

THURSDAY, 28 JULY 2022

ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE— EDUCATION; INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS; RACING

Estimate Committee Members

Ms KE Richards—Chair
Mr JP Lister
Mr JP Bleijie
Mr N Dametto
Mr BA Mickelberg
Mr BL O'Rourke
Dr CAC Rowan
Mr JA Sullivan

Members in Attendance

Ms FS Simpson
Dr A MacMahon
Mr TL Mander

In Attendance

Hon. G Grace, Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing
Ms S Durham, Chief of Staff
Mr T Shipstone, Senior Policy Adviser
Mr K Hopkins, Policy Adviser
Ms K Doherty, Senior Policy Adviser
Department of Education
Mr M De'Ath, Director-General
Mr D Anson, Acting Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure Services
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Mr R Gee, Director-General
Racing Queensland
Mr B Parnell, Chief Executive Officer
Queensland Racing Integrity Commission
Mr S Gillard, Commissioner

The committee met at 9.00 am.



CHAIR: I declare this hearing of estimates for the Education, Employment and Training Committee open. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate in this

country to live with two of the world's oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I am Kim Richards, the member for Redlands and chair of the committee. With me here today are Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair; Mr Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; and Mr Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford. Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore, is unable to attend today, and we welcome members appointed to the committee as his substitute by the Leader of the Opposition. With me we have here Dr Christian Rowan, member for Moggill, until 12.30 pm; then Mr Jarrod Bleijie, member for Kawana, from 12.30 to 2.00 pm; and Mr Brent Mickelberg, member for Buderim, from 2.00 pm until the conclusion.

The committee has granted leave for a number of non-committee members to attend and ask questions at the hearing today: Mr Michael Berkman, member for Maiwar; Mr Jarrod Bleijie, member for Kawana; Mr David Crisafulli, member for Broadwater; Mr Jon Krause, member for Scenic Rim; Dr Amy MacMahon, member for South Brisbane, who is in the chamber with us now; Mr Tim Mander, member for Everton; Mr Brent Mickelberg, member for Buderim; Mr Andrew Powell, member for Glass House; and Ms Fiona Simpson, member for Maroochydore, who is also at the table with us this morning.

Today the committee will consider the Appropriation Bill 2022 and the budget estimates for the committee's areas of responsibility. I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at my discretion as chair or by order of the committee.

The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. While mobile phone use is not permitted in the public gallery, an exception has been made for staff who are assisting witnesses here today and who have been permitted to use their device for this purpose. I do ask all present, however, to please ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode, if not turned off.

We are in the midst of quite a significant COVID wave. I encourage everyone to please be considerate of others in the chamber and ensure that they are wearing their masks, and I ask officials and witnesses when speaking today to remove their masks for clarity.

The House has determined that the committee will examine estimates for its portfolio areas as follows: education, industrial relations and racing from 9.00 am until 2.00 pm, and employment, small business, training and skills development from 2.30 pm until 5.15 pm.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2022 for the portfolio of the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing until 2.00 pm. As was determined by the House, the committee will examine areas within the minister's portfolio as follows: education from 9.00 am to 10.30 am and then 10.45 am to 11.45 am; racing will be from 12.30 pm to 1.00 pm; and industrial relations from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the times specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. The committee will suspend proceedings for breaks from 10.30 am to 10.45 am and from 11.45 am to 12.30 pm.

The committee will commence with the examination of estimates for the education portfolio area. I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and subject to the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The rules for questions that apply in the Legislative Assembly apply in this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard.

I intend to guide proceedings today in a respectful manner and in a manner that meets our community's expectations, and to ensure that we do explore the relevant issues and to ensure that there is adequate opportunity to address questions from both government and non-government members of the committee.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the directors-general, officials and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general.

I now declare open the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of education, industrial relations and racing for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister Grace, welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair. I will take that opportunity. Good morning to everyone. I welcome the opportunity to address the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I am joined at the table today by my department's Director-General, Michael De'Ath; Acting Deputy Director, Mr Duncan Anson; my Chief of Staff, Sharon Durham; and one of my chief advisers, Tim Shipstone. I am delighted to be continuing my role as Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing. I will combine all my portfolios into this opening statement, beginning with education.

Since last year's estimates hearings, I have had the privilege of making around 70 visits to our wonderful state schools and early childcare centres. Unfortunately, COVID put a dent in those numbers from previous years. We wanted to make sure that we respected the safety of all our school community. However, wherever I visit, from our largest schools, like Kelvin Grove in my electorate, to schools with fewer than 30 pupils, like Keppel Sands in Central Queensland which I went to just a few weeks ago, I am always struck by the unwavering commitment of our outstanding teachers, principals, staff and everyone in our schools to provide our young Queenslanders with world-class education, no matter where they live. It is why I am so proud the Palaszczuk government is continuing to give Queenslanders a great start in life with yet another record school and early childhood education budget of \$16.5 billion. It is a lot of money.

There will be around \$2 billion this year alone supporting around 4,200 jobs to maintain, renew and build our new schools and facilities. It is another example of the Palaszczuk government creating more good jobs and delivering even better services right across Queensland. Under our \$3 billion Building Future Schools program, we continue to deliver new schools for our fastest growing areas. We have opened 21 since 2015, have 11 more planned for 2023 and 2024, and in this budget we announced another five for 2025 and 2026. There is also nearly \$220 million over two years for additional classrooms at existing schools experiencing in-catchment enrolment growth. I know many of you have had those buildings in your electorates.

It is not just about new buildings. There is \$650 million over the next five years for renewal projects at existing schools, including playground and tuckshop upgrades, school halls and performing arts centres, and major specialist classroom renovations. There will be \$5 million from our maintenance budget set aside especially for painting projects for our smaller schools. I want to see all that old eighties and seventies paint hopefully gone as soon as possible. Schools in our discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can sometimes miss out on our larger infrastructure programs. That is why I am delighted to have set aside \$43.2 million for co-design projects in all 18 of Queensland's discrete communities.

Chair, I would also like to take this opportunity to pay my deep respects to Dr Pearl Duncan, the first Aboriginal schoolteacher in Australia who was trained at a tertiary institution who died last week. She dedicated her life to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education. The department has a teaching scholarship named in her honour which has supported more than 126 aspiring teachers get their qualification. I know her legacy will continue to inspire students and teachers for years to come. My sincere condolences to her family and friends.

Chair, I have outlined some infrastructure highlights, but our students will not learn much in these state-of-the-art school facilities without world-class teachers and staff. Since coming to office in 2015, the Palaszczuk government has employed 6,000 new teachers as well as more than 1,500 teacher aides. At the last election we made a commitment to employ 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 new teacher aides over the next four years, and we are on track to meet that commitment. I am particularly pleased at the excellent bargaining offer we have made has an attraction and retention package for regional, rural and remote teachers which improves existing entitlements and introduces new ones.

Elsewhere in education we are delivering \$80.6 million to transition schools to again change the disability support resourcing model. There is \$15.5 million for Respectful Relationships and a \$34.5 million program with Share the Dignity to provide, maintain and stock a period product vending machine in every state school that wants one. Of course, we know what a difference the early years make, which is why we are investing more than a billion dollars into kindergarten over the next five years.

In the industrial relations portfolio the Palaszczuk government continues our proud record of standing up for and supporting Queensland workers with our nation-leading reforms. It is fantastic to see the new Albanese government now implementing many of these policies, after years of inaction. This includes a critically important entitlement of paid family and domestic violence leave, which I understand will be introduced in the federal parliament this week.

My department is continuing to focus on protecting workers and ensuring contemporary standards and entitlements across all of the industrial relations portfolio. Key areas of focus include workplace health and safety, electrical safety, industrial protections for workers in the Queensland IR system, workers compensation, labour hire licensing and portable long service leave.

In the racing portfolio, we have seen the economic contribution of the Queensland racing industry soar 60 per cent under the Palaszczuk government to a record \$1.9 billion. We have some major infrastructure projects like the Gold Coast Turf Club track and lights project underway and others are not far behind. We continue to back the industry with a new sustainable funding model, providing certainty and a big boost to our country racing clubs. A five per cent levy has been added to the betting tax; the tax has been broadened to include free and bonus bets; and the percentage of the betting tax that goes straight back into the industry will rise from 35 per cent to 80 per cent. It is a great win for racing in Queensland.

Thank you for the opportunity, Chair, to make an opening statement. I am happy to take questions from the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. For our first question I call on the deputy chair.

Mr LISTER: I would like to defer to the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Minister and other representatives in attendance today. I ask a question of the minister with reference to SDS page 11 and staffing. Commencing in September 2020 the state government spent over \$1 million on a recruitment campaign to ensure teacher workforce growth meets demand. At the 2020 Queensland state election Labor also gave a commitment to deliver 6,190 new teachers over four years. With only 339 additional teachers employed, at this rate it will take decades for Labor to fulfil its commitments. Minister, do you accept responsibility for the lack of progress to date?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question but, to be honest, I think his figures are a little bit rubbery. Let me set the record straight. The Palaszczuk government is proud of our investment in teaching and schools in Queensland and our 96 per cent retention rate amongst teachers. Our government offers incentives including relocation assistance, subsidised housing and one of the highest graduate starting salaries in the country. We did make a commitment in the last election campaign to employ 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 new teacher aides.

As at 30 June 2022—1½ years in—the department has already employed 2,986 teachers and we have exceeded our number of new teacher aides, at 1,152. They are the figures. We have also employed more than 6,000 FTE new teachers since 2016 as well as more than 1,500 full-time-equivalent new teacher aides.

We have a current enterprise bargaining offer out. That includes a lot of incentives for retention and obviously incentives for regional, rural and remote areas. I look forward to the outcome of the current testing of members that the QTU is undertaking about that offer. It is leading the country. No other state or territory in Australia has a deal on the table like the Queensland government. I look forward to the outcome of those elections. It is a great deal. I look forward to implementing it. They are the numbers and we are on track to meet our election commitment.

Dr ROWAN: I have a question to the director-general. With reference to pre-estimates question on notice0 3, which reveals that teacher recruitment targets are seemingly not being met, what is the average cost of a graduate teacher in Queensland?

Mr De'Ath: We are trying to locate that information for the member.

Ms GRACE: Are you asking—

Dr ROWAN: A base figure would be approximately \$75,000, I would imagine.

Ms GRACE: It is in the enterprise bargaining agreement.

Mr De'Ath: Band 2 step 1 is a salary per fortnight of \$2,892.80 and as of 1 January 2022 it is an annual salary of \$75,471.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, with an average graduate teacher on that \$75,000, how many teachers could you employ for \$237 million—maybe roughly?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question. We will do a quick calculation for you. On that basis you have probably done it yourself.

Ms GRACE: We will help you do your maths.

Dr ROWAN: On my calculations that would be about 2½ thousand, 3,000 teachers.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you.

Dr ROWAN: With \$237 million, from a government perspective that would be of significance in relation to recruiting new teachers for our schools in Queensland?

Mr De'Ath: Correct.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, have you read the report by the Crime and Corruption Commission entitled *An investigation into allegations relating to the appointment of a school principal*, which involved former deputy premier Jackie Trad?

Mr De'Ath: I am familiar with the issue. I have not read the report.

Dr ROWAN: You have not read the report?

Mr De'Ath: No.

Dr ROWAN: Can I ask why you have not read the report?

Mr De'Ath: I have been briefed on the matters as much as I able to be for the matters that pertain to my administration of the department.

Dr ROWAN: I have a further question to the director-general. There were a lot of recommendations within that report which had implications for not only the department but the Public Service. I am curious to understand why, as a new director-general, given the conclusions in the report, you have not found the time to read that report.

Mr De'Ath: I am working from the recommendations that were made and following the implementation plan for the department of those recommendations. I am satisfied with the work that we are completing to date on that basis.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, have you been provided a report by the Public Service Commission into the conduct of former deputy director-general Jeff Hunt?

Mr De'Ath: I am.

Dr ROWAN: Are you able to advise the committee of any of the information contained within that?

Mr De'Ath: In relation to—

Dr ROWAN:—recommendations or other matters in relation to staffing or implications for the department?

Mr De'Ath: We do have an integrity plan. That is in response to those issues.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, could you furnish the committee with some information as to what is contained within that integrity plan?

Mr De'Ath: I will pass that to the acting deputy director-general for our corporate area with HR responsibility.

Mr Anson: I thank the member for the question. Integrity is something that is very important to us, as I am sure you are well aware. We are an organisation with over 90,000 people. What we see through our integrity numbers that come through each year is that about 99.9 per cent of people do the right thing.

Following some incidents, one of which you have referred to that happened a couple of years ago, the department undertook to commit to a long-term integrity plan, and that integrity plan is currently playing out. School term by school term we have a theme. We have had things like speaking up, where the director-general, as you may be aware, recorded a video and sent that out to all members. We have also had focuses on things like close personal relationships. We have introduced mandating independent panel members for all senior appointments. We have introduced training for all panel member chairs and through our mandatory all-staff training, which has been rolled out every year over the past several years, we have introduced some recruitment dos and don'ts. That is our annual code of conduct training, basically. I am pleased to say that this year we have had a record uptake of that. I do not have the figure in front of me, but I want to say it is upwards of a 97 per cent completion rate.

We are continuing through that long-term integrity plan. I should have mentioned it was based on, first of all, a 90-day short-term integrity plan and we are continuing that. We have a number of themes. I think the next one we have coming up next term is about our appropriate and ethical use of public resources policy. That was a policy we introduced in 2017 and reviewed in 2018. We were the first government department to introduce that policy, and I am pleased to say that a couple of other departments have now taken on board that policy.

As you can appreciate, there is a fair bit happening in this space. As I mentioned at the beginning of my answer, it is something that we, and certainly I and the director-general as senior executives, take very seriously.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Anson, this new integrity plan: was there an integrity plan—

CHAIR: It has to go through the director-general first.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, just to clarify, given the testimony of the acting director-general in relation to the new integrity plan, was there an existing integrity plan before that one?

Mr De'Ath: I will refer it to the acting deputy director-general.

Mr Anson: I thank the member for the question. In terms of the actual plan itself, that was a brand new plan and that was a brand new initiative. What I can say is what has always existed in the department: I started in the department back in 2017, so just over five years ago now, and for around about four years of that five I have been a member of the Integrity, Fraud and Corruption Control Committee. That is a peak control committee that oversees integrity and fraud related matters in the department and makes recommendations to the executive management board and has accountability through to our Audit and Risk Management Committee, which is independently chaired. There has always been an integrity framework in the department—there has always been one of those—but in relation to your question about a long-term integrity plan this is the first time that we have introduced such a plan. We felt it was a prudent measure and we are very proud of how that is going so far and look forward to the future initiatives that are contained within that plan.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, are you able to advise the committee of the total payment that former deputy director-general Jeff Hunt has received during his suspension, although he has now resigned?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question, member, and, yes, I am able to advise the committee. The figures are as follows: for the 2022-23 financial year to 11 July 2022, gross payment of \$6,827.04; for the full 2021-22 financial year up to the last pay period at 3 July 2022, \$294,022.37; for the 2020-21 financial year, \$297,215.29; and from the date of suspension at 11 May 2020 to 30 June 2020, \$32,640.

Dr ROWAN: Just to add all of those figures together, Director-General, what is that entire figure?

Mr De'Ath: The entire figure, member, is \$630,704.70.

Dr ROWAN: \$630,000. Does that include, Director-General, any additional benefits or entitlements or other payments provided as part of a payout or a severance? So is that just salary or were there other payments as part of the severance package?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, member. I will refer that detail to the deputy director-general.

Mr Anson: Thank you, Director-General; thank you, member, for the question. The figures that the director-general has just advised you of are the salary payments to the former deputy director-general over that period of time. So in answer to your question, no, they do not include any payments to the deputy director-general that he may be entitled to under his contract of employment.

Dr ROWAN: Are you able to advise what those additional figures would be of those additional payments as part of the severance now that he has resigned?

Mr Anson: Thank you for the question. What I am able to advise you is that the amounts that the former deputy director-general has been paid are in line with the terms and conditions of his contract, as any senior public servant would be entitled to upon completion of their contract. So if you are asking whether there were any redundancy or retrenchment payments or anything like that, no, because Mr Hunt resigned from the department.

Mr DAMETTO: Firstly, thank you very much, Minister, for addressing the committee today as well as the director-general and education departmental staff. My first question is in reference to page 14 of the SDS. Will the minister advise for the 2022-23 financial year how much money has been allocated to the removal of asbestos in our schools and school grounds and in particular as a subsequent question how much has been allocated for the Hinchinbrook electorate?

Ms GRACE: Thank you to the member for the question, and it is a good question because we take asbestos in classrooms really seriously. We have a long-term objective that all department managed and controlled assets are free of asbestos-containing material, ACM. From 2022-23 the Queensland government will invest additional funding of \$107.9 million over four years for the removal of low-density asbestos fibre boards. In 2022-23 funding of \$41.5 million is allocated for the removal of

ACM from departmental facilities and asbestos audits comprising \$25.8 million for the commencement of the LDB removal program.

Let me put that into context. In 2013 the previous government changed the definition of LDB—low-density board—from friable to non-friable, which meant that it more or less said it was safe even if it had been disturbed. The Palaszczuk government reversed that decision, so we have had to look again at our schools when it came to LDB. It was this government that changed non-friable to friable after it was brought in by the then government in 2013. We did an investigation and it was found that this was friable and it could be damaging and could be hazardous. So we reversed that which meant we had to look again at all of this, and friable LDB is your plasterboards and that kind of material.

We have now commenced a removal and there is about \$28.8 million to do that. We have also now allocated \$13 million for the removal of ACM and \$2.7 million for the asbestos audit program, so we are continuing that. Before 1990, member for Hinchinbrook, you have to assume that every school contains asbestos because that is when it was removed from use. When you go into a school, we want to make sure that your safe system of work assumes that every wall you want to drill into or whatever, unless it has been previously tested, contains ACM. That is the manner in which we want to work. We have a comprehensive register now. BEMIR has been set up to do this. We have connected under the policy with QBuild. The Built Environment Materials Information Register, BEMIR, is much more comprehensive. It says where it is located. We are continually adding to that. It is regularly upgraded and freely available.

We take this matter extremely seriously, but obviously we had to look again at LDB since we changed—reversed—the previous government's definition from non-friable to friable. From then on we have obviously had to identify that where it is disturbed. We have replacement and fixing renovation money. The money is there to do that and we are auditing and carrying out all of that. It may not be disturbed in situ, as we know, but things happen in schools—walls get knocked, balls get hit into walls and all of that kind of stuff—so the audit has done a very comprehensive upgrade to the BEMIR. Thank you for the question; it is such an important one.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, but if I could get the subsequent question answered about how much has been allocated to Hinchinbrook schools in the 2022-23 budget?

Ms GRACE: I am sorry; I—

Mr DAMETTO: I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Ms GRACE: No, I did not hear the question. I think you mentioned the Hinchinbrook electorate?

Mr DAMETTO: That is correct.

Ms GRACE: I am sorry; yes. It is not done by electorates; we do it by priority. The audit has identified that. What was the previous question; I am sorry?

Mr DAMETTO: How much has been allocated to the Hinchinbrook electorate for the removal?

Ms GRACE: We do not allocate according to electorates. If there are schools in your electorate that require it to be removed, be rest assured that it will be and the budget is a total budget. I have not allocated the 93 electorates in the state an amount of money for asbestos because I may not require it in my electorate but you may require it in yours. We do it on a priority basis—on a needs basis—and that is the best way to do that.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

Ms GRACE: Maybe next year if we do any schools in your electorate—and I will get the department to make sure they keep a record of it—and if any is removed in terms of work that we have done, I will certainly inform you of that. I would be happy to do so.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, have you read the interim and the final Coaldrake reports?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question, member. I most certainly have.

Ms SIMPSON: Are you aware of any ministerial staff applying pressure to individuals in the department, including yourself, for responses that minimise problems or discourage written advice on difficult topics?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question, member. Under no circumstances have I been made aware or have I been subject to such matters. In fact, if I could elaborate, I find the working relationship with the Queensland government since my arrival in December, and with the minister and her office, as entirely appropriate and Westminsterian in its approach.

Ms SIMPSON: The Coaldrake interim report identified directors-general keeping information from their minister to provide plausible deniability. Are you aware of those allegations and were they applying to either yourself or your predecessor that you are aware of?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you. I am aware of those allegations and under no circumstances has that been my experience or a comment made by me or, am I aware, any of my department. While I appreciate the conversations with Professor Coaldrake were confidential, I am very happy to share that information with the committee today.

CHAIR: In relation to page 2 of the Department of Education's SDS and its reference to additional renewed infrastructure, can the minister update the committee on how the Advancing Clean Energy Schools program has provided solar panels and upgraded energy efficiency measures over 900 Queensland state schools?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I know how happy she must be that across her Redlands electorate—and I have the information—over 1,900 panels have been included, including 39 panels at each of the Macleay and Russell Island state schools.

CHAIR: I think you will find a happy dance on Facebook somewhere.

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government is committed to a clean energy future for Queensland and has set a range of targets to increase the uptake of renewable energy and mitigate the effects of climate change. The \$168 million Advancing Clean Energy Schools, or ACES program as we call it, is designed to reduce energy costs across more than 900 state schools through the installation of solar panels and other energy efficiency measures. I am so pleased to announce right here, right now that this program is now complete. We have even installed more panels at more schools than we set out to do—an outstanding achievement by my department for Queensland schools.

Almost 200,000 panels now sit atop school roofs—well above the original target of 180,000. On average the panels will be able to generate around 200 megawatts of electricity per day. This equates to \$26 million of savings per year. If you calculate that, member for Moggill, that is a few teachers as well. We have virtually created a solar farm in our Queensland schools, contributing enough renewable energy to power 25,000 homes. That is about the same size as the entire local government area of Gladstone.

This significant achievement follows the completion of the Palaszczuk government's Cooler Cleaner Schools Program in April. We announced that every single classroom, staff room and library in Queensland state schools had air conditioning installed—two months ahead of schedule, on budget and six years ahead of the LNP's plans, might I add. The completion of ACES means that clean solar energy is helping to power air-conditioning units across Queensland schools, reducing costs and helping the environment. This is also contributing to the Palaszczuk government's target of using 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030 to reduce emissions, address climate change, create jobs and diversify the economy.

For the benefit of members here today, I will give a snapshot of what this means for Queensland. In the Rockhampton and Livingstone areas there are over 7,500 panels, which can generate an average of 10,000 kilowatts per day—North Rockhampton State High School alone, which the member and I recently visited, has 806 panels installed; in Toowoomba and Darling Downs, the west region, 15,000 solar panels can generate around 20,000 kilowatts of electricity per day, with 270 panels installed at Warwick State High School; the Townsville area has over 8,400 panels, which can generate around 12,000 kilowatts of electricity per day; and in the Brisbane area we have almost 37,000 panels, which can generate around 52,000 kilowatts per day, with 270 panels installed at Mount Crosby State School in the electorate of Moggill.

More than 550 jobs have been supported across the life of this mammoth undertaking right across our great state. This fantastic program is another example of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to supporting good jobs and creating better services in Queensland to support our great lifestyle. It was a bit of a no-brainer. We have air conditioning now in every school—we are the only state or territory to have that—and we have the solar panels generating the power during the day, when schools are in, to run those air-conditioning units. It is a fantastic program. Congratulations to my department on its delivery.

I think the ACES program is slightly under budget, which is good news. Of course, with that many panels we will have some that will crack or there might be hail damage—there was one school I went to that had hail damage—so we have a repair and maintenance program in place as well. This is great

news. I am so glad to announce today that it has been completed under budget and on schedule and is more than what we anticipated—a fantastic outcome for Queensland.

CHAIR: And it is a great demonstration for our students, so thank you, Minister.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you advise the committee on how the Palaszczuk government is continuing to support students with disability through a new disability resourcing model for Queensland state schools?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. This is probably one of the features of the budget and our forward agenda that I am most proud of. Our mission as a Labor government is to deliver a world-class education that allows every student to reach their full potential no matter where they live in our state, no matter their life circumstances or background. It is a prime example of the support we provide for students with disability to ensure that they can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers, and we work hard towards delivering that.

In my time as minister I have listened to the heartfelt views—and I have visited many schools with the member for Rockhampton and the members at the table—of many parents and organisations about the need for a new way of resourcing schools to support their students with disability. I am also very proud of the investment we have made in the infrastructure. When I came to the ministry these schools were very under-resourced. The infrastructure, I might add, was terrible. We have pumped infrastructure funds into these schools to revolutionise them and they have been transformed, and we are still doing it. I am so very proud of that. I am delighted, therefore, that our record \$16.5 billion education budget includes over \$80 million over the next two school years to support the transition to a game-changing new disability resourcing model for state schools.

Under the new resourcing model, starting in 2023 with full implementation by 2025, more than 30,000 extra children with disability will receive dedicated support in Queensland state schools each year, bringing to 70,000 the total number of children who will be supported under the new model. The new resourcing model moves from the current system, where disability resourcing is based on six prescribed types of disability only, to a model that is based on the level of support and adjustment that a child needs to participate in education. This means that for the first time we are going to formally recognise a number of additional disabilities and they will be supported, including dyslexia, ADHD, fetal alcohol syndrome, Tourette syndrome and mental health conditions. While schools already support these students, there will now be more dedicated resources available.

Other benefits of the new model include earlier support for prep students to give them a great start; a new Extensive Plus resourcing category to provide additional support for students with the most intensive needs; an easier, streamlined single process for families, without the need for additional medical and specialist reports—we almost ran two processes so this is going to be much more streamlined and it will be much easier to obtain those supports; and reduced workload, with no more dual reporting as occurs under the current system.

The new model completes the government's implementation of all 17 recommendations from the 2017 independent review of education for students with disability in Queensland state schools. That is why we are investing the \$80.1 million to transition. The money will fund almost 500 new frontline teacher and teacher aide positions. That will be a combination of new staff and increasing the hours of existing staff to enable us to meet the need to support the students and to provide continuity and certainty until the new model is fully implemented in 2025.

We have had some great positive feedback on this. Pat Murphy from the Queensland Association of Primary School Principals has said that the changes will lead to long-term educational, social and economic benefits for the state. He said—

The additional resourcing provides Queensland school leaders with certainty so that as schools transition to an enhanced funding formula no student will be underfunded.

That is exactly the aim. Rick Day, the Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders, said—

This new funding model is sharply focused on students' needs and will ensure resources are allocated to more students with disability, based on reasonable adjustments...

This is another great Labor reform. I cannot wait for this to be implemented over the next two years. It will transform the system with additional support for 30,000 students—70,000 in total. I am very proud of our \$81 million to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible for every school in the state.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. My deep gratitude for the investment in the Redland District Special School, which is a place very dear to my heart.

Ms GRACE: I know, thank you.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, thank you for your contribution so far. In reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you outline how the Palaszczuk government is continuing to invest in quality teaching to really give students a great start and a great future?

Ms GRACE: I know, member, you have a passion for, in particular, the schools in your area. I think you come up to me nearly every parliamentary sitting with something you would like for your schools, as all members at the table generally do.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, thank you also for visiting Wavell State High School quite recently.

Ms GRACE: That was terrific. Every day our teachers and teacher aides are making a significant difference to the lives of Queensland students. They truly are the foundation of the world-class education system that we have here in Queensland, setting up our kids for a great future. I think we have some of the best educators in the world. I am not just saying that; I see it every day. They do a remarkable job.

Since coming to office in 2015, we have employed 6,000 new teachers as well as more than 1,500 teacher aides. At the last election we made a commitment to invest in—and I have used these figures before—6,190 new teachers and 1,139 new teacher aides over four years and we are on track to meet that. I have already reported 2,986 new teachers and 1,152 new teacher aides, so we have already exceeded the teacher aide number. With the investment that we are going to make in the disability support area, you will probably see those teacher aide numbers increase as they will be able to work additional hours through funding to support students in need. I am really looking forward to rolling that out. This means we have hit our target.

We have programs in place. Our \$20 million Turn to Teaching Internship Program to employ and support 300 aspiring teachers to complete a teaching qualification and undertake paid internship employment, with a guaranteed permanent position in a Queensland state school at the end, is underway. The first cohort of 55 participants is studying in their first year of a two-year program. That number is planned to go to 125 per year in 2023 and 2024 as intakes meet our commitment.

We are putting the finishing touches on a new trade to teach program, which I will have more to say about in the coming months. We are targeting the skill sets that we need, particularly in STEM and postgraduate qualifications. We will support those people through their training and guarantee them a job. It is a terrific program. We are finding that we also need ITD teachers. The old manual arts teachers—the modern ITD teachers—are what we need. We are now looking at a return to trade. We have a lot of excited employers in this area who are looking forward to doing that. I will make more announcements on that trade to teach program.

We are proud of our investment in teaching and schools in Queensland. I think our 96 per cent retention rate amongst teachers is one of the highest. Our government offers support and incentives, including relocation assistance and subsidised housing. Our centres for learning and wellbeing are revolutionising how teachers are accepted into regional and remote Queensland. They get the support they need. Recently I was in Longreach where I met with about 16 or 17 teachers. We had a great State of Origin night at the Birdcage in Longreach where we all got together. It is the Centre for Learning and Wellbeing that is welcoming them in, educating them on the area and providing assistance. It is a completely different way that they are supported in the regions and we are kicking goals. I get positive feedback from all of the teachers and all of the centres in relation to those centres for learning and wellbeing.

We continue to invest. As I said, there is no greater investment in our teachers. The value we place on them is reflected in the excellent bargaining offer as well. They have done an outstanding job. They are out at the moment voting on that. We want to recognise that we are in challenging times. Given the level of CPI we do not want our workers to go backwards. We also want to become the employer of choice. We make absolutely no apologies for the agreement that we have entered into. We are leading Australia. Obviously, probably some of the best teachers will be in the state of Queensland and rightly so.

As I said, we want to be the employer of choice. Queensland is a great place to be and this budget is all about ensuring that we maintain our wonderful lifestyle here in Queensland. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR: Thanks to all our teachers. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: I refer to the SDS, page 11. Minister, I would like to return to your earlier response in relation to teacher recruitment. The public sector workforce profile for March 2020 shows that there

were 58,183 full-time-equivalent teachers and teacher aides, but the workforce profile for March 2022 shows there were 58,571 full-time-equivalent teachers and teacher aides, which is an increase of only 388 teachers and teacher aides. Minister, can you explain your previous answer to this committee, given that that increase is significantly less than the figures you have previously provided?

Ms GRACE: Member, I think you are confusing teachers that you actually employed. There is turnover and there is all of that with actual FTE equivalents and the manner in which the data is produced. If you want more information—

Dr ROWAN: That is the data, Minister, which is publicly available.

Ms GRACE: If you want specific information, these are operational issues and I am happy for the director-general to explain that a bit further. The figures that I have given are accurate. They come straight from the department. The figures you are quoting are FTE equivalents. There is not the turnover, people retiring, teachers being employed, teacher aides retiring, teachers being—

Dr ROWAN: But it is only 388.

Ms GRACE: You are talking about net figures; not the turnover, not the employment. It is not a static figure when you are running a staff of over—

Dr ROWAN: They sound like rubbery figures.

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, let the minister finish her answer, please.

Ms GRACE: If you ran an organisation of 91,000 people, you would know that they are not rubbery figures. There is a huge amount of turnover, a huge amount of backfilling, and a huge amount of assistance and relief that is required to run an organisation of nearly 91,000 people. I will direct that to the director-general to give you further explanation on it. We are talking about teachers we need to employ to maintain. That is a commitment we made. Then, of course, you have your FTE equivalents. We are in a very difficult market at the moment. No-one is disputing that. I do not think there is one industry, anywhere we go—and I challenge any member in front of me or in the parliament—that is saying they are not having difficulty getting staff. Unfortunately, it is the aftermath of COVID. Maybe the director-general would like to add more for clarification.

Mr De'Ath: I endorse the minister's comments wholly. This is an extremely complex space with a very large workforce. The numbers around teachers and teacher supply and the reasons for changes and so on are a complex place. That said, we will do our very best to offer you some form of explanation in what is a very complex environment. I will hand to the deputy director-general to explain, as best we can, the figures that we deal with on a daily basis.

Mr Anson: Member, could I ask you to repeat the question in relation to the numbers? Was it in relation in question on notice No. 3?

Dr ROWAN: No, it was in relation to the Queensland public sector workforce profile. For March 2020, it shows that there were 58,183 full-time-equivalent teachers and teacher aides, but the workforce profile for March 2022 shows that there were 58,571 full-time-equivalent teachers and teacher aides. That is an increase of only 388 teachers and teacher aides, as contained within this data. I was asking the minister, who has delegated to you, to explain the apparent discrepancy between her earlier testimony and the figures contained within these profiles.

Ms GRACE: No. 1, you are not comparing apples with apples, but I am happy for Mr Anson to give you clarification.

Mr Anson: Thank you for clarifying that question, member. What I can advise is: the way we report our figures—I cannot attest to anything that is published outside of what—

CHAIR: I note, Mr Anson, that we are not privy to that as tabled information.

Mr Anson: I have not seen the report that the member is talking about there, but I can explain a bit about the process that we follow and what our numbers indicate. Our numbers are based on MOHRI. That data is extracted from our system and is based obviously on a number of parameters. You have outlined some broad numbers there. What I can say is that at the end of the first quarter for MOHRI the department's school based workforce consisted of 89,058 employees—that is head count—and an FTE number of 70,613. That includes 54,028 teachers, comprising 47,463.31 FTE, and a head count of 18,399 teacher aides, comprising 10,694.67 FTE.

What is important to note about MOHRI is that it is a point-in-time number as at that date. Because those dates come through at the end of March, June, September and December, I am sure

you will be aware that they often fall within school holidays. If people are not on the payroll at that time, they are not counted. It is basically a count of who is in and getting paid on that particular day.

As the director-general alluded to, our numbers can fluctuate from week to week and fortnight to fortnight. The minister outlined in her previous answer the number of new teachers that we have brought in under the election commitment. I think it is important to clarify what the basis of that commitment is. It is new teachers coming in, which might be an additional teaching position at a school, but it also includes new teachers coming into our system for the first time who might be replacing a teacher who is retiring, moving interstate, moving overseas et cetera.

Dr ROWAN: Chair, I am happy to table those documents. Really, Director-General, what you are saying in relation to that data is that it is a timing of entry. I am trying to understand the alignment of different data sets in terms of how this is captured and that the recruitment of teachers and teacher aides in Queensland is keeping up with what is required to service students and particular populations in Queensland.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, member, for that comment. I would like to respond to it. I think it is appropriate that the committee does look at this issue as the department is looking at it intensively all the time. We know that we are an environment where there are claims of teacher supply issues. We know that we have been dealing with some of the regional, rural and remote elements of Queensland's geography to support those communities. I think the department has done some very fine work in this space.

The minister is quite correct: this is an environment at the moment where workforce is not exclusively the domain in terms of shortage and challenge for the education sector. However, I would reflect on the fact that some years ago there was an incredible injection of funding into the education sectors across Australia. That funding has been extensively used for schools that have chosen to employ additional staff beyond our allocative models. In Queensland, that is very much the case.

When we are talking about where there may be a supply shortage or challenge issue, first and foremost we are delighted with the level of recruitment and new teachers we have been able to bring into the system—and, of course, teacher aides as well, which for many is a pathway through to teaching. We are very pleased with our performance in that space. With the ongoing challenges around supply, though, we need to be very careful and very clear about when we are talking about a shortage. Is it based on the department's base allocative model or is it a number that is a count of what school purchased staff includes? They are two very different things. I think there is a lot of misinformation at the moment around this space. We will continue to do our level best, of course, to continue the great recruitment into Queensland. As the minister alluded to, the offer on the table at the moment with the Queensland Teachers' Union is a strong and positive one to help in that regard.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, the Great Teacher Great Future program was meant to maintain teacher-to-student ratios and lower class sizes. Is this outcome being achieved?

Mr De'Ath: Yes, this outcome is being achieved.

Ms GRACE: Unlike when the previous government was in power.

CHAIR: Minister. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I reference page 10 of the Capital Statement and the 16 new schools that opened between 2020 and 2022. The Auditor-General report No. 16 released in May this year found that 80 per cent of contract variations that were examined in relation to the Brisbane South State Secondary College project were not clearly approved by an authorised departmental delegate. How is it that almost \$7 million of variations at the Brisbane South State Secondary College can proceed without proper authorisation in accordance with the department's financial delegations policy?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, member, for the question. I am very familiar with that report. I am also familiar with the actions that we took prior to the finalisation and release of that report. We had quite a considerable level of activity, obviously, in this area of the department, with a very large infrastructure program. We have attended to the recommendations of that report, both during the construction of it and going forward. There were some inaccuracies in the initial interpretation of what was in the drafting. We have made very good progress in relation to ensuring that those matters have been attended to.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, in terms of those inaccuracies, was that information provided by the department to the Auditor-General, or do you mean inaccuracies or conclusions by the Auditor-General?

Mr De'Ath: I think in any process with the Auditor-General where we are looking at what their investigations have revealed and what further information we can provide, we are always able to provide a bit of greater clarity around their findings. We certainly do that with them and we did that on this occasion. I can go into further detail about those recommendations and actions in relation should the committee wish?

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr De'Ath.

Mr De'Ath: We have adopted an entirely holistic response to the audit report findings regarding *Contract management for new infrastructure*. We have acted proactively to implement the recommendations, as I said earlier, identify key risks and issues to be monitored and implemented and appropriate management action plans. That is appropriate in response to any such report.

Recommendation 3 of that report stated that the department needed to be providing appropriate training and support to staff managing contracts and to clearly define and communicate the roles and responsibilities for managing contracts. In support of that recommendation, a new program of procurement training and accreditation has been established, and that allows regional infrastructure staff to be nominated for a procurement delegation which would allow them to oversee sourcing activities with a value of up to \$1 million. Sourcing activities with a value over \$1 million must be overseen by the department's procurement and facility services branch.

We have reviewed all of our procurement policies and procedures and we are in the process of enhancing the information and guidance materials included in documentation and training to achieve the following: to clearly define and communicate the responsibility for managing contracts; to outline specific contract management processes and requirements which complement the government frameworks for managing infrastructure contracts; to ensure that all contract risks and issues are identified and effectively managed; and to ensure that standardised processes and procedures are applied for recording, evaluating and approving contract variations. A considerable level of activity and work has taken place there. I applaud our deputy director-general for her work in this area in terms of the review work that she has conducted to improve our systems and processes with such a significant infrastructure program on our books.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I refer to these amounts that were approved and which are contained within the Auditor-General's report—figures like \$570,000 and \$590,000 in relation to the Brisbane South State Secondary College, where an employee only had a delegated limit of up to \$25,000. In relation to the Fortitude Valley State Secondary College, there was a delegated limit approval of \$10,000 yet huge amounts of money—\$727,000 and \$442,000—have been approved beyond that. I want to understand: how has that occurred within the department, has anyone been held to account, and who is ultimately responsible for those systems seemingly not being optimal within the Department of Education?

Mr De'Ath: I think it is very clear that through our work we have met our legislative and regulatory requirements. We are operating in line with the whole-of-government capital works management framework, but there was room for improvement. I think it is fair to say that in a rapidly growing program that some people did exercise delegations that were not appropriate. We have attended to that matter. We have spoken with those people accordingly. We have changed our systems and processes to ensure that this cannot happen again.

Dr ROWAN: Can I clarify finally that in relation to being compliant with statutory obligations, in the last two annual reports that the department has issued, the chief financial officer has declared within those that the department has been operating efficiently and effectively in accordance with section 54 of the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019. Are the findings of the Auditor-General and the statement by the chief financial officer contained within those annual reports in alignment or in conflict?

Mr De'Ath: They are in alignment in respect of the fact that there will always be—and this is the role of the Audit Office—investigations into matters to look at our systems and processes and to find where we can improve. I think that that is exactly what has happened in this case. It is entirely appropriate. Where we have found that there were issues and we were found wanting we have taken very responsive action to respond to those matters and to make the necessary improvements. I am satisfied with the work that the department has done in that regard to bring about those improvements.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, according to the Queensland College of Teachers, Queensland currently has the lowest percentage of male teachers in the workforce recorded at 24.75 per cent. Can the minister please advise what programs and incentives have been put in place in the 2022-23 budget to address the gender imbalance between female and male teachers in Queensland Education?

Ms GRACE: It is obviously an operational issue, but it is one that has history to it. I do not think those figures have changed very much since I went to school, to be honest, member for Hinchinbrook. All the incentives we put in place are gender neutral. We do not go out to attract either males or females. We have a very inclusive employment program. Unfortunately, different occupations attract different cohorts such as nursing and midwifery, as we know. Teaching is one of those professions as well.

The department's We All Belong workplace inclusion and diversity framework is about exactly that—that we all belong in schools. There are workforce strategies to create inclusive and diverse workplaces. We also want to increase our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. I mentioned the Pearl Duncan scholarship in that regard. We value talent and all abilities. We want to include many cultures. We have our Pathways to Parity workforce strategy. We have programs for gender equality. The Proud at Work workforce strategy is aimed at the LGBTIQ+ community. The Generational Diversity workforce strategy is another one. There are a number of programs.

Some 52 per cent of our leaders are females, which is interesting. It is almost fifty-fifty when it comes to the leaders in education even though there is a disparity when it comes to teachers—25 to 75. I know that it is the same in the nursing and midwifery area.

Mr DAMETTO: It is excellent to see that the leadership is fifty-fifty, but it is a bit worrying that with regard to teachers on the ground in the classrooms we are not seeing those same figures.

Ms GRACE: Obviously we want to attract the best and brightest. That is what we are trying to do. Our Turn to Teaching Internship Program is aimed at that. Our trade to teaching strategy is aimed at that as well. Most in the ITD area are a specific gender. We want to see a diversified workforce that represents our community. We will do all we can to advance that, but there is no magic formula unfortunately, member for Hinchinbrook. As I said, those figures have remained static. I meet with the CEO of the Queensland College of Teachers and often talk about the gender issues and what we can do in that regard. Obviously we welcome everyone into the teaching profession. We hope to attract more people from diverse areas as well.

Mr DAMETTO: And so do we.

CHAIR: We are going to change over to government questions. In relation to page 11 of the SDS and its reference to facilities renewal—I know this was touched on by the member for Moggill; I had the benefit of sitting through the Thornlands State School P&C's asbestos training last Wednesday night—would the minister be able to update the committee on how the Palaszczuk government has invested in the auditing and removal processes around asbestos?

Ms GRACE: I mentioned a lot of this when answering one of the previous questions. I emphasise that we place the highest priority on the health and safety of students, parents and caregivers. We have inherited what, I think, is an over \$21 billion asset base in education, and a lot of that was built before 1990. Since that date we have not used asbestos in new schools. Sometimes there are products that come in from overseas that you have to be wary about. We do not control the borders in this states and we take what comes over our borders.

This commitment includes ensuring that asbestos containing material found in department owned facilities is managed in a way to minimise the risk to people on site and, of course, primarily our students and staff. We know that it is not uncommon for asbestos to be found. In the 2022-23 budget we are investing an additional \$108 million over four years for the removal of low density board. I went through that earlier. It was the previous government that changed the definition. They were saying it was safe.

There was \$20 million in additional funding in last year's budget for a comprehensive audit program which assessed ACM in schools, early childhood education centres and outdoor education centres. The department has upped the ante when it comes to auditing over the last couple of years with over 1,200 sites visited and 194,000 samples taken to gain comprehensive data and certainty around the presence of asbestos in our schools.

Over the coming 12 months funding of \$41.5 million will be allocated. I have gone through that—\$26 million targeted for commencement of LDB removal; \$13 million for the continual removal of asbestos containing material; and \$2.7 million to maintain our standard asbestos audit program. BEMIR—the Built Environment Materials Information Register—is fantastic. It is centrally located and contains great material. It is regularly update. The audits are put into it. The asbestos register can be accessed at any time and is updated twice a year. Obviously if more is required it can be done. We have done an amazing amount of auditing. The register is updated as the material comes in.

My department and the government takes the issue of asbestos identification and removal extremely seriously, as it warrants. We have demonstrated this with additional funding included in this

year's budget. Our changes to the friable definition of LDB now means that only class A licensed asbestos removalists can remove LDB. Before you could knock it out, rip it up and do whatever you want. We have completely changed that. That was done by the previous government in 2013. We have now reversed that. It was severely hazardous to have done that. The review that we did found that it did not reflect the seriousness of the risk. We are very proud to have made those changes and very proud of the additional money that we have allocated to ensure the safety of students, staff and the school community.

Mr O'ROURKE: With reference to page 2 of the SDS, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government is supporting student mental health and wellbeing?

Ms GRACE: I am acutely aware of the challenges facing students in their mental health. We know that school can be a wonderful time in children's lives, but this is not the case for every student. Students often report that they feel worried about their families, their studies, their future, particularly in our COVID-19 world. We know that the research showed there is a clear connection between students' mental health and their results at school. It is vitally important that every student knows that there is support there should they need it.

That is why the Palaszczuk government went to the last election with a game-changing over \$100 million Student Wellbeing Package. Our commitment is to directly employ an additional 464 frontline mental health and wellbeing professionals over the next three years so that every student in every primary and secondary state school will have access to a professional to support their mental health and wellbeing. That is a game changer and that is an Australian first. In addition, the wellbeing package includes a pilot of GPs working in selected state secondary schools one day a week to provide students in locations of greatest need with access to free confidential health support and advice.

I am glad to report on the solid progress we are making in relation to the wellbeing professionals. As at 30 June 2022 the department has employed 97 wellbeing professionals. Considering the difficulties in recruitment in the mental health space at the moment in the last 12 months, I think they have done an outstanding job, particularly with interstate lockdowns still in place. This is a very good result. I look forward to increasing those numbers in coming years.

The 97 includes 57 psychologists, 12 guidance officers, 25 social workers and three youth workers. They are currently supporting students in almost 300—nearly 25 per cent—Queensland state schools. That is a great outcome in the first year. The direction we are heading towards is a ratio of one health professional for every 500 students. That is in line with the standard recommendation of the Australian Psychological Society. This compares to the current situation where the work falls primarily on guidance officers, who do a great job I must add. This is a nominal ratio of one guidance officer for every 1,060 students. We are reducing that by half.

In relation to the GPs in Schools, our commitment was 20 schools. We had a great expression of interest come in from 50 schools. We budgeted an extra \$6 million, bringing that budget now to \$106 million. I am proud to say that we have 32 GPs in schools. We have exceeded our election commitment of 20, so we are now up and running. We have already met and exceeded expectations. It is great to have those 32 doctors in place. A further 18 schools are expected to commence providing services this financial year.

As we know, the health system is under enormous pressure at the moment due to COVID in every single state and territory in Australia, if not the world. This package that we have pulled together is game changing. It is acknowledging the seriousness. It is putting experts in. It is relieving pressure on the workload for teachers, teacher aides and principals in schools. It is a type of support that I think is very much needed out there. I think having that professional support available will not only help the students but, like I said, help the whole school community. It will give greater peace of mind to parents, it will allow teachers to focus on their job of teaching and it will allow principals to get on with their job of leading their school.

Every child deserves a world-class education. If they experience mental health issues, we will be there for them. We will continue to back our students and support them. I look forward to updating the committee on its upcoming rollout. It has been a great initiative. We look forward to continuing in challenging times to implement this fantastic election commitment.

CHAIR: It is an invaluable program.

Mr SULLIVAN: I refer to page 2 of the SDS—in particular, to the delivery of additional and renewed infrastructure in Queensland state schools. Can the minister outline how the Palaszczuk

government's Go for Gold program is delivering new and updated sporting infrastructure in our schools both in terms of wellbeing for our students and ahead of the Olympic Games?

Ms GRACE: I know that we are all excited about the Olympic Games. It is 10 years away. Who knows where the next Ian Thorpe or Cathy Freeman will come from? Our state schools today are full of possible Olympic athletes of tomorrow. We want to provide them with the best chance in the lead-up to the games by funding gold standard sports infrastructure projects.

This is a really great program. The Premier and I are both very excited about this. It is a \$100 million Go for Gold Fund to build new sports infrastructure at state schools across the state to encourage as many students as possible to participate in sport. The fund can also be accessed to enhance existing infrastructure. If we need to build a better pool, a better sports field, a better athletics field—something like that—these are the types of projects we want to look at. This investment will also ensure the benefits of 2032 games are felt right across Queensland state schools, and we have a legacy project there.

The program will fund a range of upgrades—ovals, multipurpose courts, synthetic pitches, refurbishment of outdoor court spaces and emerging sports, and we know our young people have done particularly well at those. I am looking forward to putting those in some of the schools as well. We know that active kids are happy kids and we want to get more kids more active more often.

We recently met with the Queensland Academy of Sport. They know that the athletes of the future for the Olympic Games are probably participating in sport in our schools at the moment. It is probably the best feeder for them for athletes of the future. There was a great meeting with the department and with me at the Nathan campus. We are really looking forward to working with them and implementing this. Their board and their strategy are incredible to see. They are focusing on a number of sports that they feel they can deal with. Most of those sports are played in schools. We want to link with them. We want to link with them in the rolling out of this program. We want to link with the Olympic committee. We want to link with the Premier, who is the Minister for the Olympics.

It is a really exciting program. We are hoping that grants will be awarded from May 2023. We expect all projects to be delivered by the end of 2025, so it gives enough time for these facilities to be in place. It will make a difference to so many students and local communities across Queensland as well as create an average of nearly 60 jobs a year over the life of the program.

I cannot wait to see the applications roll in. I am looking forward to those upgraded facilities. I know that many of you would love them in your electorates. There is no doubt about it. We will work around that and try to do our best to spread the \$100 million as much as we can so that we have fantastic facilities going forward.

CHAIR: Excellent. I am sure everyone will be very excited to see that in their schools. With reference to page 1 of the SDS, can you please advise how the Palaszczuk government is supporting new research that responds to key challenges in education?

Ms GRACE: This is important because we know that education is constantly evolving and we want to ensure that we are tapping into the best available minds and research to stay ahead of the game and continue to deliver world-class education for Queensland students. Some aspects of schools and education from 100 years ago, or maybe even 10 years ago, might not have changed all that much but others are barely recognisable. Who would have thought that when I started I had a slate! Interestingly, it is about the same size as a laptop or an iPad but they are completely devices. They are unrecognisable. I do not even think the kids of today would recognise a slate if they saw one. Maybe I am giving away my age but hopefully not too much!

CHAIR: You might be, Minister!

Ms GRACE: It is on the website anyway, so it does not matter. We want to keep looking over the horizon at what is next. Today I am delighted to announce the 14 successful projects that will receive a combined \$1 million in funding from the Palaszczuk government under the Education Horizon grants program for 2022—10 of which are led by women. Member for Hinchinbrook, it is great to see that women are in the research space as well.

This is funding for some of Queensland's brightest minds in education research to tackle modern challenges in early childhood and school education. The 14 projects cover a wide range of education matters, from health and wellbeing to leadership, to learning in a rapidly changing modern world. For example, the Queensland University of Technology's Kate Williams is researching how neuroscience can be used to influence and enhance early childhood education practices. This project will help to

bridge the gap between neuroscience and its application in an educational environment to benefit the development, learning and wellbeing of Queensland children in early education.

Susan Hopkins from the University of Southern Downs is researching how we can empower students to be literate and critical users of social media—very important. This research program will look at how schools can address the potential harms of social media use and educate students on how to safely navigate the online world. I think that is so important. You cannot take those devices away. Students are growing up with these devices. We have to give them the tools to manage them.

Griffith University's Dawn Adams is researching barriers to learning and wellbeing for students on the autism spectrum—a very important part of our disability enhancement program as well. This project will look at how physical environments such as lighting and sound can negatively impact on children with autism who have sensory processing challenges and how schools can make their learning environments more inclusive.

There is some great work being done. We need additional research. This is great research, particularly in relation to the improvements we are making to special schools and the facilities in schools. We are always looking to improve outcomes for all Queensland students, and that is what these Education Horizon grants are all about. I would like to congratulate the successful applicants. It is heartening to see so many women represented amongst the grant recipients. We often say that you can't be what you can't see. It is so important that Queensland girls and young women see role models succeeding in their fields. This is a very great announcement. I am really looking forward to it. There are many more examples here. Dr Linda-Dianne Willis from the University of Queensland, in partnership with Parents and Citizens' Associations Queensland, received \$200,000 over two years to research and identify best practice parent and community engagement in our schools. There are some other great ones about linkages with positive parenting and community engagement, which create better academic and social outcomes. Congratulations to all. I look forward to hearing similarly positive outcomes from this year's research projects.

CHAIR: There is some fantastic research. I do not think we can underplay the importance of skilling up for social media and how to help our young people manage that. Member for South Brisbane.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is for the minister. Minister, you have said that the benefits of the Olympics will be felt across the state, yet it is becoming increasingly clear that a legacy of the Olympic Games will be the closure of East Brisbane State School. Can you provide details on what options are being considered and the likely future of the school?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I think I answered a very similar question on notice in relation to what you have asked. You are asking it again. I know that the Greens do not support the Olympic Games.

Dr MacMAHON: That is correct.

Ms GRACE: I know they call it a flash in the pan. I do not know whether that necessarily reflects the views of a lot of citizens around Queensland.

Dr MacMAHON: It does. It certainly reflects the views of my electorate.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane!

Ms GRACE: I would say that it is a very exciting time. We are providing \$100 million for facilities right across the state, and at the same time it is our time to shine. We have 10 years before the Olympic Games happen. Some may call it a flash in the pan; I call it a momentous moment for Queensland and the world that we are hosting the Olympic Games.

I think you mentioned closing the school. I do not know how you have come to that assessment. Final design and final works on that stadium have not been completed. As Minister for Education, I am happy for the school to remain where it is. We know that they are going to be impacted. We are not in a cocoon where we do not see the outside world. The Gabba redevelopment is expected to impact East Brisbane State School.

In answer to the question on notice I said there are a number of options and scenarios that could possibly come about. Once a decision is made on the extent and timing of the stadium rebuild—which has not been done to date—we are operating in a vacuum. We do not know the footprint. We do not know the design. We have a schematic sketch. We are still stabbing in the dark. It is still 10 years away, but I recognise that the stadium probably needs to build for the future. We are looking at all of those things, as I said in my response to you. We will always commit to consultation. I have met with the

school community and Minister Hinchliffe on two occasions. I promise that when we have more information I will meet with them again.

Dr MacMAHON: I do not think that constitutes consultation.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane!

Ms GRACE: We now have a meeting scheduled because I know they have heard all of the speculation and all of the misinformation—

Dr MacMAHON: And lack of information.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane!

Ms GRACE:—that is coming out from the Greens. If you have any information that you can give them please share it with me, because at the moment no decision has been made.

Dr MacMAHON: We are waiting for answers from the government.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane, unless you have something to table please cease with your interjections.

Ms GRACE: No decisions have been made. No final designs are available. If you have them please share them, because I certainly do not. All I can say to you is that I am more than happy to meet with the school community. From memory, we have a meeting on 16 August. We have always committed to full consultation with that school community, but I just do not want it to be fake consultation for consultation's sake. That is disrespectful to that school community. I want to give them the information they justly deserve to make an informed decision and to work with us on what we need to do in relation to East Brisbane State School. As I said, I have already met with them. I think the Deputy Premier, who is also the minister for Olympics infrastructure, has already met with them on two occasions. I think they are getting the same response as well—

Dr MacMAHON: No responses.

Ms GRACE: There are no responses because we have not finalised the design; do you understand?

Dr MacMAHON: You will finalise design before you consult with the school community.

Ms GRACE: We know that the stadium is going to be built on that site. We know that we have the Olympic Games in 2032. We do not know the full impact at the moment, but of course there are options and things that we are looking at. I am happy to meet with the school community. I will meet with them soon. Once the government makes a decision they will be the first to be consulted. I extend my absolute commitment—in spite of the misinformation and misleading points that are being made by the Greens on social media—to full consultation with that school community. I give them my guarantee in spite of what has been said by the Greens, who hate the Olympic Games and see it as a flash in the pan.

Dr MacMAHON: To clarify, Minister, you will make a decision before consulting.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane, you do not have the call. I said from the get-go this morning that people at this table are to conduct themselves respectfully. Speaking over the top of the chair is not doing that, so I will now call to the member for Moggill for the next question.

Dr ROWAN: My question is to the director-general. With reference to page 48 of the capital statement and the Cooler Cleaner Schools program, can you please advise whether there have been any asbestos exposure incidents in the last 12 months that were identified and/or reported which were directed related to air-conditioning installation under the Cooler Cleaner Schools program, and if so which schools and how many incidents were notifiable?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. Of the 649 schools with air conditioning installed there have been 24 asbestos-related incidents. Where that asbestos has been identified or encountered onsite, as we heard earlier, the department follows our asbestos management policy plan and guidelines and of course considers the safety of students and staff the highest priority at all times.

The schools where asbestos-related incidents were identified are: Beenleigh State High School, notifiable—I can go into further detail, but I think you just want the list at hand, member; Baringa east state school; Capalaba State College; Clontarf Beach State High School; Clontarf Beach State School; Corinda State High School; Gympie State High School, not notifiable; Harristown State High School, not notifiable; Ipswich State High School, not notifiable; Logan Village State School, not notifiable; MacGregor State High School, not notifiable; MacGregor State High School again, not notifiable—so there are two incidents; a third at MacGregor State High School which was notifiable; Miami State

School, notifiable; Miami State High School, not notifiable; Mount Gravatt State High School, not notifiable; Norville State School, notifiable; Palm Beach Currumbin State High School, notifiable; Rosedale State School, notifiable; Sunnybank State High School, notifiable; Sunnybank State High School again, notifiable; Victoria Point State School, not notifiable; Victoria Point State School, not notifiable; and Woodridge North State School, notifiable.

Dr ROWAN: I have a further question to the director-general about that. In relation to those notifiable incidents, can you confirm they were all managed in accordance with procedures and protocols and the relevant workplace health and safety legislation?

Mr De'Ath: I have information relating to the summary of each incident, and I believe that to absolutely be the case.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, on 19 April 2022 the minister announced the completion of air-conditioning installation in all Queensland schools. The capital statement has an allocation of more than \$276 million for this program. Given the Queensland government announced the full completion of the program in April this year, can you explain how more than \$40 million will be expended in 2022-23 with more than \$36 million to also be spent after this financial year?

Ms GRACE: One word.

Mr De'Ath: The minister is right—maintenance. I will pass to the acting deputy director-general to elaborate.

Ms GRACE: We have over 35,000 units in Queensland.

Mr Anson: The Cooler Cleaner Schools Program that you refer to—the \$477.1 million program that goes from 2019-20 through to the end of the 2023-24 financial year; that is, 30 June 2024—includes a number of components. As you alluded to earlier, there is the installation of air conditioning across the schools, and I do not have the number in front of me—

Ms GRACE: It is 649 schools and 10,000 classrooms.

Mr Anson: Thank you, Minister. That is one component of it. There is also the replacement or upgrade of units that exist across what we call the cooler school zones, which is everywhere west of the Dividing Range and north of about Gladstone. That is happening from 2021 through to 2024. There is also maintenance included in that program out to 30 June 2024, there was a budget there for utilities costs for after they were installed, and there is a component that relates to ACES as well. In relation to the 2022-23 budget, I can say that the replacement of the cooler school zone units component is about \$55½ million, the maintenance is just over \$6 million, utilities is just over \$6 million, and ACES has a residual budget of just over \$23 million. It is important to note that the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program is not just the installation piece; it is many components.


Dr ROWAN: Director-General, in relation to that \$55.5 million for replacements, is there a breakdown of how many of those replacements are ducted air conditioning as opposed to split system air conditioning?

Mr De'Ath: I think we might have to take that on notice and see if we can obtain that information during the break.

Ms GRACE: We will try to get that for you. All new schools are now ducted. Most of them are split because no schools were air-conditioned other than in the cooler school zones, and even they were modified from previous buildings that have happened. I do not know whether we have the breakdown of split versus ducted. I do not know whether we keep that but we will let you know if we have it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will now take a break and the hearing will resume at 10.45 am with the continued examination of the estimates for the education portfolio.

Proceedings suspended from 10.32 am to 10.46 am.

 **CHAIR:** This hearing is resumed. How delightful it is to be joined by the students of Durack primary school to hear the estimates process for the education committee. Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will continue its examination of the estimates for the education portfolio. We will start with the government side for questions.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, in relation to page 2 of the SDS and its reference to 'additional and renewed infrastructure', can you advise how the Palaszczuk government's \$20 million Eat Right Play Right Learn Well program will deliver playground and tuckshop upgrades across Queensland?

Ms GRACE: Can I start by going back to the question in relation to split units and ducted units. There are over 35,000 spaces and over 50,000 units in Queensland. Unfortunately, we do not have the

exact figures that separates them. It is not contained in that way so there are no figures I can give you. I thought I would let you know that.

I thank the member for the question about tuckshops and upgrades to playground areas. I know the students from Durack would like to hear about upgrades to playground equipment. I opened some beautiful playground equipment at Nundah State School this week. The grade 2s actually helped design the playground, which was terrific. They are now in grade 3 and those students assisted in designing their playground and it is gorgeous. Students, if you need an upgrade to your playground, let all the people behind me know because they are the ones who might suggest we come out to Durack and have a look at your playground and maybe build something fantastic.

When I ask students what their favourite part of school is, most of the time they say lunchtime and other times they say being in the playground and outdoors with their friends. I see a lot of thumbs up and nods from the gallery. We are going to invest \$20 million over two years for our school playgrounds and tuckshops. I know that students love their tuckshops, so we are going to invest in them so they are in the best condition in order to support active play and healthy eating for students.

Around \$20 million will be divided equally, with half for improving playgrounds and half for upgrading tuckshops. We want to see nice tuckshops so that when you order your lunch, your morning tea or whatever you eat during the day you can go to lovely facilities. We have done up a lot of them and there is more to do, but we now have this dedicated funding. We have our eyes on prioritising those ones that are looking a bit sad so we can improve them. Perhaps your tuckshop and a playground in your school might get upgraded very soon with that \$20 million.

The Eat Right Play Right Learn Well initiative is part of the Palaszczuk government's ongoing commitment to enhance school infrastructure. Many schools have identified the growing need for investment in tuckshop facilities. A lot of schools want to see their tuckshops upgraded so that they can meet the health and safety and food preparation standards and to be fit for their school environment. We want to ensure that the students, particularly those from Durack State School who are in the gallery, have tuckshop facilities that can support healthy eating and give students the food they need to grow for physical development and cognitive enrichment. What that basically means is so that your mind works really well when you are at school learning. This program is all about supporting health and wellbeing of students and it is part of our ongoing commitment to students, to make sure that they can learn in very good environments. We also want to help schools that do not have the means to undertake P&C fundraising initiatives to facilitate tuckshop upgrades to provide healthy food options for students made fresh and on site.

Meanwhile, the \$10 million playground upgrades will help keep our kids active and healthy, a strong focus from the Palaszczuk government in the lead-up to the 2032 Olympic Games. Who knows, Chair, we may have some future Olympians in the gallery today from Durack State School! I am sure most of them would love to be in the Olympic Games. Hands up if you would like to be. I can see many hands up there in the gallery. Investment will focus on encouraging participation, getting more kids active and partnering with our \$100 million Go for Gold Fund which will improve other facilities. We are going to transform tuckshops, playground and sporting facilities in all schools. I cannot wait to roll it all out. Thank you for the question.

Mr SULLIVAN: With reference to page 2 of the SDS, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government's election commitment to introduce homework centres in Queensland is being received?

Ms GRACE: We went to the election with the homework centres and they have been a great success in supporting students and easing the burden on families. Homework, as we know, is an important and necessary part of every child's education. However, I bet a lot of students in the gallery do not like doing homework. Every single hand has gone up—amazing! Any parent will tell you how difficult it can be to find time to assist their children to get their homework done. After-school homework centres are designed to provide an alternative for busy families by making good use of our fabulous teacher aides to provide a supportive, supervised environment for kids to do their homework before they go home for the day. Funding is also provided for extra resources to support the homework centres' operation, including the provision of healthy snacks for the students. It was great to be at Darra State School where we visited the homework centre. The healthy snacks were lovely: they had nuts, fruit and all kinds of snacks for the children. They were hungrily eating it all which was really lovely to see.

The key feature of the initiative is that it is available to students free of charge, and families at participating schools can register their children simply by contacting their school administration. It is entirely voluntary; no-one is made to go to a homework centre.

In line with the \$8 million commitment we took to the last election, homework centres are currently operating at 120 Queensland state schools—a good mix of primary and secondary schools—across the length and breadth of the state with more than half in regional Queensland, which is really great. At last count, we had almost 5,000 attendees at 300 homework sessions across 120 schools. The feedback from the schools has been exceptional, demonstrating how important and successful the initiative has been. From Darra State School, which I mentioned before—

Parents and children are loving having the time and assistance to do their homework at the school. Students enjoy having free time at home. Parents like not having the stress or responsibility of supervising homework at home.

I was impressed by how enthusiastic the kids were in attending in the afternoon. A group of them went to one of the lovely classrooms there, where they were assisted one-on-one. They got straight to work. I was a distraction more than anything, I think. It was really nice to see them enjoying it. From Cunnamulla P-12 State School—

Improvements in our school because of the homework centre included improved staff-student relationships, improved social and emotional learning, and the introduction of healthy diet choices.

They are seeing a great improvement. From Elliott Heads—

The homework centre has been a godsend for our students. Completion rates of homework have increased. Students are getting a healthy afternoon tea three days each week. Students have an adult to support and encourage them with their homework task.

From Clermont State School—

Our school community loved the homework centre.

These are absolutely glowing endorsements. I believe they are working really well. We want to see how the initiative might be even further rolled out and hopefully we will be making further announcements because they are such great initiatives. We will continue to back our students with all the support they need to reach their full potential. All I can say is I wish there was one when I went to school. Homework was not my forte!

CHAIR: Me, too! In relation to page 2 of the department's SDS and its reference to additional and renewed infrastructure, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government will renew and upgrade specialist learning spaces across 36 schools?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question and I know how passionate she is about this particularly in her electorate. The Palaszczuk government continues to make significant investment in world-class educational facilities across the state as part of our nearly \$2 billion in the budget for education infrastructure. This investment is not just for new schools and new classrooms, but also includes more than \$623 million to renew, refresh and refurbish facilities at existing schools. I can tell you that the schools are loving it! Each one of them talk about the benefits. They have been able to remove and change carpets, paint—it is amazing what a lick of paint, new cupboards, new furniture, new carpet and new lighting can do to some of our tired buildings. We were finding that we were going to our state-of-the-art, most beautifully designed new schools with new buildings which are fantastic and then visiting some of the older ones which were in need of a bit of a refurb, so this refresh program is to join the gap between the two. It is working really well.

We know that the majority of enrolment increases are concentrated in high-growth areas in the state's south-east, but it is important to know that the Palaszczuk government works for all Queenslanders, and this budget reflects that.

Our contemporary specialist spaces program is a four-year, \$180 million funding boost for 36 schools which will focus on learning spaces for the delivery of specialist subjects such as industrial design and science, home economics, music and the arts. This program will renew and upgrade existing learning spaces at schools across Queensland to ensure our students are getting the best. Specialist subjects give our students the skills they need for the jobs we have now and for the jobs we are creating for the future.

I know the \$13 million design and technology precinct at Gladstone State High School is very welcome. I was there recently. I visited with the local member, Minister Glenn Butcher, in June. I received good news from Principal Martin, teachers and students who told me how excited they were. Gladstone is an industrial town, and I might say that their design and technology precinct left much to be desired, so this \$13 million is going to deliver a state-of-the-art precinct in the largely industrial town. They are so excited about this being delivered. It will include four junior workshops, one engineering workshop, a senior construction workshop, and three robotics and electronics studios. It will be state-of-the-art. We will transform that area in the school to modern-day, world-class facilities.

Projects like this will help the school teach valuable, modern skills within the design and technology curriculum, including a Certificate III in aviation for drone piloting. I was in Bundaberg recently. The drone school studies is incredible; the kids love it. The uses that they put these drones to is really second to none, as we know, such as protecting our beaches. Drones are changing the way we operate every day.

Facilities that are helping students learn skills that will help them enter careers that did not exist 10 years ago will be included in this. I know the honourable member for Moggill is extremely happy to see the \$6.5 million investment in Kenmore State High School in his electorate for manual arts, robotics and hospitality enhancements. Inglewood State School will receive over \$800,000 to extend its flexible specialist spaces. I have seen how handy these spaces can be and how conducive they are to learning, so I know the member for Southern Downs will be pleased to see this addition. Goondiwindi State High School will also receive over \$800,000 to upgrade their ITD area.

We know how important it is to ensure existing facilities meet the rapidly changing curriculum for our students. I am so proud of the budget and that we unashamedly allocate this kind of money for renewal and refurbishment projects so that kids can continue to enjoy these facilities. We want to narrow that gap between the brand new, state-of-the-art—the design is incredible. The infrastructure team that are here today do an amazing job, but we do want to see other schools keeping pace and other areas of the schools keeping pace as well. That is what this is all about.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thanks very much, Minister. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I wish to go back to the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program, and I reference the Capital Statement, page 48 and also page 4, the impacts of COVID-19. During the last 12 months, how many schools have undertaken full and comprehensive air ventilation audits?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I will just locate that information for you. Based on expert advice, the department adopted a multilayered approach to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 in schools including physical distancing, good hygiene, additional cleaning, and natural and mechanical ventilation. Obviously our Queensland weather means that ventilation of learning spaces can often occur naturally by opening windows or doors—we are very fortunate—or relocating learning to outdoor settings. Schools can of course also ensure there is mechanical ventilation through fans and air conditioning.

The department engaged a consultant engineering firm to conduct ventilation assessments in classrooms and staffrooms. Those assessments consider natural and mechanical ventilation options and recommend necessary adjustments to improve cross-flow ventilation and air quality. Carbon dioxide monitors and guidance materials will be provided to all Queensland state schools, and air purifiers are available for installation in classrooms and staffrooms where natural or mechanical ventilation options need to be supplemented. In terms of total ventilation assessments, as at 20 July 2022 there were 102 in total: 50 physical assessments completed, 43 scheduled and an additional nine requested.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, just to clarify, has the department committed to a complete and comprehensive air ventilation audit of every classroom, or in that response is it a risk management framework that is being implemented?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I believe the audit and ventilation assessments have taken a risk management approach to the issue.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, the use of air conditioning to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 is advised, along with the instruction that air must be drawn from outside and not recirculated, indoor air. In fact, that is the advice of the Department of Education as well. In your earlier response at the beginning of this session you said there were 50,000 units in Queensland schools but you were unable to identify how many of those are ducted versus a split system. I want to ask: can you assure this committee that the air-conditioning units that are installed in Queensland schools have the ability and function to draw air from outside, as advised by the department's *Creating a COVID safe environment* document?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. In relation to our expert panel, I can say that no-one in any of the other states has done—because last year for six months New South Wales and Victorian schools were closed—comprehensive audits of the air ventilation. They could not have done it because the schools were empty. Their audits were more along the lines of whether or not they could open a window. We are the only state or territory that has full air conditioning in all of our schools. This is all taken into account.

Most of our units are such that fresh air is drawn in. Wherever that may not be the case or we need to go out and check, we do that; we go out and have a look. We do the ventilation audits that the director-general spoke about and air purifiers are provided. We are very comfortable with where we are in maintaining as safe an environment as possible in schools because of the unique position that we are in, being six years ahead of the LNP's policy, where our schools are air-conditioned, they can open windows and they are greatly ventilated. In any new buildings we are building the ventilation is second to none, which enables that free flow of air to occur. If there are issues, we will go in and obviously conduct a more comprehensive audit, and the director-general gave you those figures. My understanding is that most of the units are pretty big. I took a photo recently at Nundah State School. They are pretty big units. They draw in fresh air. I do not have a breakdown because we do not have it here. The director-general is giving me some information.

We have entered into an agreement with the Queensland University of Technology to support the development of a ventilation strategy. This is supported with the distinguished Professor Morawska from the International Laboratory for Air Quality and Health. We are getting the best advice we possibly can and we are ensuring that our schools are as safe as they can be. The working group which I established has been working on this, as you know. We had non-state schools there as well; they were very keen to participate. We considered the expert advice, and I mentioned Professor Morawska. There is no advice to suggest that a comprehensive audit was required for every single classroom in the state. Where audits do take place, they should be done only once students are back in the classroom so that accurate measurements can be conducted. Let me tell you: we have a more comprehensive strategy in this space than any other state or territory. I feel very confident to say that. I am happy for the director-general to add to that.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, Minister, for your comments. I will try to reinforce them a little bit further. We have been very consistent throughout the entire COVID-19 pandemic that we would follow expert health advice. I think we have honoured that in the true intent of the word spoken. In relation to this matter, the expert panel has been an important consideration for us and that has provided us with the expert advice, as the minister said. I think it is only appropriate that where the department are not experts in air ventilation we seek expert advice and we follow that advice.

Dr ROWAN: What I really want to get to is: in terms of those 50,000 units—and the department at this stage does not know how many are split systems versus ducted, and there is a replacement program which the acting deputy director-general has said is \$55.5 million—is the process when air conditioning is replaced under the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program that there is alignment with the policies that are there to ensure the optimal outcome in relation to air ventilation and in accordance with the working group? I want to know how those processes are all brought together to ensure that delivers the optimal air ventilation. That is a question to the director-general.

Ms GRACE: Can I take a point of order, Chair? The department knows the units that are out there. They just do not have the exact number. Every region has a responsibility for their schools—their maintenance, their enhancements and their replacements. To be able to say to you that out of 50,000 units there are so many of this and so many of that—they know the units that they have. I just want to clarify—

Dr ROWAN: Is that reported to the department centrally?

Ms GRACE: It is not that they do not know; it is just not collated in that way. The department is well aware of the units that are in schools. I just want to clarify that on the parliamentary record.

Dr ROWAN: Is that centrally reported, Minister?

Ms GRACE: Centrally reported or however it is reported—you are asking me a question and I am saying that we cannot give you the exact numbers. However, to suggest that the department does not know what is in their schools from a regional and a school perspective—a lot of the time we refer the units to the principal. They know their school better than anybody and we work with them in doing that. I just wanted to clarify that on a point of order. I am happy for the director-general to continue.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for your question. I would just refer back to my earlier comment about expert advice and the expert panel in relation to whatever form of ventilation we have, and that is where we take our expert advice from. If it does help the member with the question, all of our replacement units do draw on fresh air. I think that is an important consideration to note and I am sure that is relevant to the question that you have asked us.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, in relation to specific school planning measures being undertaken by the department and particularly given the current third wave of COVID-19, can you advise the

committee how many rapid antigen test kits have had to be purchased by the department for schools and have they been delivered to every school and what has been the total cost?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. This was actually a feature of the department's work through the pandemic that I would have to say that both the minister and I are incredibly proud of in terms of how highly responsive we were to this issue. I think it is fair to say that the Queensland government and the Queensland Department of Education took a very considered approach to this. We did follow the health advice, as I mentioned earlier, and when it was determined that we would supply rapid antigen tests out to all school sites that happened in an expedient and often incredibly creative manner, and I want to really pay tribute also to our regional staff for their terrific work there.

To come to the specific nature of your question, the department since the beginning of the pandemic has purchased and delivered over 1.05 million rapid antigen tests to Queensland schools, including Catholic and independent schools, and, alongside probably your earlier question, more than 1,440 carbon dioxide monitors and over 250 standalone air purification and filtration units to state schools. As at 27 July 2022, approximately 2.5 million face masks have been delivered to Queensland state schools, including outdoor education centres. We continue to monitor the stocks and supplies that schools have, and have in fact quite recently followed up further on that given the recent wave, and we are very satisfied that schools are communicating with us about their needs, that we are monitoring that and being highly responsive to that and providing them with whatever they need.

Ms GRACE: Member for Moggill, I think we cornered the market on hand sanitiser as well at one stage.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, just in relation to those additional costs for the Department of Education for whether it is additional hand sanitiser, additional high-touchpoint cleaning and the provision of extra protective equipment including masks, is there an anticipated cost that you could advise in terms of what the implications will be of that for the next 12 months?

Ms GRACE: The next 12 months? I think we have all of the supplies we need.

Mr De'Ath: I think we are well stocked at this point, and I thank the member for the question. The information I have before me looks quite aggregated, so I just want to check if we have any further breakdown. We have a total of \$169.2 million, including health national partnership funding. I am going to ask for a little further clarification on that, if I may. We will come back to you on that.

Mr Anson: I can just add that that figure that the director-general quoted includes the additional cleaners—that is, the cost of the additional cleaning, if you like, for the cleaners—

Ms GRACE: I do not think that is what he is asking.

Dr ROWAN: For high-touchpoint cleaning, yes.

Mr Anson: We have aggregated those costs in terms of the figures that Mr De'Ath has provided you.

Ms GRACE: Can I clarify: did you ask for this financial year or do you want the whole time COVID has been in?

Dr ROWAN: It was anticipated for this next financial year, but if there are figures for the entire time that would be great. It was really anticipating moving forward and including high-touchpoint cleaning, masks and so on.

Ms GRACE: Yes, all of that and we have been doing all of that, as you are well aware.

Mr De'Ath: If I could elaborate, as at 30 June 2022, the estimated net financial impact of the COVID-19 health pandemic on the department is around \$205 million. That includes \$19.8 million for 2019-20, \$60.2 million for 2020-21 and \$125.1 million for 2021-22. I trust that assists.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is in relation to the COVID-19 mandates, Minister. Can the minister advise how much was paid out during this time in the last financial year in relation to relief staff to cover the costs of those teachers and staff who were unable to work within the Department of Education in Queensland?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. We have a relief staff pool and at any point in time we have staff who are absent for all kinds of reasons—whether it is on leave, both paid and unpaid, whether it is due to sick leave, whether it is due to COVID and whether it is due to a number of other instances such as whether people resign and we need to provide relief or they are on some sort of paid leave. My understanding is we do not specifically have a figure to say that that relief is there for COVID purposes because there are all kinds of reasons as to why people are away. There is a question on

notice—No. 9—which talks about relief teachers and the costs. If you look at that, that gives you the cost of what our casual and temporary relief staff is. If you look at those figures, we have been pretty standard the whole time. If you look at our history from 2015 right through to 2021-22, the figures are pretty static. Those figures are there for everyone to see in answer to question on notice No. 9, member for Hinchinbrook. Basically the response is we have not seen any blowout in—

Mr DAMETTO: Or fluctuations?

Ms GRACE: Yes, there are always fluctuations as you can see from the last few years, but they are pretty much in line with previous years because we have this pool of around 6,000 relief teachers and obviously we use those for all the different emergencies that come our way or relief that we require—not so much emergencies but for whatever we require on the day. The TRACER which is used is very effective and we provide those teachers, but if you look at those figures they are the best I can do in relation to—

Mr DAMETTO: I guess without interrupting too much, the department has not quantified what it has cost to keep those teachers at home or stand them down in relation to relief staff related to the mandates?

Ms GRACE: The ones who were stood down were not paid, so the amount of salary was not paid to staff who were on suspension. So they were not paid, so any relief that was provided is a net amount. What I am saying is there was no increase to relieve those people who were stood down because they were not paid and those who came in to relieve them would be paid, so it is a net figure.

Mr DAMETTO: I guess to clarify what I was trying to ask was the department has not quantified what the relief costs were for replacing those stood down teachers?

Ms GRACE: I can ask our acting director-general to see what they have. I know that the staffing figure there is around \$21 million of not paid, but, like I said, if you bring in relief staff you are not paying those staff so there is a net additional amount. These broader figures are the ones that count. This is what we need for casual and temporary relief staff in our schools. Those figures demonstrate no increase, but there is a lot of work we have to do in schools without having to quantify every kind of relief that goes in for the specific reason. I know that the system can gather how much we have not paid in salaries from those stood down without pay. I do not know whether the acting director-general can give any more than what I have given, but I will defer to him now.

Mr DAMETTO: Before you do, would I also be able to get a figure perhaps of how many staff members were stood down by the Department of Education? That might be able to quantify that later.

Ms GRACE: Some 549 teachers were suspended.

Mr DAMETTO: Excellent.

Mr Anson: I thank the member for the question; it is a very valid question. The reason we cannot pin that exact number down is that we have a system in place called TRACER and that is where we source all relief teachers from—whether it be because staff members are suspended or whether it be because they are sick or absent for other reasons—so we only collect that data at a total level. We do not collect information on the reasons why a school may or may not require a relief teacher.

It is important to note as well that just because a teacher may be absent for any reason it does not mean that the school is automatically going to source a relief teacher. They may have other options that they draw upon. It would not be prudent of me to estimate what a cost would be in relation to what your specific question is.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for your answer.

CHAIR: Did you want to add to that, Mr De'Ath?

Mr De'Ath: If I may, Chair. I think it is a really good opportunity, and it would be remiss of me not to take it, to recognise that this is a relief pool of about 5,000 teachers in the state who stepped up during a time that was really important for us to ensure that we kept schools, teachers, communities and young people safe. I really want to recognise the fantastic contribution that those people have made throughout the first part of this year.

CHAIR: We have another school in the gallery today. Welcome. We hope you enjoy the estimates process for education.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you update the committee on how the Palaszczuk government is improving internet access for school staff and students by boosting bandwidth at all Queensland state schools?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. It is a great question. I am delighted to update the committee on the progress of this fantastic initiative. This is one area that has significantly changed since I went to school. We had no internet, we had no computers and we had no mobile phones when I went to school.

CHAIR: It was with slate, wasn't it?

Ms GRACE: When I say that the more things change the more they stay the same, I am once again giving away my age.

Dr ROWAN: It was last century.

Ms GRACE: It was last century, member for Moggill. I will take that interjection. We have entered into a \$190 million, five-year partnership with Telstra that will deliver faster internet speeds at every one of our 1,258 state schools across the state. We have worked on this for a while. We wanted to get it right. I think the department has done a great job. We are talking speeds of 40 times faster on average than the previous standard by the end of 2023 and 200 times faster in 2026. That is a significant increase. This will enable teachers and students right across Queensland to have access to the latest tools and technologies needed to deliver a truly 21st century education.

Around 40 schools will be connected to fibre-optic for the first time, and our more isolated schools and students will not be left behind. Newer technologies like next-generation satellites will be used to deliver faster internet where terrestrial options are less practical. As a result of these upgrades, students from even the most remote part of Queensland will have better access to quality, high-speed connectivity and will get to enjoy all the opportunities that come with it.

I was at the Isolated Children's Parents' Association conference out at Blackall in June and it was fantastic to let the conference know how particular remote and regional schools were progressing with their upgrades. Cunnamulla P-12 State School had already completed its phase 1 upgrade, increasing its bandwidth to 200 megabytes per second, up from 10 megabytes per second previously—an incredible upgrade already there in Cunnamulla. As of yesterday—27 July—191 schools have now been upgraded, with interim upgrades provided to an additional 247 schools and other department sites. These are rolling out every single day. They continue to grow. Just last week we reached a milestone of 50,000 students who now have access to faster internet, and that number had increased again to 60,000 students as of yesterday. We are seeing incredible leaps in relation to this.

This partnership will also see Telstra invest \$110 million to upgrade hundreds of exchanges across the state. Around 370 have been identified already and more are to be added as work progresses. What this means is the benefit of better, faster internet flow, not only now to our schools but also to that broader local community. As they upgrade these exchanges it is not only going to benefit the school; our investment actually benefits the entire community, which is incredible for regional and remote Queensland. I do not know whether the member for Southern Downs was here when I talked about Cunnamulla P-12 State School, one of his schools?

Mr LISTER: It is a little bit west of me.

Ms GRACE: A little bit west, but nearby. Their bandwidth has increased to 200 megabytes per second from 10 megabytes per second.

Mr LISTER: That has really helped our little state schools.

Ms GRACE: And your community out there, too.

Mr LISTER: Yes.

Ms GRACE: Because they now benefit from all of that. From Aurukun to Agnes Water, Currumbin to Cooktown and Yarrabah to Yeppoon, hundreds of communities will reap the benefit of this investment. It really is terrific to see the bandwidth expanding. It is such an exciting development for our schools and the delivery of education throughout Queensland, with great additional benefits.

We are looking at an equity and excellence type of program. We are working on that. This will enable us to rethink how we can deliver to the isolated children in our state. We want to work with the ICPA as well. Technology advancements will give us better opportunities to get certain subjects into classrooms and into schools. It really is a game changer for the future. Classrooms will have access to the very latest technology and students will have no limits placed on their learning.

We are looking at what that means for the modern school of the future. A lot of this research, the grants that I have announced today, will look at that. We want to work with the ICPA about what that means for them. It is a great partnership. As new technologies emerge we will be taking advantage of that new technology—the contract stipulates that—such as low-orbit satellites in remote locations. This

is another way that we are delivering world-class education for Queensland students and for the communities out in regional Queensland. They have not been forgotten. The 370 identified at the moment will benefit incredibly, just like Cunnamulla, as we roll this out by 2023. It will completely change the way we can deliver education and we are working on what that means, what are the opportunities and how we work with these organisations to deliver world-class education into our schools, particularly in regional and remote Queensland. No-one will be left behind. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR: Did you want to add to that, Mr De'Ath?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the opportunity. I cannot state strongly enough, as a director-general of an education department, how exciting an opportunity this is. We are absolutely serious about improving student learning outcomes, about bringing better learning opportunities to students not just in, but particularly in, remote, rural and isolated communities. This is a real game changer. It is an opportunity to really support our teachers in building their expertise in how to teach in different environments and to learn to be better teachers all the time—and our school leaders. It is a big game changer. We are doing a lot of work—the minister and I, with the department—on what this actually means and how we can really exploit this opportunity. We are very excited about it. Queensland will lead the way in this space.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, with reference to page 1 of the SDS, can you update the committee on the purpose and operation of Early Years Places in locations across the state?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, member. I know you have a special place in your heart for the early years as well. As you know, it is a key part of our commitment to giving every child a great start no matter their circumstances. I think getting it right in the early years is so important. It can make all the difference in giving our young children, particularly those in potentially vulnerable situations, the support they and their families need to get them up for later life.

Early Years Places is designed to provide that support for potentially vulnerable children and families and improve education, health and wellbeing outcomes for the next generation of Queenslanders. Essentially, they are one-stop shops where families can access multiple services or referrals to specialist services for their children and themselves, with the needs of the local community determining the type of services delivered. They deliver a variety of integrated services ranging from early childhood services such as kindergarten and long day care to child and maternal health services such as immunisation, child health screening and allied health services such as speech therapy—if you can pick these things up early it is so much better for the family and the child—to parenting and family support such as home visits, play groups, parenting programs, music and play therapy and counselling services.

Early Years Places currently operates in more than 50 communities across Queensland providing those integrated health, parenting and early childhood services for more than 10,000 families per year. These are 10,000 families we are engaging with that without this service probably would not engage with early childhood education. It really is assisting these vulnerable families and children. Surveys of parents and carers have found that more than 90 per cent reported having improved engagement with their child—an incredible outcome—because of the programs and activities provided, and over 80 per cent reported the Early Years Places assisted them to access the services they needed which they may never have been able to. Twenty per cent may have found it, but 80 per cent of the 10,000 families are getting connected and engaging because of the service.

With results like these I am delighted to report that the state government continues this investment with nearly \$30 million—\$29.4 million—invested to support the operation of early years places in the 2022-23 financial year. It is a fantastic example of practical programs supporting children, families and communities to ensure we give every child a great start. At whatever school I go to, if there is a program where a young child has had the ability to go to kindergarten and engage in playgroups then a completely different child enters prep compared to one who has never had any of that engagement. That is what it is about. It is about engaging the disengaged. It is a great program and we are happy to keep investing the money in this financial year.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, can you advise how the government's Cooler, Cleaner Schools Program will continue to provide cooler classrooms, libraries and staffrooms across Queensland state schools?

Ms GRACE: We had a bit of a discussion on this before. I think the Stafford electorate saw almost 120 units installed, including 66 at Wavell Heights State School alone, where we announced that we had air conditioned every classroom, staffroom and library.

Mr SULLIVAN: That is right and thank you again for coming to the school premises.

Ms GRACE: It was great. The Deputy Premier and I were with you at the completion of the program in April. It was a truly memorable day. We are investing in world-class education facilities. As we previously announced, we achieved this magnificent milestone in April, two months ahead of schedule, to ensure students and staff can enjoy air-conditioned spaces from the start of term 2. Around 10,000 spaces in 649 Queensland state schools are now air conditioned thanks to the \$477 million Cooler Cleaner Schools Program.

I cannot commend the department enough. We did this at a time when we needed to provide work and we needed to provide benefits to the community through COVID. They did this during COVID times. They achieved it two months ahead of schedule. It supported a number of jobs. I think at the height of the pandemic, when we were really rolling this out, there were about 1,000 jobs for a moment in time. It was incredible. There were hundreds of jobs during a very difficult time at the height of the pandemic. It was part of our economic recovery plan. We planned to do it at that time and it really worked well.

In the Moggill electorate, 14 air-conditioning units were installed across seven schools with a quarter of a million dollar investment. It is good to see that done. In Southern Downs, 29 schools are now air conditioned with 172 units after an investment of almost \$3 million. I know the member for Theodore is not here, but 268 units were delivered across eight schools through almost \$5 million in Theodore. You can tell that some of these electorates did not have benefit from an ability to put them in. I thank the P&Cs that did an outstanding job in the meantime, but they never have to put their hand in their pocket again. We have put over 50,000 units in all schools. Just divide that by 365 days a year, which is if you can replace a unit every single day, and work out how long it would take to replace every unit in schools. Let me tell you, it is well over that. When I thought there were 35,000 spaces, it would take 100 years to do it. We are not going to take that long. They will never have to put their hand in their pocket.

In Stafford, it was 124 units in seven schools at \$2.6 million. In the Redlands, it was 172 units in seven schools at \$308 million. I know you were so passionate about this, Chair.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms GRACE: I have good news and bad news for the members for Rockhampton and Hinchinbrook. The bad news is that their schools received zero but the good news is that that is because they were already air conditioned. They were not in the cooler part of Queensland. As the member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Rockhampton know, we have a renewal program. Schools in their areas have had new units installed as part of the refreshing of those systems.

In many instances, electrical upgrades are a part of this. So many schools required electrical upgrades. We fully funded all of those and worked with Ergon and Energex to do all of that work. When you are putting in that many units—such as 170 units in the Redlands—it will have an impact on the air conditioning in those schools and on the electrical works. That was a normal part of the upgrades as well. As I said, we paid for all of those electrical upgrades and we will continue to pay for the maintenance and replacement of air-conditioning units as part of this program. As the DG has informed, those units will be about bringing in fresh air, they will be state-of-the-art units and they will be completely upgraded.

Once again, thanks go to our P&Cs. They did a great job but we will take it from here. There are almost 50,000 air-conditioning units now across the state. We know that on any given day one is going to fail. There is no doubt about that. I think they are saying now, together with repair, older units, end of life, operation and all of that, there is probably around \$60 million in the budget to ensure that we maintain it all. It is difficult times at the moment.

Did I say \$380 million for the Redlands? I meant to say \$3.8 million in the Redlands. I know you were lucky, but it was \$3.8 million.

CHAIR: I missed that slip of the tongue.

Ms GRACE: Did you miss that slip? You would probably come back to me asking, 'Where is the other \$100 million for the area?', so I had better correct that. My handy chief of staff mentioned it to me because she knew you would be knocking on my door, asking for the additional funds. There is \$3.8 million for the Redlands.

It is fantastic to sit here and say that we have completed this. I know other states have tried and they are nowhere near Queensland. It has been an outstanding effort. Thank you to my department. They did an outstanding job and they need to be commended for it: well done. Now the ACES is all done. Solar panels: there were more schools than we anticipated and 200,000 panels. It has been an

outstanding program. They said it could never be done. I remember in Parliament House my opposition saying it could never be done. Not only did we do it six years ahead of their plan; we did it two months ahead of schedule. It is an outstanding achievement.

CHAIR: Absolutely. A shout-out to our P&Cs too for everything that they do across our school communities. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: I refer to the SDS at page 11 and staffing. This is a yes or no question: is one assault on a teacher or staff member one assault too many?

Ms GRACE: I agree.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, with reference to your answer to question on notice No. 107, how is that the number of WorkCover claims accepted for teacher and staff assaults has risen by over 78 per cent to 470 claims in the 2020-21 financial year?

Ms GRACE: I agree entirely that one assault is one assault too many, but you are not comparing apples with apples. Firstly, when the previous government was in—the LNP government—they put in a number of barriers to members claiming for WorkCover. The way that you decrease the number of WorkCover claims is you put in barriers. For example, you have a definition of ‘injury’. You would know this with a background as a medical professional. You put in barriers such as definitions that provide a barrier to people getting a claim, such as certain injuries becoming the major contributing factor—work having been—to those injuries.

When you look at previous figures and you look at the figures since this government has been in, we have wound back many of those barriers. Before there were barriers to psychological claims and other claims. Those barriers have now been removed to common law. First responders now get automatic recognition of their injury without having to go through. We have changed the manner in which WorkCover handles psychological claims, where they get in early and they provide assistance while a person is going through a process rather than the person being left in a hiatus situation and not receiving the support that they need. There have been many beneficial additions to the WorkCover scheme.

We believe that if an injury occurs at work then workers deserve to be compensated for that with beneficial legislation. We do not put in barriers; we remove them. It is very difficult to compare those figures from when we came in when all those barriers were there to now when a lot of those barriers have been removed. One way you can say you have safer workplaces is to stop everyone claiming common law, like the previous government did, and you stop them claiming for injuries. That does not mean that the workplaces are any safer; it means the workers are not being compensated. You do not do it by putting in barriers with regard to their ability to claim. You are not comparing apples and apples. We have made beneficial legislation even better, but I agree with you: one assault is one assault too many. We want to make sure that workers get the compensation they deserve.

Dr ROWAN: I will come to the director-general. The department has an Occupational Violence and Aggression Prevention Strategy 2021-2023. Director-General, this strategy implements a so-called operational plan with 20 points of action across five initiatives, with only one initiative pertaining to safety and security. Given that one assault is one assault too many, is how will each action point be specifically measured, benchmarked and quantified?

Mr De’Ath: You are correct that there are a range of initiatives that have been delivered in this space. Of course, I reinforce the comments of the minister: we take these matters most seriously in relation to the safety and wellbeing of our workforce.

Phase 1 of the Safe and Respectful School Communities external communication and engagement campaign is underway: introduction of a new parent and community code of conduct; implementation of the department’s occupational violence and aggression incident support and response process and guide; the development of a psychological first-aid training program to ensure capability and confidence in supporting staff affected by occupational violence and aggression; enhancement of reporting systems for occupational violence and aggression in the department’s incident management system—and there is a recording; and inclusion of occupational violence and aggression content in the department’s mandatory staff training programs. I think this demonstrates that there are a number of actions that we take to both support and monitor our staff, our workforce. We take that most seriously and will continue to do so.

We do have performance metrics around how we are travelling where we record in the My HR incidents and injuries. They are by category and class but, for example, if we look at how we are tracking

in those metrics that is a good news story all around as almost in terms of every measure we are seeing quite significant percentage reductions in the incident rate.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, there are targeted measures and performance measures which you have indicated are being developed. I really want to understand what success looks like in relation to the Occupational Violence and Aggression Prevention Strategy. Is that fewer assaults, fewer WorkCover claims or a combination of both? What is success going to look like? How will the data monitoring be put transparently into the public domain?

Mr De'Ath: It is really important to note that when we raise the profile of a particular issue an increase in reporting is actually a positive. We do not want incidents—let's be very clear about that—but the fact that people feel they can come forward and know there is a response from the department in relation to their concerns is very important. When we look at what is happening around our data on these claims at the moment, we see them falling. We see that as a very strong positive that we are making good gains and good improvement in the space in an environment where this is very much at the forefront of the minds of people who are working in our schools. They know that they can readily report and that they will get a response. They continue to do so, yet most of our key metrics are falling.

CHAIR: I welcome the next school group to the gallery. For our final question of this session, I will go to the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Can the minister advise if the department captures data that stipulates the gender of students in Queensland state schools? Are transgender and non-binary students collated in that data?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I am sure that the schools know the profile of their students. There is no doubt about that. We know when they enrol who is male, who is female and who identifies as a member of the LGBTIQ+ communities. Whether or not we have a comprehensive list of that profile readily available—I think something is coming to me—schools do what they can to ensure they are inclusive schools and that we also identify students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We record that on the My School website. There are a number of different profiles: OneSchool records a student's sex with, obviously, a number of variants such as their backgrounds et cetera. Every school has a welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment.

Mr DAMETTO: Of course. Does the department use that data to help it plan and allocate funding for infrastructure upgrades?


Ms GRACE: Infrastructure upgrades are often based upon a number of things the department works out. Obviously student numbers is one them. I do not think whether they are male, female or from the LGBTIQ+ community has a lot to do with it, to be honest with you.

Mr DAMETTO: I am just curious to know.

Ms GRACE: It is a good question. There is a number: growth, the age of the buildings, what needs to be repaired. The department works on a number of matrices to deliver first-class facilities. I am a little bit anxious to get them all looking spick-and-span, as best we can. Every time I speak to a principal I say, 'Right, get on with the Refresh program.' They are now starting to quote it back to me, so I know I am making an impact. They use a series of matrices to prioritise work: growth, needs—all of that kind of thing. They do an incredible job. One thing is for sure: we work very hard to have an inclusive, supportive and welcoming environment in all of our state schools.

CHAIR: That concludes the committee's consideration of estimates for the education portfolio. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 12.30 pm to consider the estimates for the racing portfolio.

Proceedings suspended from 11.46 am to 12.30 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing is resumed. I welcome back the minister and officials. The committee will now examine the estimates for the racing portfolio until 1 pm. I welcome to the table the member for Everton, Mr Tim Mander. I also welcome for this session the director-general and officers from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. I call the member for Everton.

Mr MANDER: My first question is to the CEO of Racing Queensland. My understanding is that Racing Queensland had a lawsuit against Tabcorp for approximately \$600 million in unpaid fees but recently came to a settlement. Can you advise what amount Tabcorp eventually agreed to pay?

Mr Parnell: In relation to the matter of the litigation which has been settled between Tabcorp and Racing Queensland, that assessment is not accurate. That figure is incorrect. The figure was referred to in Tabcorp's statements previously. The key part of the focus had been litigation between Racing Queensland and Tabcorp over our view that they were not paying the correct amount of taxes in Queensland. That matter was before the courts and has since been settled, subject to legislation taking effect. The critical element within that was around securing industry funding. That was an ongoing discussion that took place. The Tabcorp matter is settled pending the outcome of that legislation.

Mr MANDER: To follow up for clarification: are you saying that the original claim of \$600 million is not accurate?

Mr Parnell: The full claim was worth more than that, but the state would have been a beneficiary. However, the hard claim, which was Racing Queensland's dispute against Tabcorp, was substantially less than that. There were varying bookends to the dispute and we elected to settle on the basis that it would have a substantial litigation cost. The outcome we have secured for racing in Queensland, by virtue of the settlement and the increased payments into the infrastructure fund, outweighed the potential outcomes at court which were at risk.

Mr MANDER: Is it true that a condition of Tabcorp agreeing to settle was the government introducing a five per cent levy on the point of consumption tax on its betting agency competitors?

Mr Parnell: The settlement of the matter and negotiation of it—other than what was publicly disclosed through statements to the Australian Stock Exchange and in our media release—relate to a series of events taking place. First of all, the renewal of racing industry funding through our share of the point of consumption tax. Second of all, through settlement arrangements between us and Tabcorp, of which elements have been disclosed. Then there is increased payments to the state. All of these things are sequenced based on certain events, but they are not all fundamentally interlinked.

Mr MANDER: So you are saying that it is not true that part of the condition of settlement was a five per cent increase in the point of consumption tax?

Mr Parnell: It is an outcome from the settlement and not a condition of the settlement. There is a sequence of events that will take place. One is the renewal of racing industry funding from the wagering tax—the betting tax; a tax on Queensland punters—which is planned to take effect, as we understand it, in December this year. The sequence of events from that will then see an outcome from the settlement of the dispute which was before the courts between Racing Queensland and Tabcorp.

Mr MANDER: When were you first aware the government was planning to increase the point of consumption tax?

Mr Parnell: The discussions with government had been ongoing for the renewal of industry funding. There were three funding arrangements that were due for renewal in mid-2023. Those discussions had been ongoing through this financial year at numerous junctures. They reached finalisation in the last six months of this year. That was around the streamlining of the existing three funding arrangements into one as a share of the betting tax to simplify our arrangements and ensure the sustainability of the racing industry longer term.

CHAIR: Welcome to the Durack State School students who are joining us in the gallery today. It is lovely to have you with us.

Mr MANDER: Lobbying firm Anacta was engaged by Tabcorp to advocate on their behalf and met or had discussions on 22 occasions with the minister's chief of staff. How many times did you or RQ staff meet with or have discussions with Anacta on these matters?

Mr Parnell: On no occasions.

Mr MANDER: On zero occasions?

Mr Parnell: Zero occasions.

Mr MANDER: Minister, would you confirm that the reason Anacta has seemingly unfettered access to you and your staff and significant influence on your decision-making is due to the firm's principals having strong Labor Party ties and being significant donors to the Labor Party?

CHAIR: Member for Everton, I am not quite sure how that is relevant to the estimates before us. Do you think you could recast that question?

Mr MANDER: Chair, we are talking about the integrity of racing which is imperative with regard to revenue flows. That is what the question is about.

Ms GRACE: I am happy to answer the question. I refute the premise of the question. It is absolutely incorrect and misleading, as they generally are from the opposition. Let me be clear: I have had no face-to-face meets with anyone at Anacta regarding this issue and neither has anyone in my office. My staff and I have discussions with hundreds of stakeholders on a broad range of policy issues. Ministerial officers cannot control who calls them or which companies they engage to assist them.

In accordance with the nation's most transparent lobbyist laws—those in Queensland—they logged the contact they had with my office on behalf of their client Tabcorp. There were 22 phone calls, as the member said, over a 12-month period. These were not meetings as has been claimed previously by the LNP; they were phone calls. The contact made with my office was quick calls initiated by Anacta on behalf of their client with regard to settlement issues as Racing Queensland was in litigation with Tabcorp, including a number of updates about what was occurring. I refute the premise of the question and the allegations made. They are baseless just like the raid or seizure of iPads allegations were baseless.

Mr MANDER: They are a lobbying firm. They rang your chief of staff or somebody in your office on at least 22 occasion. They were not ringing to have a quick check of facts; they were lobbying for their client. That is correct, is it not?

Ms GRACE: I do not understand how the member can anticipate what went on in phone calls in my office.

Mr MANDER: That is why I am asking.

Ms GRACE: I have answered the question and I stand by it. They are a registered lobbying firm. We have the strictest reporting requirements in this state. They have a right to exist. I cannot control who Tabcorp engages. There was nothing other than quick phone calls as I have said before.

Mr MANDER: So the 22 interactions with your chief of staff you would summarise as quick phone calls to verify facts and get clarification of detail?

CHAIR: Member for Everton, I think that is what the minister just said when she responded to your previous question.

Ms GRACE: All transparently documented. I have nothing further to add.

Mr MANDER: If it is transparent and documented can you tell us what the exact nature of those phone calls were?

Ms GRACE: We have the most stringent lobbying requirements in the country and they were met. I have nothing further to add.

Mr MANDER: Why did you not consult with other betting agency stakeholders before this increased tax was announced?

Ms GRACE: I think that was a question that should have been put to the Treasurer. This is a Treasury bill that will go before the House. The levy on the point-of-consumption tax will be done and guided by the Treasury. It is not in my portfolio. Our portfolio had regard to the settlement of the litigation with Tabcorp and Racing Queensland.

Mr MANDER: The Treasurer said in his estimates hearing on Tuesday—

... there was no negotiation with me or my office with Tabcorp or through their lobbyist. That is because the substantive negotiation was conducted by Racing Queensland. Those questions perhaps should be put to Racing Queensland through the appropriate minister.

That is why I am asking you, Minister. Why didn't you consult with the other betting agencies when you were aware that the point-of-consumption tax was going to increase?

Ms GRACE: The two issues that he is conflating are the levy on the point-of-consumption tax and the litigation that Racing Queensland and Tabcorp were settling and negotiating. The second part is in my portfolio. As the CEO previously answered in relation to this, we were discussing the settlement in

relation to the litigation that was before us. We also mentioned that last year when we moved to the 35 per cent POCT we were looking at long-term funding arrangements. This is an issue that we have been looking at for quite some time.

Mr MANDER: I raise a point of order on relevance. I specifically asked: why did you not consult with the other betting agencies before this tax was introduced?

CHAIR: Member for Everton, that is not a point of order. The minister has responded to your question and she has provided you with an adequate response.

Ms GRACE: The day after the announcement was made I met with Justin Madden, CEO of Responsible Wagering Australia, and Dean Shannon, CEO of Entain. They requested a meeting with me to discuss the betting tax. I did so on 7 June, once it had been announced. It was not for me to announce it to them. That was the morning after the announcement. I further met with Entain CEO Dean Shannon on 21 July. Entain is the parent company of Ladbrokes and Neds. They are a member of Responsible Wagering Australia. The meeting was cordial and productive. It included Racing Queensland CEO Brendan Parnell, because there were arrangements in place up until 23 June to do with race field fees. They are matters for a new negotiated outcome. They were very cordial. They were very productive. We spoke about a number of policy issues.

A lot of this was due to unwinding the incredibly complex and ridiculous contract that was entered into by the previous LNP government—a 30-year deal which was going to disadvantage the racing industry. There is not one person in the racing industry I have met or spoken to who is not fully supportive of what we have done for racing in this state. Every single jockey, club, member, chair, deputy chair, trainer—anybody you speak to—is glowing. Is the LNP somehow suggesting that they are going to vote against this levy?

Mr MANDER: Minister, you would admit that Anacta won a very significant victory for Tabcorp through their negotiations with your office and that of the Treasurer?

Ms GRACE: I will not admit any such thing. This was negotiated between Racing Queensland and Tabcorp. Racing Queensland has said that they never met with Anacta. I will not agree to any such nonsense.

Mr MANDER: Minister, the Coaldrake review into government integrity says—

The appearance of guiding a political party to office one week and then advocating a client's case for a government or council decision a few weeks later naturally raises suspicion which cannot be remedied ...

It goes on to say—

Suspensions ... may be heightened if subsequent government decisions favour clients of the firms engaged to run election campaigns.

Minister, this is exactly what has happened with Anacta representing Tabcorp. Do you concede that this process was inappropriate?

Ms GRACE: Absolutely not. That is utter nonsense. This has levelled the playing field. No-one has been advantaged by this. It has levelled the playing field. The previous LNP government left us with an absolute mess with a 30-year deal that did not respond to the changes in the racing industry. It is absolute nonsense and I totally refute it. No-one has gained anything out of this. It completely levels the playing field. I refute any suggestions to the contrary.

Mr MANDER: Minister, is it true that Tabcorp will benefit by \$30 million a year due to the increase of the consumption tax on its competitors?

Ms GRACE: It depends on your definition of 'benefit' if you level the playing field. There are racing fees still to negotiate. They were not paying them before; they will be paying them now. There is a loss of the exclusivity of advertising at certain sites. That was part of the litigation, as I understand it. I am happy to refer to the CEO of Racing Queensland in relation to that.

This is a deal that will benefit the racing industry. It is remarkable that we are leading Australia. I look forward to the racing industry growing even further than the 60 per cent it has since this government was elected, with the mess that we inherited from the MacSporran report. I am happy for the CEO to add anything in relation to that.

Mr Parnell: I thank the minister for those comments.

Mr MANDER: Point of order: my question was to the minister. It does not need to be referred to anybody else.

CHAIR: The minister is within her rights to refer the response to the CEO, and she has done that.

Mr MANDER: Point of order: the standing orders do not allow that. If I ask a question directly to the minister, I expect only the minister to answer. It does not need to be referred to anybody else.

Ms GRACE: That is not correct. I can refer to the CEO.

CHAIR: Member for Everton, that is not a point of order. I will take advice on that. No, that is not a point of order.

Ms GRACE: Read the standing orders.

CHAIR: Mr Parnell, please proceed.

Mr Parnell: As the minister has highlighted, the change in the wagering landscape to level the playing field will see Queensland TAB now having to pay race field fees for the first time, having to pay point-of-consumption tax, as opposed to using their make-good arrangements with government previously, and having to compete for on-course wagering sponsorships and signage.

The renewal of the funding through this new methodology will enable us to continue to invest in the industry, particularly the Country Racing Program, which has become such a vital part of racing in this state. Over the last five years we have added 4,000 more jobs by virtue of our commercial focus. Certainty now with the renewal of funding means that a bet with any bookmaker, a bet with the TAB or Sportsbet or Ladbrokes will see the same amount returned to racing, so it does level the playing field and not align us to a partner that was failing and a partner that was failing to deliver longer term certainty as well.

Ms GRACE: The failing was thanks to the 30-year deal the previous LNP government locked us into which we have now sorted. We now have racing on a good stead in this state and we are very proud of it.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister. I understand that the state government will cease its country racing support program in 2023. If this is the case, will country racing be wholly supported under the government's new sustainable funding model? If so, what will be the total annual funding allocated to country racing under this model?

CHAIR: That is actually a good question, member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: I thought it was too.

Ms GRACE: As you know, the money was allocated over two years, so that has been locked in. Under the new funding model, Racing Queensland will hypothecate an amount for country racing which will increase by CPI. We will be maintaining that level of support for country racing.

What we have done for country racing has been transformative, as you have seen in your own electorate. I met with the country racing panel recently, on 23 June. They expressed their support for the changes and what this means for country racing. They are so supportive everywhere I go. We have transformed country racing in this state. Peter Flynn, the chair of the Downs Country Racing Association, was glowing. Scott Pomerence, the chair of the Eastern Downs Country Racing Association; someone I have known for a while, Gary Peoples, the chair of the Central West Country Racing Association; and Lyle Murray, the chair of the South East Country Racing Association, are very supportive. This will raise funds for country racing and we will ensure it is hypothecated for country racing. There are no doubts about that at all. I can give you a guarantee that that will occur.

Mr DAMETTO: Was there an exact figure for the 2022-23 budget?

Ms GRACE: I think the figures are in the budget for country racing. It is a total of \$17.6 million. That will continue and increase by CPI. I see the CEO of Racing Queensland nodding. Would you like to give an update on what you are planning for the next year?

Mr Parnell: I am happy to, Minister. The Country Racing Program is also supported by additional funding from Racing Queensland. As part of this hypothecation the minister has referred to, we will be increasing our investment and increasing our transmission from non-TAB to TAB and spotlighting regional Queensland. As you well know in your part of the state, for 85 towns in regional Queensland racing is the biggest or the second biggest event. This investment and the hypothecation will help us continue to invest in infrastructure and continue to return jobs to regional Queensland.

Mr DAMETTO: I am looking forward to the next Ingham Gold Cup, that is for sure.

Ms GRACE: I just came back from the Bundaberg Cup, member for Hinchinbrook, and it was terrific. You could see how the community gets behind that event. If not the biggest, it is probably the second biggest event in Bundaberg. It was excellent to be there on Saturday for the Bundaberg Cup.

CHAIR: Half your luck! We will move to government questions. With reference to page 26 of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries SDS, can the minister please update the House on how the Greyhound Adoption Program is benefiting retired racing greyhounds?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Madam Chair; I know that you support this program. I am pleased to update the committee on the continued success of the Greyhound Adoption Program. It is amazing how things occur, because this morning as I was leaving to go to work a couple of my constituents who have an adopted greyhound were walking up the street where I live, so that may have been a bit of an epiphany with regard to this question.

The GAP program is run by Queensland Racing Integrity Commission, and I welcome the new commissioner Shane Gillard. It is a fantastic initiative that helps retired greyhounds find loving homes once their racing days are over. Every greyhound in the program is health checked, behaviourally assessed, desexed, wormed and vaccinated. I am pleased to say that 1,550 greyhounds have now been adopted through the GAP since 2016, with 267 greyhounds adopted in the 2021-22 financial year alone. This is an increase from 228 adopted in the previous financial year. This year the GAP hosted a successful adoption day on 30 April. These days are a great opportunity for members of the public to gain an understanding of what it means to welcome a loving, gentle greyhound to their family. Should any member of the committee be on the lookout for a new four-legged friend, I can advise that the GAP is planning to hold another adoption day in September.

To help raise the profile of GAP, they will have a dedicated stand for the entirety of the Ekka at the Stockman's Rest and a booth at the companion animal pavilion on opening day. We are constantly looking at new ways to improve the program and enhance its outcomes. In South-East Queensland the GAP operates from Churchable in the Lockyer Valley. It can house 83 greyhounds and coaching dogs. It is extensive around the country. Shane Gillard, the new commissioner, may like to tell the committee about how successful it has been. I know that his crew is doing a great job. I will defer to Shane so that he can say a few words on the success of the program.

Mr Gillard: I would like to echo the minister's sentiments in relation to the context of the success of the Greyhound Adoption Program. It is very central to what it is that we do for animal care and welfare in the state of Queensland. We are very active. We are very happy with the progress of the Greyhound Adoption Program here in Queensland. As the minister has already mentioned, we are always looking at ways to innovate and ensure we can get as many former racing dogs out into the community as possible.

Ms GRACE: The GAP program also works with the University of Queensland Veterinary School to introduce a work experience program, which is really great.

Mr O'ROURKE: My question is of the minister. With reference to page 9 of the SDS, what training initiatives are there to reduce jockey shortages and attract young people, particularly girls, to pursue a career in racing?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. All Australian states and New Zealand are experiencing jockey shortages. This is an issue I have spoken to Racing Queensland about. I am pleased to say that they have a wide range of successful training initiatives on offer to attract more people to become jockeys in Queensland or work in other roles within our racing industry. Championing diversity is also key to addressing this challenge. Becoming a jockey has become an increasingly attractive career path for young women. I am incredibly proud to see this traditionally male-dominated industry, member for Hinchinbrook, making great strides towards providing more training and employment for females here in Queensland.

May I say that the female jockeys in country racing are doing an incredible job. They will be the jockeys who will probably come to the city eventually, which is why supporting country racing is so important. We have come a long way since Pam O'Neill became the first woman in Australia to race against male jockeys in 1979. It is a sport where men and women can compete on a level footing. Around 37 per cent of Queensland's licensed jockeys are women and the future of racing is undoubtedly female: 79 per cent of apprentice jockeys are women and girls. It is great to see so many fantastic female jockeys as role models, inspiring girls to get in the saddle and pursue a career in racing. Last Saturday I got to see firsthand so many talented female jockeys hard at work during the Bundaberg Cup.

Racing Queensland is working with the industry to raise the profile of apprenticeships generally, particularly in remote and regional Queensland. As a registered training organisation, Racing Queensland is also delivering qualifications for a racing and breeding training package. These qualifications are predominantly delivered as school-based part-time or full-time traineeships and apprenticeships. We are seeing strong enrolment numbers for these qualifications. At the end of the third quarter of the 2022 financial year Racing Queensland had 89 students enrolled. These include: 40 apprentice jockeys, of which 31 are female; 37 track work riders studying for a Certificate 3 in Racing; and 12 stablehand students enrolled in other certificate courses. We are really going to look at this training program. I want to work on a national basis with ministers from around the country. We want to exchange programs so we can benefit from this. I know that the CEO, Brendan Parnell, would like to add something to this exciting area which we hope to grow.

Mr Parnell: As the member for Rockhampton and the member for Southern Downs know, we are investing significantly in gender-equitable facilities and female jockey room expansions. The member for Rockhampton was there recently for that launch. Warwick is also getting a substantial upgrade. Last weekend up in Atherton in Far North Queensland female jockeys rode all winners on the race card. If you look at our student enrolment, 83 per cent of our apprentice jockeys are female. We have grown enrolments, but the job is not done. We have a substantial shortage in the north-west and central west of the state. We are continuing to address that and have recently formed a partnership with the Indigenous recruitment agency Mona.

We are looking at other ways to recruit young talent for a career in racing. It is a dangerous career, as we have seen in the last month, but a career which can be rewarding and meaningful for many young people. Our registered training organisation is now working with the Gold Coast Turf Club and the Australian Industry Trade College to find school pathways for years 10, 11 and 12 students to have a career with horses. We have also added a large number of track work riders and stablehand students to our program. There is always a focus on education to provide careers, particularly for females. We need to invest more of the point-of-consumption betting money in gender-equitable facilities. We will be expanding female jockey rooms around the Sunshine State.

Ms GRACE: Rockhampton is going to benefit. Callaghan Park is part of a \$2.3 million upgrade. I know that you are very happy about that, member for Rockhampton.

Mr O'ROURKE: I am very happy, and I want to put on record my thanks for that investment into the Rockhampton Jockey Club. It is a wonderful thing for us.

Ms GRACE: Mind you, Madam Chair, it is happening all over the state in many clubs.

CHAIR: I am certain of that. With reference to page 9 of the SDS, can the minister please advise what benefits the Gold Coast Turf Club tracks and lights project will bring to the Gold Coast and Queensland racing?

Ms GRACE: I recently joined the Gold Coast Turf Club at Aquis Park in Bundall to turn the sod on the \$63 million track and lights project. This project will revolutionise racing on the Gold Coast. Its transformational development will provide the club with state-of-the-art broadcast lighting. This will allow for night racing a stone's throw away from Surfers Paradise, opening up fantastic new opportunities and enhancing the wonderful coast lifestyle. We will also see the refurbishment of racing surfaces and an infield tunnel which is being expanded as part of this project to enhance equine welfare. It will allow movement from the inside to the outside of the track without crossing the track itself. There have been changes to the original scope of the infield tunnel construction, and that means the tunnel will be safer, wider and built faster. The project will create nearly 330 good, quality jobs for Queenslanders during construction and is expected to inject more than \$100 million into the local community.

This is fantastic news for the club on the Gold Coast. The fantastic Magic Millions, part of our Summer Racing Carnival, will go from strength to strength with these upgrades. We are going to see a number of improvements in relation to this. This will be the second synthetic track to be constructed. We have one on the Sunshine Coast and it is certainly meeting the Sunshine Coast's needs. It will play a big part in attracting major race meets to the Gold Coast.

It can provide an important contingency option for training and racing activities during periods of wet weather, as we have seen on the Sunshine Coast. Its synthetic track was installed last year, and 15 scheduled meetings have proceeded at Corbould Park, with almost \$4 million in prize money and bonuses returned to industry participants. This is an exciting project. It is no doubt going to be a game changer. There will be an all-weather synthetic track scheduled for completion in time for the 2023 Magic Millions. With racing, you have to time these things so that they all work together. The rest of the works—including lights for night racing—are scheduled to be finished before the 2024 Magic Millions. I

am excited for the Gold Coast to boost its standing as a world-class racing destination in any weather, day or night, at a state-of-the-art facility that will be the envy of clubs across the globe. This is what we are delivering with racing in this state.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the committee's examination of estimates for the racing portfolio area. Thank you to the officials who have attended today. The committee will now examine the estimates for the industrial relations portfolio area. Would officials who are changing places at the witness table and in the chamber do so as quickly as possible.

CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the estimates for the industrial relations portfolio area until 2 pm. I welcome to the table the member for Kawana, Mr Jarrod Bleijie, and the member for South Brisbane, Dr Amy MacMahon. The first question is from the member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, I referred to a matter in this estimates a year ago that I had referred to the Crime and Corruption Commission. It involved a business in Queensland and allegations of CFMEU collaboration with the Office of Industrial Relations and also allegations of harassment with certain CFMEU officials. The department outsourced it to a company. Can you advise the committee which company was outsourced that investigation?

Mr De'Ath: I will refer to the acting deputy director-general of the Office of Industrial Relations for a response.

Mr James: Thanks for the question. The company that it was referred to was Ashurst.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, on 21 December I was advised by ethical standards, Mr Peter Edwards, that the appointed investigator had indicated her investigation would be provided to the department in the week beginning 24 December. On 24 January 2022 I was advised by Mr Edwards that the report was provided to the department and was being considered. On 16 March I received a further letter—this time from acting ethical standards, Mr Gavin Gleeson—advising me that the report continued to be considered by the acting deputy director-general. On 6 June Mr Gleeson emailed me again advising me that the acting DDG continued to consider this report. The department have had this report now for seven months. Where is it?

Mr De'Ath: Obviously these are all matters of process that we all understand take some time. I will refer for the detail that we are able to communicate to you to Mr James.

Mr James: If I may, I was excited by saying Ashurst. The actual investigating company is Ashdale.

CHAIR: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr James: I am aware of the matter that the member for Kawana is referring to. It was raised in July last year. It was referred to the investigators. It was provided to the then DDG, Mr Craig Allen, in January. Mr Allen retired in February and the matter was passed to me during March. I have considered the matter and a further process is underway. I appreciate the time it has taken to have this matter brought to a conclusion, but I am dealing with Public Service Act requirements and procedural fairness and natural justice. As the member for Kawana has said, we have kept both him and the Crime and Corruption Commission fully informed of our process and we will continue to do so when the matter is finally concluded.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, were there any adverse findings in that report against any departmental officials?

Mr De'Ath: I think that is a bit pre-emptive of the outcome of this matter and I do not believe I can respond to that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, I RTI-ed the document as the complainant, and access was refused on the basis that it was subject to CCC ongoing investigation. Now that we know that the department were provided that report and it is completely finished—we do not know what is in the report but it is finished and the department has had it for months—why can't the public have access and see what is in that report, bearing in mind it was over a year ago now that this was first referred to the Crime and Corruption Commission?

Ms GRACE: You have had that response.

CHAIR: I think Mr James contributed to that response in his previous response, but Mr De'Ath might have something further to add.

Mr De’Ath: I think it is appropriate to respond as I have been responding—that when there are no documents released and things are considered exempt due to CCC complaint then we follow the requirements that we must meet.

Ms GRACE: And rightly so.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Director-General. Minister, I am sure your director-general can answer without the assistance.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am guiding these proceedings. I have been very clear about that from the outset this morning and I would look to continue in that vein.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, the matter is finished though. My point is: why can’t it be released to the complainant considering the matter is actually finished? The obligation that you refer to under the CCC is correct, but the matter is not under investigation by the CCC. It was outsourced by your department. You have the report. I am the complainant. There was a business involved, interestingly—

CHAIR: This is a very long preamble. Can you get to the point of the question?

Ms GRACE: And it is misleading, I might add.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Chair. Serious allegations were raised of CFMEU intimidation. Interestingly, when I referred to the CCC the CFMEU stopped.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you are not coming to the point of your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, when am I as the complainant going to receive a copy of the final report?

CHAIR: Mr De’Ath, I believe you may have already answered this question but feel free to add to it if you would like.

Mr BLEIJIE: I want a date.

Mr De’Ath: I believe I have responded appropriately to the member and I thank him again for the question—when the matter is concluded.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, can you satisfy this committee though? How long do these matters usually take? It was a complaint a year ago. The department have had the report for six months.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, your questions are bordering on repetitious and tedious and you have had responses to that.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am not getting an answer.

Mr LISTER: I think this line of questioning is aiming to get an answer on a matter of public interest.

CHAIR: And I think Mr De’Ath has provided that response.

Mr LISTER: I think he has not.

CHAIR: Mr De’Ath, I believe you have provided that response but if you have anything further you would like to contribute please do.

Mr LISTER: But he has not answered the question.

CHAIR: I am allowing Mr De’Ath to add further if he would like to.

Mr De’Ath: I do not think we can have a debate on integrity on the one hand and then be compromised on how we conduct our business on the other hand.

Ms GRACE: Touche.

Mr De’Ath: I think it is very appropriate that we follow the process and the procedures and we do that within the time frames to the best of our ability. That is all I can add to the matter.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, has any action been taken against any public servants in the Office of Industrial Relations with respect to that report and, if so, what actions?

Mr De’Ath: The matter is not concluded.

Mr BLEIJIE: Can you define ‘concluded’ to this committee? Is it ‘not read’?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am really starting to struggle on how this line of questioning relates to the estimates that are before us. I believe Mr De’Ath has provided, along with Mr James, substantial response to this line of questioning.

Mr LISTER: Madam Chair, it is a simple question. It does boil down to the use of the appropriation for the salary of the persons concerned, if nothing else. The member is not asking for the identity of any of the individuals concerned.

CHAIR: I believe Mr De'Ath has answered the question appropriately.

Mr LISTER: I would disagree. We welcome an answer. We have talked about process, but we have got no further. The report is done. It is sitting on someone's desk—

CHAIR: Member for Southern Downs, are you asking a question or are you taking a point of order? Member for Southern Downs? Deputy Chair, is that a point of order or are you taking a question?

Mr LISTER: I am happy for the member for Kawana to continue.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I take it from the responses we have, and I will move onto another question—

CHAIR: Lovely. Thank you, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: But I take it from those—

CHAIR: We do not need a preamble, just put your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is not a preamble, but for the benefit of the estimates committee on this serious matter, we do not know when this report—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I don't need you to make a statement here at this table. As I just said—

Mr BLEIJIE: Considering this was talked about—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I would really appreciate—

Mr BLEIJIE:—one year ago in this committee—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, if you continue to speak over me, I will warn you. Member for Kawana, I am asking you to put your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: To the minister, while we are talking about CFMEU bullying, intimidation, threats and so forth—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, again, that question is not appropriate. If you could look at recasting it in a more suitable manner, thank you.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, can you direct me under the standing orders where it says I can't talk about the CFMEU?

CHAIR: You are making assertions about bullying and harassment. I am asking you to reword your question, please.

Mr BLEIJIE: Hence the CCC investigation.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, in the department you oversee, in the last 12 months 14 workplace health and safety inspectors have resigned. Are those resignations due to CFMEU allegations of bullying, harassment or intimidation? 14 inspectors have resigned in a year.

CHAIR: You have put your question. Minister, would you like to respond, thank you.

Ms GRACE: As we know, people resign from workplaces for all kinds of reasons—

Mr BLEIJIE: Not that many in one area!

Ms GRACE:—and every worker—

CHAIR: Minister, if you could hold for one second, thank you. Member for Kawana? Member for Kawana?

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes.

CHAIR: We have had a morning that has not had that type of interjection. I would ask you to be respectful of this process. You have asked your question. Now please allow the minister to answer. Thank you, minister.

Ms GRACE: This is really just a misleading and ridiculous line of questioning. People resign for all kinds of reasons from their employment. Every worker—every worker—deserves to be treated with dignity and respect and should not be subjected to anything that alters from that mode of behaviour.

In 2021-22, as at March 2022, there were 17 occupational violence incidents involving OIR, and I think this is where the member for Kawana may be trying to draw a very long bow. Four of those 17 involved a person in control of a business or undertaking, a PCBU—that is employers—two related to a contractor or a worker, four related to unions, one related to a union and the PCBU, two related to injured workers, and four to customers of it. Those figures show the vast majority did not include unions. Of those matters that were raised, 14 people may have resigned in the last 12 months, and I am sure for all kinds of reasons. These are operational matters and I do not think that we will know whether or not they involved the CFMEU as alleged. They are baseless allegations by the member for Kawana. If he has any information to that, he should come forward with it. Once again—

Mr BLEIJIE: To the CCC.

Ms GRACE:—it is union bashing by the LNP, exactly the same line of questioning that the opposition is doing federally at the moment. The first day of the parliament hearing and what did they embark upon? Good old union bashing. Nothing changes in the LNP, whether it is federal or at the state level, and I refute the premise of the question from the member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, the new South Australian Labor Party Premier has indicated publicly that he is concerned about the influence of the CFMEU over his state. Do you share those concerns of the CFMEU over the state of Queensland and your office?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am not sure how the position of the South Australian Premier is relevant to the estimates—

Mr BLEIJIE: The CFMEU are registered across Australia.

CHAIR: Member, I am going to rule that question out of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: And they donate to the Labor Party.

CHAIR: Member, I am ruling that question out of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Put your next question, member for Kawana.

Ms GRACE: I suggest he asks the Premier of South Australia.

CHAIR: Thank you for the response, but it has been ruled out of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: I think the CFMEU is bad everywhere across the country. Director-General, the question I just asked the minister with respect to 14 workplace health and safety inspectors actually comes from the question on notice which the minister answered, so it is her own answer that she gave. I am not sure what she was going into before. Can you advise this committee—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, again, we do not need the preamble; just put your question, please.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, can you advise the committee why the 14 workplace, health and safety inspectors resigned from the department in the last 12 months, which is an extraordinary amount of resignations?

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr De'Ath.

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question, but I think it is safe to say on the information I am provided with that the number of resignations of workplace health and safety officers is not out of the ordinary in terms of what we would see in any given year.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, how many workplace health and safety inspectors have been out on sick leave in the last 12 months, long sick leave owing to the fact of allegations of bullying or intimidation on work sites by unions?

Mr De'Ath: I will refer it to the Acting Deputy Director-General, Office of Industrial Relations.

Mr James: I believe we have had 198 people on sick leave in the inspectorate which is not unusual, given that we have had a year of COVID. In terms of the member's question as to those on sick leave as a consequence of bullying, I do not have a figure for that, but given the number of bullying incidents that have been recorded which the minister has actually mentioned, it would be, to the best of my knowledge, a small number. I will have a quick look through.

CHAIR: And come back to that?

Mr James: I am not sure that it is a number that we would have. I will have a look.

Mr LISTER: Chair, can I ask: will that be taken on notice?

CHAIR: I do not believe it is being taken on notice; I think he is seeking some further information to see if he is actually able to answer that question. We will come back to that.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, Queenslanders who have been affected by bullying or harassment have turned to the Fair Work Ombudsman as well as the Fair Work Commissioner and have been told they can only advise and not act on their behalf. What is available at the state level for those workers across Queensland who are not a part of a union or cannot afford their own legal advice?

Ms GRACE: I guess they are able to access their rights under the Queensland Industrial Relations Act. They can make their submissions. They can seek—

CHAIR: I point out in that regard that we do have a bill before the House and in terms of pre-empting a debate in that space, can we please consider that in any response.

Ms GRACE: I was just going to say that there is a bill before the House and I will be careful with the rules of anticipation, Chair, but just to say—

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for your guidance, Chair. My question was not aimed at that, though.

Ms GRACE:— in general, obviously if it is a health and safety complaint, they can go to the department. The department then will take that up for them. If there are other areas where they want their rights to be accommodated, it is up to them on how they choose to make an application to the commission or to their employer. Of course they can do that. They can make workers compensation claims if there is an injury in the workplace. There are a number of bodies that would be able to assist those workers, from lawyers to members of the family sometimes, friends they can use as agents, and they will do that in line with the Queensland Industrial Relations Act, bearing in mind that I will not touch on the anticipation rules of the bill I have before the House.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much, Minister, for the answer. I will be writing to you on a particular matter.

Ms GRACE: Please do, and if there is a way we can assist, we certainly will.

Mr SULLIVAN: With reference to page 7 of the SDS, can the minister advise on the progress of labour hire licensing regulation in Queensland?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. This was a real issue when we came to government. We were hearing all kinds of stories about the disreputable actions of labour hire companies in this state, and protecting vulnerable workers is a key priority of the Palaszczuk government and myself as minister. That is why we have led the way in introducing Australia's first labour hire licensing scheme.

In 2018 we took strong action through a rigorous licensing scheme, establishing basic minimum obligations that all labour hire providers must meet before they can operate in Queensland. Despite evidence of exploitation and the need to regulate the sector, the LNP chose to fight the laws tooth and nail—yet another example of their dismal record when it comes to failing Queensland workers. Despite empty promises made by the former LNP federal government, they sat on their hands when it came to addressing exploitation of labour hire workers and did nothing.

In April this year Queensland's labour hire licensing scheme celebrated four years in operation; we led the country. During this time industry standards have been lifted and vulnerable workers have been protected from exploitation. I am immensely proud of what this scheme has achieved. As at 1 July 2022 there were 3,700 licensed labour hire providers in Queensland. This has far exceeded our expectations. The Labour Hire Licensing Compliance Unit has taken action against 880 providers who have not met the required standards. These actions include refusal to issue licences, cancellation of licences and suspension of licences. Can I say that those labour hire licensing companies that do the right thing very much welcome that those that enter the market and do not do the right thing are not able to operate, because that exploitation tarnishes all of the industry. They are probably more welcoming of these laws than anybody else.

Any labour hire provider that is found to not be doing the right thing will be prosecuted. Since the scheme started there have been 19 successful prosecutions with fines totalling more than a million dollars imposed by the courts. The Labour Hire Licensing Compliance Unit has also forged strong linkages—and this is the understated part of these laws—with other state and federal agencies. This includes: working with the federal task force in a coordinated and strategic approach to address illegal phoenix activity; and collaborating with WorkCover Queensland to ensure labour hire providers have adequate workers compensation policies, which has resulted in over 870,000 premiums being paid to WorkCover that otherwise would not have been paid.

I have consistently called for a national approach. Labour hire and worker exploitation is a national problem and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his government understand this. I look forward to working with them. I am sure they will not sit on their hands for 10 years and do nothing. I am looking forward to harmonising our laws. We will continue to ensure labour hire providers operating in this state meet and adhere to basic minimum obligations because Queensland workers and our international or other workers who make up a lot of this workforce deserve nothing less. Thank you for the question.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, I refer to page 7 of the SDS. Can you outline the government's response to ensure the health and safety of workers in the engineered stone industry?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. The Palaszczuk government has taken the emergence of silicosis amongst engineered stone benchtop workers very seriously and has once again led the nation in addressing the serious risks to workers' health. Our actions have been widespread, ranging from a comprehensive and ongoing statewide compliance campaign to developing Australia's first code of practice to ensuring workers who have developed silicosis receive the care and support they need through workers compensation.

Another key action has been the investment of up to \$5 million for medical research that improves the health and wellbeing of workers suffering from occupational dust lung diseases like coal workers' pneumoconiosis and silicosis. After conducting an independent tendering process, I am very pleased to announce that we have entered into funding agreements with three successful recipients. The University of Queensland will receive approximately \$1.5 million to collaborate with the University of Illinois to analyse existing government data to help identify factors in how CWP and silicosis develop and progress. That is great research into that area. The Wesley Dust Disease Research Centre will receive \$782,000 to compare screening of X-rays and high-resolution CAT scans for Queensland workers with an over 10-year history of occupational dust lung diseases. This is the major way that this disease is recognised. That is a great project to see how we have advanced.

The University of Queensland will receive a further \$827,000 to work with the University of New South Wales to examine the pathogenesis of coal workers' pneumoconiosis and silicosis. The remaining grant funds will be allocated through a second expression of interest process, which will open today. Dust lung diseases are sadly widespread throughout many industries. I look forward to seeing how these research grants will help in the fight against these insidious diseases and improve the lives of those suffering from them.

I am also pleased to advise today that, in another nation-leading first, my department is close to finalising a silica code of practice for the construction industry. This code will establish minimum enforceable standards to ensure silica dust is managed safely and workers are protected in both the construction industry and the manufacturing of construction materials. The code has been developed in consultation with unions, industry associations and experts through a tripartite working group. It is anticipated that the silica in construction code will be finalised later this year.

I have constantly called for a national response. The National Dust Disease Taskforce released its final report on 12 July 2021. It recognised Queensland's approach to tackling dust lung diseases as the model example. I am very proud of that. On 4 April 2022 the all-of-government response to the final report was released and confirmed that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments will provide in-principle support for the task force recommendations. I look forward to working with the current Labor government, which I am sure will deliver for the workers in this area. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR: In relation to page 7 of the SDS, could you provide an update on Queensland's participation in the national workforce relations system please?

Ms GRACE: I thank the chair for the question. Workers deserve governments at all levels that support and protect them. As Minister for Industrial Relations, I am proud that Queensland has led the way nationally when it comes to workers' rights, protections and entitlements. As a partner in the national workplace relations system, the Palaszczuk government has strongly advocated for national workplace laws that reflect the robust standards set by our government. We have also strongly advocated for national workplace laws to keep pace with the changing nature of work.

After nearly 10 years, Australian workers finally have a federal government that will take decisive action to support and protect them. I am so pleased that the first bill that the Albanese government will be introducing is to make paid family and domestic violence leave a national statutory standard. What a disgrace that we had to wait this long, but that is what Labor governments do: they fix the problems after others have sat on their hands.

In 2016 Queensland was the first—once again, nation-leading—jurisdiction in Australia to legislate for 10 days of paid family and domestic violence leave. I have constantly advocated for this critical entitlement to form part of the national workplace relations system. It is fantastic that workers throughout Australia will soon have access to this entitlement.

I commend the government on the swift action in also convening a summit of employers and unions to ensure all Australians have secure work and the national enterprise bargaining system works effectively. I think it is very timely for us to be discussing this. If I have the opportunity, I welcome being involved in that. In early July I was pleased to participate in a meeting with the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Tony Burke, and our ministerial colleagues. I hardly had any meetings federally prior to this. This was one of the first meetings I had with the new Albanese Labor government. Convening the meeting so quickly after taking office goes to show the different approach to industrial relations, in stark contrast to the lacklustre approach taken by the former government when it comes to consultation.

Due to the inaction, there are obviously a number of issues we need to work through. I look forward to working on this broad range of issues: harmonising labour licensing laws, criminalising wage theft, making workplaces safer through implementing the Boland review, addressing insecure and precarious employment and the rights and entitlements of gig economy workers, the abolition of the highly politicised ABCC—I think the only thing they achieved was stopping people putting stickers on their helmets and flying a union flag, after hundreds of millions of wasted dollars—if you want to talk about hundreds of millions of wasted dollars—

Mr BLEIJIE: All the union officials in jail. How about all the ones in jail?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana.

Ms GRACE:—just have a look at the ABCC. The list goes on: supporting union-led applications in the landmark work value case to increase wage rates for aged-care workers and supporting minimum wages to keep pace with the cost of living. There are many differences between the current government and the previous government. I look forward to a more constructive, consultative and productive working relationship. There is no doubt that the future is brighter for Queensland workers now that we have a government that is looking at these issues, which have been ignored for far too long. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, talking of meetings, I have had a look at your diary. From January to now you have met with the QCU, the builders trades unions, the United Workers Union, the Transport Workers' Union, WorkCover, QCU, ETU, QCU, QCU and the builders trades unions. Can you tell me what the builders trades unions are please?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. It is a group of unions that work in the building trades. It is not that hard.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, which unions? You have met them twice in a few months. Which unions were at the meeting?

Ms GRACE: The unions that represent the building trades group. Not all of them turn up. They have a representative group that attend and we speak about a number of issues. It is a highly hazardous industry. Workplace health and safety is particularly important to them and it depends on who is available to come to the meeting. My diary would say exactly who they were, as it is a public document, and I refer the member to my diary.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, that is my point: it does not. It does not say who was at the meeting; it just says 'building trades unions'. Were the CFMEU at those meetings?

Ms GRACE: I believe the CFMEU was at the meeting. They are part of the building trades unions—the ETU, the QCU, the AMWU, the Plumbers Union. I think they are mainly the unions that make up the building trades unions. There is nothing to hide; they are just the unions that are in the building trades.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, ministerial diaries should disclose who you actually meet with because you have had—

Ms GRACE: I am meeting with the building and trades union group.

Mr BLEIJIE: In those same months you had QCU and Deputy Premier and you have had WorkCover and QCU, so in other unions you have separated which unions you met with but not the building trades unions, so the CFMEU. Is it because you are afraid to have the CFMEU in your diary?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I believe that the minister has just answered your question.

Ms GRACE: I thought he just quoted that I met with the CFMEU in my diary.

Mr BLEIJIE: No, my question was is the minister afraid—

Ms GRACE: No.

Mr BLEIJIE:—to have the CFMEU in her diary because of the donations to the Labor Party from the CFMEU?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, that is really inappropriate and, again, I would ask you to recast your question. In fact, referring back to her previous response, I would suggest that she has answered your question quite clearly. Member for Kawana, do you have another question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Of course. Minister, will you commit to this committee now that you will go back through your diary and you will actually put in who you actually met with, which is the point of ministerial diaries?

Ms GRACE: I will put in my diary what I have always done in line with the requirements.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms GRACE: It is out of order.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister; I am very capable of chairing this and, member for Kawana, I would suggest that that was really not even close to being relevant to an estimates process sort of question and this is an important—

Mr LISTER: Chair—

Ms GRACE: Here we go! The protection racket starts up!

CHAIR: This is an important opportunity to interrogate the estimates, so, member for Kawana, do you have a question?

Mr LISTER: Chair, the salary of the minister comes from the appropriation.

CHAIR: Member for Southern Downs, that is not a point of order. Member for Kawana, do you have a question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, ministerial diaries have been discussed at estimates every year since I have been a member of this parliament for 14 years. They form a—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am not ready to take a statement from you. I have just asked you: do you have a question? If not, I will move on to somebody else.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Minister, are you aware of how much money the CFMEU has donated to the Labor Party?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, that is absolutely not relevant to the estimates before us. Do you have another question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, does the CFMEU meet with you with respect to trying to influence policy decisions on you for particular purposes?

Ms GRACE: I think everyone I meet with in my diary—and I meet with hundreds of stakeholders every single year as per my diary—would be talking to me about policy issues of the government and obviously discussing those of relevance to them. It is a standard reason why we meet, in case you did not realise when you were a minister back then.

CHAIR: No, that is enough; thank you, Minister.

Mr BLEIJIE: I was never influenced by the CFMEU, I can assure you of that.

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Kawana.

Ms GRACE: I am sure they would not meet with you either.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr BLEIJIE: And I never got donations from the CFMEU.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Okay, I think we will just stop right now. No more. Do you have a question, member for Kawana?

Mr BLEIJIE: Absolutely. Director-General, I refer to the WorkCover website, of which I have a copy here, and the deputy chair, Mr Clifford, from the workers compensation website. This is a website, I assume, run by the department—WorkCover; correct?

Ms GRACE: It is not part of the department. It is a separate statutory—

Mr BLEIJIE: I want to read to you, Director-General, that as part of the website it says here—

Michael was the inaugural Chairperson of the Australian Labor Party's Queensland Policy Coordination Council ...

Is it standard practice on Queensland government websites to have Labor Party affiliations and job descriptions when they should be an independent body?

Mr De'Ath: I am sorry—

Ms GRACE: Michael Clifford? He is the secretary of the QCU.

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes, I—

CHAIR: Can I have a look at what you—

Mr BLEIJIE: I am fully aware of that.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, without waving around pieces of paper, unless you want to share it—

Mr BLEIJIE: It is the government website. It is worksafe.qld.gov.au and it has the Deputy Chair, Mr Michael Clifford, and it says he was inaugural chairperson of the Australian Labor Party's Queensland Policy Coordination Council. I would have thought a department or WorkCover trying to be independent would not have Labor Party credentials on government websites.

Ms GRACE: Full disclosure; integrity.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have asked the DG, not the minister.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question. I think it is entirely ordinary that someone would disclose openly their credentials.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, do you support the abolition of the ABCC federally?

CHAIR: Minister and member for Kawana, I do not believe that that has anything to do with the estimates that are before us. I will now move to a question from the member for South Brisbane.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is for the minister. Minister, with reference to the current EBA negotiations with teachers and nurses, given the current levels of inflation teachers and nurses will see their real pay remain unchanged or a cut in real terms. Has the department conducted any modelling on delivering teachers and nurses a real wage rise beyond inflation?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I think you have to take the whole agreements that have been done before where we were way above inflation and look at what occurred with the deferral and the 2.5 per cent. There were two payments of those. That was way above the one per cent and lesser one per cent. That was before, so we have had real wage increases for workers in the public sector for quite some time. If you look at the inflation rate and you look at the 4.6 per cent that was there, we think that the four per cent is definitely a reflection of that. We have locked in four per cent, four per cent and three per cent as the headline rates, but obviously with agency negotiations, member for South Brisbane, you also have a number of other components that are included in there such as attraction for regional and remote teachers. There are classification adjustments, there are a number of other elements and they are all funded and they are all priced as part of the package of entitlement that goes in that.

As well as that, we have to understand and recognise that we are the first government in Australia to do this. We are in challenging times when it comes to CPI. We really do not know where we are going to be in 12 months time. There will also be a recognition of that to keep pace with an adjustment of any inflation figure that is above the four per cent, which is extraordinarily generous and we are the first government in Australia to offer that to nurses and midwives and to teachers. They are out getting the views of their members at the moment. We think the package is excellent as well as that being separate. There are changes because of the changes to the superannuation guarantee levy where it has been increasing and the 12.75 per cent that is offered by the government. There have been arrangement changes with that to better reflect that increase. That is in addition to and outside of what has occurred in the EBA process.

We are very proud of it and we will look forward to reporting back from the members, but we want our workers to keep pace. We want to recognise them, but you just cannot take an isolated view. We need to look at where we have been, where we are going and what predictions are going forward. We think we have a package that is leading every state and territory at the moment in the country. They are striking all over the place compared to what we have been able to establish here. Unlike the previous

LNP government that was unable to secure one agreement with one union, we are on the path to securing, in difficult times, a very good enterprise bargaining outcome for nurses, midwives and teachers. They are out getting the views of their members at the moment, but it does recognise those challenging times.

Dr MacMAHON: Inflation in Queensland at the moment is at six per cent, so four per cent will not be keeping pace. Will that additional loading be going into the teachers' base rate?

Ms GRACE: The additional will be paid, in accordance with the agreement, as a lump sum based upon the difference between the rate of the CPI and the four per cent. It will be paid as a lump sum payment.

Dr MacMAHON: If inflation exceeds seven per cent, will you be increasing that additional sum so that teachers are keeping pace with inflation?

Ms GRACE: I take your point. It is challenging times. We have figured that seven per cent is at the absolute high end and we have locked in the maximum of three per cent to be paid as a lump sum in recognition of that possible seven. There has to be a ceiling somewhere. We do not have unlimited funds and that is what we have locked in.

Dr MacMAHON: There is a potential that teachers will essentially see a pay cut?

Ms GRACE: There is a potential that teachers could do very well depending on where we go during the life of this agreement. You just cannot take one year at a time.

CHAIR: There is probably a bit of crystal-balling in that in terms of looking at where CPI lands.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, CFMEU grub Luke Gibson—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you know better than that. Honestly, you have been in this place a very long time and you know better than to use unparliamentary language. You can withdraw that and then you can restart your question in a more appropriate manner.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will withdraw. Director-General, CFMEU entry permit holder Luke Gibson intimidates and harasses women. It has been alleged he was barking at a female safety officer, called her an effing—

Ms GRACE: That is enough.

CHAIR: Let us get straight to the point of your question, member for Kawana.

Ms GRACE: Point of order, Chair.

Mr BLEIJIE: The director-general needs the context of the question.

CHAIR: We have a point of order.

Ms GRACE: This is unparliamentary conduct about someone who cannot defend themselves and I ask that he come back to the standing orders with regard to the decorum that parliamentarians should conduct themselves with.

Mr BLEIJIE: Would you like me to table all the news stories, the fines?

CHAIR: Do not make me stand to my feet again.

Mr BLEIJIE: Seriously.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you can reword your question. You understand the standing orders. You have been here a very long time. Please recast your question in an appropriate manner that gives respect to not only the people in this chamber but our community in general. Please recast your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, Luke Gibson has just had, three days ago, his federal workplace health and safety entry permit suspended because of constant fines and harassment. Fact! Director-General, why is Luke Gibson still on the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Entry Permit Register?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. On the publicly available register kept by the Industrial Registrar, as at 27 July 2022 Mr Gibson is not listed as currently holding a work health and safety permit for the CFMEU, a federally registered union.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, I understand that, but I am referring to the Queensland register which your department is responsible for. This is printed today, as at 27 July. Luke Gibson has a state permit registered. It is quite concerning that the minister would jump to his defence because this guy is an absolutely terrible individual.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, we do not need the statement.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am after—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, the fact that he is a—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, this is the third time and it is the last time. You are now on a warning. If you do not cease talking when I call to order, you may leave this chamber.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order.

Ms GRACE: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: There is a point of order and I am going to take the point of order from the minister.

Ms GRACE: The member for Kawana is misleading and I take personal offence and I ask that he withdraw.

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw.

CHAIR: Can you please put your question in a manner that is appropriate.

Mr BLEIJIE: I asked the director-general why the state has not suspended the state permit of Luke Gibson, who has had his federal permit suspended by Fair Work.

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. They are two separate issues. I will pass the question to Mr James for a response.

Mr James: I thank the member for the question. Yes, the register has been updated and the card has been handed back in to the Industrial Registrar this morning. I am looking at his registration under the state legislation, which is: to be eligible to hold a ticket if you are a member of a federal organisation you should also be having a ticket under the federal organisation. I am looking as to why. I know that Mr Luke Gibson may well be a member of the CFMEUQ, which is a state registered organisation. He would also be an official of the CFMEUQ, which may give rise to him holding a ticket there, but I imagine it will be a matter of analysis by the registrar.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, is it not the case then, based on that answer from Mr James, that the CFMEUQ registered to flout the laws and get around these federal laws because they were registered as a national body?

CHAIR: There is an imputation within that. Please think about the way you are wording your questions, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: The CFMEU are not here to take objection. I am asking the director-general. I cannot understand how a person who has his licence suspended by the Fair Work Commission—set up by Julia Gillard, I might add—is still able—

Ms GRACE: Yesterday.

Mr BLEIJIE: The Fair Work Commission was set up by Julia Gillard and it was that body that suspended Mr Gibson's licence. Should it not be the case that if you are suspended because of all those issues that they raise, including allegations of abuse, swearing, blatant—

CHAIR: Now you are straying into a really long statement. If you do not want to get to the question I will move—

Mr BLEIJIE: I got to the question. How is he still—

CHAIR: Put your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: How is this individual still a permit holder in Queensland? I only just printed this out.

CHAIR: Thank you. There is your question. Mr De'Ath, I believe the question has been covered by Mr James, but if you would like to add anything further I am sure we would all be delighted to hear it.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question. I concur with the chair. I believe Mr James has answered the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: I dispute that.

CHAIR: Member for Hinchinbrook?

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister. Workers compensation is a brilliant scheme across Queensland and we do support it, but unfortunately we do see fraudulent claims. How many fraudulent

claims have been investigated in the past financial year and in how many fraudulent claims that were found to be true was money recovered? I am happy to place that on notice.

Ms GRACE: No, I have it here. I thank the member for the question. The Workers' Compensation Regulator manages prosecutions relating to workers compensation in order to keep our scheme functioning fairly and efficiently for all participants. This includes dealing with offences such as defrauding an insurer; providing false or misleading information to an insurer or medical provider; failure to insure or underinsure, where employers fail to actually meet their commitments such as some labour hire companies, for example; and prohibited use of workers compensation information, particularly if they use it incorrectly. There are a number of areas.

For the 2021-22 financial year the regulator commenced 29 prosecutions—they were all workers—and successfully finalised 12 prosecutions—11 workers and one employer. The outcome of these prosecutions was around \$550,000 in restitution on behalf of insurers; nearly \$240,000 was awarded in legal costs to the regulator and over \$120,000 in fines from defendants. Can I say they are minimal numbers, thank goodness. Most of the claims, of the thousands and thousands of claims that we receive in WorkCover, are legitimate claims of injured workers. I think you will find that 29 prosecutions is really a drop in the bucket, but one prosecution of fraud is one too many and the WorkCover regulator certainly pursues those workers that are deemed to be defrauding the insurer. We do not want to see it. We pounce on it quickly. They do an excellent job and I commend them on the work they have done. Thank you for the question, member.

Mr SULLIVAN: My question is to the minister in relation to page 7 of the department's SDS. Can the minister advise on the various initiatives being undertaken to address and tackle the really important issue of mental health in the workplace?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I know that he has a passion for this as well. The Palaszczuk government takes mental health in our community and in our workplaces seriously. That is why within my portfolio a number of initiatives are being undertaken in both the work health and safety and the workers compensation areas. I am pleased to advise that my department is currently finalising a code of practice for managing the risk of work related psychological hazards. The code has been designed in consultation with key stakeholders such as unions and employer representatives, industry representatives, government agencies and commissions and expert academics. It has been a very thorough consultation phase. The code is intended to provide practical guidance and examples on how to comply with existing obligations to manage risk of psychological health in the workplace. It is anticipated that the code will be finalised in the second half of this year. It is very comprehensive. We want to get this right. We are dealing with workers' mental health issues. We hope to have a transition to commence in April 2023. We have to let employers and industry know what the code entails to give them a bit of a chance—and I am sure that the acting deputy director-general of the department will welcome this—to educate, to implement and then, of course, to take effect from April 2023.

To work alongside the new code of practice, a psychological risk regulation will be introduced at the same time. This new regulation will ensure that Queensland is giving effect to the Boland review recommendations concerning psychological health and will provide greater detail on employer obligations concerning managing psychological health at work. We do not want to see a situation like in the federal parliament where, when these issues came to the forefront, they were ignored and not handled properly. We want employers to have proper processes in place that can deal with these issues. We want to ensure that they have them in the workplace. This is a consistent approach to physical risks in that you have to assess them. It ensures our regulatory framework appropriately reflects the importance of psychological health from a work health and safety perspective.

To complement the new regulatory framework, my department has undertaken a variety of outreach, education and awareness activities across industry, social partners and the communities. These initiatives include the online People at Work risk assessment tool, delivery of the mentally healthy workplaces workshops and associated materials, advisory work with the Injury Prevention and Management program and the development of tools and resources to support good work design in the management of work-related psychological hazards.

In addition, as I said, my department will deliver workshop presentations and industry engagement activities for Mental Health Week this year, which is a big week on the calendar for workplace health and safety. We also provide support for suicide prevention through our five-year funding arrangement with MATES in Construction, which has really done an excellent job in reducing the incidence of suicide in that industry. That was set up following a number of work-related deaths that came through the superannuation fund when claims were made by families and members who were

left behind when people committed suicide. The numbers were quite staggering. It came out of that. They have done an excellent job and they are world renowned.

As we know, mental health impacts all aspects of life for workers and their families. That is why the government will continue to do all we can in this space. It is an area where, with WorkCover in particular, we want to ensure that we compensate where it is required but it needs a whole approach. We are looking forward to implementing these reforms so that we can get the best outcomes for workers who suffer from mental health issues in the workplace. Thank you for the question. It is very important.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, in reference to page 5 of the SDS, can you advise on the functioning of the new portable long service leave scheme for community service workers?

Ms GRACE: That was one of our election commitments that I know the member was very proud of as well. We will never rest on our laurels when it comes to improving the lives of Queensland workers. The community services industry portable long service leave scheme is a great example of our ongoing work to improve the lives of Queensland workers right across the state. Queensland community service workers are among the most dedicated of workers. They are at the front line, day in and out, supporting and advocating for some of our most vulnerable people. The services and supports provided by these workers include alcohol and drug services, child safety and support services, family and domestic violence services, disability support and mental health and homelessness support, just to name a few. They are really in a very challenging space in our community.

Due to the nature of their industry, these dedicated workers, of whom about 70 per cent are women, had been denied access to long service leave until 1 January last year. If anyone deserves long service leave for all of their service to this sector and our community, it is these workers. I am so proud that for the past 18 months they have been able to access it.

I am proud to report back on the growth of this scheme, which is now the second largest in Queensland. The numbers are impressive. As of 30 June there are now more than 1,100 registered employers in the scheme, which is up from around 800 in July 2021. It is great to see this level of engagement from employers. There are now more than 107,000 registered workers with the scheme and, over the past year, around 90,400 of those accrued service towards long service leave. These numbers are up from around 70,000 at estimates last year. Total contributions are around \$55 million and total payments of around \$740,000—it is very early in the scheme, of course—have been made on behalf of more than 1,000 registered workers. That is money that they would probably never have been able to get before.

I am pleased to advise that QLeave, which administers the scheme, has heavily engaged with industry stakeholders to maximise the number of workers registered in the scheme and to enable employers to easily transition to portable long service leave. QLeave has also worked to ensure that employers understand their obligations regarding the quarterly return and levy payment processes, and has provided support, ongoing education and compliance with worker management and employer obligations. The growth of the community services portable long service leave scheme is just another example of the Palaszczuk government improving the lives of Queensland workers, especially in industries where women predominate such as in the community sector.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, in relation to page 7 of the department's SDS, can you advise on the awareness activities being undertaken specifically in relation to electrical safety?

Ms GRACE: This is a really good question because, sadly, as we know, often there are no second chances when it comes to electrical safety. We are committed to ensuring that Queensland's safety laws are of the highest standard and keep pace. That is why an independent review has been undertaken on the Electrical Safety Act. The review of the act was a key recommendation from the *Improving electrical safety in Queensland* report by the Commissioner for Electrical Safety and provided to me. I commend the work of the review team, which started in December 2020. It was undertaken by an independent reviewer, Dick Williams. The review had a strong focus on consultation with stakeholders from right across the industry, ranging from industry groups and all stakeholders—families who have lost loved ones, government bodies, unions, employers, electricity generators. They have done an excellent job. In December the report was delivered. There were a number of recommendations that we are working through. I commend Tony James, the department and the team working on this. There are a number of recommendations and we are working through those.

Strong and contemporary laws are vital to ensuring electrical safety, but they must be partnered with electrical safety awareness and engagement activities. That is why my department undertakes a range of electrical safety awareness and engagement activities, including the annual Electricity Safety Week, films and digital and print resources. I know they go into schools to talk about electrical safety. I

have been with them when they have done school talks. When it comes to electrical safety, we must all play our part. I encourage Queenslanders to engage with the many resources, programs and practical tips to stay up to speed. There have been a lot of changes in the electrical area with solar panels, wind farms and a number of other elements.

The act review is very complimentary of what we have done to date but also very comprehensive in looking at the new regulations and the new way that we need to regulate electrical safety in the state. We are working through it. We have had a number of meetings with the department. They have been very productive. I look forward to the government responding, taking something to cabinet and then bringing legislation to the House.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, in relation to page 7 of the SDS, can you provide an update on how our government is responding to quad bike and farm safety in Queensland workplaces?

Ms GRACE: As the member knows, we have been doing this for a while. It has been a key priority. We established the agricultural unit in 2015 when we came into power. When it comes to farm safety, quad bike safety is a priority. We launched a comprehensive quad bike safety strategy in 2016. The strategy included the development of the Ride Ready website. I thank all our ambassadors, particularly the Coco family from Atherton. They became ambassadors when their son, Dominic, had a terrible accident on a quad bike after which they basically had to scrape him off the road. His life was saved by fantastic health professionals. The family have become wonderful ambassadors for the Ride Ready campaign.

We have now established a new advertising campaign because you just cannot rest on your laurels with this. The new campaign is titled 'Quad bikes are Queensland farming's biggest killer'. It will focus on the following messages: wearing helmets, kids only on kids' bikes, don't double, don't overload and quad bike training. The campaign will run from 4 September to 2 October this year. To ensure we have the strongest safety standards possible, we are investigating changes to the workplace health and safety regulations, including: requiring quad bike operators to be at least 16 years of age on a full size bike; operators and passengers to wear helmets; operators to be trained; and prohibit passengers to be carried unless the vehicle is designed to carry them, like a side-by-side. I encourage all interested stakeholders to have their say as part of the consultation process, which closes at the end of this month.

Quad bike safety, however, is an Australian issue. That is why I will continue to advocate for a national approach. You do not want something to be sold in one state that cannot be sold in another state, particularly with regards to safety features. We want to encompass awareness, education and engagement. Since 2015 we have run the annual Farm Safety Calendar competition for school students. It is terrific. Many of those drawings are to do with safety regarding quad bikes. Once again, the calendars are available. I think I put one on everybody's desk in the parliament. It is a fantastic tool. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you very much.

Mr BLEIJIE: Chair, a point of order. I want to correct the record. When I was asking about CFMEU and Mr Luke Gibson before, the word 'allegations' was yelled out. Madam Chair, I want it on the record that Luke Gibson was found to have committed common assault on a—

CHAIR: No, that is not a point of order and we will review—

Mr BLEIJIE:—on a woman last year—

CHAIR: That is not a point of order, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I am correcting the record.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you are not correcting; you raised a point of order. I am telling you that we will review the transcript at the end of the proceedings.

Mr BLEIJIE: Can I finish my point of order?

CHAIR: That is not a point of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: Can I correct the record?

CHAIR: Yes, we can do that with the transcript at the end of these proceedings.

Mr BLEIJIE: Can you hear my point of order?

CHAIR: I have. You are correcting the proceedings; you are not raising a point of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: He committed common assault.

CHAIR: Refer me to a standing order. I am sorry, member for Kawana. The time allocated for the consideration of the proposed estimates for the portfolios of the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing has expired. I note that no questions were taken on notice.

Minister, on behalf of the committee I thank you, your director-general and all of the officials who have participated today for your attendance and helpfulness. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 2.30. Minister, would you like to make a closing comment?

Ms GRACE: Just very quickly, Chair, as I know the time has expired. I thank my Department of Education, the Office of Industrial Relations, QRIC, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and Racing Queensland for their assistance. In particular, I thank my ministerial staff, who do fantastic, hard, loyal and dedicated work, particularly my chief of staff, Sharon Durham. I thank everyone who has participated in the estimates. This is a democratic process and I thank you for being an excellent chair. Thank you to the committee and thank you for the process under which we undertake this important role.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: What is your point of order?

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Tony James indicated that there was not going to be a matter taken on notice but he would come back to the committee at the end with those details about the workplace health and safety permit.

CHAIR: If he had those. He has not provided that information to the minister in terms of any additional information.

Ms GRACE: He can respond.

Mr De'Ath: We are happy to respond, Chair.

CHAIR: Very briefly, Mr James.

Mr James: There were 18 matters of occupational violence or bullying allegations. Five related to the CFMEU. I believe the question was raised concerning the CFMEU. There was one staff member who was counselled and assisted, as we do with all our staff members who are subject to occupational violence and bullying. One member had a couple of days off—less than a week.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you very much for that clarification. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 2.30 pm for the examination of the estimates for the portfolios of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development. Again, thank you all very much for your participation here today.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair.

Proceedings suspended from 2.03 pm to 2.30 pm.

**ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE—
EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS; TRAINING AND SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT****In Attendance**


Hon. DE Farmer, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development

Mr I Hutcheon, Chief of Staff

Department of Employment, Small Business and Training

Mr W Agnew, Director-General

Mr S Koch, Deputy Director-General

 **CHAIR:** I am Kim Richards, the member for Redlands and chair of the committee. With me here today is James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair. The other members of the committee here today are: Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; and Mr Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford. Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore, is unable to attend today and in his place we welcome the member for Buderim, Brent Mickelberg, whom the Leader of the Opposition has appointed to the committee for the rest of the hearing today.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2022 for the portfolios of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development until 5.15. As was determined by the House, the committee will examine areas within the minister's portfolio as follows: training and skills development from 2.30 pm to 4 pm; and employment and small business from 4.15 pm to 5.15 pm. I remind members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the times specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. The committee will suspend proceedings for a break from 4 pm till 4.15 pm.

The committee has granted leave for a number of non-committee members to attend and ask questions at the hearing today: Mr Michael Berkman, the member for Maiwar; Mr Jarrod Bleijie, the member for Kawana; Mr David Crisafulli, the member for Broadwater; Mr Jon Krause, the member for Scenic Rim; Dr Amy MacMahon, the member for South Brisbane; Mr Tim Mander, the member for Everton; Mr Andrew Powell, the member for Glass House; Dr Christian Rowan, the member for Moggill; and Ms Fiona Simpson, the member for Maroochydore.

I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in the Legislative Assembly apply in this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, argument or opinion. As I stated earlier this morning, I intend to guide these proceedings respectfully today so that we can explore relevant issues and provide the opportunity to address questions from both government and non-government members. As I said earlier this morning, it is important that we ensure these are respectful proceedings that meet our community's expectations.

I remind everyone present that anyone may be excluded from the proceedings at my discretion as chair or by order of the committee. While mobile phone use is not permitted in the public gallery, an exception has been made for staff who are assisting witnesses here today and who have been permitted the use of their devices for this purpose. I do ask all present, however, to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode if they are not turned off. I also encourage everyone to wear face masks. We are in the midst of a significant wave of COVID, so it is important that we all look after ourselves and each other. I also highlight the importance, when asking or responding to questions, of people removing their face masks to do this.

On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general. I now declare the

proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of employment, small business, training and skills development open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish, you may make an opening statement of more than five minutes.

Ms FARMER: Thank you so much, Chair and committee, for the opportunity to address you. I acknowledge the Turrbal and Jagera people and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge that we meet on Aboriginal land. It always was and it always will be.

The employment and small business and training and skills development portfolios are at the heart of the current and future success of the state's economy and, in turn, the fortunes and wellbeing of each and every Queenslanders. From supporting the day-to-day operations of small businesses to making training available to every Queenslanders, no matter who they are or where they live in this great state, to building our future workforce, including those industries that are still emerging, the Palaszczuk government is committed to delivering good jobs, better services and a great lifestyle.

Investing in our state's almost half a million small businesses has always been front and centre of our \$15.2 billion economic recovery plan. Small businesses are the heart and soul of our local communities, employing almost one million Queenslanders, which is why through the COVID period the Palaszczuk government has provided around \$2.5 billion in support to them. Our initiatives have all been aimed at helping small businesses to survive, grow and thrive. The almost \$250 million commitment to small businesses in this year's budget is testament to that, with our announcement that we have increased the ceiling for payroll tax deductions to \$10.4 million, creating a saving of up to \$26,000 a year for around 12,000 small businesses.

After the resounding success of our grants programs in supporting small businesses during the pandemic we have locked in the full suite of grants permanently, with \$31.9 million committed over the next four years. Yesterday I was delighted to announce that almost a thousand more small businesses, including 262 regional businesses, have been awarded a \$5,000 Business Basics grant. Today I can advise that the \$2.5 million Business Boost grant programs will open on 12 August. Through feedback from our stakeholders, we have continued to refine our application process to ensure it is as equitable and accessible as possible.

I cannot leave the topic of small business without also saying how delighted I have been to see the ascendancy of the social enterprise sector over the past year, with the significant assistance of our \$8 million Social Enterprise Jobs Fund. I am so proud that we can show off our many social enterprises on the world stage with the Social Enterprise World Forum, which is being held in Brisbane in September this year and which we are delighted to sponsor.

In these current times, the importance of skills and training to the economic growth of our state and to ensuring that every Queenslanders is able to access the human services which they have every right to expect could not be clearer. Our commitment to skills and training is evidenced in our record investment of \$1.2 billion in this year's budget to deliver exceptional training and, wherever possible, in state-of-the-art facilities. We are seeing the results of that investment. This year alone I have opened or inspected new or upgraded facilities at 13 different TAFE sites. Initiatives such as our Free TAFE for under 25s and the shared commitment to JobTrainer have meant that we have seen a 64.6 per cent increase in apprenticeship and traineeship commencements, with a further 18.6 per cent projected for the next 12 months. Queensland completions are up by 16.4 per cent in the past year alone. In school based apprenticeships and traineeships we have more than 55 per cent of the nation's total.

Of course, I cannot speak about skills and training without mentioning our flagship Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, a program which makes a profound impact on the lives of disadvantaged jobseekers around the state, with more than 76 per cent of former participants in employment or training—or both—a year after finishing a program. What an incredibly worthwhile program!

Across the world and across our nation, industry and businesses are crying out for staff. With Queensland's economy thriving 7.8 per cent stronger than before the pandemic, we are not immune to the problem. This is why in March this year we led the nation in bringing together over 350 thought leaders for the Workforce Summit to devise solutions to current and future workforce challenges. The summit revealed some consistent themes that have helped shape our Queensland workforce strategy, which will be released in the next few weeks.

A great example of our thinking around workforce is our Hydrogen Industry Workforce Development Roadmap, which I launched last week at the national Clean Energy Summit in Sydney,

with Queensland the first state to set a clear path to meet the skills and training needs of this emerging industry. There is also our new Growing Workforce Participation Fund for which I flagged the opening at the summit. The fund supports industry organisations to develop innovative solutions to workforce issues. I was delighted to visit Spinal Life this morning to announce the names of the successful applicants. I hope to have the opportunity to discuss this fund further during today's hearing. These are exciting times. In Queensland, it is our time to shine. I thank the committee for your time and interest, and I look forward to answering your questions.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you so much, Minister. The committee will commence with examination of estimates for the training and skills development portfolio areas. I call the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. My question is to the minister. Minister, you paid \$2 million for two tradies at one million dollars apiece. Some \$2 million seems like a large amount of money to pay for two tradies to lure them to Queensland. Given the Tradies in Paradise program has been an abject failure, what would the government have done differently to ensure that taxpayers' money was not wasted on this program?

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair: imputations.

CHAIR: You could recast that question.

Mr MICKELBERG: Given the Tradies in Paradise program has only delivered two tradies when the target was 1,000 tradies, what would the government have done differently to ensure that taxpayers' money was not wasted on a program that has not met expectations?

Ms FARMER: The Premier and I announced the Tradies in Paradise program at the workforce summit earlier this year. It is aimed specifically at helping with the construction and repair work after the significant floods which affected families and businesses in more than 20 LGAs. It was based on an incentive payment for tradespeople from states, excluding New South Wales—given the flood impacts in New South Wales—to encourage them to move to Queensland and to stay in Queensland. An advertising and marketing and campaign was attached.

The program was based on the highly successful \$7.5 million Work in Paradise campaign that attracted over 3,500 tourism and hospitality workers in eight months. At the time of launch we had excellent support from a range of organisations. In fact, I quote Alli Smith from the homes claims team at Suncorp, who was with us at the launch, who said—

The Tradies in Paradise incentive scheme is an excellent initiative by the Queensland government, which we at Suncorp fully support.

Since the program has been announced we have worked with a range of industry organisations including Master Builders Queensland, the Housing Industry Association, the Master Plumbers' Association of Queensland, Master Electricians Australia, Engineers Australia, the Insurance Council of Australia and insurance companies—AAMI, Allianz, Budget Direct, QBE, RACQ, Suncorp and Youi. We have made sure that the information was available through general job search engines—Zoono, CareerOne, Gumtree, Indeed Australia, Job Search, Jora and Seek. We have had links to QBuild careers for people who are interested as well as links to the QBCC's South-East Queensland flood recovery rebuild and recover tradie register. The guidelines for the incentives were developed in consultation with central agencies, including the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport and the Department of Energy and Public Works, and licensing bodies such as the QBCC and the Office of Industrial Relations. They were provided to key industry stakeholders and insurance companies following their release at the launch in April.

We have had more than 130,000 unique webpage views of the campaign and over 870 unique expressions of interest. At this point, two people have been paid. Before they receive payment they must show that they have worked for at least eight weeks in a flood-affected area. Of the 12 people who have applied for that payment, two have been eligible at this point.

The advertising campaign was run across all states except New South Wales. We are very pleased that, aside from anything else, it has given us an opportunity to market Queensland. That is never a wasted opportunity. We have been very pleased to see the number of webpage views that that has attracted. Would I like to see more tradies applying for this program, yes I certainly would. Ultimately, what we want for those people whose homes have been damaged—and there are people who are still not back in their homes and there are businesspeople who are still severely affected; a number of members here are from LGAs where people were badly affected—is more assistance available to them. We know that there is a labour shortage. I was very pleased to hear that 55 per cent

of the homes that were flood damaged no longer require support or have been repaired. That is very good to hear.

There is no way we could see this level of need in our community—people completely displaced from their homes and businesses; some suffering the most abject misery and still suffering—so this government was going to leave no stone unturned to assist these people and businesses. That is why this program was put together on the basis of the success of the earlier program.

I would point out that, in addition to this, this government has a number of successful employment programs. Our track record in developing employment programs that are highly successful is second to none. I reference the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program which is the most successful employment program of its kind in Australia.

Mr LISTER: Chair, I raise a point of order on relevance. The question was not about employment programs.

CHAIR: I do not think that that is a point of order, Deputy Chair. I think the minister was being responsive to the question asked in terms of investment in how we attract employees to this state.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, as we have heard, and despite what the minister just said, there have only been two tradies who have been paid a total of \$3,500 under the Tradies in Paradise program. Can you tell me where in Queensland those two tradies have completed flood restoration work?

Mr Agnew: We do not actually have that information directly to hand in terms of where, but the eligibility criteria and the process that those tradespeople are required to fill out is to ensure that they have conducted work in an LGA that has been declared as flood affected. Those would be the LGAs that fall under the DRFA and QRA process.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, I take it then from your answer that you do not know if the two tradies are still working in Queensland?

Mr Agnew: In terms of the eligibility criteria the minister referred to, one step for that is to verify that they have conducted eight weeks in total. The evidence provided for that is a statutory declaration by those tradespeople.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how was the \$1,750 incentive payment determined as being an appropriate amount to lure tradies to Queensland, particularly given the considerable relocation costs involved for a tradie moving up to Queensland and when there are skilled worker shortages in other states as well?

Mr Agnew: As also outlined by the minister in her response, the Tradies in Paradise scheme was built off the Work in Paradise scheme and the success of that program in terms of attracting workers to Queensland for that sector.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, I would contend that tradies and labour for the Work in Paradise scheme are different markets. Builders have told me that carpenters are paid about \$15 an hour less in Queensland than they would earn in Victoria. If a carpenter was to work for, let us say, three weeks in Victoria, the difference in their earnings would be greater than the \$1,750 that would be paid to them under the program. Can you explain to me the rationale behind why any carpenter would want to relocate to Queensland under the Tradies in Paradise program just to receive \$1,750?

Mr Agnew: I would point out that the broader part of the program, if you have seen the advertising and marketing campaign, was about working in Queensland. It was obviously pushing the lifestyle benefits of working in Queensland as well as highlighting the considerable work available, arising particularly from the flood-affected LGAs, as I referred to. Any incentive scheme would not seek to compete with the breadth of total work available to a tradesman. The key part of the program was to highlight that there was work and the benefits of working in Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: What were the measures of success when this program was put together? Is two tradies considered success?

Mr Agnew: I essentially agree with the minister that we would like to see more tradespeople come to Queensland for the purposes of working in the flood-affected areas. That was the purpose of the program. The marketing campaign did drive a lot of visitations to our website—130,000 visits to our website is a considerable number. We believe that came directly from the marketing campaign. We are not at that point yet, but we will be undertaking an evaluation of the success of that marketing campaign. They are numbers we have to offer at this point in time.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear, Director-General, with the nearly \$2 million that has been spent on this campaign, it is considered that 130,000 visits to a website and two tradies moving to Queensland is success? The minister spoke in detail about the good points associated with this marketing campaign, but at the end of the day the program was designed to deliver tradies to Queensland in flood-affected areas and we only have two.

Mr SULLIVAN: Point of order, Chair: I take your advice as to whether the question is quite literally seeking an opinion from the witness.

CHAIR: I think there is relevance to that point of order. I also suggest that it is possibly a repeat of the previous question. Member for Buderim, would you like to recast the question?

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you for your guidance. In that case, Chair, I will ask the question of the minister. Minister, is two tradies and 130,000 visits to the website success for the Tradies in Paradise program?

CHAIR: I think that goes to the very first question that you put to the minister in terms of possibly repeating. Minister, I will allow you some scope in how you would like to respond.

Ms FARMER: I believe both the director-general and I have answered the same question in six or seven different ways. I think I gave a fairly comprehensive earlier. I seek your guidance on whether I can really add anything to what is essentially the same question.

CHAIR: I think your response to the very first question you were asked certainly answered that question. Member for Buderim, do you have another question?

Mr MICKELBERG: I will take that as it is not a success.

CHAIR: No, member for Buderim. There is no need to add your commentary. Ask your question.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, when the Tradies in Paradise program was being developed, what risks were identified in relation to the delivery of the program?

Mr Agnew: In terms of providing advice to the government on the Tradies in Paradise scheme, as the minister outlined, very broad consultation occurred. That included speaking with Master Builders, HIA and the Insurance Council. They were all consulted on the need for tradespeople to move to Queensland for the recovery effort. That was a key way of gauging the level of demand and need for the campaign. It was also understood that a campaign, on the basis of the success of the Work in Paradise scheme, would require a significant marketing campaign. Clearly we were not, as the minister outlined, seeking to lure tradespeople from New South Wales for obvious reasons. Moving to Queensland from further states is a considerable undertaking. That led our assessment of what was required in terms of those risks.

Also, we developed the guidelines by consulting across government, Treasury, the Premier's department and central agencies, as well as the department of tourism, in terms of that work. We also worked with key regulators in terms of licensing registration in Queensland. We also needed to understand that there would not be any other bottlenecks in the process that could slow down a tradesperson coming quickly to Queensland for this purpose. We worked through those risks as well.

Mr DAMETTO: To give youth offenders every opportunity to succeed once they leave detention, how much has been allocated in the 2022-23 budget for trade skills or traineeships or upskilling at-risk youth after they have left the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre?

Ms FARMER: I do believe we have some information in the folder because I think there was a similar question on notice in the lead-up to estimates. I will go over some of those points. As the member knows, there are a range of programs that are available, particularly aimed at disadvantaged cohorts. Clearly the cohort that you are describing is disadvantaged for a range of reasons. Those programs include User Choice, Certificate III Guarantee, Higher Level Skills, VET in Schools and Skilling Queenslanders for Work.

My department provides \$200,000 a year to the Department of Education to support VET in Schools delivery in Queensland's two youth detention centres. That complements the education provision which is already delivered at the centres, which are themselves registered training organisations.

Additionally, our Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative—I know the member is very aware of that program—targets a range of groups, as I have said, who traditionally face barriers to participation in training. Those groups include young people, mature age jobseekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, women re-entering the workforce, and people from culturally and

linguistically diverse backgrounds. People who are coming out of detention centres will often span a number of those cohorts.

Two programs delivered under Skilling Queenslanders for Work specifically target young people, and they are Youth Skills and Get Set for Work. The Youth Skills program funds community based organisations to assist young people aged 15 to 24 years engaged with Youth Justice or Queensland Corrective Services by providing them with nationally recognised training and supporting them into employment or further training with intensive case management. Since 2015, 76 projects worth \$9.7 million under the Youth Skills program have been approved to assist 2,059 young offenders. To date, 1,341 young offenders have participated in the program.

In recognition of the distinct level of disadvantage experienced by program participants, outcomes for individuals will vary according to their learning pathway and goals. For instance, for some participants, to achieve personal and social development improvements upon completion of a Youth Skills project is a major achievement. In 2022-23, \$1 million is available under the Youth Skills program to further assist these young people.

I know from my previous portfolio and from the conversations we have had over the years that the member is also aware of the Transition 2 Success program, which is run by Youth Justice, and Project Booyah, which is run by Queensland Police Service. Both of those have extremely high success rates in terms of positive outcomes for young people taking part. I appreciate this is an issue the member has had great interest in over the years, and I commend him for that.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Minister.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, will you outline how the recently announced Growing Workforce Participation Fund will help regional Queensland businesses access more staff?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I acknowledge that this is something that is close to his heart. We have had a number of conversations about workforce issues in regional Queensland. I am very excited to inform the committee, as I said in my introductory speech, that this morning I launched the Growing Workforce Participation Fund.

I was able to visit Spinal Life Australia as one of the first groups to receive funding through this program with its EnABLED Businesses Program, which works to bridge the gap between people with a disability and business to increase opportunities for both parties. As Mark Townsend, the CEO of Spinal Life Australia, said today—

With Australia experiencing record levels of employment—now is the perfect time to help build confidence of employers and employees alike when it comes to employment of people with disability.

Our EnABLED Businesses Program will provide awareness training and one-to-one business mentoring to identify and undertake practical actions to welcome employees with disability into their business. This will help to create a level playing field for people with disability, making the labour market truly accessible for all.

I sincerely hope that this is actually a crossing of the Rubicon for employers being willing to take on people with disabilities, so I am very excited about it. I opened the Growing Workforce Participation Fund at the Workforce Summit in March with \$1.5 million allocated to support ongoing employment for jobseekers from identified groups. It flags a really important aspect of the workforce strategy that we will soon be releasing relating to (1) a more important role we believe people from vulnerable cohorts can play in helping to address workforce issues; and (2) the right of every individual to the dignity of work.

Under the new fund, nine successful seeding projects will receive grants of up to \$200,000 to deliver projects that assist businesses adapt to employ more disadvantaged jobseekers to alleviate the shortage of workers some industries are feeling. Of the nine successful projects, five are specifically targeted at regional areas, including: Balonne shire, Cairns, Dalby, Proserpine and Townsville. As the member is aware, providing greater employment opportunities to regional areas is a priority of this government. I would like to thank the member particularly for his advocacy in this area. Regional Queensland is confronted with employment challenges that are different to those experienced in South-East Queensland. Across regional Queensland different LGAs and industry sectors are experiencing different problems. Some towns are feeling an acute shortage of workers to fill their rapid growth in jobs, while outback Queensland is struggling with an average rate of unemployment over 11 per cent. This includes many of our First Nations communities such as Aurukun. Employment issues such as these are complex and require an innovative, holistic approach which I believe this program provides.

Together with the member, I very much enjoyed meeting a number of small business owners during the many times I have been to Rockhampton. I particularly remember Robin and Linda, whom the member took me to visit at CocoaBrew in Rockhampton at the end of last year, and hearing about their business journey, especially as they had only just started out three months prior to COVID starting, and some of the issues raised by those and other businesses we visited together. They also told me about issues raised at the Workforce Summit, especially around attracting and retaining staff. The impacts of these issues in our regions and communities are particularly important for us to address, which is why we have adapted our Back to Work pilot program into the Growing Workforce Participation Fund to work with communities and industry to develop new solutions to these emerging issues. The fund will support Queensland employers to address labour and skills shortages by improving the way they work with disadvantaged people who are looking for work.

We are excited by the really innovative nature of the applications, and I cannot wait for people to see them. There is the Bowen Gumlu Growers Association project, which will utilise interactive media and virtual reality to engage young people and create awareness of the opportunities in modern agriculture and aquaculture. We are funding the Balonne shire to employ a project officer to showcase the employment opportunities available in the council. Other projects we funded include: QCOSS, Queensland Council of Social Services, to provide education services to community service organisations to improve employment and retention of diverse employees, including those from ATSI and CALD backgrounds and people with a disability; Energy Skills Queensland will provide support to young people with anxiety and autism spectrum disorder to work within the ICT industry; the Cairns Chamber of Commerce will provide business owners with resources to assist them in recruiting outside their typical workforce with a focus on disadvantaged jobseekers; the Queensland Hotels Association will deliver the #hospitalityfirststep program, which is a five-day training course that will focus on essential specialist skills in the industry; the Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise Project will seek to increase the health workforce capacity in the Western Downs by establishing a database of inactive healthcare workers in the regional community and understand the barriers to these individuals re-entering the health industry; and the Australian Red Cross Employment Project will focus on individuals who are long-term unemployed due to their contact with the justice system and support employers in Townsville to gain capacity and practices to recruit and retain this cohort.

Almost 80 per cent of all employees associated with our Back to Work program found their job in regional Queensland, and through these programs we are going to continue to work with regional Queensland to help jobseekers overcome the barriers they often face.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, how is the Palaszczuk government supporting apprentices, trainees and other students to complete their training?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. There is so much good news associated with that question. The Queensland government has forecast that we will need more than 280,000 extra workers by 2024-25, with jobs growth across every region and every industry. That is why our commitment to skills and training is stronger than ever, with more than \$1.2 billion invested in skills training in this last budget. Our investment last year saw more than 53,000 Queenslanders start an apprenticeship or traineeship, an incredible 64.6 per cent increase from the previous financial year. That is against a backdrop of a 35.4 per cent decline in completions across Australia from 2015 to 2020. We are bucking that trend, with completions up 16.4 per cent in the last year. We continue to punch well above our weight nationally when it comes to apprenticeship and traineeships completions. Our 20,000 plus completions represent 24.9 per cent of all completions across the country, well above our national population share of 20 per cent.

We have strong ambitions to fill our growing workforce, and we have matched that with ambitious targets and record investments. As at the end of June we have 89,000 apprentices and trainees in training. This is the highest level in a decade and is built on our record commencement levels. We want not only every single apprentice or trainee who starts a course to finish for their own wellbeing and sense of achievement but given our workforce shortages right now we need every single one of those apprentices from that impressive jump in commencements—and everyone who comes before and after them—to finish so they can be part of the solution to labour market challenges. That is why in July last year I asked the Queensland Training Ombudsman to review the support measures available to apprentices and trainees across the state with a particular focus on females in male-dominated occupations. I did so after hearing from a young female apprentice who had suffered terrible harassment and discrimination; however, her story was unfortunately just the tip of the iceberg. I have heard stories of the nearest women's toilet on a site being 15 minutes walk away or there being none on the site at all; stories of apprentices being ridiculed, bullied, socially isolated and sexually harassed;

having sexual acts simulated upon them; of tradesmen isolating them from any meaningful work or ignoring them altogether. What the ombudsman's report found was that, at best, there was a lack of knowledge and understanding of what is required, and at worst there was a fundamental disrespect of apprentices and trainees. This is simply not acceptable. We must remove these barriers so that trainees and apprentices can confidently complete their training, which is why the Palaszczuk government has accepted all 12 recommendations from the review.

As part of that we are implementing a Train to Retain strategy. We have, and will continue to, proactively reach out to apprentices, trainees and employers to raise awareness of the one stop shop apprentice info line and the support my department office through its regional officers. We are creating an advisory group of current apprentices, training experts and the Training Ombudsman to support improved apprenticeship outcomes. We are engaging with industry bodies such as Construction Skills Queensland, Energy Skills Queensland, the Furnishing Industry Association of Australia and the Motor Trades Association of Queensland to develop strategies to support the employment of more women in trades. We will educate employers on their obligations to apprentices and trainees, including how to create a more inclusive workplace. We will work with other government agencies focused on gender equity, including the Office of the Special Commissioner, Equity and Diversity and the office of women and build on top of work already undertaken such as the Respect@Work report, the Women's Strategy and Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce. We will provide advice and education to small businesses about the benefits of a diverse workforce.

Earlier this year I was at the Bohle TAFE and I met a young man called Bryce, who is an apprentice employed by Wilmar Sugar. I want to take this opportunity to highlight the excellent work Wilmar is doing with their apprenticeship program. Over the last five years Wilmar has achieved an average apprenticeship completion rate of 98 per cent. We also fund several programs for young Queenslanders to explore a potential career path before committing to a full qualification or apprenticeship. Our Gateway to Industry Schools Program connects thousands of Queensland students from over 270 schools to industry partners from 11 priority sectors, including the recently announced hydrogen gateway to industry schools program. Our TAFE taster programs allow high school students to try a course one day a week for nine weeks.

We also have a group training organisation pre-apprenticeship program and a pre-apprenticeship support program. I had the pleasure of meeting students from the women in construction pre-apprenticeship program who completed a certificate I in construction at the Acacia Ridge TAFE campus. I met a number of young women who were so excited to have been given an opportunity to try different trades and then make really strong choices about which trade they wanted to pursue. We are committed to ensuring that all apprentices and trainees are not only well informed to make the right choices about where they want to go but supported to complete those apprenticeships and traineeships as well.

CHAIR: I love the Try a Trade Day.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, in the 2021-22 budget there was a target of 11,500 apprenticeship completions but the government actually only delivered 10,300. At a time when Queensland is in the middle of a skilled worker crisis, can you provide an explanation of why the apprenticeship completions failed to even come close to meeting the state government's target?

Mr Agnew: In relation to the targets, they are our service delivery targets which have remained in place. I would particularly make the point that they have remained in place compared with pre-COVID levels of those completion targets. I would also make the point that the government has made the funding available to support and subsidise apprentices, trainees and the broader student training market. It provides a demand system in Queensland so there are no limits on the supply of anything that is on our priority skills list or any of our other priority areas. There are subsidy levels that are identified through our network of industry skills advisers which provides those qualifications, whether there is the skill set or a full-blown apprenticeship or traineeship. They are available and those subsidy levels are available.

I would also make the point that there has been a considerable increase in the number of completions last financial year, 2021-22. It is good to see we are actually going back to aspirational targets, which as I said was set before COVID. It has not been from a system that limits the number of places available or funding available. Even in the very small number of skill sets where we had limits in place—which were more there for quality reasons as opposed to the needs of industry—those limits were removed last year for the purposes of ensuring there was as much funding in the system as possible to support any industries, any employers and any trainees who were entering the system in any of those skill sets.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, you spoke about the fact that the targets have been in place for some time. Every single year the Palaszczuk government has been in power, the government has failed to meet its apprenticeship target. The shortfall over the term of government has been 14,400 apprentices. Can you explain how that target number is determined?

Mr Agnew: That target number has been in place for some time, as I acknowledged in my previous answer. It was increased after it had been exceeded quite some time ago. It has remained in place as the aspirational target. As I said, the system and the funding that is in place from the government to support the training system remains in place. It is not through limits within our budget allocation.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, has the department completed any modelling on what effect having 14,400 fewer tradies than has been targeted in Queensland will have on the economy? If so, can you share the outcomes of that modelling?

Mr Agnew: The answer is no to the modelling. I would like to add to my previous answer and note that the number of completions for traineeships in 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 all exceeded the targets: by 1,300 in 2016-17; by 1,500 in 2017-18; and by 1,800 in 2018-19. Also, the number of completions in apprenticeships in 2014-15 was exceeded by 800.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, given you have told me the department has not done any modelling in relation to the chronic shortfall of tradies right across the state, and taking your point with respect to the completion of trainees—I note my questions were in relation to apprentices and not trainees, so two different things—of which the government has not met the target once in government, why hasn't the department considered the effect of this shortfall and the impact it is having on industries, particularly critical industries like the construction industry?

Mr Agnew: I certainly would make the point, though, that the targets do mean something. We have a system that supports apprentices and trainees in their arrangements between the employer and the student. The minister just outlined a number of initiatives that have been re-enlivened and emphasised as a result of a recent report by the Queensland Training Ombudsman. We certainly have a very strong network of regional officers who are front-facing employees within the department that have a regulatory and service delivery model that is there to support apprentices and trainees. The outcome of that is to ensure that those students and employers are supported to achieve the outcomes they are setting out to achieve. Certainly, from an employer's perspective and an industry perspective, it is to have the skilled workers they require. As I outlined earlier as well, we have a network of industry skills advisers we work with all year round in terms of our system to continually hone the subsidy levels that are provided through the department to those students.

For apprentices and trainees, they are three to four years through to completion so it does take some time for some of these elements to come through. As the minister also pointed out, there are very strong commencements at this time. We have very strong support being provided by the department. There were some improvements recently in our system through the introduction of, for example, our SMS system to support information flow between employers and apprentices to ensure they are well aware of their arrangements and where to receive assistance if they require assistance and also to ensure they are adhering to the standards they need to adhere to, particularly from an employer's perspective. We certainly are leaning very strongly into supporting getting good completion numbers in all of our apprentices and trainees across Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: I acknowledge commencements have increased considerably. My concern is in relation to completions, because at the end of the day we have a critical shortage of skilled tradespersons. Director-General, you alluded to it in your previous answer, but presumably these targets are set because that is the number of apprentices required in order to provide those skilled workers for industry. You alluded to Construction Skills Queensland earlier. Presumably that apprenticeship target—that 11,500—is derived because that is how many are required in order to provide a skilled workforce. Has the department sought feedback from organisations like Master Builders or HIA in relation to the effect that critical shortage is having on builders on the ground? We know it is very hard to get a builder or any tradesperson at the moment, and it would be useful to understand the consultation the department has had with those peak bodies.

Mr Agnew: Certainly we do continue to engage with stakeholders inside our industry skills adviser network. They are industry peak bodies that are there to provide insight into the requirements of the skills specific to each of their industries. They are a very big part of our system. The government also instigated initiatives such as Free apprenticeships for under 21s. That was extended to under 25s to seek to encourage greater numbers of apprentices into the system. That was one key initiative that

was undertaken in more recent times. Also we have a number of other programs that are there to support students and young people into programs like our successful Gateway to Industry Schools program which the government has continued to support. It is a very strong program about which we do receive good feedback from industry. We are leaning in particularly strongly at the moment in times of workforce shortage.

The minister referred to the estimates that come from Jobs Queensland in terms of the anticipating future skills workforce which is forecasting 280,000 new jobs in Queensland which require all kinds of different levels of skill sets, and a key part of that is to ensure that industry is being enabled as much as possible in undertaking their workforce planning so that they can start early for the skills that they need. As I referred to earlier, apprenticeships and traineeships take some time to complete, to bring young people up into those levels of skills to be deployed productively across any of those industries.

There are quite a large number of ways in which we are working with industry and what their needs are through initiatives like pre-apprenticeships as well, to making sure that we are providing the opportunity for young people to not only go into an apprenticeship with their eyes open as to what is required but also to be well prepared to make a success of that. That was an initiative that received very strong input from stakeholders as well in its development.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, can you tell me: was the Tradies in Paradise initiative a response to the fact that there are these critical shortages of tradies because we have not met the apprenticeship targets over a long period of time?

Mr Agnew: The timing of the announcement of the Tradies in Paradise initiative certainly was at the workforce summit where a key theme of that was the workforce shortages in Queensland, but acknowledging that that is a prevailing issue across the country as well as having at that point in time also the flood response requirements and looking to, from a government perspective, supporting that flood response. It was a double-pronged consideration from the department's perspective.

Mr MICKELBERG: Turning now to the skills shortages supply program, Director-General, when deciding on what training providers will be accepted as Skills Assure suppliers, what consideration does the department give to the geographic footprint that providers service?

Mr Agnew: There are a range of eligibility criteria for any supplier of training to become a Skills Assure supplier in Queensland. In regard to the geographical consideration, I may need to come back to the member before the hearing is out.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, in the last financial year, how many Skills Assure suppliers claimed a location loading for delivering training in country and remote Queensland? I think that is the terminology that the department uses.

Mr Agnew: I will need to come back to you on the detail of that one as well. There is quite a detailed response required to get the number of that.

Mr MICKELBERG: While you are at it, I will follow on with another question on the chair's indulgence.

CHAIR: You are coming back before the end of the session? We will not take that on notice; we will wait to see how you go with finding that information.

Mr MICKELBERG: I suspect the answer will be the same to this follow-up question: in the last year, how many students undertook units of competency delivered by Skills Assure suppliers in country and remote Queensland for which a location loading was paid? The first question was with respect to the number of Skills Assure suppliers that are paid, and the second question is with respect to the students that attracted that loading.

Mr Agnew: I will consult with my team and see if that information can be made available.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what is the intent of restricting Skills Assure supplier eligibility only to RTOs that have their head office in Queensland? Surely it is about providing user choice for students and, if that was the case, surely we should be encouraging the best providers to be offering Skills Assure supplier training in Queensland.

CHAIR: Member for Buderim, am I right in understanding that is in reference to RTOs in other parts of the country?

Mr MICKELBERG: One of the eligibility criteria with respect to Skills Assure suppliers is you have to have your head office in Queensland. My question is why is that the case when there are arguably

providers who could be delivering that training in Queensland? Surely it should be about what is in the best interests of the students to get the best training.

Mr Agnew: The Skills Assure supplier framework and the way in which the Queensland government engages with RTOs—the information we have is we have the most contestable market for VET in the country, and we have a large number of providers who are Skills Assure suppliers in Queensland. Essentially, through our frameworks, through our quality monitoring, we believe we are regulating, procuring those services in a quality way that is providing quality training to Queensland students.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what analysis does the department undertake to establish that there is a gap in the training market when determining the need for additional Skills Assure suppliers?

Mr Agnew: That is an assessment that we undertake on an annual basis before we go about the process of reissuing registrations for interest in contract renewal. Steve Koch, the Deputy Director-General, runs that process for the department. I will ask Steve to elaborate on that process.

CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Koch. Over to you.

Mr Koch: As the director-general outlined, we consider a large number of factors when we look at the Skills Assure framework as well, and the number of suppliers that are approved to deliver subsidised training through government programs through that framework. We have about 400 Skills Assure suppliers in the state that we contract with on an annual basis. Historically, that is the largest number of contracted suppliers of any jurisdiction in the country. Queensland also has, as the director-general said, the most contestable VET market as well. What we currently do is look at how many existing suppliers are there. We look at student demand for training as well. Decisions about the coming Skills Assure suppliers for this financial year will be made based on assessment and projected training needs against the supply of VET programs. That basically means that we look at the number of suppliers, the number of historical students and make assessments based on that analysis. As the director-general and the minister have also outlined, we also have strong industry engagement arrangements that enable us to inform that process.

I am also really pleased to advise the committee of the positive feedback we have received from the Independent Tertiary Education Council of Australia, ITECA, which is the peak body for private registered training organisations. They recently corresponded with the minister to express their pleasure in the contractual renewal process that the department has recently run. We managed to engage with the sector and made sure that contract renewal process was a much more streamlined and strong process for all involved as well.

Mr DAMETTO: It was recently reported that it has been difficult for the mining industry to attract young people and school leavers into the industry. Can the minister update us on what, if any, programs are currently running to encourage young people to join the mining industry and also to train to join the mining industry?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. It is a very good question. In terms of the programs we are running, the mining industry probably performs better than any other industry. The member may have heard me referring to the Gateway to Industry Schools Program, which we now run across 11 different sectors; I just announced that the hydrogen sector would be added. Mining is one of those sectors where we can attract industry organisations to work with schools. The industry organisations have to tender to win that contract—we call it GISP. Then they work with local schools to see who would like to work with them to offer a program which gives students from year 10 up to year 12 actual experience in the industry itself. Usually that turns out to be in areas where mining is a key industry for that community or for that region.

The Queensland Minerals & Energy Academy is the GISP provider that is run out of the Queensland Resources Council. I believe their success rate is higher than any other GISP provider. Students who go through the mining and resources GISP program are 10 times more likely to enter that industry than any other non-participant of a GISP program.

The member will no doubt have heard, as there has been increasing conversation and debate about workforce shortages, many employers and many large organisations say they are just going to go into schools and get all of those kids to come into their industry. If I had \$10 for every time an employer or organisation said to me they were going to do that, I would be a very wealthy woman. The issue is that industries are not familiar with how schools work and schools are not familiar with how

industry works. The GISP program is a real connector program. We take a very close look at that. In fact, we often hold the QMEA up as a model for the other GISP programs to follow.

The Workforce Summit, which was held earlier this year, certainly identified school-to-work transitions as a really important focus area. In Queensland we have something like 55 per cent of the total national share of students doing VET in schools—more than all of the other states put together. We know that is really important. Having students getting exposure to industries and having them get some qualifications in the industry sets them up to be more likely to choose to go into that area.

The Minister for Education and I are looking very closely at that. Although those figures are fantastic and Queensland is the shining light, we are looking at that very closely because we know that those students are one of the pipelines to address our worker shortages. We want to take a very close look at how those VET in school programs are going and whether we can do even more to enhance the likelihood of young people going into the industries that are going to be most in demand. Of course, we know that is an industry in demand and it means much more in some regions than others.

Mr DAMETTO: Has the department identified that perhaps demonisation of coal as a whole is having an effect on young school leavers wanting to get into the coalmining industry?

Ms FARMER: I have had many conversations with Ian Macfarlane about this and also with the QMEA people. I think the resources industry is also way ahead of every other sector in terms of recruiting women. I think they are up to something like 25 per cent of the resources industry, which has traditionally been a very male dominated industry.

Mr DAMETTO: It has changed a lot since I was in the mining industry; that is for sure.

Ms FARMER: It possibly has. There is a really strong Women in Mining and Resources organisation. All of those people say to me that they are very conscious that the issue the member raises actually is a challenge. They have some fantastic programs and I would be really happy, because I know this is an interest of the member, to have the member briefed in more detail. They have young leaders in mining and resources actually going into schools. They have young ambassador programs. They focus those on women. The GISP program is fantastic.

I have just been reminded of some of the great partnerships TAFE has. TAFE is amazing at developing industry partnerships. They have one with BHP Mitsubishi Alliance. They all look at what are the barriers: 'How can we encourage people, but what are the barriers?' It is really important that we can work with industry to know what they are and specifically what we can do and how we can deliver those. Absolutely, going into schools and setting up those programs in a way that we know works is very important. As I said, I would love to be able to offer a really comprehensive briefing to the member, who I know is very interested in this.

Mr DAMETTO: That would be excellent.

CHAIR: It is very different from the Pilbara days—

Mr DAMETTO: And the North West Minerals Province, of course. It does concern me when I run into young mining professionals in the Brisbane area who tell me that they lie to their friends sometimes about the industry they work in because of the stigma attached to it, especially in the city areas. I would like to see a lot more work done on that.

CHAIR: Member for Stafford?

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, how long does it take to see the effect or the impact of training and skills investment and policy?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. It is a very good question. That is why, when we talk about the labour shortages we are experiencing now and in the future, we are so pleased about the massive jump in apprenticeship and traineeship commencements that we have seen over the last year. We have seen a 64.6 per cent increase in commencements and a further 18.6 per cent increase. We know that it takes between four and eight years to complete an apprenticeship. That is a pipeline that we see going through. That is why we have invested so much in making sure that not only do we encourage those commencements—and that is massive increase in anyone's language—but also we really look after apprentices and trainees as they finish. Of course, Queensland's completion rates are really bucking the trend nationally. As I said earlier, there has been a 35.4 per cent decline in completions across the country, but over that same period Queensland has actually seen an increase. In fact, just in the last year alone Queensland has seen an increase of 16.4 per cent. We are obviously doing a lot that is right.

Unfortunately, what we saw in Queensland before we started seeing that turnaround in completion rates was the result of the three years of the Newman government when we know that the skills and training budget was absolutely decimated. That government certainly seemed to have a particular vendetta against TAFE. In those three years when money was ripped out of the system I think we saw them close five campuses, sack 2,000 staff and cut \$170 million in funding. That happened during those three years but then, after the Palaszczuk government reinstated those programs and that funding, it took quite some years to recover. It was quite catastrophic. In fact, one can see that when we were getting to the four-year mark after the first cuts took place they were the lowest figures we had seen for quite some time.

People do not realise that it is not just the really horrific actions that are taken at the time, but those things take years to build up and to build up the expertise. I know that the Skills and Training Task Force that the Campbell Newman government had put in place had recommended—I remember it at the time, but it is still quite confronting when you see it—cutting TAFE campuses from 26 to 15 campuses in Far North Queensland, from 13 to eight in the Fraser and Sunshine Coast region, from 16 to 11 in the western corridor, from six to three on the Gold Coast, from 15 to five in the Brisbane metro and reduce SkillsTech campuses from six down to just two. The member can imagine, if they had been re-elected and we had the worldwide skills crisis that we are going through now, what the absolutely cataclysmic effect of that sort of policy would have been on Queensland's ability to supply the workforce demand that we are seeing now.

CHAIR: Minister, can you provide us with an update on the Palaszczuk government's improving training infrastructure investment across Queensland?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question and I know that the member loves this program because we have done a few really great visits to the Alexandra Hills campus which services the member's region. We have such a fantastic record in terms of providing world-class training facilities that Queenslanders need and responding to what demand is now and in the future. From Coolangatta to Thursday Island, we are investing in publicly owned infrastructure so that whoever you are or wherever you are in Queensland you can have access to high-quality vocational education and training.

Last financial year we spent nearly \$56 million providing upgrades to 27 TAFE campuses across the state. We have committed \$100 million for Equipping TAFE for our Future and \$112 million through our Advancing our Training Infrastructure program. We secured \$10.6 million from the federal government's Revitalising TAFE Campuses Across Australia initiative for six trade modernisation projects and a new marine training facility which is the largest amount of funding offered across the country. We are investing more than \$50 million in training infrastructure in hydrogen. With the member being a hydrogen champion, I acknowledge how active the member is with our hydrogen skills subcommittee. I know how interested the member is that out of that \$50 million there is \$20 million for the Hydrogen Training Centre of Excellence at Beenleigh, which is the second stage of our Queensland apprenticeship centre. We have the \$17 million to build the Pinkenba Renewable Energy Training Facility, and the member was there as well. There is \$10.6 million to build a hydrogen and renewable energy training facility for training in hydrogen, solar and wind at the Bohle trade training TAFE in Townsville, and I was just there a couple of weeks ago. There is \$2 million to upgrade facilities at Gladstone State High School and \$4 million for an energy training and skills strategy.

With regard to the \$100 million Equipping TAFE for our Future fund, every month—in fact, more than every month—I am so excited to go to yet another TAFE site to either turn a sod or to open a new facility or to look at the plans for some new upgrade. The opportunity it is going to provide to Queenslanders is absolutely amazing. I think I said in my introductory speech that I have either turned a sod or opened a new facility or an upgrade 13 times.

CHAIR: If they are anything like the Fashion Centre of Excellence, wow!

Ms FARMER: With regard to the Fashion Centre of Excellence, I know the committee has been out there and I am sure you have all been extremely impressed with that. It is just amazing.

CHAIR: Indeed.

Ms FARMER: My most recent opening was just a couple of weeks ago. In fact, I opened the new Robina TAFE campus which has won a silver global award for sustainability. It is the first fully sustainable TAFE campus in Australia which is going to have 2,000 students at it to meet demand. I also opened with Senator Anthony Chisholm the new six-level Plumbing Tower at Ashmore. The member for Rockhampton knows that we have contributed over \$8 million to kick-start the consolidation of the CQU Rockhampton campus, which includes building a new trades training centre of excellence. I know the member is very happy about that. We have \$14.2 million for further upgrades to the Bohle

TAFE in Townsville. We have \$3.6 million for advanced manufacturing skills labs. Honestly, Chair, there is just so much going on and I think almost every member across this committee will have a TAFE near them where their constituents go who are going to really benefit from this amazing program.

CHAIR: Absolutely! Thank you, Minister. To ensure that the member for South Brisbane gets to ask a question, I am going to throw to her next, but I just remind everyone that before we close this session we have a little bit of information to come back. Member for South Brisbane, you have to call.

Dr MacMAHON: Minister, there are people in my electorate on bridging visas who cannot get the skills they need to work because they are not eligible for subsidised vocational education and training courses like many other visa holders are. Has the department done any analysis with respect to the cost of providing access to subsidised TAFE courses for bridging visa holders to bring Queensland into line with other states?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question, and the issue of visas in general is certainly one which looms large in discussions. It was discussed at some length at the workforce summit and it is certainly an issue which is being discussed across the nation, particularly in readiness for the federal government's Jobs and Skills Summit. I can say to the member that there are a range of issues around skilled migration that we see and we will certainly be flagging some of those issues when we release our Queensland workforce strategy, and I have had a number of conversations with the federal minister about a range of workforce issues. In particular response to the member's question, the director-general has just handed me something which may also give me some information in general about skilled migrants. On that particular issue I may get him to answer that one, but I can say to you the many facets around visas and skilled migration in general are an issue that we are looking at quite closely. Would you mind if I hand over to the director-general if there is anything in particular we can add?

Dr MacMAHON: Yes. However, I might just clarify that I am specifically talking about people who are seeking asylum or have been seeking asylum and are now on bridging visas, so not skilled migration per se but people who have, say, come out of detention and are now on bridging visas.

Ms FARMER: Yes. Sorry, what I mean to say in responding to the member is across the whole spectrum of visas and migration, whether skilled or unskilled, there are so many different categories, so it is an important question.

Mr Agnew: I thank the minister for the referral and thank the member for the question. In terms of our VET programs, I am advised that we do subsidise students who reside in Queensland and have work right visas. We have a very supportive approach to undertaking that, but whether that applies specifically to the bridging visas is something that we need to take under advisement.

Dr MacMAHON: No, it does not. Okay; thank you.

Ms FARMER: If I could just add we would be very happy, once we have released the workforce strategy, to offer a briefing to the member about sort of general but related issues.

Dr MacMAHON: Thanks.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Did you have any responses from earlier prepared yet? Still coming back?

Ms FARMER: Chair, if I could just say that some of those questions were quite detailed.

CHAIR: I appreciate that.

Ms FARMER: I understand that we have until—what is the final time?

CHAIR: Four o'clock.

Ms FARMER: But we are able to provide information up to, isn't it, a day or so after the hearing?

CHAIR: If you are taking it on notice.

Ms FARMER: Yes, that is right and I do so on behalf of the department.

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms FARMER: They are quite complex questions, so please give us some flexibility if we are not able to come up with those in time.

CHAIR: Yes, I agree. Absolutely.

Ms FARMER: Of course, if they had been asked as questions on notice in such detail prior to the hearing, we would have been able to supply those.

CHAIR: I totally appreciate the detailed response required, but I just thought I would check in because we are heading very close to four o'clock. I did have one question I wanted to ask. I am passionate about the hydrogen industry and the future opportunities. How is the Palaszczuk government working with industry to address the skilling needs of the future, particularly the skills required by our growing hydrogen industry?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. As I said before, I acknowledge her advocacy. I know how delighted the member was to be made a hydrogen champion, and I want to acknowledge your contribution, Chair, in a range of different forums. I know that you have really increased the awareness in your community of hydrogen as a transport fuel and really supported that local transport supply chain via the government's trial of five Hyundai Nexa vehicles, I understand, which have been refuelling at the temporary green hydrogen refueller at the QUT Redlands Research Facility, which is great.

In Queensland we are accelerating quite rapidly towards our target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030, as you know. The Minister for Energy, Renewables and Hydrogen and Minister for Public Works and Procurement will release the energy plan in the coming months. That plan is going to deliver thousands of jobs and help drive sustainable economic growth across our state and nation.

Our commitment to a clean energy future was reaffirmed in last month's budget with an investment of more than \$2 billion in large-scale storage, renewable energy generation and transmission projects and our annual investment in skills and training of \$1.2 billion. One of the biggest challenges we will face for the hydrogen industry is workforce availability. It is a challenge we are not only grappling with; we are attending to it in quite some detail. I was very privileged last week to actually present to the national Clean Energy Summit our hydrogen workforce road map, the Hydrogen Industry Workforce Development Roadmap, which is actually the first road map that any state or territory has produced in Australia to work us towards a pathway for skilling for the hydrogen industry. It is such a new industry that we are not even across, yet, what skills—

CHAIR: I did not realise we were first to do that.

Ms FARMER: Yes, there was a fantastic reaction and lots of great feedback about it. We know that we are going to need skills in construction, transport, safety, refuelling, research, manufacturing and so much more. We are still not clear on what upskilling, cross-skilling or microskilling is going to be required that we can be using with existing workers. It is why we have established the hydrogen subcommittee that I am always very pleased to see the chair participate in. I co-chair this with the Assistant Minister for Hydrogen Development and the 50% Renewable Energy Target By 2030. We are learning from early industry projects in real time by partnering with the industry. There are about 40 projects running across Queensland at the moment, with about \$90 million worth of state government investment.

There is a range of really interesting activities. TAFE is exploring innovative training delivery, for example, through virtual reality. When I was at the Bohle TAFE a couple of weeks ago I oversaw the signing of an MOU between Arc Energy and TAFE from that campus and the manufacturing hub up there to look at ways of involving hydrogen and actually training people as they go around the transport industry. That is a classic example of working side by side with a project and developing skills as they happen.

We will soon be home to the world's largest electrolyser manufacturing facility, the Green Energy Manufacturing centre, and we have partnered with Fortescue Future Industries to deliver this facility in Gladstone. They are looking at setting up their own vocational education and training centre in Gladstone. We talked before about the Gateway to Industry Skills Program and that I had just announced that we would add hydrogen as the 11th sector to be covered by the GIS program. I have already spoken to people from schools in areas like Townsville and Gladstone, and they are absolutely keen to have their students getting exposure to the hydrogen industry. I talked about that \$50 million investment in facilities like PICAC at Beenleigh and the renewable energy training facility at Pinkenba. There is so much happening in this space and I am so excited that Queensland is leading the way in setting that clear path to an available workforce.

CHAIR: That is fantastic. Thank you very much, Minister. Member for Buderim, did you have a question?

Mr MICKELBERG: I do, thank you, Chair. Director-General, in relation to Skills Assure suppliers, can you give me a recent example where it was identified that existing Skills Assure suppliers were insufficient to meet demand for training and where consequently additional Skills Assure suppliers were added?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I can refer you to Deputy Director-General Steven Koch.

Mr Koch: I thank the member for the question. One recent example, which we are actually working through at the moment, is in relation to training for pest control and pest management activities. Previously contracted suppliers may have left the market, so we are currently working through that process around new potential suppliers entering the market.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, can you tell me is there any reason VET Skills Assure supplier agreements are not offered for longer than one year?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. This is a discussion we are having with ITECA as well in terms of understanding that we have a number of suppliers that had ongoing contractual arrangements with the department. We are continuing to work with ITECA about that and also considering our ongoing funding arrangements each year. We have not come to a landing on extending that.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, have any additional Skills Assure suppliers been offered 2022-23 VET Skills Assure supplier status who are not already or were previous Skills Assure suppliers? You referred to pest management, but have any been offered a contract in the 2022-23 round?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. For 2022-23 there are no new Skills Assure suppliers on our list.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what date were existing Skills Assure suppliers advised that they were to be offered a 2022-23 Skills Assure agreement extension?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I will confirm with Deputy Director-General Steve Koch in terms of the date on which they were informed of that process. I would say that was the process the deputy director-general was referring to that we received very good feedback on from ITECA in relation to the way in which that ran, because that was something we had undertaken with the sector to look to do—telegraph as early as possible that renewal process—and we certainly met our commitment to that with those stakeholders this year. I will refer to Steve to offer any further detail on that.

Mr Koch: I thank the member for the question. As the director-general said, all Skills Assure suppliers who were offered a contract renewal were offered it before 31 May 2022. That occurred over a number of business days in the lead-up to that process. The key target we set for ourselves was to have all of those contract renewals out by the end of May. As I mentioned before, I actually have here a copy of the letter from ITECA that the director-general referred to earlier. We also had a session with those Skills Assure suppliers that the ITECA peak body organised and received excellent feedback from the sector throughout that process.

Mr MICKELBERG: That is good to hear, because it was a considerable issue in previous years whereby Skills Assure suppliers were not provided that information until very late in June or even after 30 June, which is obviously an issue if you are trying to resource.

CHAIR: Mr Agnew, you had some answers you wanted to provide?

Mr Agnew: I have, in relation to the three questions that the member for Buderim required. The first question was in terms of the eligibility criteria and the regional elements to that. As we discussed, being a Queensland based RTO is a requirement. The other criteria related to demonstrated delivery history to Queensland students in the vocational qualification being delivered and demonstrated links to industry. Approved Skills Assure suppliers are able to deliver training to students in any location across Queensland, with location loadings paid to Skills Assure suppliers in recognition of the higher cost of delivering to regional and remote locations. In answering the question and to add to the discussion, I would also point out the considerable regional footprint that TAFE Queensland has as the premium public provider in Queensland.

In relation to the data on leave loadings across Queensland, we are having to run some detailed data reports to seek to answer that question. If I can, through the chair, provide you an update through the hearing on whether or not we will be able to answer that?


Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy with that.

CHAIR: With regards to that last piece on the data analysis, Minister, it would need to come back in this session under the standing orders because we shift to the small business portfolio in the next section.

Ms FARMER: I would seek to take that on notice, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It being four o'clock, the committee will adjourn for a break and the hearing will resume at 4.15 with the estimates for the employment and small business portfolio areas.

Proceedings suspended from 4.01 pm to 4.15 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing is resumed. Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the estimates for the employment and small business portfolio areas until 5.15. I call the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a question to the minister. After the Business Basics grants round 3 failed to launch, the second attempt also had problems with many businesses finding that funds had been exhausted before they had even had a chance to apply. Minister, were some businesses provided preferential access and able to log on to apply for grants before others?

Ms FARMER: As the member knows, we opened what was to be round 3 of the Business Basics grants, I believe, on 4 May. We used the provider SmartyGrants. We have used them about 20 times over the past five years or so. They are a provider that operates in about 45 different countries and, arguably, are the most used provider in Australia. On 4 May, due to a nationwide technical difficulty, the system crashed. I think it goes without saying that for all of us that caused great consternation and distress to the small businesses that had been ready to apply. As the member knows, we give people two weeks beforehand so they know when the system will be open and can get ready their paperwork, their affidavits and all of those sorts of things. Certainly it caused great consternation in the department.

My department worked very closely with SmartyGrants to make sure that the next time that those grants opened properly we could be absolutely assured that the system was going to be okay and sound. I really want to thank my department for the work that they did there. We had many late night meetings and early morning meetings. I think we even had a meeting on Mother's Day—didn't we, Steve?—to make sure that this was going to be right. The managing director of the SmartyGrants platform stated—

SmartyGrants is mission critical to DESBT, as it is to our many other customers. We do not take that responsibility lightly. The problem that occurred on 4 May was ours, and ours alone. We apologise for the issues that this outage caused to DESBT, and to the small business community that relies on DESBT for assistance.

Upon opening the grants again at nine o'clock on 16 May and for regional businesses on 17 May, we understood that the applications would not be able to be accessed or commenced prior to 9 am. SmartyGrants had set up a virtual waiting room in the SmartyGrants platform, which was really just a place for anyone who came on to collect. It was to guarantee system stability. That was a new technical solution that SmartyGrants had deemed was necessary to manage the demand on the system. We were not aware that some applicants would be able to queue prior to the 9 am opening of the grant round. This was not our intention and it was not communicated to any applicants. We recognise that, as a result, some businesses may have been disadvantaged and we apologise for this occurring.

I have to say that this is a very popular grant. It is one of the three grants programs for which we have now secured permanent funding through the most recent budget. Unlike some of our COVID support grants and flood support, lockdown support and border support programs that allocate funds, which means that every business that applies can actually get that support, these are competitive programs. It means that not everybody who applies is actually going to be successful.

I was very pleased to announce that we would run an additional Business Basics round later this year. In terms of round 4, I was very pleased to be able to announce the successful applicants from that Business Basics round only yesterday. In fact, Chair, I have a list of all of the small businesses from each of the members' electorates, if the member would be interested in hearing that list.

Mr MICKELBERG: Maybe you could just table it.

Ms FARMER: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you seeking leave to table the list or are you going to read it?

Ms FARMER: I can do that or I can read them out.

CHAIR: Read them out.

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, Chair. I am sure that we can use time more productively than by reading out a list of grant recipients.

Ms FARMER: I know that the members on this side of the House are pretty excited. I am sure some of the other members are, too.

Mr MICKELBERG: If you table it, Minister, we would be happy.

Ms FARMER: Over to you, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will come back and ask that during government questions.

Ms FARMER: Thank you. We will have this additional program. As a result of that experience, the way we have run the grants program and structured the guidelines, the application process and the assessment process has morphed quite a bit over the last few years. Obviously, there has been significantly increased demand for those grants programs. As we have run each one, we have sought feedback from small businesses through bodies such as CCIQ and other small business peak bodies. Certainly, the way the programs are set up is a direct result of that feedback—for instance, making sure we give people two weeks notice before the grant system opens so that they can ask all the questions they want and can collect all the papers and prepare any quotes they might need so that when the system opens they are ready to go.

We have also done a lot of work through CCIQ. We have nine small business peak bodies, including the Small Business Commissioner, in that group. We work with them quite closely to make sure that the way we are running those programs will be easy. I think the application process is easier and easier as we go through. They certainly test that out with their individual members. The member may have heard me say that we have announced the next round of the Business Boost grants. They will open on 12 August. We have worked really closely with the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, the Small Business Commissioner and CCIQ to modify that application process again to ensure we are giving businesses an equal opportunity.

There were some points of feedback. Nine o'clock may be a peak time for some businesses. If you are in rural and remote Queensland, connectivity is a very big issue. There may be times of the day which are not optimum times. Under the new Business Boost grants, we will open for just over a week and people can basically register their interest. At any time of the day or night you can register your interest. You still have notice beforehand. It gives time for you to ask the questions and get your paperwork ready. It is a two-stage process. We will then have a ballot process so that we have a level playing field from which businesses will be invited to apply. They will have two weeks to finalise their applications. I really want to thank in particular our Queensland Small Business Advisory Council—

Mr LISTER: Chair, as much as we would like to hear this, I think it is straying away from relevance to the original question about preferential treatment.

CHAIR: I think it was directly relevant to the question, because it is talking about the lessons learned and how we are applying those lessons to the future grant rounds.

Ms FARMER: With the greatest of respect to the member, the issue of access and equity goes to the heart of the question. We have been working really closely to make sure we are addressing those issues and getting advice from small businesses on how we can do that.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, has the minister been granted any financial delegation to approve grant payments since the minister was appointed?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. The answer is no.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how much funding has been allocated for the Mentoring for Growth program over this financial year?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I will just consult with my team briefly. Essentially, the core resources that support the Mentoring for Growth program, as the member may be aware, are the administrative resources from the department. The mentors themselves are not paid for the service they provide. I will come back to the member with the additional amount.

Mr MICKELBERG: No worries. Thank you. Director-General, the budget contains only \$1.396 million this financial year to fund small business grants and the Mentoring for Growth program. The minister has spoken about a number of different grants programs which are either rolled out or intending to be rolled out. Where is the funding for those grants programs going to be reallocated from?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the grants programs that are yet to be rolled out in 2022-23, we still are in the grants rounds that we are completing under the Big Plans for Small Business program, which was announced two budgets ago. The dollars which are in the budget and announced ongoing are in relation to future rounds for future financial years.

Mr MICKELBERG: Just to be clear, Director-General, the money that is in the budget this financial year is for future financial years? Is that what you are saying—the \$1.396 million?

Mr Agnew: No, sorry. That is to complete the—

Mr MICKELBERG: The previous years?

Mr Agnew:—previous years. It is on top of our existing funds that are within the budget. I refer you to the SDS number in our budget which refers to our total funding for small business support in the SDS. I believe it is page 6 under our service line of 'Connecting Queensland small businesses to grants and support programs'. The total amount for 2022-23 is \$30.845 million.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what are the key performance measures that will be used to assess success or otherwise of the Business Boost grant round 2?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to our overall performance targets for small business success and the support that we provide small business, in particular for grants that we provide, I refer you to page 4 of the SDS. Overall in terms of success for our small business grants, on the measure of 'percentage of new or existing businesses reporting increased capability ... as a direct result of participation in small business grant programs' the KPI target for 2022-23 is 98 per cent—I refer to our achievement in 2021-22 of 99.1 per cent against that target; and on the measure of 'percentage of businesses assisted by small business programs that report a projected increase in either employment, turnover or profitability' the result in 2021-22 was 95.9 per cent, with a target estimate at 98 per cent for 2022-23.

CHAIR: We will go to the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, my question relates to the grants allocated by the department—for example, the Business Basics grant. What process does the department have for auditing to ensure that the grants are being spent correctly, ensure that they have gone to businesses that should get them and ensure value for money for the taxpayer?

Ms FARMER: In terms of the operational details, if it is okay with the member I will pass to the director-general. I will tell the member for Hinchinbrook some of the businesses that, you may or may not know yet, have been given a Business Basics grant this time. They include My Drafting Centre, Collective Candles, Peters Plumbing and Drainage, Ivy & Ann Floral Studio and Project Immortality. I am sure they will be very excited to hear from you. I will pass over to the director-general.

Mr Agnew: I will invite the deputy director-general, Mr Koch, to answer. Essentially, we undertake acquittals. There is a very formal process in terms of reporting back to the department on claimed expenditure from small businesses.

Mr DAMETTO: I do not mind; this is like a game of AFL.

Mr Koch: We have a variety of processes that we use across our suite of small business grants in terms of monitoring and measuring the success of those programs, as the director-general mentioned before. In terms of acquittal processes, for some of those programs we do not pay the grants until we get evidence that the appropriate expenditure has been entered into. For some of those programs we do a survey process. It depends on the scope of the program. I would also add that we work closely with the Queensland Audit Office around all of our program approaches and continue to look to improve our practices as we work through those programs.

Mr DAMETTO: While you have been going through that process have you found any businesses that have falsified claims or falsified their applications?

Mr Koch: Not in the last financial year. We do not have any through our small business grant programs.

CHAIR: We will move to government questions.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, I want to hear more about some of the work the government is doing in the grant space. Can you please update the committee on the success of the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy, and in the particular Business Basics grant program and how these grants are supporting Queensland small businesses?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the great visits I have had to his electorate to meet some small businesses that are doing some outstanding work. I think I have told the story 100 times of the transparent masks that I was shown the last time I came out. I hope that lovely business got some business out of that. Some of the successful grant recipients in the member's electorate include Computer Zen, Carrie Rose Consultancy, the Alderley Shuttle Company and Focussed Fish. I know how much the member loves his small businesses and loves giving that good news.

As I have said, I was pleased to announce yesterday the successful recipients of that round of grants. There were just over 1,000 businesses that were successful. They are part of the \$140 million over two years we have delivered through the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy 2021-23. This was put together solely on the basis of feedback we had from small businesses about what they needed.

I acknowledge the involvement of the member in the small business roadshows. In fact, all members took part in those. The member was at the Brisbane north roadshow. We heard from 3½ thousand small businesses in that process about what they needed post that period of COVID. That was when I first started as the minister. We wanted to know where we are now and what they need. The Big Plans for Small Business Strategy was put together solely on the basis of that consultation. We allocated \$25 million for the Business Support Grant program, including the Business Basics grant which, as the member knows, provides an up-front grant payment of \$5,000. Nearly 3,200 businesses had received grants before this last round. That means nearly \$16 million going into the accounts of small businesses.

We have had fantastic stories of success. In fact, the SDS outlines the real success in terms of businesses growing their business. Some 99.1 per cent of the round 1 recipients told us that their business had an overall increase in capability and 95.9 per cent reported a projected increase in employment turnover or profitability, which is exactly what we want to see.

I think every member who has seen the benefit a business has got from a business basics, a business boost or a business growth grant was absolutely thrilled to see that the funding for those grants has now been made permanent as of the last state budget. Some \$39.1 million was allocated over four years to those programs. There is ongoing funding for our Mentoring for Growth initiatives, which is incredibly popular and celebrated its 20th anniversary.

As I have said, we have been consulting very closely with the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, CCIQ and a range of others to make sure we continue to deliver those grants in an effective and equitable manner. I thank the member very much for being part of that and making sure that we get access to small businesses in his electorate so we can hear feedback as well.

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you for the answer and for also spending so much time on the ground. We appreciate it. Whether it is small businesses or Skilling Queenslanders for Work providers, we appreciate your time and how much you love being on the front line.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, as our small businesses continue to rebuild and recover from COVID-19 and natural disasters, can you please tell the committee how the Palaszczuk government is continuing to provide opportunities for business to continue to advance and improve their productivity?

Ms FARMER: If anybody watches the social media of the member for Rockhampton they would know he is a huge fan of small business. I do not think a day goes past when he is not profiling a small business. I have had conversations with the member about how he always has businesses putting their hands up saying, 'Can we be on your Facebook'. It is a great thing to encourage people to support their local businesses. All members on this side do that. I am sorry, I do not follow the social media of those on the other side so I do not know if they do that as well. I know the member for Buderim only promoted Small Business Month once. My staff actually told me that.

Mr MICKELBERG: I think the minister misled the committee when she said she did not follow.

Ms FARMER: True story. I have mentioned the Business Basics grant. It was great to announce the recipients yesterday. It was great to announce the Business Boost grants program that gives up to \$15,000 to a business. It is quite a different process. We have worked hard to make sure the process is equitable. The Small Business Advisory Council that has done a lot of the hard yards on this is amazing. Those involved come from all over Queensland. It is such a diverse group. I think it is fair to say that they put the department through their paces. There have been frank, honest and helpful discussions.

In addition to that permanent funding for the grants program, we have also seen the lifting of the ceiling on payroll tax deductions to \$10.4 million. That is worth about \$210 million. It is going to mean savings of up to \$26,000 a year for about 12,000 businesses. I have to say that it is probably in the top 3 items that CCIQ has been raising with me consistently since I have been minister and the chambers as I travel across the state and certainly a number of businesses so that is fantastic.

Also, the Small Business Commissioner has been made permanent in the last year. I want to acknowledge the great work that the Small Business Commissioner and her team have done since they first started, with 8,300 inquiries going through her office. It was wonderful to listen to the debate in the chamber—and I know she and her team were really chuffed to hear the debate in the chamber—when

pretty much every single member who spoke in the debate spoke really glowingly about either the work that she and her team had done with them personally or the feedback they have had from their businesses. We know that that office has been greatly valued and has made a difference to a lot of small businesses.

CHAIR: Most definitely.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, we know that the last few years have been pretty tough for our Queensland small businesses. Can you tell us what the Palaszczuk government is doing to support small business as we rebuild and recover from the pandemic?

Ms FARMER: As I have said, we know that small business in Queensland is absolutely critical to our economic recovery. Our economic recovery plan is worth \$15.2 billion. Right from the beginning we said that support for small business was absolutely essential to our economic recovery. We have committed \$2.5 billion in support for small business. That has meant loans and subsidies. That has meant the setting up, as I said, of the Small Business Commissioner's office.

We also know from going around the state that financial support has been fantastic. There has been a reduction in red tape with initiatives like the Business Launchpad, like our Small Business Friendly Councils—there are 33 of those, with another eight to sign and seven in the wings. We also know that workforce shortages is a huge issue that affects small businesses no matter where they are. Members will see, when we release the workforce strategy in the coming weeks, attention given to supporting not just the big businesses and every sector but the small businesses as well who are really struggling with workforce shortages. That is going to be a really important issue. I look forward to working with all members around that workforce issue to make sure that we continue to respond to their needs.

CHAIR: AgPlan was a very good start. I call the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the Queensland Audit Office report No. 3 identifies that more than 400 businesses received both payroll tax relief and the adaptation grant despite not being eligible, noting that some of the claims may have been eligible because the business had grown and then was eligible for payroll tax relief. How many recipients of the COVID adaptation grants have been identified by your department as being fraudulent claims?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to that report, the Queensland Audit Office did note that some of those 400-odd businesses may have been eligible to receive both. The Audit Office were informed through their inquiries through the department in relation to that around decisions for the department to assess the effort required against the purpose of the adaptation grants as they were provided to those recipients in relation to the information and effort that would be required to potentially recover and identify any of those businesses that were not eligible to receive both of those grants and that a judgement had been made not to pursue that cause further.

I note that the QAO report did not suggest that the department go back over that decision but that the recommendations were around looking to the future and looking for ways in which agencies across government can look to share information in a way that is within the bounds of our legal requirements of agencies dealing with businesses' confidential information and within the bounds of information requirements that are suitable for grants that have guidelines and information requirements that are pursuant to the speed with which those grants are there to assist. For example, the adaptation grants were put in place to support businesses that were severely impacted by COVID-19 through that period. We have, as a department and through my letter back to the QAO, confirmed that we accept the recommendations of the report and that we will continue to look at ways in which we can incorporate that information sharing across agencies.

Mr MICKELBERG: The Queensland Audit Office report quantifies that potential overpayment or fraudulent claim at approximately \$4 million. I do not want to verbal you. Just so I am clear, you are saying that the department has made a decision not to investigate those approximately 400 recipients to see whether they were fraudulent claims or not; is that correct?

Mr Agnew: That is correct.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, yesterday I met with several small businesses owners and customers who were affected by roadworks along Lawrie Street in Gracemere, which is in the member for Rockhampton's electorate. One of those business owners owns the Gracemere Bakery and she said she was going to close the bakery, which had been operating for 28 years, as a consequence of the roadworks and the impact on her business. How does your department support small business in their interactions with other state government departments?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to other agencies undertaking works such as roadworks or other infrastructure works, we have a *Works with Small Business* good practice guide, which is available to all agencies. That is a key principles based approach to ensuring small businesses are supported when works are being undertaken within the broader community.

We have regional offices available right across the state from the department of small business which are there to support businesses to make sure they are able to make contact with other agencies where it is appropriate to do so and where they are being supported to do so. The Queensland Small Business Commissioner is also a strong advocate of small business and is there to support small businesses including seeking to raise issues across other government agencies. There are a number of ways in which we are seeking to support small businesses.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, you mentioned the *Works with Small Business* good practice guide. Can you tell me how the department monitors implementation and compliance with that guide, noting it is other departments? It is a great guide—I accept that—but how does the department monitor or assess if other government departments are complying with the intent of that guide?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. As a good practice guide, it is a resource for departments. I have reinforced with other agencies at senior levels that it is available to support small business, as it is part of the ongoing role of all agencies to support small business in Queensland. We have other programs as well that do that, such as our procurement programs and so forth. There may well also be a small business that raises issues advocating to an agency, and to ensure those principles are being adhered to those agencies play back to us and we make those inquiries. I understand that in a particular case there were assurances obtained from the contractor that they were adhering to those good practice guidelines.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, in relation to works affecting small businesses, and particularly in relation to a reduction in trade and income, has any consideration been given by your department to advocating for compensation or some form of financial remediation to be paid to small businesses that are significantly adversely affected as a consequence of state government actions like roadworks?

CHAIR: That possibly might be a matter for that particular portfolio in terms of TRM. Mr Agnew, I am happy to allow you to answer, but I do think that is possibly a question for the transport and public works committee.

Mr Agnew: In terms of infrastructure delivery, it is for the agencies to consider that within their own infrastructure delivery responsibilities.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the question was: has your department done any advocacy or considered advocating for that, noting it would not be delivered necessarily by your department?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. Those sorts of policy initiatives are something for consideration from time to time. There is not currently something under consideration.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the business owners I met with yesterday said they felt like the state government had abandoned them and they did not care if they were trading at the end of those roadworks. I do not intend to impugn the minister in any way; that is why I framed it as the government generally. My question is: what actions will you or your department take to ensure that the concerns of those businesses specifically are addressed, noting that one of those businesses has said they are going to close after trading for 28 years. I am happy to pass on their details to you if you or your department wants to contact them.

Mr Agnew: The department of small business has quite a number of support mechanisms available. We have grant programs and so forth. If we were to get the details from the proponent we could take them through any guidance we would be able to.

CHAIR: It is very hard to respond when you do not have the context of what the roadworks entail, so perhaps that is a matter for briefing outside of the committee.

Mr MICKELBERG: In fairness, the director-general did refer to the fact that some members of the department have had contact with those individuals in the past. They are clearly at a breaking point. After 28 years in business they are about to close up. Is there something that you or your department can do to try to remediate this issue further in addition to anything that may have been done in the past?

CHAIR: Again, I think that is a question that really goes back to the transport and public works committee in terms of understanding the context and needs of the work they are undertaking, obviously in conjunction with those business needs. Mr Agnew, would you like to add anything?

Mr Agnew: As we have contacted them previously, we will of course make ourselves available further and on receiving that information we will make sure we do so again.

Mr DAMETTO: Director-General, the minister made a ministerial statement in July last year and said that the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council would assist to deliver the government's big plans for small business strategy. Noting that the first meeting of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council did not occur until nearly a year later, how has the Small Business Advisory Council met that objective?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland Small Business Advisory Council has been reconstituted and there has been a meeting of that council. In a previous answer at this hearing the minister also referred to the assistance that advisory council has provided to the department, particularly at this point where we are looking at our grant delivery processes, and that is directly in line with delivering the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy and assisting the department to ensure we are delivering those grant programs in a way that is customer-centric from a small business perspective. That particular council is made up of small businesses themselves from across Queensland and areas within which we are confident their advice to us is broadly representative of quite a large portion of small businesses in Queensland. That is just one way in which they are assisting us.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, in relation to the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, do any members of the new council have a pecuniary interest in entities that derive income directly from the Queensland government and any contracts with the Queensland government?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I would need to take advice in order to respond to you on that particular item.

CHAIR: Similar to the question in the previous session, those sorts of questions are really probably better to be put on notice.

Mr MICKELBERG: If the minister is happy to take it on notice, I would be happy for that to happen.

CHAIR: We are not at the end of the session yet.

Ms FARMER: Chair, I would ask for some respect to the department. Clearly, these are detailed questions. I think we are all aware that in relation to really heavily detailed questions it is not possible for the department or myself to answer things with a huge depth of detail. There is a question on notice process for estimates and parliament. Those questions that are detailed are really best done through that process. I think the member should show some respect for the department.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy for the minister to take it on notice.

CHAIR: We are not at the end of the session yet, so we will come back to that at the end. Your next question, member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the first meeting of the Small Business Advisory Council was on 5 May. What were the outcomes of that meeting?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I seek leave to provide some information in relation to the previous question. I can furnish you with the list of checks that we undertake for any appointment such as, for example, an appointment to the advisory council.

CHAIR: That would be very useful.

Mr Agnew: The checks undertaken for any member of a council such as the advisory council are: bankruptcy checks, a google search, Queensland government lobbyist registers, Queensland Register of Appointees to Government Bodies, Australian Securities and Investments Commission register of banned and disqualified persons, criminal history checks and personal particulars form.

Mr MICKELBERG: So there is nothing in relation to whether or not they have pecuniary interests deriving income from the state government?

Mr Agnew: That would arise out of the personal particulars form if there were any. If there were any conflicts of interest, we would be seeking that detail from the individuals.

Mr MICKELBERG: Have any conflicts of interest been declared, Director-General, in relation to members of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council?

Mr Agnew: I would need to take that under advice.

Mr MICKELBERG: I would appreciate it if you did so. Director-General, red tape and regulation are huge imposts on Queensland's small and family businesses. Can you advise what the top five red

tape reduction initiatives that have been implemented and delivered by your department over the last 12 months are?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I recall that we answered that exact question in a question on notice to parliament earlier this year.

Mr MICKELBERG: You have done nothing since?

Mr Agnew: I can refer to that. Was that in relation to the top five priorities for this year, 2021?

Mr MICKELBERG: My question was with respect to what has been delivered as to opposed to priorities.

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. My memory is that the answer to the question on notice did point to a key initiative the minister referred to earlier, which was to establish permanently the Queensland Small Business Commissioner legislation, which certainly did occur. In terms of the other five actions referred to there, we continue to maintain our focus on the business launch pad initiative, which has been a very successfully delivered initiative across Queensland with a very large number of businesses supported through that initiative. The launch pad has assisted more than 18,600 users across the food and beverage and residential construction sectors in Queensland since its launch in 2021, and it is now available to all local governments across Queensland.

That was an initiative which commenced from joint funding between the Queensland and Australian governments. We have continued to support that initiative particularly through Queensland as a priority because it continues to deliver good benefits. We can see the visitation to those sites and how that can assist.

In terms of our other key regulatory and services support, our VET informed consumer project was another initiative which we rolled out. I referred to that earlier. It has been a key priority for us and is assisting us to conduct support in the area of apprenticeships and traineeships between the student and the employers. In particular, that was a technical solution that we have supported to help. Again, it is not a regulatory change; it is actually assisting to support how regulatory arrangements are met by employers and apprentices.

We have published and participated in the broader Productivity Commission's performance report exercise. We published the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training's report on that for 2020-21 earlier this year. That outlined that broader level of support and the way in which some of the initiatives that I referred to are assisting the pure regulatory function this department has.

It also highlighted the resources of our offices in our department, like the Queensland audit and trainee office, and the benefits they are supporting through the enhancement of the services they are providing and the department is providing in relation to its response to the Queensland Training Ombudsman's report as well in terms of accepting the recommendation from the ombudsman to reinstate the Train to Retain 2.0 initiative. That is another initiative that is underway. Upon the release of that report we have been supporting the broader sector and students considerably, with thousands of contacts being made with students across Queensland in that support as well. Again, it is providing regulatory support as a priority from the department as well.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, with the rising cost of doing business in Queensland, increased input costs and inflation expected to hit 7.75 per cent by the end of the year, what is the department doing to alleviate the cost of doing business in Queensland? Are there any conversations happening across departmental lines to ensure we can bring down the cost of running a small business in Queensland?

Ms FARMER: That is a very important question. I think we are all conscious of the effect of cost of living and inflation in general on businesses and families. There are issues like supply chains and those sorts of things which are also affecting costs.

We talk on a very regular basis—probably a daily basis—with one or more of our key small business peak bodies about how their members are going and how they are experiencing the current economic situation. In addition to the contact our local DESBT officers have, I am in contact with small businesses on a regular basis. One of the key things we get quite strong feedback from those bodies on is actually increasing the ability of small businesses to be resilient and cope with whatever is coming at them. Coming out of the first 18 months or two years of COVID, that resilience for taking a curveball no matter what was going on was a key request we were hearing from business. What you see as a result of the grants programs, for instance, is really high levels of reporting of an increase in capability and the ability to have a successful business model so you are actually in a position where you can cope with whatever comes at you. They are things which we get exceedingly good feedback on.

When the federal Treasurer delivered his budget outlook and economic statement today, he talked about inflation possibly going up further, to 7.7—and that will hopefully be the cap—so we know we still have some tougher times ahead. A lot of those peak bodies are saying to us that we need to move on and we need to equip people to be as resilient as they possibly can be in their business operations. Having said that, we will continue to monitor the situation for people and tailor our support to whatever we are hearing is needed.

Mr DAMETTO: Has there been anything identified to try to alleviate some of that cost of doing business?

Ms FARMER: I guess it is one of those difficult issues. On a broader level, our economy in Queensland is growing at a fast rate. I think we have the second highest economic growth, with 7.8 per cent being the most recent figure. We have obviously kept Queensland open and trading. In terms of providing an environment where Queensland businesses are able to do as well as possible, it is really important they have a foundation like that. We were obviously only closed during COVID for a certain number of days, while New South Wales and Victoria were closed for literally hundreds of days.

Lifting the payroll tax threshold, for instance, has been a huge boost to businesses. The director-general was talking before about some of the red-tape-reduction measures. Businesses talk to us about reducing the time they spend on the end of a phone going from one council or government department to the other. They want us to even just do that. I had a business on the Sunshine Coast talk to me only a month or two ago, when we were about to sign with a small business friendly council, about the benefits of reducing the difficulties of dealing with government. They said, 'I would give up every grant you gave me for the rest of my life if you could save me some time and stress.'

There is no one thing, but all of those programs are developed to try to alleviate the stress. It is why we work very closely with organisations like the CCIQ because things are changing rapidly. The CCIQ just announced today, for instance, that they are running a survey on the future of work. We are currently commissioning an engagement survey with businesses to identify where they are at right now. Things are changing so quickly. All of those interactions are about keeping in touch with what businesses need most.

Unfortunately, there are levers around cost of living and inflation that we cannot control at a state level. Obviously, we are seeing those issues right across the world so we need to be constantly monitoring. The feedback we are getting in relation to the type of assistance we are offering at the moment—including things like our mental health initiative to support people as they navigate these really trying times—is that we just have to keep on moving and keep on going through this. I would be happy at any time for the member to give me feedback. In fact, I rely on members. I have had some great interactions with the member for Southern Downs. I value those interactions and would welcome any feedback you could give us as we go forward through these difficult times.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, as you are talking about the tough challenges small businesses have had with COVID and natural disasters, for example, one of the concerns is about the mental health of small businesses and their staff. Can you talk to what the government is doing in that mental health space?

Ms FARMER: This is an incredibly important question. I am so impressed always by the tenacity of small businesses and what they have gone through over the last few years. If it hasn't been COVID, a lot of businesses have been affected very badly by natural disasters. They have had all sorts of things happen to them including contending with work and supply shortages, as we were saying before. There are still a lot of businesses who talk about how badly their staff get treated. We saw that during the period of the vaccination mandates.

Certainly the mental health issue of businesses is one of the top three issues that are raised with us not only by CCIQ but also by businesses. Everywhere I go, people have been raising it. In fact, the CCIQ Pulse survey that was reporting on the December 2021 quarter reported that 60 per cent of their businesses had said that they had experienced mental health challenges due to COVID-19. Therefore, I was so pleased to announce the rollout of our \$6.75 million Small Business Support and Wellness Package during Queensland Small Business Month in May.

Heidi Cooper, who is the CEO of CCIQ, stood alongside me and talked about how delighted they were, and we are working really closely with them to roll that out, along with the Queensland Mental Health Commissioner. It involves the appointment of six specialist small business wellness coaches across Queensland to join our statewide network of the 43 rural, tourism and small business financial counsellors who are so highly thought of. There is access to a \$3 million Small Business Support Services Fund to help small business owners in alleviating the stresses of their current situation. The

Mental Health Commissioner says sometimes the best thing you can do is stop small problems from becoming bigger problems. We have a locally based coach or counsellor in the network who will be able to connect the small business owners with a service provider to help them address those issues.

We have the extension of a successful proactive education program, Small Business Smile4Biz, which was started up by the Kingaroy Chamber of Commerce. I really want to acknowledge Damien Martoo who is the president of that chamber. I have had some great chats with him about what they did. We will roll that out to 40 chambers across the state. I am really looking forward to going out to visit Damien and the chamber, I hope later in the year. We will also have a promotional campaign to raise awareness of the mental health financial counselling and other support services to small business.

It is an incredibly important issue. In fact, we first started paying attention to it in when the broader support package was being put together. The member for Southern Downs and I had a number of conversations about that as well. Certainly for those businesses there was a mental health package associated with that which was worth \$700,000. We have been able to help 422 individuals, including small business owners with that. In fact, we launched the program at one of my local businesses, a local toy shop called Crackerjack Toys. Jo Wallace, who is the owner of that business, capped it off with the best quote I have heard about it which was, when she was asked by the media, 'It means we are not alone.' That is really the message that we want to send to small businesses.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, how is the Palaszczuk government assisting small businesses affected by flooding and natural disasters?

Ms FARMER: Small businesses really have had to endure more than their fair share of natural disasters over the past nine months. I started this year visiting Gympie with the Deputy Premier when they had just experienced their first major flooding again. We know that that unfortunately was not the first of the major flooding events of Gympie. I want to commend the mayor, the council and that whole town for the amazing way they have responded and supported each other. We know Goondiwindi experienced its worst flooding in a decade in November and December last year. In January, Cyclone Seth impacted businesses throughout the LGAs of Bundaberg, Fraser Coast, Gympie, North Burnett and South Burnett. In South-East Queensland, we experienced a significant rain event in February which was only just over a decade from the last flooding event. Small businesses across 20 local government areas in SEQ were affected, and 13 people lost their lives. It was a terrible time for everybody. Many of these areas were hit again by heavy rainfall and flooding during May.

As Minister for Small Business, I visited many of those areas. I was certainly very pleased to speak to our disaster recovery coordinator when he was doing his investigation of the support that needed to be provided and to actually pass on those insights.

In response to the SEQ rainfall and flooding event, and in conjunction with the Australian government, we are providing an initial \$558.5 million in immediate financial assistance to those impacted by the flooding across those 20 LGAs. I mentioned earlier that we have essentially two types of grants programs. There are the ones that are competitive and these ones where we aim to provide a sufficient amount of money that whichever business actually needs that support, that that money is available to them. I am very pleased to say that the first payments from that program were made one day after the announcement of the program. There were grants of \$75,000 for primary producers and up to \$50,000 for small businesses and not-for-profit organisations. There were concessional loans of \$250,000 and essential working capital loans of up to \$100,000. As at 15 July, nearly 32.5 million—

CHAIR: Minister, thank you.

Ms FARMER: Oh, I was on a roll, Chair!

CHAIR: You were on a roll, but we have sailed past time.

Ms FARMER: Could I make a correction to something I said earlier, please?

CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

Ms FARMER: Earlier I was talking about Business Basics, round 3, and I said that the regional round opened on 17 May and the SEQ round opened on the 16th. It is actually the other way around. I am so sorry.

CHAIR: The time allocated for consideration of the proposed estimates of expenditure for the portfolio of Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development has expired. I note that there were questions taken on notice. Minister?

Ms FARMER: Thank you, Chair. I understand it is around Mentoring for Growth, the Small Business Advisory Council and, from earlier, the Skills Assure regional and remote locations.

CHAIR: Thank you. The committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice must be provided to the committee secretariat by 10 am on Monday, 1 August 2022. You can confirm the exact wording of any questions taken on notice in the proof of transcript of this session of the hearing which will be available on the Hansard page of the Parliament's website within approximately two hours, or by watching the archived broadcast. Minister, would you like to make any closing statements before I thank everybody?

Ms FARMER: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to say a few thank-yous: firstly, to yourself as chair. You have done a great job, all day, not just for this hearing. To the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about some of the initiatives in our portfolio. I do want to thank the parliament staff including all the attendants, Hansard, and everyone who puts this enormous event together over the two-week period. To the department staff: the Director-General and in his office Jemma Baker and Siobhan Speak. To our deputy director-generals Steve Koch, Rebecca Atkinson, David Lucas and Leighton Craig who is unfortunately ill and unable to attend today. To their estimates team: Naomi Quirk, Marcelina Simon and Lisa Haling. To our communications team: Maria Karatzis, Helen Vickers and Louise De Santis. To TAFE Queensland: CEO Mary Campbell, Simon Pritchard and Katherine Kurukitoga. To my office who work so hard and I am so proud of them: my CEO Ian Hutcheon, Gayle Walters, Vickey Payne, Maud Beach, Nicholas Fowler, Emma Renwick, Debra Macqueen and Duncan Potter. If there is anybody else I have forgotten who has worked so hard on this, I thank them as well.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for your participation today. Thank you to the director-general, deputy director-general and all of the officials who have been here today. Thank you to our secretariat, who are forever hardworking in helping us navigate the process. We are very grateful to the Hansard staff, to the parliamentary attendants and to my committee for ensuring that today has been extraordinarily respectful and a rigorous debate of the estimates for both portfolios. Thank you very much. I now declare this hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.20 pm.