



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair

Mr JP Lister MP

Mr MA Boothman MP

Mr N Dametto MP

Mr BL O'Rourke MP

Mr JA Sullivan MP

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen—Committee Secretary

Dr S Dodsworth—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF PORTFOLIO AGENCY 2021-22 ANNUAL REPORTS

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2022

Brisbane

MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2022

The committee met at 9.16 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public briefing. My name is Kim Richards; I am the member for Redlands and chair of the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I would like to acknowledge that we are sitting on the land of the oldest living civilisation in the world and I pay my respects to the Jagera and Turrbal people and their 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. With me here today from the committee are: Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair; Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Mr Nick Dametto, for member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford; and Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton.

The purpose of the briefing today is to assist the committee in its consideration of agencies' annual reports, which forms an important part of the committee's public accounts responsibilities. This will assist the committee to understand the achievements, performance, outlook and financial position of portfolio agencies for the 2021-22 year. Would any members like to declare any conflicts of interest?

The committee's proceedings today are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the parliament's standing orders. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Witnesses will not be required to give evidence under oath, but I remind everyone that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I now welcome representatives from the Department of Education.

ANSON, Mr Duncan, Assistant Director-General and Chief Financial Officer, Finance, Procurement and Facilities, Department of Education

BANCROFT, Ms Kym, Deputy Director-General, Office of Industrial Relations, Department of Education

BARRY, Ms Megan, Deputy Director-General, People, Information and Communication Services, Department of Education

DE'ATH, Mr Michael, Director-General, Department of Education

ELLIOTT, Ms Tooley, Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure Services, Department of Education

FORRESTER, Ms Kathleen, Deputy Director-General, Policy, Performance, International and Intergovernmental, Department of Education

HANSEL, Ms Stacie, Deputy Director-General, Schools and Student Support, Department of Education

PORTER, Ms Tania, Deputy Director-General, Early Childhood, Department of Education

CHAIR: Thank you for agreeing to brief the committee today. I invite you to make an opening statement, after which the committee will have some questions for you.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you very much, Chair. I, too, would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of these lands, seas and waterways. I pay my respects to elders past and present and I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the committee on the 2021-22 Department of Education annual report including our achievement, performance and, most importantly, future outlook. I am accompanied by my senior executive team today, as kindly introduced by the chair. I felt that was Brisbane

important given the number of changes we have had in the department—and for the committee to hear from if necessary—but also to see the settled leadership team in place. Sharon Schimming, Associate Director-General, Early Childhood and State Schools, and Phillip Brooks, inaugural Deputy Director-General, First Nations Strategy and Partnerships, extend their apologies to the committee for not being able to be here today.

As you can appreciate, we have an incredibly diverse portfolio which includes early childhood education and care, school education, industrial relations and racing. Since I commenced in the role in December last year—almost a year ago, believe it or not—I have had the opportunity to better align services with the demands of our operating environment to enhance performance, support innovation and better support our schools and regions, and with that prioritising First Nations outcomes. The senior leadership team is now in place, and we are focused on working together to position us to deliver on our strategic objectives for Queensland. They are significant. Over the last year I have been privileged to meet many employees and stakeholders and have seen firsthand their commitment and passion to providing high-quality services to all Queensland. Indeed, for all of those many great men and women out there working in our workforce we are truly very fortunate. I do not say that lightly; they are high-quality people.

However, it is fair to say that 2021-22 was a challenging year and our people demonstrated incredible resilience and the agility to respond to and support the needs of staff, students and their communities. I think we quickly forget just exactly what that was like as we move out of those significant events. The flood event earlier this year caused extensive damage and disruption to a number of our schools, communities and workplaces. While COVID-19 and its impacts continue to affect our people and services, it also provided opportunities to embrace new ways of working and learning. Those are things we are capitalising on as we go forward.

Despite those disruptions, the department's financial performance was effective and efficient. We achieved an operating surplus of approximately \$159 million against our total controlled budget of \$11 billion. Our 2021-22 financial performance was considered by the Queensland Audit Office, with no material inconsistencies found.

In early child education and care, it is critical for us that all Queensland children have access to high-quality early childhood programs to make successful transitions into schooling. Queensland has 98 per cent of children enrolled in an early childhood education program, exceeding the national partnership target of 95 per cent. I am also pleased to report that in 2021-22 Queensland improved to have 67.1 per cent of children developmentally on track on four or more Australian Early Development Census domains. That exceeds the target of 66 per cent. This is a positive outcome for Queensland and one that will have long-lasting benefits; however, there is always more to do. Our teams in early childhood education and care are working hard to continue to build on the factors impacting on children's development across our early years services, supporting services to lift the quality of care provided to children and support positive transitions to school.

In school education, in the schooling sector Queensland's performance has been mixed. There have been strong post-schooling outcomes, with nearly 87 per cent of state school students engaged in education, training or employment six months after leaving year 12. Some measures, such as NAPLAN and report card assessment, the A to E data, remain relatively stable, with declines in some areas such as attendance. This is not surprising given the impact and disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the focus of schools in supporting their students, families and communities through this. However, it is critical for Queensland that as a system we focus on the theme outcomes for every child and young person no matter their circumstances or where they live.

Queensland is a signatory to the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, which commits all states and territories to the goal of promoting equity and excellence. The declaration sets a clear aspiration for us as an education system, and I tasked my department to develop how we might better deliver on this commitment. We have undertaken extensive research this year, analysed our performance, and consulted with educational experts and key stakeholders to develop a strategic direction to deliver on the goals outlined in the Mparntwe education declaration.

In October I consulted with over 1,400 state school principals and system leaders about the future strategic direction. The focus on both equity and excellence resonated deeply with them, and it is clear there is an energy for a renewed focus to ensure we can realise the potential to lift learning outcomes for every student. We know that the greatest in-school difference to learning outcomes is from the powerful impact exceptional education leaders and teachers can have on young lives, and investment in educational teachers and leaders at key stages throughout their careers is essential to improving outcomes for students. Lifting the quality of professional learning offered to educators is a critical step in elevating the status of the profession and attracting and retaining the best teachers to Brisbane

Queensland's state school system. Sustainable performance improvement will be driven across our state by providing greater clarity about performance priorities and expectations, improved monitoring, revitalised school reviews and targeted systems support to those schools that need it most.

In First Nations outcomes it is critical that we have a strong focus on improving those outcomes for First Nations students by setting clear expectations for schools to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student can reach their potential. There is still much more work to do to close the gap in outcomes for our First Nations children and young people. We acknowledge this. This is why we have created a dedicated division within the department, First Nations Strategy and Partnerships, led by Phillip Brooks. Phillip commenced with us last week to work in partnership across the department to lift outcomes.

In student wellbeing and inclusion, more than ever our children are navigating and adapting to pressures not experienced by previous generations. We are ensuring safe and inclusive environments for our students through the three-year \$106.7 million Student Wellbeing Package. This is employing psychologists and similar professionals and piloting GPs in state schools to support the mental and physical health of our students. We have released a new disability resourcing model in 2022 which will provide dedicated support for an extra 30,000 students with disability, with \$80 million to go to schools in the next two years to fund 500 frontline positions to support the implementation of the model.

In our infrastructure program, we are delivering the largest investment in state school infrastructure in Queensland's history. In 2021-22 three new schools opened—on the Gold Coast, Logan and the Sunshine Coast—representing a \$200 million investment. While new schools are critical to meet our rapidly expanding population, we are maintaining existing schools through the School Refresh Program, delivering critical building and grounds maintenance upgrades.

In industrial relations, we have had positive outcomes in the industrial relations space, with over 90 per cent of clients reporting overall satisfaction with the inspectorate's effectiveness and professionalism. That is a great result and demonstrates the dedication of Office of Industrial Relations staff to support safe and healthy workplaces and communities.

In racing, where we make a strong contribution to the Queensland economy, particularly in rural and regional communities, we support the control body Racing Queensland in enabling initiatives such as the Country Racing Program and Racing Infrastructure Fund.

CHAIR: We are big lovers of the Country Racing Program here at the table.

Mr De'Ath: Including me. That is all with a view to supporting the growth and sustainability of the greyhound, thoroughbred and harness codes of racing, as you well know.

In conclusion, on equity and excellence we are committed to realising the potential of each and every Queensland student and young person. Our consultation with over 1,400 principals and education stakeholders confirms overwhelming support for the strong focus. Indeed, around 97 per cent of the principals at the conference endorsed the strategic directions as the right directions. That is an incredible vote of confidence in where we are heading. I am confident that the work, which is well underway, will establish immediate priorities for schools and set us up to provide sustainable, long-term systems improvement. The focus will create positive and sustainable impacts not just for the department but for the Queensland community we serve—the very thing we are here to deliver on.

CHAIR: Having spoken with the principal and teachers at Russell Island State School, I am extraordinarily delighted, because we started the KindyLinQ program and we are one of the schools that is doing kindergarten in the state school system. When you speak to them, they say that the transition from kindergarten to prep is outstanding. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about other regions—because I am only aware of the ones in my patch—and what that looks like for Queensland students going forward in terms of possibly rolling that program out further.

Mr De'Ath: We are delighted to elaborate on that. I will invite Deputy Director-General Tania Porter to the table to give a considerable level of detail on this. Tania has stepped up into the role with great energy. She was already in the unit and is well across the detail. This is a really significant investment that we are making in early childhood. We are looking to the federal agenda in the coming years as well to see just what that will mean for us as we go forward. The transitions between all settings for a learner are incredibly important, so you are very right to pick up on that. People are talking positively about the difference that is making. I will turn to Tania to give an overview of exactly where we are heading with all of that early-childhood-to-school activity.

Ms Porter: Firstly, I just want to clarify that your question was on State Delivered Kindergarten as well as school?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Porter: We are very excited to be able to deliver our State Delivered Kindergarten program. In 2022, 134 kindergartens across 116 Queensland state schools were able to deliver a State Delivered Kindergarten program. I am pleased to say that in 2023 there will be an additional two, which will start at the beginning of next year, which will take our numbers to 136 schools in some of our most remote Queensland communities—from the Torres Strait right throughout some of our western corners. I know that some members here today have State Delivered Kindergartens in their locations. We are very pleased with the work they are doing, which really does support that transition to kindergarten. There is also the \$1 billion over five years that has been invested in kindergarten to support all children, regardless of their location or life circumstance, to access the best quality start. That is certainly something very exciting we are looking forward to rolling out in 2023. That package also includes \$38.5 million for our outer regional, rural and remote communities so that they can attract and retain the very best teachers to support children transition, as you said, into their school program.

CHAIR: Is there a geography—

Ms Porter: Our State Delivered Kindergarten program is looking at where they are 40 kilometres from the nearest kindergarten or there are areas of market failure. It is where there is no other access to a kindergarten program for those children in those areas. We also offer our eKindy program. They are also available for our very remote children—on properties most often—where they cannot transport into our State Delivered Kindergarten program.

CHAIR: You do eKindy online?

Ms Porter: That is correct. They are supported through our School of Distance Education.

Mr LISTER: I would like to ask about the wellbeing program that was announced some time back to recruit psychologists and similar professionals into our schools. I see that the plan was to employ 464 additional full-time-equivalent psychologists and similar professionals to ensure every Queensland state school student has access to a wellbeing professional at school. It looks like 92.28 FTEs have been recruited against that. My educated guess would be that it is in electorates like mine, in more remote locations, where the department has not been able to fill those positions. What are you doing about that given the obvious labour market reaction to those positions being available but not being filled? I know that in my electorate there is certainly a lot of need for those staff. I was very pleased about the announcement and I would certainly really like to see some of them on the ground.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question. I would like to invite Ms Stacie Hansel to the table to provide some of specific detail about your question, but I will start off. You are right: this is a challenging employment market that we are all in across multiple fronts. In terms of health and wellbeing professionals it is just as challenging, if not more so, given where we have been. In terms of our performance and delivering on this commitment, we are actually very pleased with what we have achieved. Since the annual report was tabled, we have continued to roll out the initiative with 84 psychologists, 32 guidance staff, 79 social workers and eight youth workers employed through the package, and 42 pilot schools have commenced providing the free GP service at schools one day per week, with services estimated to commence in all 50 schools in the first half of 2023. Given the environment we are operating in, that is a fairly significant achievement. Having had experience also in running a health system and understanding the pressures that exist in our health system for these types of professionals, we are delighted with that response.

Ms Hansel: As the director-general mentioned, this is an absolutely critical area for us in terms of the mental health of all of our students within our state schools. We currently have 203 professionals working within our state schools across the state. They are currently supporting 450 Queensland state schools. There is a rolling recruitment process going on in terms of that. As the director-general mentioned, by 2024 every primary and secondary school will benefit from this support. We are partnering with our HR team in relation to selection and recruitment in terms of that wellbeing workforce and are really excited to hear that some of our most remote locations in Far North Queensland have been filled. We certainly will be promoting that for all students to go forward.

We are also looking at hybrid models of delivery and how we might be able to do that in terms of a flying squad approach—to have the service provided in an online environment to care and then paraprofessionals and health professionals arriving in schools when required and when needed to support those students if they need to.

One of the other pilots we are very excited about is with Queensland Health in terms of transitioning our mental health students who may have been in our Jacaranda facility, our \$69 million facility in Chermside. When they transition back into their communities, what does the support look

like for those students? We are piloting a hybrid online model for those students when they transition back into their communities to ensure they are successful and they have appropriate support when they return. That is something we are very proud of. It has gone very well. We are offering a service in Longreach, Emerald and Mackay for those facilities around that going forward.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for that. I appreciate it. I am glad to see that you have made significant inroads since the publication of the annual report. Going back to the context of my own electorate of Southern Downs, I believe that one or two positions may have been filled. I acknowledge, of course, that it is a difficult market at the moment, but what is the department doing about addressing the need to have them on the ground and not rely on the flying squad model? Is the department considering improving the remuneration offering so that these professionals could be attracted just long enough so that they can settle down and marry someone and stay in my community for good?

Ms Hansel: I am not sure we will be able to do that in terms of the second half of the question, but we certainly are looking at packages around accommodation, transfer and remuneration for those young people. We are also looking at how we sponsor students when they are going through the university program and partnering with our higher education centres so that we are placing students and our professionals where they need to be. We are partnering with HR in terms of that and looking at how we can get that on the ground in terms of our higher education services as well. We are definitely working very closely on that. It is a priority for us.

CHAIR: It is an extraordinarily challenging environment. I think for everybody in our communities, in my community in particular, access to GPs is challenging. I can only imagine the complexity in that recruitment process.

Mr De'Ath: I think it is important to note that we are not stopping there. An important part of what we have just consulted with our principals on in terms of those various streams to achieve equity and excellence is a revised school review methodology. That is one thing, but we will do something that we believe is an international first—that is, look at a precinct review approach. That is about saying that schools do not exist in isolation; they exist in a community, often with community schools around them. In that precinct there are various things going on: what is the population health data telling us; what is happening in child safety; what is happening in social housing? What are the things that are impacting in that community on the ability of our schools to deliver our students a world-class education? The precinct review approach will take a look at all of those factors and then seek to develop a precinct plan which will say, 'What are we going to do about all those things when we identify them? What are the resources that schools need to have that are beyond necessarily the teaching professionals to support them to achieve these outcomes?' The wellbeing package is a significant step towards that.

We now want to go to another level in terms of the analysis that we can give schools to understand the community they are operating in, the dynamics and the resources that are needed. These are things that we will work up and probably run some pilots on to commence, try, test and learn to see how they go. They will not be in every community—can I manage the expectation?—from day one, but they will shape as we go forward. I think it is quite a powerful move for an education system to take, along with other parts of government.

CHAIR: Particularly given the decentralised nature of Queensland and the diversity of communities. I think that is a really fantastic initiative.

Mr De'Ath: It is particularly relevant to Queensland's geography.

Mr SULLIVAN: Ms Hansel, I just want to thank you for the work you do with Jacaranda Place. I know that it is in strong partnership with Queensland Health, co-located on the Prince Charles Hospital site in the heart of my electorate. Thank you for everything you do for those really complex matters but really important cases.

Ms Hansel: Thank you very much. I will certainly pass that on to the fabulous team that is there. They are doing a world-class job in that facility. Thank you.

Mr SULLIVAN: I give a shout-out to the member for Greenslopes. His mental health committee came out to see the team there and see what model they had. They do a tremendous job. My question is to the director-general. I cannot remember if I have said this before, but I apologise in advance because I spent almost six years working for the member for Redcliffe, when I was her chief of staff as attorney-general, so I am absolutely going to stay your name wrong. Forgive me for that.

This might be an operational issue for Mr Anson. I was privileged to welcome the education minister to Wavell State High School on the finalisation of every school being air-conditioned. Wavell is one of those more challenging projects as it is an older, established school with a high enrolment—that means you could not move kids around—an ageing electricity grid and all those sort of things. It

was great to see it done early. Can you speak to what sorts of achievements the department was able to deliver in terms of air-conditioning not just every classroom but also every staff room and library across the state?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question. What a phenomenal achievement. I must say: for me, arriving into the role almost a year ago, to see this in train and well advanced was heart-warming, really—for young Queensland students in all of our schools to be in an environment that is equipping them to learn. The hierarchy of needs kicks in: if you are not comfortable and you are too hot, it makes everyone's job harder—the teachers, the students, the teacher aides and so on. This has been an incredible achievement and it was completed ahead of schedule. Mr Anson has some figures which he can provide. If needed, Ms Tooley Elliott can also come to the table. We will start with Mr Anson.

Mr Anson: The rollout of the air conditioning was a component of the broader \$477 million Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. We basically did a stocktake of what was existing in our current schools. We always had—and we still do—what was called a cooler school zone, which is everything sort of west of the Dividing Range and everything north of about Gladstone. That then gave us a bit of a picture of what we needed to do. There had been exercises, going back over a few different terms of government, that had spat out a few different figures, but this was the first time we had done a proper audit where we had people eyeballing every single classroom, school office, staff room et cetera. We air-conditioned 649 schools through that. We set ourselves a pretty aggressive timeline. As you can imagine, it was important for us to ensure that those classrooms and other spaces were air-conditioned as soon as possible. We set the deadline of 30 June this year. The program was completed—and Tooley may correct me—around March this year. We finished it around three months early.

Of course we had a number of challenges, but through that—I was actually running the infrastructure team at the time—we forged a really strong relationship with Minister de Brenni's team. It was quite fortunate that Minister de Brenni became the energy minister at a point along the way and was able to really assist us, along with his team, to ensure we got things like the electrical upgrades that had to happen. Electrical upgrades are not uncommon for us. When we do big projects, we have to work with the Energexes and Ergons of the world to make sure the particular upgrades are done. As you can imagine, the sort of scale we had to deal with at those 649 schools and the pace that we wanted to deliver it at versus the other priorities that those energy providers had meant that we really had to go in and play hardball and push that program through. I am happy to report that we did that within budget and, as I said, we delivered it three months ahead of schedule. It was an amazing effort.

The director-general talked about the collaboration that we intend to do with other service providers and school communities to give our schoolchildren the best chance of getting the best education. We did that in spades with those energy providers and the Department of Energy and Public Works in the rollout of that program. It is something we and the department were really proud of as that reached the conclusion.

Mr De'Ath: I might add to that the formation of the Department of Education solar farm—912 schools—to support the running of these in a clean energy, efficient manner. That added to the achievement. You were talking about some of the challenges. We were certainly challenged along the way in terms of electrical upgrades in some spaces and so on. Some things took a little than others, but it was important to do the job once and do it well.

CHAIR: Particularly some of those heritage buildings. I know that Redland Bay State School has a really old building, so well done.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question is along the lines of retaining teachers within the first three years of commencing their work with the Department of Education. A little while back I put a question on notice about the fact that it was found that just under 2,000 teachers have left the department since 2015. Has the department discussed the reasons these teachers are leaving the department? What strategies are in place to retain teachers going forward?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I will invite Ms Megan Barry, our new deputy director-general for our corporate division and formerly the Public Service Commission. This sort of question is very much Megan's bread and butter. I will start off the answer by saying what an incredibly challenging environment we have all been in regarding teacher supply. Having been associated with education for many decades, I can say that this is a rise-and-fall type activity. Getting teacher supply right, particularly in a federated model, is incredibly challenging.

What I have been incredibly impressed with is the work we are doing in our recruitment and our retention campaigns. It is pretty impressive work when I compare that with other jurisdictions and I look at how we are travelling. We have had a lot of teachers come back into the system, which is Brisbane

fantastic news. I think we all understand the reasons teachers were not in the system or were in the system on and off over the past few years. We absolutely understand that. However, seeing people return and being really welcomed into our schools and seeing how that is assisting is really great. I will turn to Ms Barry to expand on the nature of retention with the first three years.

Ms Barry: As the director-general has already stated, resignations are part of the life cycle of employment and the department is not immune to those. I recognise the importance of making sure we are retaining as many of our new teachers as possible—making sure they are supported when they begin their teaching profession and also making sure they are connected with appropriate mentors in and around the school communities.

In terms of resignations, in the 2021-22 financial year we had 2,211 permanent teachers—that is head count—resign or retire. Interestingly for our Queensland state school teachers, the retention rates have remained very stable since 2015 and currently sit at around 96 per cent, which is actually about three per cent higher than our department retention rates overall. That really shows that our teachers are very much staying with the profession.

In terms of the 2021 school year, the number of teachers who resigned with fewer than three years service with the department was a head count of 362. I think it is important to be mindful of that when we are thinking about our overall workforce size, which is sitting at a bit more than 55,000 teachers currently within our workforce.

Mr De'Ath: I would like to take the committee, if I may, Chair, into some new territory with your question. What we have tended to think about traditionally in terms of teacher supply, and often in relation to many of our newer teachers, is that they do come and go from the profession in those early years for various reasons, some which you would absolutely understand because they like to travel. There are often a lot of younger teachers in there. Our commitment going forward—and indeed, again, what we have floated in our Equity and Excellence strategy—is to examine in quite some detail different modes of delivery. Many of our teachers may not even reside in Australia. They are off overseas or they are doing something else, but there is no mechanism for them to contribute back into the system.

What is most important and what do we know makes the greatest difference? It is having expert teachers in front of students. Expert teachers in front of students in a supervised environment via remote learning opportunities is something that we are going to do quite a significant piece of work on. There are literally hundreds of thousands of teachers who are available to us who could work for us, sometimes on a part-time basis and so on, to deliver expert teaching into our classrooms. Education systems need to modernise and adapt into an environment in which people are used to working and working differently now. The idea that you have to live in this community, that you are required to be at the school five days a week during those hours and delivering teaching and learning to students is something that we have to adapt now that a significant portion of the population are wanting to work differently and contribute in other ways. It is a challenging environment for us. It is an exciting piece of territory to chart.

If there was a positive out of the COVID experience, it is that people developed the confidence to actually deliver the curriculum in remote ways. We do not want all our students sitting at home and having the curriculum delivered to them in that way, but we would benefit from having them in supervised environments and having an expert teacher delivering to them from somewhere else; it could be anywhere else in the world. That is a really exciting development. In Gladstone, for example, I know that the secondary schools there—and they are not the only ones—have already started work on aligning their timetables—

CHAIR: I was just going to say that Cleveland District State High School have done exactly that. It is really innovative how they have looked at the timetables.

Mr De'Ath: It is very challenging to get secondary schools to do that, and how brilliant of them to have done that, because they are thinking about the needs of their students and how they deliver to them better. As I am talking to principals around the state, we are hearing more and more of this sort of innovation, facilitated and supported by the department, for them to really bring expert teaching to students to get equity.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Has the department done a review into why these teachers are leaving within the first three years? Is there some quantitative evidence or discussions between department heads and teachers about why they are leaving so early in their profession?

Mr De'Ath: I am not aware of a specific study, but someone may be able to enlighten me as to that.

Ms Barry: Not that I am aware of at this stage. It is interesting to note, too, that as people move into their profession of choice it often occurs to them after a couple of years that they would perhaps like to do something else or, as the director-general has said, there are opportunities for young people to travel, particularly if they have an education qualification under their belt. It certainly makes them highly employable in all markets.

Mr De'Ath: We have an interesting dynamic at the moment. Some of you may be aware that there is a national workforce strategy being developed by the current federal education minister, with all states and territories contributing, and there is a draft out for consultation. Education ministers will be discussing that particular piece of work in depth when they meet in December. Part of that is a further piece of review work to be carried out by Mark Scott on initial teacher education.

We are not actually waiting for that piece of work. There is work we are going to do in Queensland and work we are doing in Queensland. I will be meeting soon with the deans of education of the various providers, having a look particularly at what is happening in our initial teacher education space. Retention is not just about when they start in school; it is actually about how they are set up to succeed when they do get into the school setting. What we are seeing across Australia is a decline in retention rates in initial teacher education—it is quite marked in places—where people are entering into the initial teacher education program but not being retained at that level. There is a range of factors that we believe are contributing to that. We want to start and get ahead of that in Queensland. That is why I will be meeting with and working with the deans.

CHAIR: My cousin is in Dubai. She took her teaching degree and decided to travel.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for attending this morning. We appreciate you facing us as a panel. Are there any strategies in place to deal with issues arising due to older schools being right next door to new schools across Queensland? There can be a little bit of argy-bargy between parents as to which school they want their children to go to. I am seeing one in particular with Bohlevale State School as well as the new North Shore State School in the electorate of Hinchinbrook. Catchment boundaries have changed over the last couple of months and we are seeing some parents getting a little bit irate about that.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you for the question. I will invite Ms Tooley Elliott to the table. This is an enormous challenge for governments, any education system and any jurisdiction: how do you balance the new, the renewal, the modernisation and so on in your system? I am really pleased that the minister has made a real commitment to recognising this as an issue and knowing that alongside the new builds and so on you need to have a program, and there is certainly plenty of activity in that space.

One of the very important steps we have taken is condition assessment reporting. Before you start investing, you actually need to have a deep understanding across a huge system of what all of that infrastructure looks like, where you would invest and where you would invest in a prioritised fashion. That has been a very significant piece of work to inform where we go from here to address the very issue that you describe.

Parents are influenced by school infrastructure. I would like to think they are more influenced by what happens in it and the experience their young people have as learners, but we know there is a reality to that and there is further work to do. We are well on to that. I will hand over to Ms Elliott.

Ms Elliott: Thank you for the question. We undertake asset and life cycle condition assessments across all 1,258 schools. They occur every four years, and we currently have a new rollout underway across the state. That establishes our program for maintenance and fit-for-purpose works that we undertake as part of the investment portfolio for our infrastructure.

Obviously new schools are built in areas where we have fast-growing populations and they can be adjacent to the older existing schools. We do catchment reviews every three years. They are based on the Queensland Government Statistician's Office areas around equal distance principles and specialist mapping software to determine the equal distance between neighbouring state schools. It measures the shortest, most direct trafficable route by road to and from the main entrance of the school. That actually establishes our catchment boundaries.

We are in the process of undertaking a major schools refresh program, which is co-contribution with schools, where we have spent \$40.8 million in 2021-22 to undertake those refresh programs around painting. It is only available to schools that were built prior to 2012. That goes to programs to refurbish, general maintenance around garden upgrades, painting, things like playground equipment upgrades et cetera.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before us this morning. We are very grateful for all of the information that you provided the committee. Sorry, member for Rockhampton, you have missed a question. That concludes this session. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee inquiry webpage in due course. There were no questions on notice. Thank you again very much.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the committee. It is an exciting time to be in the Department of Education.

CHAIR: Absolutely. You are doing an amazing job. I do not think there is a school in my area that has not been touched by the great work you are doing. On behalf of all members sitting here at this table, I give a huge shout-out to our teachers, teacher aides and all of those working hard in our school community to deliver for our students.

GORE, Mr David, Assistant Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor

HELEY, Mr David, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, WorkCover Queensland

NICHOLSON, Mr Simon, Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor

REID, Ms Janine, Acting Claims Management Officer, WorkCover Queensland

SPRING, Ms Simone, Director of Corporate Services, Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor

WATSON, Mr Bruce, Chief Executive Officer, WorkCover Queensland

CHAIR: Good morning and thank you for appearing before us. I invite both WorkCover and the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor to make an opening statement. After your introductory statements, we will have some questions for you.

Mr Watson: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the annual report as tabled. WorkCover is the insurer for over 170,000 Queensland employers. Whilst we have experienced a challenging year, we have maintained a financially sustainable fund, despite rising costs and claim complexity. Over the past year we have continued to experience the challenges of a difficult economic climate. Like many others in the personal injury insurance industry, we have experienced rising claims costs and lower investment returns, and the uncertain economic conditions are continuing.

Prudent financial management in the past years has put us in a good position, and our financial reserves have allowed us to subsidise premium rates by over \$1.2 billion over the last six years. Rising costs, however, continue upward pressure on our lowest-in-the-country premium rate. Since 1 July this year, we have continued to see improvements in our claims management thanks to a number of internal initiatives. These include earlier decision-making, early intervention claims management along with support from external experts. The result of this is a reduction in our average claim duration and costs being below budget.

WorkCover's focus has always been to support workers and employers after a workplace injury while balancing return-to-work outcomes, costs and employer premiums to maintain a financially sustainable fund. Fundamentally, that means supporting injured workers and employers to achieve a safe return to work as soon as safely possible after injury. We continue to provide more assistance for workers than ever by: one, working with medical professionals to ensure timely access to allied health and medical professionals for treatment, despite the impact of COVID-19 on service availability; two, implementing streamlined processes and presumptive post-traumatic stress disorder legislation for faster access to much needed treatment; and, three, expanding our services to access telehealth, psychotherapy and counselling services along with return-to-work service providers and specialised psychological expertise.

As noted in our annual report, one of our challenges in the year under review was that we identified errors with how we record our final return-to-work outcomes. However, once identified, we took immediate action to undertake file reviews and provide feedback, coaching and training for our people. Balancing our challenges while continuing to deliver excellent customer service has resulted in customer experience scores for the year in review as follows: 7.2 out of 10 for both employers and injured workers; 8.9 out of 10 for employers with common law claims; and 4.3 out of five for claims process and digital service ease of doing business.

As the main provider of workers compensation insurance in Queensland, WorkCover is responsible for maintaining a stable and strong fund. Our position is still strong. We continue to be fully funded and have maintained an average premium rate that has remained one of Australia's lowest for the past eight years. I will leave my comments there. We are happy to take any questions from the committee.

CHAIR: We will come to back to you. Mr Nicholson?

Mr Nicholson: Firstly, I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and I would also like to pay my respects to elders past and present. I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I am the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, who was recently appointed pursuant to the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. I was appointed on 31 October this year.

CHAIR: Very new then indeed.

Mr Nicholson: My functions are consistent with part 4 of schedule 2 of the act—that is, to conduct and defend proceedings for breaches of Queensland’s work health and safety and resource safety and health laws. I also have an advisory capacity to advise the regulator on matters relating to the act. In performing these functions I have powers under the act, together with the power to do all things necessary and convenient for the performance of my functions. I represent the state of Queensland, and although I report to the honourable minister I am not under their control or direction. In considering briefs of evidence and requests for advice, we apply the guidelines of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions which require a reasonable prospect of conviction and for a matter to be in the public interest in order for charges to be laid.

I acknowledge my predecessors: Mr Aaron Guilfoyle; Her Honour Judge Wooldridge KC, who acted in the role before her appointment; and Mr David Gore, who appears with me this morning. He acted in the role prior to my appointment and continues to provide me and the office with considerable support. He discharged his functions as Acting Work Health and Safety Prosecutor with diligence and professionalism at all times. Mr Gore is the author of the annual report that you have before you this morning, and I may call upon him to assist me in answering your questions should the need arise. I also note and appreciate the valuable assistance given by our director of corporate services, Simone Spring, who also appears with me today and who may also be able to assist the committee.

In acknowledging Mr Guilfoyle, I note the leadership he provided to the office as the first Work Health and Safety Prosecutor. As set out in the annual report, he really did create a foundation for a lasting legacy that will continue to influence my office’s culture for years to come. Her Honour’s time in the role, whilst brief, was certainly significant. Having been in the role for only three weeks, I can already join in what Mr Gore said in his report about our staff where he wrote that the staff of our office are a dedicated team of public servants and work in an efficient, effective and transparent workplace that proactively engages with stakeholders and, perhaps most importantly, the workers’ loved ones left behind, the families and friends of people injured or sadly who die at work.

We have a strong relationship with the coronial and investigation liaison unit within the Office of Industrial Relations with whom we have a communication protocol to ensure a joint commitment to working cooperatively and professionally to ensure the obligations of next of kin and certain injured people and their representatives are met. We are also in close contact with the affected persons committee established under the act. I note that Her Honour, whilst she was in my role, attended the workers memorial breakfast.

We also maintain a cooperative working relationship with the Director of Public Prosecutions office, including seeking the director’s assistance with statutory available mechanisms of review on decisions not to prosecute. The director’s office also considers and authorises indictments for industrial manslaughter and category 1 reckless conduct offences contrary to the Work Health and Safety Act. That is a brief overview of some of the work that I do in the role I have just begun. I thank you for the opportunity to appear today and hopefully I can answer all of the questions you have.

CHAIR: Welcome again. With regard to gender and diversity within both WorkCover and the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, could you talk a bit about how you are seeking to get that balance, particularly when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and how that might be included in future reports going forward?

Mr Watson: We have been very active in ensuring that inclusion and diversity are major features of the organisation. To give you an idea about gender equity, 68 per cent of our employees are women. The pay parity has reduced over the last five years, from very close to 14 per cent down to just over eight per cent. We are really focused on ensuring we have equitable pay and conditions for all genders. We also have a great focus on our First Nations people. We are just kicking off a program to be dedicated and active in the employment of First Nations people to increase the percentage that we already have.

CHAIR: That is terrific.

Mr Nicholson: I certainly share Mr Watson’s views. Gender diversity and equitable practices are at the forefront of my mind in taking on this role. We brief external counsel to appear in some of our matters. As set out in the annual report, the Law Council of Australia prescribes a briefing of female counsel in at least 30 per cent of matters and paying at least 30 per cent of the total fees. Happily, my office does that in 39.3 per cent of cases so we are above the recommended scale there. I hope to ensure that continues into the future during my time here. I share Mr Watson’s views and we are already achieving something beyond the national benchmark.

CHAIR: That is terrific. You should be including that in your report.

Mr LISTER: Mr Watson, can I ask you about workforce attrition in WorkCover. I understand from the report that you are looking at over 15 per cent turnover in the most recently reported year. How does that compare to previous years? Can you offer some insights into why it might be happening?

Mr Watson: Our attrition rate has increased up to 16 per cent at the moment and currently that has stabilised. The previous years were sitting at around seven to eight per cent so it has been quite a jump. A lot of that has been that people in this interesting world of COVID and post COVID are exercising their rights to review what they are doing with their employment, travelling and taking on leave and studies. We are finding also that Brisbane is a very tight market for the type of people that we employ in the sense of case managers and claims managers. There has been an increasing demand on those types of staff so there have been movements around sharing them amongst other Queensland-based organisations. It is not remuneration related or for any other systemic reason; it is purely by choice. Also, under our rights to make decisions during the probation period, we found that a number of staff—it is a small percentage—have chosen not to continue or we have chosen not to continue with them for various reasons of cultural fit et cetera. They are the main reasons.

Mr O'ROURKE: Mr Watson, your report states that in 2022-23 WorkCover Queensland will increase its premium rates for the first time since the 2012-13 financial year. How does that compare across Australia with other jurisdictions in this space?

Mr Watson: We have needed to increase our premium to cover the rising costs of claims and at the same time the lower economic returns that we are receiving and continuing to receive. They have been the main drivers. As far as comparisons are concerned, I am pleased to share that we are still the lowest premium in the country. You cannot compare Comcare with WorkCover because it is not like versus like. However, we compare very favourably to all other jurisdictions. For instance, Queensland this year is running at \$1.23 average premium per \$100 of wages; South Australia, \$1.80; New South Wales, \$1.48, WorkCover, \$1.27—however, that has had substantial government injection; Western Australia, \$1.82; Comcare, as I mentioned, 83 cents but that is not comparing apples with apples; and Tasmania \$2.03. We are very pleased that WorkCover remains the lowest premium rate when compared with other jurisdictions.

CHAIR: We are the only jurisdiction that is fully funded; is that right?

Mr Watson: No. It is hard to get some of that information. However, it is fair to say that we are well funded. We are sitting around 141 per cent funding ratio at the moment which is very healthy. We are aware that some of the other states are under substantial pressure in relation to their funding which would not be appropriate for me to comment on.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You mentioned the rising cost of claims. With inflation spiking at the moment, are funds increasing to cover existing claims or is that just a flat rate? Obviously it is going to be very difficult for some of those people.

Mr Watson: For statutory compensation, our weekly payments are, as a percentage, 85 per cent of their income. If their income is going up, we continue to cover the 85 per cent. There is a flow-on in relation to common law claims. Future lost earnings might increase, so that should increase, although I am very happy to say that our common law expenses last year were lower than the previous year. It is manageable, but it is definitely part of our scenario planning and part of the reason that we did increase our premium for the first time in a number of years. The small increase was to ensure that we are adequately funded to be able to continue to meet expectations, whether it be inflation based or general wage growth.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mental health is obviously a big issue that is developing in our communities. What is the department doing to cater for the expected increase in the number of claims?

Mr Watson: In relation to mental injury claims, yes, already there has been a substantial increase over the last couple of years—off a small base, I must say. However, one of the things we are currently doing is employing a psychologist. I note that Education seems to be getting a lot of them at the moment.

CHAIR: It is a battle.

Mr Watson: It is a battle and they are few and far between. They are hard to source. Apart from our own expertise, we have a specialised area that focuses on the nature of these claims, and we use external experts to come in and not only support our own people but support the injured worker as well and work with the employer. That is one of the key areas in relation to mental injury claims. Clearly, they take substantially longer to return to work and there are much higher costs. That is one of the impacts we have had on the rising claims costs.

Mr DAMETTO: The report talks about mental health injuries. How is WorkCover dealing with trying to distinguish the validity of some of the mental health claims and injuries that have arisen with the change in legislation and the complexity that must come with that?

Mr Watson: I might ask for some assistance from our Acting Claims Management Officer, Ms Janine Reid. In relation to PTSD claims, it is quite clear in the sense of a diagnosis. Therefore, we are very much guided by the medical profession. In fact, we are always guided by the medical profession. However, if it comes down to a general—‘general’ is not the right word—non-trauma mental injury claim, we will go through and understand what the background is, understand whether there are any pre-existing conditions, to satisfy ourselves that it is work related or not. The good thing is that, under the new legislation, we are providing immediate treatment to claimants as soon as they register with us. Irrespective of whether we accept it or not, we are assisting the individual in the immediacy. Early intervention is the key.

Ms Reid: As Bruce said, that early intervention treatment is available for everybody while they are waiting. The trauma claims have a much more streamlined process. Working with the Office of Industrial Relations, we established a process in about 2020 to streamline that, and then the legislation came in to reinforce that for a number of first responder agency employees. Those claims are fairly straightforward. We ensure we have confirmation from the employer that the person was exposed to the trauma that they allege and we obtain information from their treating practitioners. We try to avoid sending people off for too many independent medical examinations because retelling their story can be very stressful.

The non-trauma claims—the ones that involve management action; they are typically the bullying or harassment allegations—we investigate through statements from the worker and their witnesses and also from the employer as to the circumstances that occurred at work to understand if reasonable management action was involved. If that is involved then that is one of the exclusion provisions for those non-trauma claims. That is the critical part of investigating those claims. They do take us longer to decide as a result while we gather that information.

Mr DAMETTO: We acknowledge that mental health is something that needs to be addressed in workplaces across the spectrum. I want to make sure that people who really need access to WorkCover claims are getting it, so that is great.

CHAIR: Mental health is a societal problem across the board. I do not think anybody in this room is not touched by it at some point.

Mr SULLIVAN: In relation to the fast-tracking of the PTSD claims in relation to trauma, we heard during the legislative review that the clinical view was that sometimes it would be one significant event that could trigger trauma and sometimes it could be the day-to-day grind and it just happens over time. Are you seeing any trends in terms of what types of first responder claims are coming through?

Ms Reid: That is a good question. It depends on the agencies the claims are coming from. You can imagine that some of the frontline workers, particularly police and ambulance et cetera, do have that recurring history. I do not have any numbers to hand, but certainly the experience is that it is often more than one incident for people. It could be someone’s first day on the job. We have those claims as well. All manner of circumstances happen.

Mr SULLIVAN: Mr Watson, I am wondering about the issue of silicosis and whether you think we are going to see a dramatic increase in claims in years to come. I know that Queensland is ahead of the game in terms of the tradies who are involved in manufactured kitchens. Do you think we have seen the worst of that? We have invested in research and other things that we can do. Are we going to see a dramatic rise in those claims or do you think the number of claims will cut out in that regard?

Mr Watson: The good thing that is happening in Queensland is that we intervened very early and offered free screening to all companies to ensure we could get on top of this early.

Mr SULLIVAN: Sorry to interrupt, but it is also a demographic that is not likely to go to the GP.

Mr Watson: Correct. We believe that we are on top of it substantially. We are still seeing small numbers coming through. However, it is nothing like the 24 per cent diagnosis rate that we were seeing previously. I think with the broader and deeper level of screening that is happening—whether it be tunnelling or mining—the use of CT scans, which show and find silicosis early, is good from the workers’ perspective. We are not seeing any substantive silicosis numbers coming through for the year. I am not sure whether we have any numbers as such, but it would be low numbers.

Mr SULLIVAN: Do you think awareness in that space has increased?

Ms Reid: I am sure the prevention initiatives have been helping as well.

Mr SULLIVAN: Mr Nicholson, have there been any prosecutions in relation to that sort of work?

Mr Nicholson: The annual report refers to a prosecution currently before the court relating to the dry cutting of manufactured stone benchtops. That is still proceeding through. I am aware of a previous matter in a previous year involving the successful prosecution for silica exposure. I come from a jurisdiction where I was involved in the prosecution and successful conviction of a company for using engineered stone without appropriate control. I am certainly aware of the issues that face these kinds of cases. It is a very complex but necessary aspect of compliance.

Mr SULLIVAN: In terms of prosecuting, it would be the prosecution of the employer. In these circumstances, often the employees are self-employed subbies. It is not as though you have a factory sort of thing.

Mr Nicholson: Yes, that is right.

CHAIR: That would be challenging.

Mr Nicholson: There are always a number of duty holders that we consider in every case. Certainly with silica exposure there can be quite a few.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you very much for your time today. We are very grateful for you appearing before the committee. There were no questions taken on notice. The transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage. Thank you very much again for appearing before us today.

BASSETT, Mr Brett, General Manager, QLeave

CULLEN, Ms Jennifer, Deputy Chair, Community Service Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Authority

IRVINE, Ms Peta, Chair, Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Authority

THOMPSON, Mr John, Chair, Contract Cleaning Authority (Portable Long Service Leave)

CHAIR: Good morning and thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. I invite each of you to make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you.

Ms Irvine: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee about the important work we do to assist workers and employers in three key industries across Queensland. I wish to start by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet, beautiful Meanjin, and their connection to land and community. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I also respectfully acknowledge the members of the committee, the chair of the Contract Cleaning Industry Board and the deputy chair of the Community Services Industry Board and the general manager of QLeave, who are attending with me.

I would like to start by giving an overview of the overall administration of QLeave and then I will talk briefly about some of the highlights of the building and construction industry scheme. I will hand over to the chair and deputy to talk respectively about the contract cleaning and then the community services portable long service leave schemes. At this point I would like to note that portable long service leave schemes play a really important role in enabling workers to accrue long service leave entitlements based on their length of service in an industry rather than traditional continuous service with a single employer. That is a really critical distinction given the nature of employment in the three sectors.

In terms of BCI, QLeave is the trading name of the Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Authority. I will say 'BCI' and then that should help us out. QLeave has been operating for 30 years after being established in 1992. It administers portable long service leave for workers and employers in the building and construction industry in Queensland. It is governed by the Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Act 1991. As at 30 June 2022 the BCI scheme had approximately 319,000 registered workers and almost 25,000 registered employees. We paid \$92.9 million in claims during the financial year. Since 1992, long service leave scheme payments totalling \$1.23 billion have been made to industry workers. We had a bit of a celebration when we hit the billion dollar mark. The BCI scheme is funded by a levy on all construction work in Queensland costing \$150,000 or more to complete.

QLeave has been through a process of optimising operations and processes, including an enhanced focus on education and compliance across the sector, embedding contemporary corporate governance frameworks and processes. In addition, significant organisational improvements in our processes and service delivery are being rolled out. Since inception, two further authorities have been added under separate acts. The delivery and administration of the contract cleaning and community services industry schemes are carried out by the BCI authority under a fee-for-service arrangement. Each of the authorities has its own board with members appointed by Governor in Council and each board reports to the Hon. Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing. The BCI board is supported by a subcommittee, the Finance Audit and Risk Management Committee, or FARM, which acts in an advisory capacity to the board. The FARM Committee assists the board in fulfilling its corporate governance and oversight responsibilities.

The team of people we have working for QLeave are hardworking and committed to assisting the scheme participants, both workers and employers, and they are a fabulous group. I might hand over to the deputy chair of the CSI authority to discuss the CSI scheme.

Ms Cullen: The Community Services Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Authority commenced on 1 January 2021 and as at 30 June 2022 the CSI scheme had just over 107,000 registered workers and approximately 1,100 registered employers. During 2021 and 2022 we paid \$739,953 in claims to employers for the first full year of operation of the scheme. The CSI scheme is also a wage-based scheme and is funded by a levy paid by registered employers. The levy is 1.35 per cent on ordinary wages of their eligible workers. The types of workers who come under the CSI scheme include workers employed by a community services provider in Queensland Brisbane

to perform community services work or to support, supervise or manage the provision of community services. This includes workers who are engaged in full-time, part-time or casual employment, are engaged under contract for service, including labour hire workers, and also operate as a sole trader, and registration is optional.

Over the period since 1 January 2021, including the period of the annual report we are briefing you on today, the CSI authority has spent significant time embedding the new scheme into QLeave. A large focus for our board has been ensuring that QLeave engages with the sector. The high number of participants who have come into the scheme in the past 18 months is evidence of the positive impact of QLeave's engagement with the sector. The CSI board has also worked hard to ensure that robust risk processes and frameworks are in place to ensure effective governance of the scheme.

Finally—and it is very exciting—a key program of work supported by the board was the implementation of an online portal that facilitated worker and employer registration. The CSI board looks forward to ongoing engagement with both the CCI and the BCI boards to support the administration of the schemes and continue the great work across QLeave. I would like to now hand over to the CCI authority board, John Thompson, to provide an overview of the CCI scheme.

Mr Thompson: I thank the committee for the opportunity to be here today to make some comments and provide some commentary with regard to the contract cleaning industry scheme, which is known as the CCI scheme. That authority commenced in July 2005 and as at 30 June this year the CCI scheme had over 64,000 registered workers and approximately 1,000 registered employers. During the 2021-22 financial year the scheme paid \$300,000 in claims to employers and \$1.6 million in claims to workers directly. In respect of the employers, what happened in those circumstances is that the employer makes the payment to the worker and then makes a claim back through the scheme. There are two options in terms of how a worker might be paid at the time of taking their long service leave. The scheme, like the previous scheme, is also a wage-based scheme and is funded by a levy paid by registered employers. The levy rate has been at 0.75 since 1 July 2018. The types of workers eligible under the CCI scheme are cleaners and supervisors who perform cleaning work and supervision work and who are engaged generally as a trainee, as a casual, part-time or full-time employee, as a sole trader, subcontractor or by a labour hire company.

As the BCI chair has already explained, QLeave has been enhancing the CCI scheme through enhanced governance and processes. As well as that, the CCI board has had an increased focus on raising compliance in the contract cleaning sector. A big part of this is lifting the number of staff who are out in the field doing random compliance checks to see whether employers are making payments or registering the correct number of employees employed by those particular companies.

Finally, there has been an increased focus by the CCI board in relation to taking investigatory action against recidivist offenders who have either not come into the scheme when they should have or not been paying the levy that they should have been paying. Like my colleagues, I am happy to answer any questions.

CHAIR: My sister has just become a CSI scheme member and I actually had the opportunity to see the portal myself, so good work there. Deputy Chair?

Mr LISTER: What is the role of the boards and the board members on a day-to-day basis? Presumably there are staff who administer the scheme. What tasks are generally put upon the members of the board?

Ms Irvine: That is a great question. It is not dissimilar to the normal board structure where the boards provide strategic advice and oversight—keeping the GM and the organisation honest, as it were—but on a day-to-day basis it does vary. Obviously we have a series of board meetings where we will look at financial statements and adherence to the strategic plan and discuss future improvements, potential scheme adjustments and changes or major projects that are underway. One of the key focuses is culture; as with many organisations, that is really critical in the current environment. What that looks like does vary from month to month, but as chair I will certainly have fortnightly catch-ups with the general manager to keep abreast of things and then as a board we meet four times a year.

Mr LISTER: You say that you report to the minister. Is the strategic plan, for instance, part of a document that you give to the minister and have approved?

Ms Irvine: The strategic plan is provided to the minister.

Mr Bassett: That is correct. As the BCI chair said, each of the boards has an individual legislative obligation to make sure that they provide the authority that I oversee with strategic planning guidance. Each of the boards is responsible as per the acts for the strategic, the operational and the

commercial arrangements that are in place. As part of that, the boards each have an obligation to sign off on a strategic plan and, as the chair has said, the strategic plan is sent up via Minister Grace's office and Minister Grace's office then considers whatever Minister Grace's office needs to do with it.

Mr SULLIVAN: Ms Cullen, the community services industry covers the NDIS workforce?

Ms Cullen: Yes, it does.

Mr SULLIVAN: As that scheme has matured, are you seeing the workforce in that industry accessing long service leave? Because it was a new scheme, did they bring with them their previous years of service, whether it was through service providers, Queenslanders with Disability Network or whatever? Did that count?

CHAIR: Was there an accrual of leave?

Ms Cullen: I might ask for some assistance from the general manager for this one, please.

Mr Bassett: In respect of the first part of your question around whether claims have been made—I will paraphrase there—the answer is no, not as yet.

Mr SULLIVAN: Because it is still in its infancy?

Mr Bassett: That is correct. We can only pay claims out once somebody has accrued seven years of service. In respect of the member's second question around accrual, the answer is no. Because it is a new scheme, in effect, people come into the scheme from the time they are eligible for the scheme and they then start to accrue service credits once they are in the scheme.

Mr BOOTHMAN: When it comes to future challenges for the board, is there anything that comes to mind that would potentially cause a few headaches for the organisation when it comes to leave? With the NDIS starting quite a few years ago now and individuals coming up to their annual leave periods, what is being put in place to manage this?

Mr Bassett: I think it is fair to say that, as the CSI deputy chair has said, QLeave spent a significant amount of time, in the preparations for bringing the scheme in, to make sure the sector is aware of the scheme. As part of that there has been a significant amount of external engagement, and it is fair to say that the engagement in the CSI scheme is significant around compliance. At last count there was about 86 per cent compliance of those employers who were supposed to be in the scheme coming in. That then means that, conversely, registered workers who should come into the scheme are actually coming in.

In respect of challenges around long service leave, the answer is really no, we do not see many challenges in respect of the portable long service leave scheme itself. Because of the compliance, because of the levy that is being paid and the long-term actuarial assessments that we undertake, obviously at the direction of each of the boards every year, we have a long tail and we are very comfortable and confident that we can meet those financial obligations. Of course, being a good administrative organisation, we need to make sure we do not rest on our laurels, so we are in the process of redefining the organisation's first ever education and engagement strategy. We are going to go out to those parts of Queensland in particular where we have not had a significant amount of uptake or involvement through QLeave as yet. For example, in the community services industry we are looking at using a pilot program up in Far North Queensland where we will embed staff in Far North Queensland and in Central Queensland to make sure we are going out to those organisations and workers that we have not had a touchpoint with as yet to make sure that everybody who should be in the scheme is coming into the scheme and is getting the entitlement they are entitled to.

CHAIR: I imagine that would be quite substantial in the care economy in terms of the way workers work and having access to the scheme?

Ms Cullen: Absolutely, Chair. I will expand on what the GM said. Member, your question was in relation to issues and challenges that we see. Our board sees the authority as an opportunity. We know that we need more care workers for the NDIS, and the ability for employees to move from job to job and from region to region is absolutely invaluable, so I see this as a way of supporting our employers and, more importantly, employees who want to continue into this industry but have that opportunity to move across the state which will particularly help rural and remote parts of Queensland.

CHAIR: Yes, most definitely.

Mr DAMETTO: Mr Bassett and the team from QLeave, thank you very much for facing our panel this morning. I do have something that teeters on the edge, Chair, that may be a declaration of a conflict: I had my QLeave account cancelled this year because—

CHAIR: Is that a good thing or a bad thing, member for Hinchinbrook?

Mr DAMETTO: I have not made a contribution or service to the construction industry since 2017, which makes me sad as well.

CHAIR: You are a problem child!

Mr DAMETTO: My question is with regard to the key challenges and risks identified in the report. There is some information in the report, but, Mr Bassett, I ask you to expand on the expansion of QLeave to new industries since 2021.

Mr Bassett: In respect of the member's first point about the cancellation, I think it is important for me to say that QLeave takes its obligations in respect of administering the law really seriously.

Mr DAMETTO: Well done! I receive the emails constantly.

Mr Bassett: As part of that, one of the risks we often face is making sure we go through the annual cycle of work every year, so getting back to core is what we like to do in the organisation—that is, make sure of the annual cycle of work which includes cancellation, compliance checks, worker service returns et cetera. Across each of the schemes they will be individually different, but there is a similar cycle of work.

One of the challenges we have identified over the last 12 months—and the former GM, Helen Sharpley, started this work—is to re-engage with the sector about making sure that everybody who has an obligation to come into the scheme, predominantly employers, does so so that those who have an entitlement to the scheme can get their entitlement when it has come in. We have had a very significant focus over the last 12 months and the period of the annual report in getting back out and engaging, and that is across the BCI, the CCI and the CSI schemes.

In respect of the BCI scheme, one of the challenges is because of the size of the sector. As the BCI chair said, there are roughly 319,000 workers in the scheme and a significant number of employers in the scheme. One of the challenges is making sure we can give them easy access to their information. One of the things we did as part of the annual cycle for the annual report this year was redefine the portal for the building and construction industry scheme, and I will give you some stats, if that is okay, Chair. In the previous financial year we had 50 complaints from employers about accessing the portal. As a result of some work that we did, we had only two complaints this financial year. On top of that, previously we had only 1,100 employers submit their worker service returns via the portal. This financial year we had over 13,000.

CHAIR: Wow!

Mr Bassett: The reason we talk about that is: one of the challenges is making sure that people have access, either as an employer or as a worker, to their account, so that is one of the things that we have done there. One of the things we are going to continue to do around the digital front door is enhance the portal to make it easy for people to access their accounts and to question us online et cetera rather than having to phone up. They are just a couple of examples.

CHAIR: With the digital aspect of the projects, that would be major projects for you and that strategic grant is looking at digital capabilities?

Ms Cullen: Absolutely.

Mr O'ROURKE: Ms Cullen, you mentioned that a levy of 1.35 per cent is there and Mr Thompson I think you said 0.75—

Mr Thompson: I said 0.75, yes.

Mr O'ROURKE: How do the levies get worked out?

Mr Bassett: Thank you, member. I get all the fun stuff!

CHAIR: You do indeed!

Mr Bassett: Member, it is important for me to say this: each of the authorities has the statutory obligation to make sure that the levy that is set is sufficient for each of the individual authorities' long-term tail. The tail is 10 years for portable long service leave, so every authority every year does an actuarial assessment and that actuarial assessment is based on the number of workers who are in the scheme, the long tail of the scheme, the average wage rate and the increase in CPI across each of the individual sectors. Then with the Actuary each of the boards makes the determination as to what rate the levy should be set at. There are differences in each of the schemes because, firstly, the BCI scheme is not a wage-based levy; it is a levy on building and construction work over \$150,000. As the CCI and the CSI deputy chair said, the levy is wage based. Depending on the individual requirements, the long tail, the number of workers and the likely claims over the projections, that drives the levy and that is why there are different levies.

CHAIR: So wage based, project based—

Mr Bassett: Correct.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you.

Mr LISTER: What fees do the various boards pay QLeave to administer the system?

Mr Bassett: As the BCI chair said, QLeave is the trading name for the Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Authority. The way that the administration services are run is there is a written agreement between the BCI authority and the CSI authority and then the BCI authority and the CCI authority. I do not have those numbers in front of me, but in general I think the approximate number is around \$1.8 million for the CSI scheme for the financial year and around \$2 million to \$2.2 million for the CCI scheme, and that number is driven by a cost allocation model which is, in effect, the amount of time that QLeave staff spend doing each piece of work for each of the different authorities.

CHAIR: Presumably it is calculated on the basis of time and multiplications?

Mr Bassett: Yes, that is right, Chair.

Mr LISTER: What do they get for that? Obviously there is the administration—that is, dealing with the customers, the clients. Is there a portion which accounts for the costs of managing the investments that underpin the schemes?

Mr Bassett: The BCI and the CCI authority up until 1 July this year were the only two authorities that had investment opportunities through the Queensland Investment Corporation. QIC charge us fees—that is, charge each of the authorities fees—so the fees to invest are charged to the BCI and the CCI authorities by QIC and then the CSI authority is just in the process of defining its investment parameters and it will then start to, obviously subject to what the board determines, invest with QIC. QLeave itself as the trading organisation does not charge fees to any of the authorities in respect of investments; that is done by a third party—namely, QIC.

Mr LISTER: Thank you.

CHAIR: Mr Bassett, thank you very much for appearing before us today. We are really grateful for your time. They are very interesting schemes and there is obviously lots happening, so thank you very much. There were no questions taken on notice. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 10.54 am to 11.30 am.

ASHTON, Ms Christine, Executive Director, Registration Services, Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (via teleconference)

FOLEY, Ms Lynne OAM, Chairperson, Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (via teleconference)

WILTON, Ms Jacqueline, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority

CHAIR: I now welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the committee today. We will allow you and Ms Foley the opportunity to make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you.

Ms Wilton: Thank you, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to brief you today. Can I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders and their descendants who continue the cultural and spiritual connections to country and extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today.

In the 2021-22 financial year the QCAA, like many other agencies and people, experienced something of a challenging year. However, despite the pandemic and the February floods the QCAA recorded some notable achievements that position us well for the future. We recorded an operating surplus and received no adverse findings from the Queensland Audit Office. On 30 June this year the QCAA farewelled its founding chair, Brian Short, and its inaugural CEO, Chris Rider. Both served the QCAA with distinction since 2014, overseeing major policy programs including the introduction of the new Queensland Certificate of Education system and some significant information technology system reforms as well. Our new chair, Emeritus Professor Carol Nicoll, and I are committed to building on those achievements.

In February the QCAA offices at South Brisbane were very badly affected by floodwaters that caused devastation for so many other folk as well. With many officers already balancing working from home with working in the office, we were very well positioned to recover our services with minimal disruption. The authority moved into new premises on George Street in late May, and during that accommodation gap I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of the QCAA staff who were still able to meet the needs of schools and ensure all major project activities were delivered as planned.

In 2021 Queensland's year 12 students were able to sit the full complement of internal assessments in general and applied subjects for the very first time. All external exams were developed, administered and marked without disruption, and nearly 48,000 people across Queensland received their Queensland Certificate of Education. In May the QCAA, in partnership with ACARA and the three schooling sectors, successfully delivered NAPLAN fully online for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9—an extraordinary first for Queensland. We are now supporting schools to get ready for NAPLAN's earlier testing window in March. We recognise that is a big change for schools, so we are working closely with our schooling partners to ensure they are well supported for that to be a success.

For nearly two years—and again predominantly because of COVID—most of the QCAA's professional development activities have been delivered online. I think making in-person connections with people is essential to building trusted, effective and productive working relationships, and to that end we are working to continue returning to face-to-face activities in 2023.

Right now we are working with kindergartens and primary schools to support young children's first steps to the formal years of schooling. This is part of an annual process where kindergartens prepare a statement about a child's strengths for their future prep year teacher. Last year 48,500 transition statements were written to support our youngest learners and delivered to schools via the QCAA's digital portal.

Looking ahead, we will develop further resources and roll out professional learning that supports all Queensland schools to use version 9 of the prep to year 10 Australian Curriculum. The updated curriculum introduces the most significant changes to content since the first learning areas were introduced in 2011. Schools have a genuine appetite for our support, and our recent forums and webinars about the changes attracted thousands of participants.

The QCAA works with many stakeholders, including the state, Catholic and independent schooling sectors, principals, teachers, parents, students and professional associations, amongst others. It is a responsibility that we take very seriously, and we work every day to ensure young Queenslanders have the educational foundations they need for future success.

The outlook for the authority includes preparing for a detailed independent evaluation of the new QCE system. The evaluation will commence early next year, span multiple years and involve extensive consultation. The final report will be provided in early 2025, with interim reports delivered at appropriate junctures. We will also continue the revision of all senior syllabuses along with delivering a comprehensive professional learning program to support Queensland schools to successfully transition to the revised AC in all learning areas by 2026.

For our youngest learners, the *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline* will be updated to align with the newly revised Early Years Learning Framework. As mentioned before, we will be providing resources and coordinating the preparation of activities to support schools to transition to NAPLAN testing in March next year instead of May. Finally, we will continue to develop and enhance our ICT infrastructure to support our functions, activities and, most importantly, our engagement with schools.

Ms Foley: I have been chair of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board since June 2018. Thank you for this invitation to inform the committee of the board's 2021-22 annual report. I do very much appreciate the committee facilitating this teleconference today to allow me to participate. I acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first Australians. I acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal people as the traditional custodians of the land and waters of the Brisbane area. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

The board's role is of regulatory compliance: to uphold standards of education in non-state schools; educational programs; the effective implementation of curriculums; sufficient and qualified staff, adequate facilities et cetera; maintain public confidence in the operations of non-state schools; effective governance; financial accountability for student safety and welfare; foster educational choice in this state—religions, various philosophies, different focus, academic; and meeting the needs of students and community, trades and vocational.

We operate through a seven-member board appointed by the Governor in Council across a four-year term. We meet every month supported by a secretariat within the Department of Education, and we discharge our functions as per the legislative framework. Our role is to: accredit non-state schools; monitor compliance with regulatory requirements through matters like routine assessments—36 in the year we are discussing; five-year compliance reviews—107 schools in the year in the report; monitor assessments where concerns arise; and concerns raised in submissions from governing bodies. We investigate unaccredited places as well.

In the current year, 2021-22, there were 545 operating non-state schools, an increase of eight from the previous year, and 34.1 per cent of all primary and secondary students in the state are in those operating non-state schools. We received 65 applications for accreditation in that year with 41 decisions made on those applications in the year. New schools, 11; new types of education, three; things like adding prep to primary; some new sites; changes to existing schools; and changes to student intake days. In relation to our assessment work we did: 42 routine assessments; 30 monitoring assessments; and our five-year compliance program, as I mentioned earlier, 111 schools. We also do receive compliance concerns and manage those. You will see from the report the increase in those during this year. I will leave my opening statement at that point, Chair.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for appearing before us today. I have a question for Ms Foley regarding performance targets. Your report provided information about performance indicators and your performance against them, but you have not specified targets against these indicators. Does the board set targets for its performance against each of the performance indicators? If so, what are they? If there are targets, how do you measure your performance?

Ms Foley: In our strategic plan we do set our performance indicators (inaudible). They seem more qualitative than quantitative. It is difficult in the regulatory environment that we are in to set some targets. The main targets we work towards (inaudible) time lines. Throughout the legislation to which we accredit and hold schools compliant, there are significant time lines around every one of those actions for which we must acquit our responsibilities under the act. We are very mindful of those time lines, and you will see in the report areas where we check satisfaction within our jurisdiction around our ability to meet those time lines and satisfaction for our services with schools across the non-state sector. We also monitor very closely between the board and the secretariats about meeting those time lines. That is one of the major areas that we focus on in terms of a target, as you put the question.

Mr SULLIVAN: I have a couple of questions. I might start with Ms Wilton, if that is all right. You mentioned the change in time frames for NAPLAN that is coming in. The genesis of that is to try to make it a teaching and learning aide for teachers in that year rather than just something that schools put on a website. Do you think that moving forward the organisation will be able to turn it over in time for teachers to use it in that capacity?

Ms Wilton: Certainly the move of the NAPLAN testing window from May to March is intended to provide schools with a timelier turnaround of their school information so that you can plan for and prepare any appropriate interventions. We do not—

Mr SULLIVAN: Or extensions, as it may be.

Ms Wilton: Or extensions, absolutely. For those kids who are performing in those upper two bands, absolutely you want to continue to stretch and challenge them as well. The idea would be that, if you are getting that test done something in the order of two months earlier, you will in turn bring forward the provision of the data back to schools. Ultimately, the QCAA is responsible for the marking of the NAPLAN tests in Queensland. We have consistently demonstrated that we are able to turn that marking operation around really quickly and get that data back to ACARA for them to process.

Mr SULLIVAN: Ms Foley, I am the member for Stafford, which is one of the inner north suburbs of Brisbane. One of the phenomena we are seeing at the moment is not quite universal, but an extended move of girls at independent and Catholic schools extending into primary school age, particularly five and six, as we have seen with a lot of boys' schools. Is your organisation involved with that? Do they need to go through a separate process in terms of oversight when they move from—I am talking about very established Brisbane schools—a traditional high school into that upper primary? Does your organisation have oversight of that?

Ms Foley: Yes. Whenever an accredited non-state school, which those schools you refer to are, wish to add or delete attributes—we call them attributes of accreditation, so wanting to add year levels in this case—then they must submit an application for accreditation the same as if it were a new school. Even though they are already accredited, they must go through the entire accreditation process as per the legislation and the process that is advertised on our website to gain accreditation for years 5 and 6 in primary. Therefore, they have to show that they can meet those requirements of accreditation through education programs, student safety, good governance—all of the things that schools have to. That is an example of some of the matters. Facilities, buildings, toilets—everything that we require in schools, they have to apply. Then it goes through our normal process against the board and will be approved if that organisation can show they can meet the requirements of accreditation.

Around two to three months after they have their student intake day, which is the first day they take students, we do a monitoring assessment for the school to show that they are meeting what they said they would meet at the point of being accredited because sometimes schools apply for accreditation at least a year or perhaps two years ahead of their intention to do that student intake day. They might apply this year for 2024 or even 2025 depending on how they are going to roll out that program into primary. Then they fall in line with our five-yearly cycle of assessments, evaluations et cetera. They have to meet the requirements the same as they would for secondary when they add any year levels to primary.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Ms Wilton, you were talking about professional development. In a previous hearing we heard from Education Queensland that there is still quite a large gap when it comes to Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and in rural and remote areas. What type of professional development is your team undertaking to try to close those gaps and give leadership opportunities through mentor programs to those more regional and Indigenous communities?

Ms Wilton: The QCAA predominantly focuses our professional learning activities around our curriculum and assessment programs. In prep to year 10, that is the Australian Curriculum and in senior that is obviously the Queensland syllabuses. One of the priority areas though for the authority is—we support all students—critically looking at ways of enhancing and encouraging teachers to be confident in their delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives through the P to 12 curriculum. It is a key feature of all of our professional learning programs. Next year we will be supporting all Queensland primary schools as we start our transition to the P to 10 Australian Curriculum by running face-to-face professional learning programs for English and mathematics and integrating within the context of that professional learning program a focus on the cross-curriculum priorities, one of which is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. We work closely with the schooling sectors in regard to student performance. Ultimately, the authority provides the curriculum and assessment products which schools and schooling sectors implement, but it is certainly a focus of our professional learning activities.

CHAIR: Can I give a shout-out to Victoria Point State School? At every assembly they sing the Australian national anthem and in the last year they have been singing it in Jandai first, which is quite incredible to hear. At the last assembly, the whole school—even the preppies—knew the words. It was very impressive.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is in regard to the increase in expenditure by the board. The report says that in 2021-22 we have seen a 30 per cent increase in expenditure and, in particular, there has been a 390 per cent increase in legal fees and costs; why is that?

Ms Foley: The board's legal advice is sourced from the whole-of-government legal service's power which the board has opted into. In 2021, the previous annual reporting period, the board made requests for legal advice relating to 11 schools compared to 32 schools in 2021-22. There has been a significant shift in the need for the board in its regulatory role and in terms of its compliance activities for its regulatory role to seek legal advice over decisions which may progress. Most expenditure was related to concerns raised about a school's compliance with the legislative framework and issues arising out of monitoring assessments in schools. You will see from the report that we do a range of routine and monitoring assessments in order to acquit our responsibilities around the compliance of schools in the sector. Complaints to the board also increased 25 per cent in the 2021-22 period compared to the previous financial year. The complaints have increased not only in number but also in complexity.

Our board's legal expenditure also includes the costs of QCAT matters. When the legislation was amended as at 1 January 2018, the decisions of the board were then to be reviewed by QCAT rather than through to the minister as in the previous legislation. The number of matters taken to QCAT increased and the average legal cost per school in dealing with QCAT matters has increased by 159 per cent as well because of the increased complexity in those matters being referred. These matters also require experts in areas such as curriculum, governance and finance. The costs of those experts is also included in those expenses. There was a 55 per cent increase in routine assessments; 66 per cent in monitoring; 25 per cent in compliance concerns; and 44 per cent in the five-year compliance review program. They have certainly been the main reason for that increase in our need to seek legal advice around particularly very complex issues. You will notice also our endowment and available funding has increased in that period as well to assist us in the process of doing the role that we are required to do.

Mr O'ROURKE: Ms Foley, my question is in regard to some of the alternative schools that are in our communities for those kids who do not fit into the mainstream schooling process. Can you talk a bit about the assessment and accreditation for those alternative schools in comparison to some of the mainstream schools?

CHAIR: Do you mean schools such as the YMCA youth vocational schools?

Mr O'ROURKE: Yes. There are a few different ones around for those kids who do not fit into normal schooling.

Ms Foley: There are quite a number of special assistance schools. Under the legislation, their name is 'special assistance schools'. There were 42 accredited special assistance schools within the financial year that we are reporting on. There are two schools offering special assistance at a site. These schools, as you have defined, cater to students who are disengaged in education and may not be attending or participating in a mainstream education setting. They expand provisions with adding additional sites, so they can add additional sites. The process for accreditation is the same for all schools in the non-state sector which wish to become accredited. There is no difference in standards. There is no difference in requirements in that accreditation process. When you look at our legislative provisions around what a school has to do to become accredited, it is backed up by significant support—supporting materials on our website to assist governing bodies to table their applications and to ensure that their application meets all of the requirements—but the process is the same.

There are slightly different requirements around their sites et cetera. They can have a temporary site for 200 school days, I think it is, before it becomes a permanent site. The young people who come to those schools are meant to have a meaningful education and head towards the QCE, the Queensland Certificate of Education. They are meant to get vocational and/or academic outcomes in due course through an alternative pathway. These schools work like all schools, but these schools in particular work very hard to engage those young people who, for whatever reason, have become disengaged in their schooling somewhere during the time that they have been attempting to do the learning that is required for them to have a fulfilled life and employment in the future. The nub of the question is that it is the same process of accreditation and there are the same compliance requirements. The monitoring assessments, routine assessments, the five-yearly assessments apply to all types of schools under our act.

CHAIR: My question to both agencies is in terms of diversity in your workplace. Can you talk a little about how you engage with gender diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Ms Wilton: The authority is proud of the diversity within its workforce. I think you might have picked up in our annual report that we have strong female participation, which is something, certainly as a female CEO, I am also very proud of. The participation of other groups within the authority continues to be a priority area for us. I think, though, it would be fair to say that the job market is very challenging at present. We are fortunate that we have a nearly 96 per cent retention rate. When we get high-quality people, we are keeping them, which is excellent. It is excellent in terms of the service we can then provide to schools. It is an ongoing challenge for us as an agency like other agencies as well.

CHAIR: We have heard that loud and clear from most this morning in terms of the workforce. Ms Foley, would you like to comment?

Ms Foley: The Non-State Schools Accreditation Board does not oversee its own workforce. As you would have heard in my introduction, the secretariat that supports the work of the board are employees within the Department of Education. Our role is about regulatory compliance. We do not have any of that oversight or input into the recruitment and selection of the workforce that supports us. Neither do we have control over the membership of the board. In terms of the diversity of the board, we have a seven-member board—I should know this—of which four are females.

CHAIR: There you go. You are over 50 per cent.

Ms Foley: I just had to count mentally to try to get you the number! I am not apologising; I just had to count mentally. As you know, our board is appointed by the Governor in Council. Again, it is a different situation from perhaps a board that oversees a workforce such as QCAA.

Mr LISTER: I have another question for Ms Wilton. Regarding the data on actual performance in your annual report, why is there estimated performance data instead of actual performance data in the 2021-22 report when there is a legal requirement for actual performance data to be expressed?

Ms Wilton: I am probably going to have to take that one on notice, if that is okay.

Mr LISTER: I am happy with your consent, Chair, for that to be taken on notice.

CHAIR: That is okay.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I note that one question has been taken on notice. A transcript of these proceedings will be available in due course. I thank you all for participating in the committee's inquiry today. Thank you very much for your time.

Proceedings suspended from 11.59 am to 12.05 pm.

ANDERSON, Mr Stuart, Financial Controller, Racing Queensland (via teleconference)

CALDWELL, Dr Karen, Government Liaison Officer, Racing Queensland

GILLARD, Mr Shane, Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner, Queensland Racing Integrity Commission

MURPHY, Ms Dominique, General Counsel, Queensland Racing Integrity Commission

PARNELL, Mr Brendan, Chief Executive Officer, Racing Queensland

CHAIR: I now welcome our witnesses from Racing Queensland: Mr Brendan Parnell, Chief Executive Officer; by phone Mr Stuart Anderson, Financial Controller; and Dr Karen Caldwell, Government Liaison Officer. From the Racing Integrity Commission, we have Mr Shane Gillard, Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner; and Ms Dominique Murphy, General Counsel. Welcome to you all. I will provide you both with the opportunity for opening statements. Then the committee will have some questions for you.

Mr Gillard: I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathering today and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the support that I receive from everyone at the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission, and no more so than our Deputy Commissioner, Natalie Conner. That also extends to our executive leadership team, one of which is here with me today—our General Counsel, Ms Dominique Murphy.

The 2021-22 financial year was characterised by challenges for the racing industry. We have continued to navigate through the effects of COVID and, like many in South-East Queensland, the commission also felt the effects of the flooding event in February 2022. It would be fair to say that a great deal of the previous financial year was focused on our core day-to-day operations of the business.

Our Racing Science Centre closed for a brief period due to flood damage and a number of racetracks across South-East Queensland also suffered some significant damage. That brought about a real sense of community for our people which was great to see. Everybody rolled up their sleeves to ensure that our participants knew that we were available to assist in any way we could. These challenges highlighted the unity across the industry. As participants and the commission, our people pitched in to ensure the continuation of racing.

I am pleased to report that 14,234 race meetings went ahead this year. That was an increase—168 more than the previous financial year. The community effort to overcome the recent challenges aligns with the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission's vision of a 'one industry' perspective, which is essentially uniting stakeholders and the community and working together towards an ethical and safe racing industry in Queensland. We are working with the racing industry and the community to fulfil this vision because, of course, we cannot do it on our own.

The way we do this is by safeguarding the welfare of animals involved in racing; promoting the integrity of racing by ensuring consistent and fair administration of the rules of racing; working collaboratively to engage and educate industry and stakeholders; and maintaining public confidence in the integrity of Queensland's racing industry. To that end, we have seen an increase in public confidence in the past financial year, with 78 per cent of community members surveyed last financial year reporting that they are somewhat confident or very confident that the industry is run with integrity.

Like many businesses, the commission has also faced the challenge of a tough labour market. Fortunately, we have managed to attract some new staff from interstate and we are working on an ongoing basis to enact strategies that will ensure staff retention. Despite those interruptions to our usual operations, we are very proud to announce significant achievements throughout the financial year which include: the appointment of a permanent commissioner and deputy commissioner—less than 12 months, or approaching almost 12 months anyway; the commencement of a functional realignment to improve the delivery of our services; the establishment of a new executive leadership team to provide specialist leadership in key functional areas that we strive to achieve and to support the delivery of the 'one industry' vision.

We have completed, or have converted to business as usual, all the outstanding Martin inquiry recommendations for which the commission had sole or joint responsibility for. We have also established equine and greyhound racing injury working groups, which meet quarterly to review serious and catastrophic injuries across all three codes of racing. We have enhanced the visibility of Brisbane

greyhound life cycle information in the commission's digital licensing and registration system. We have also provided the first report to the minister on greyhound life cycle data. Finally, we have enacted an internal review of QRIC's investigations and intelligence system, which is called 'Report Something', to identify and better leverage the channel as an intelligence-led tool.

Looking forward in 2023, QRIC will develop and implement improved processes to the way in which we manage our reports received about threats to integrity and the welfare of racing animals in Queensland. We will also turn our focus to key actions and priorities which include the implementation of the commission's 'one industry' vision. Queensland racing industry stakeholders share the same vision of ensuring the highest level of animal care integrity, safety, industry growth and sustainability. Our priority is to establish clear channels of communication across the breadth of the industry to ensure that everyone remains informed and aligned with industry objectives and emerging issues. This work is already underway.

In August we established the stakeholder reference group, which brings together a whole range of people across the industry including clubs, participants, peak bodies, animal advocacy agencies, of course Racing Queensland and ourselves. That provides an open forum to discuss contemporary matters with subject matter experts in the room from within the commission and the racing industry. We are also working to develop and implement the commission's risk-based and intelligence-led prohibited substance control strategy. Finally, we are focused on a strategy to modernise the operations of the commission's racing stewards which will be a major component in improving staff retention across our operations statewide.

Essentially, our key priority now and into the future is working with the community and the racing industry to develop trust in each other's roles and functions. This, of course, will enhance confidence in the industry as a whole and in the commission, empowering us to place the public and racing industry participants at the forefront of what we do.

Mr Parnell: Thank you, Chair and the committee, for the chance to come and share the results and take some questions on this year's annual report—the privilege of which I have had four full years of overseeing. I am delighted with some of the results and, echoing a couple of Shane's comments, partnering with our racing community together more and more with one platform has been vital. I also echo his comments in acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I am joined here today by Dr Karen Caldwell, veterinarian as well as being our Government Liaison Officer, and Stuart Anderson, our Financial Controller, is online.

The annual report that I referred to—which is now my fourth full year of overseeing—talked about reaching a new record revenue figure for the racing industry in Queensland. That has been done through very strong commercial endeavours—\$353.9 million, which is up five per cent in a year in which we had devastating floods. The commissioner talked about Albion Park being underwater for a period of time and the damage that caused and the disruption to our business from the global pandemic and seeing those trading results impacted.

The full year finished with Racing Queensland reporting a consolidated loss of half a million dollars. However, most pleasingly, as the industry came together and supported the commercial endeavours, our returns to participants were just under \$300 million—the highest that has ever been. That is prize money, club funding and club infrastructure, of which some of the members' local racetracks have been the beneficiaries of in recent years. It is well above our strategic target we established to try to achieve by financial year 2024; we have delivered that in financial year 2022.

Some of the other highlights from the annual report, navigating the most amazing last couple of years, include enabling racing to continue from behind closed doors. We are now coming out from behind that, giving our clubs a chance to welcome patrons back again. It has been a privilege to sit behind a lot of that. New wagering turnover records were achieved. For the committee's benefit, this year betting on Queensland racing went above \$6.7 billion. That shows the interest in Queensland racing nationally. Of course there was international turnover: thoroughbreds, \$4.4 billion; greyhounds, \$1.6 billion; and harness, \$0.7 billion. All up that was up eight per cent, so that is a great demonstration of the interest in our racing.

We all know the difficulties we have had with the Queensland TAB, and thankfully with the betting tax legislation that has been resolved. Their revenues were down, as reported in our annual report, whereas our bookmaker revenue from our race fields was up 13 per cent. The really pleasing thing, though, was the economic contribution, which Minister Grace announced in April this year, up to \$1.9 billion, and the great element of that which pleases me is 4,000 additional jobs in Queensland since financial year 2016. It is a huge stride forward. There are some major infrastructure projects now in delivery. The Sunshine Coast track was delivered last year, under budget and on time, and it is—

CHAIR: That is what we like to hear!

Mr Parnell: Yes. It is difficult in these times, Chair. What it has delivered by having washed out race meetings recovered, \$3.8 million in extra prize money was paid out; participants could still continue as well. In recent months, significantly, ministerial designation approval was received for a new greyhound centre of excellence at Purga. Bulldozers will be in there in February, all going well. Again, credit there to the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Racing for their support.

I visited the Gold Coast Turf Club construction last week—\$63 million new tracks and lights that will inject significant employment into Queensland, with export opportunities with racing under lights from the Gold Coast. One of our favourites, to members on either end of the panel, more than 36 clubs benefitted from the Country Racing Program which will now be rolled into the betting tax legislation changes which have passed the House.

Finally, the last two points, being complementary and additive to Shane's comments, the support of the government in achieving the betting tax outcome means that instead of coming back every two years and seeking to have funding renewed, we can invest in regional Queensland and metro Queensland with confidence and provide confidence to our participants, and that is also to improve the safety of our facilities which Shane and I talk quite often about. The final one is the Off The Track Program is starting to hit its straps. Three initiatives came online earlier this calendar year and already we are seeing some great numbers of horses being rehomed through subsidised lessons, accredited or acknowledged retrainers and our infrastructure grants as well. I am happy to take any questions from the committee, thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: That is wonderful. They are bringing all of those stakeholders together—the animal advocates; all of them. Is that a first, to have them all in the one room?

Mr Gillard: I would have thought so, Chair.

CHAIR: Well done.

Mr Gillard: The intent of that was to drive this 'one industry' concept that Brendan and I talk about at length. To have the club participants, peak bodies which is the jockeys' association, the trainers' association, owners and breeders, in the room, along with the likes of Animals Australia, the RSPCA, of course our own subject matter experts, it is key for us to drive forward. We are trying to be as transparent as we possibly can in the way in which we operate, and only with the help of the likes of Racing Queensland and all of those other stakeholders around the industry can we be better. This whole concept of one industry is exactly that; it is about bringing everyone together for the same cause and you get better outcomes across the board, with animal care right at the heart of what we do.

CHAIR: Exciting times. Well done.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, everyone, for coming today. Mr Gillard, I understand that you take the lead in responding to complaints about the treatment of retired animals from the racing industry. Is that correct?

Mr Gillard: That is correct.

Mr LISTER: What are the general processes involved in dealing with a complaint? How long does it take generally to respond to the complainant or to decide if action will be taken?

Mr Gillard: It depends on the way in which it enters the organisation. If it comes through the channel report, something that I mentioned a moment ago, it is generally triaged within 24 hours, and, when I say 'triaged', I mean someone will review that particular matter. We are evolving to be a risk-based regulatory model now which means that we have identified what we will not accept, what we will not tolerate in the context of those sorts of behaviours, and they become high priority for us. Anything that is categorised such as that, we are onto those pretty quickly. What I mean by that is that it will then go through our internal mechanisms, through the intelligence division or intelligence unit that we have within the organisation, and then fed out to the most appropriate person to respond and react. Whether that is code specific—for instance, if it was in relation to greyhounds, then obviously it would go across to the chief steward of greyhounds and then they would look to see what resources they have in that particular part of the state. It does become challenging for us when it is in remote parts of Queensland. Queensland is obviously a very big state. I found that out myself coming from Victoria this year. It depends on where it sits, to be honest, but we do have some standards that we are working towards internally and then that relates to the risk-based methodology that we have put in place again. It is almost like a traffic light system that we use internally.

Mr LISTER: Is it fair to say that the conditions under which animals are rehomed or turned into pets or horses for kids to ride enforceable? Obviously there are agreements that the owners of the animals are obliged to comply with on retiring them. Are you saying that once the retirement has occurred it is purely a risk-based system that ensures compliance?

Mr Gillard: Yes and no. To some extent it is. We have jurisdiction for anyone who is registered within the racing program generally across all three codes. If they are rehomed outside of, say, a participant into a general home, then it does fall under the guise of that local municipality at that point in time. However, what we also find is that the racing community is fairly well connected, and the people who would adopt that out, whether it is a horse or a dog, like to track the movement of that animal and I find that they check in. Our greyhound adoption program people, if it is a greyhound, of course, do regular check-ups as well to make sure that everything is can going okay in that context. It is a little bit different for horses because obviously they are out and not on a couch—that is for sure. They are a little harder to track down, but certainly our people keep a keen interest on those matters and obviously work through the Off The Track Program as well. We do as much as we possibly can to ensure the ongoing support of those people who take ownership of that retired racehorse or dog.

CHAIR: I give a shout-out to Love A Greyhound in my area which does a great job in rehoming greyhounds.

Mr SULLIVAN: Mr Parnell, noting that some big corporates have been the subject of some cyber attacks recently, I am interested to know, without asking specifics, what Queensland Racing does, as an organisation that may be a target of something like that, or what internal mechanisms or training do you have in place?

Mr Parnell: A lot of our data systems in racing are managed nationally by governing bodies, and I had to leave a national board meeting earlier today where this very topic was discussed. Above Queensland Racing in Australia is Racing Australia where each of the state bodies is represented by a board member and a CEO. It is the same with Australian Harness Racing and Greyhounds Australasia: we have an executive and a board member. Each of those are going through rigorous reviews of their cyber security. At the moment, we are relatively comfortable that perimeter testing could not be broken at Racing Australia. I know that Harness Racing and Greyhounds Australasia have been through similar. From our perspective, we rely on the national systems and the robustness under any sort of duress. From a customer data perspective, licensing data is maintained by QRIC. However, ownership data we also have through Racing Queensland. Our focus has been very much on the national systems.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mr Gillard, my question follows on from the question of the member for Southern Downs in regards to the welfare of animals. When it comes to greyhounds per se—and I note the greyhound adoption program—one of the pages of the report you have a 1.7 per cent return rate, and on page 13 it was four per cent. I am seeking clarification on that. What is the main reason for the return of the dogs? Has there been any quantifiable evidence?

Mr Gillard: I can speak generally about the return rate. What has come out of the last couple of years is—and I do not like to use COVID—but people were working from home during COVID, so it was easier to adopt animals. The uptake was pretty significant, I would have thought. I think all animal care agencies have seen the same and, in fact, unfortunately they are probably seeing the adverse play out a little bit now. For us, it was the fit or situational changes. Similarly, people have been returning to the office and it does not fit their family any longer. Those numbers over the last four or five years have been pretty consistent in around four per cent, so we have not seen much of a shift, to be honest. I think we will probably see much the same into the next financial year. In terms of the clarity, though, of the two numbers—you referred to page 13; is that right?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Pages 11 and 13. It talks about 1.7 per cent and then four per cent—uses the same terminology.

Mr Gillard: I refer you to the table on page 13—target versus actual. One was the target; the other one was actual. Page 11 details the results. One is the previous year as well—the result rather than target.

Mr O'ROURKE: I think the racing industry has been absolutely wonderful, from what we have seen over the last few years, in particular the infrastructure that has gone into lots of regional racetracks. In general, what do you see are the main opportunities for the racing industry in the coming years, with guaranteed funding and the like?

Mr Parnell: The significant detail that is in the annual report refers to a large pipeline of infrastructure, a pipeline which—and subject to the result of the Albion Park and discussions underway with the government at the moment—will be largely already funded by virtue of the betting

tax. That infrastructure has a tri-code and regional focus. Among the large projects that are in play, the Gold Coast track and lighting upgrade will see horses galloping over that synthetic track next month, on target and again going well with budget with all of the escalation of steel and concrete costs, and then racing under lights at the Gold Coast from January 2024.

The Greater Brisbane Greyhound Centre, which will be rebranded—it sees the merger of the Ipswich Greyhound Club and the Brisbane Greyhound Club to form a new and world-class greyhound centre south of Ipswich—will have bulldozers in in the next quarter. The final piece of the puzzle to exit Albion Park will be the relocation of metropolitan harness which will be announced very soon. That will then create some state-of-the-art venues in South-East Queensland which are the showpiece of Queensland, which will be exported to the world.

Beyond that, there is a very large regional focus. As the member for Rockhampton may recall, we have recently invested in a new stabling complex at Callaghan Park in Rockhampton, but that is not the only one. Townsville has recently received a DA up in the north, member for Hinchinbrook, and will hopefully be supporting that club for some on-course stabling. Cairns has already made a funding submission for stabling on course as well.

You will see the same in South-East Queensland. The Sunshine Coast Turf Club is under construction. A new stabling box is 126 stables or close to, thereabouts. My esteemed colleague will confirm that one. On the Gold Coast, construction will commence next year. There is a large pipeline of infrastructure which will lead the future.

The big prize, if you like, amongst that will be helping create an event centre at Eagle Farm. The facilities are old and tired and there is a large heritage overlay. As part of the Olympics infrastructure, we would like to support the development of an events centre there. There is lots of parking, it is close to the airport and it makes natural sense to have a new events centre in Brisbane. We are working with the Brisbane Racing Club on a business case for that.

We talked before about the quality of our tracks. An important matter is a significant investment in our racetracks for quality, safety and suitability will be ongoing. You will have noted in our annual report that the infrastructure expenditure with our clubs has significantly stepped up in recent years. It is to deliver higher quality racetracks more suitable for racing. There are some difficulties in remote venues that only race once a year.

I think the future will be pinned on infrastructure, in answer to your question, member for Rockhampton. However, the major events and innovation focus will continue. Your city, the Beef City, hosts one of the richest regional races in Queensland—the Archer—a slot race in May, and next year it reaches another high level of prize money, whereas the member for Southern Downs has a competing race on New Year's Eve, the King of the Mountain. The rivalry between both of your electorates—

CHAIR: Can you see what I have to manage here!

Mr Parnell: That innovation focus will continue. Next year Queensland is hosting the Inter Dominion, which is the showpiece pacing event in the Southern Hemisphere. It is fantastic. It has not been here for a very long time. In answer to that question, the second piece will be innovation, and the third one will be a very big focus around people, so our talent pipeline. When we fronted estimates two years ago, we had only 63 students enrolled, and already we are up to over 100 this year and 78 per cent of those are female. The career pipelines are fantastic. At a race club level, we need to help with governance and be able to improve what is an ageing volunteer base and help our clubs bring more people through. They are the key priorities. Our joint focus will be on animal care and welfare as well as we look to give great careers and post careers to our animals.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is in relation to the community's attitude towards racing integrity. Before I ask the question, I congratulate Mr Parnell on overseeing a fourth year of these reports. That is a brilliant achievement. Page 13 of the report says that 33 per cent of community members that were surveyed believed the integrity of racing had only slightly improved over the last 12 months. Can you give us an overview on those low results? Also, what can Queensland Racing do to improve that over the next 12 months?

Mr Gillard: If I can just clarify that position, there is a footnote below that—footnote 2—that clarifies that 87 per cent of people believed the integrity of racing remain unchanged or had improved over that period. That one is a funny measure. The 33 per cent was that it had improved not that it had retracted, which is what the target suggests, so it is a bit confusing.

Mr DAMETTO: It is a bit of a skewed one, that is for sure.

Mr Gillard: Just to put it on the record, 87 per cent of people believed that the integrity of racing remain unchanged or had improved for that period of the annual report.

Mr DAMETTO: Are there any plans for improvement over the next 12 months?

Mr Gillard: There is, and probably part of the last question plays out in this response as well. What we are trying to achieve in the future—and when I say the future I mean right now—is to decentralise and regionalise our operations to make sure that people in the community are better connected with the racing industry and the racing program more broadly. One of the things you would notice with the racing program in Queensland is that it is vast, diverse and very dispersed. Brendan spoke about just the one race meeting here and there all over the place. We are setting up regional hubs, if you like, which means it will put leadership and probably more resources in the likes of Rockhampton as a regional hub for us and of course Toowoomba as another regional hub.

We have identified that our ability to be able to respond will be enhanced by the establishment of those hubs, rather than having to deploy people from central or metropolitan areas to get out. Also, we know that people in the regional centres enjoy the land and they also enjoy animals on the land, so it makes absolute sense for us to tie the two together and offer employment opportunities to those who are closest to the program out in those areas. That does not extend just to Toowoomba and Rockhampton; it certainly goes to other reaches of the state as well.

I was at Roma on the weekend last for the Roma Cup. It was a fantastic day and I had lots of conversations with people out there. In fact there was a vet who operates in and around that area, and he explained the importance of the regional racing program to me through his lens and he supports about 20. They are some of the other things we are doing to not only enhance integrity in the regions or throughout the breadth of Queensland but connect the people to the program and to connect communities essentially.

CHAIR: I imagine the greyhound centre for excellence will add an enormous amount of value in that space as well moving forward.

Mr Gillard: I certainly think so. It is being designed for the highest level of integrity and safety when it comes to those racing animals. The ability to have three tracks in one centre of excellence out there certainly assists the industry moving forward.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I thank you for your time today.

Mr Parnell: Can I clarify a couple of my earlier points for the record. I have been corrected in relation to Sunshine Coast stables in that 128 are being constructed. I was getting ahead of myself on the Off The Track grants program. The infrastructure grants program is a future program. The event sponsorship program, which is for not-for-profit and charities for vet care and training of horses, is underway.

CHAIR: I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment. Queensland Racing will miss you. I thank everybody for appearing today. The time for the briefing has expired. I thank all of our witnesses for the information you have provided today. I thank our Hansard reporters, our secretariat and the parliamentary broadcast staff for their assistance. A transcript of these proceedings will be available in due course. I note in this session there were no questions taken on notice but we did have one in the previous session. Answers for those are due by close of business on Monday, 12 December so we can include them in our deliberations. I declare this hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 12.35 pm.