

THURSDAY, 1 AUGUST 2024

ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND SKILLS COMMITTEE—EDUCATION; YOUTH JUSTICE

Estimate Committee Members

Hon. MC Bailey—Chair
Mr JP Lister
Mr N Dametto
Ms M Nightingale
Mr BL O'Rourke
Mr D Zanow

Members in Attendance

Dr CAC Rowan
Ms FS Simpson
Mr MC Berkman
Dr A MacMahon
Mrs LJ Gerber
Mr BA Mickelberg

In Attendance

Hon. DE Farmer, Minister for Education and Minister for Youth Justice
Ms C Collier, Chief of Staff
Ms K Auguston, Senior Policy Advisor

Department of Education

Mr M De'Ath, Director-General
Mr D Anson, Chief Finance Officer and Assistant Director-General, Finance
Ms T Porter, Deputy Director-General, Early Childhood

Department of Youth Justice

Mr R Gee APM, Director-General
Mr MI Drane, Deputy Director-General, Youth Justice Services

The committee met at 9.00 am.



CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this hearing of the estimates for the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee open. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and offer our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all now share.

My name is Mark Bailey. I am the member for Miller and chair of the committee. Mr James Lister to my left is the member for Southern Downs and the deputy chair of the committee. The other members of the committee are: Ms Margie Nightingale, the member for Inala; Mr Nick Dametto, the member for

Hinchinbrook; Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; and Mr Darren Zanow, the member for Ipswich West. The committee is joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today. I welcome the member for Moggill.

I remind everybody present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the chair's discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

Staff who are assisting our witnesses here today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. I ask all present to ensure that all phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. Do not be that person. I also remind everyone that food and drink are not permitted in this chamber.

This year the House has determined the program for the committee's estimates hearing. Today the committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the portfolios of the Minister for Education and Minister for Youth Justice, and the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the time specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House available throughout the chamber and on the committee's webpage.

This first session will examine the proposed expenditure for the education portfolio and the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority until 11.30 am. We will suspend proceedings for an intermission between 11.30 am and 11.45 am. I remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing orders and rules of the Legislative Assembly. In respect of government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides that a member may ask any question that the committee determines will assist it in its examination of the relevant Appropriation Bill or otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the Minister for Education and Minister for Youth Justice, the director-general, officials, departmental officers and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of education and the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish you may make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Ms FARMER: Thank you very much, Chair, and committee members for the opportunity to address you. I acknowledge the Turrbal and Yagara people and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I grew up on Bailai country.

I am very pleased to have the joint portfolios of education and youth justice because we know that they are inextricably linked. Education is the means by which we can give all Queensland children the best start in life and the Miles Labor government believes that no matter who you are or where you are in Queensland, you deserve the same access to that high-quality education. It is why this year we will develop a record \$20.9 billion education budget, rolling out, among others: our Putting Queensland Kids First strategy to give children that good start from conception; a youth engagement strategy, recognising that not all children can thrive in a mainstream classroom; our record \$1.3 billion capital budget, which includes our playground and tuckshops program; Go for Gold; two new schools to open in 2025, bringing us to a total of 29 new schools since 2015; our commitment to hiring 2,000 specialist staff to provide wraparound support for students with disabilities in schools; our \$15 million school and community food relief program; and our GPs in Schools program.

We need to also look after our school staff, whose responsibilities are enormous. Our staff are dealing with increasingly complex environments. Managing student behaviour, providing the right support for increasing numbers of students with disabilities, occupational violence and dealing with workforce shortages are all significant challenges. It is why I have established specialised round tables comprising stakeholders from right across the education spectrum to collectively come up with practical solutions. Our workforce round table, for instance, has focused on finding innovative solutions to attract, recruit and retain teachers.

I have already announced in the last week the results of our workload survey and what we are doing to cut administrative tasks for teachers, our Grow Your Own Workforce pilots in three regions that are experiencing greatest teacher shortages, Far North Queensland, North Queensland and Central Queensland; incentives for teachers to work in high-priority areas; an expanded rural and remote teacher experience program; and reconnecting with retired teachers, offering them short- to medium-term relief placements. I am delighted to announce even more great news on that front today: a \$54.5 million teacher workforce package with 200 more Turn to Teaching internships, 30 more Trade to Teach internships and a \$300 increase in the regional attraction and retention payment for state school teachers working in high-priority regional locations. If the average person knew of the physical and verbal abuse teachers and other staff are seeing in their schools every day they would be astonished. I will be very clear on this. We have zero tolerance for occupational violence. Building on previous actions, we have been working closely with stakeholders to address occupational violence. I will be pleased to announce further details of those actions very soon.

Not every child who is disengaged from education is in the youth justice system, but every child in the youth justice system is disengaged from education. That is why every element of our \$288 million youth engagement program is so critical. Today I am very pleased to announce the newest of those elements, 24 new flexi spaces, adding to the 34 already announced this year including seven in primary schools and two in primary-secondary school clusters. In addition to the two new pathways colleges already announced recently in Toowoomba and Mount Isa, a new pathways college campus in the north of Brisbane will be announced in the near future. Our \$481.5 million youth justice budget complements this program and supports the recently released Community Safety Plan and the Safer Queensland—Queensland Youth Justice Strategy 2024-2028. In both we focus on prevention, early intervention and detention and, of course, always supporting victims. After significant investment over a number of years under our previous Youth Justice Strategy, we are already seeing the results: a 30 per cent drop in the number of youth offenders in the past 10 years and a 14 per cent drop in serious repeat offenders.

We will always need to do more and that will include our new On Country programs. I am pleased to announce today that Mossman-based Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC has been appointed to deliver the new Far North Queensland intensive On Country youth justice program in addition to Mithangkaya Nguli Young People Ahead Youth and Community Services Indigenous Corporation, which I announced just last week in Mount Isa. We are open to evidence-based proposals for further services to address offending by young people.

The Miles government is committed to doing what matters. I look forward to discussing these and other key programs throughout this hearing. Thank you to the committee for your work and for your interest in this portfolio. I look forward to sharing with you the outcomes of the government's commitments in my two portfolios and the hard work of the staff of my departments and of all our stakeholders.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Southern Downs.

Mr LISTER: Thanks, Chair. I defer to Dr Rowan.

CHAIR: I call the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Chair, and welcome, Minister, Director-General and other representatives. Minister, let's get this party started! With reference to the Rochedale State School asbestos incident, on 22 May 2024 your senior policy adviser advised that students whose parents did not wish for them to return to affected classrooms are being taught in a newly refurbished classroom. Minister, are you aware that this option had in fact been removed for parents five days earlier on 17 May 2024?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. As to specific dates, I will just wait for my advisers to give me information about those specific details. However, I compliment the principal and the leadership team of Rochedale State School for guiding their school community through this really quite stressful situation given the media attention. Obviously any discovery of asbestos in a school evokes a very quick response. We have a well-established and robust protocol for dealing with asbestos. Parents of all of the students were made aware of the situation very quickly and both parents and staff were given the option. They were moved to different classrooms. After the remediation work had occurred and after several hygienists had declared the spaces safe, parents were still given the option whether to return those children to their classrooms.

Dr ROWAN: Specifically, Minister, just in relation to you being aware of the incorrect correspondence, were you aware of that?

Ms FARMER: I just got a note. I do not have the dates of specific times and meetings, so I will have to get back to you about that. I am not going to recall necessarily what dates certain things happened, but we will get back to you about that through this hearing.

Dr ROWAN: Okay. You are happy to take that on notice?

Ms FARMER: Yes. Sorry, but could I just clarify: you are referring to some correspondence from my senior policy adviser; is that correct?

Dr ROWAN: 22 May was the correspondence, but in fact this option had been removed five days earlier on 17 May.

Ms FARMER: Okay. I will have to get back to the member about that.

CHAIR: Just to clarify, is that coming back to the committee today or on notice?

Ms FARMER: Yes, through this hearing, yes.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Dr ROWAN: In a letter to the Clerk of the Parliament on 19 April 2024, Minister, you said that only one student had left Rochdale State School because of the asbestos incident. Is this still the case, Minister?

Ms FARMER: I do have figures on that. In fact, since 13 March 2024, 37 students have left Rochdale State School since that date. Twenty-five were from years 1, 2 and 3 and three were siblings of these students. Forty new students have enrolled at Rochdale since 13 March—19 in years 1, 2 and 3 and 21 from other year levels. Including prep, overall enrolments are up by four in this time period.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you. Whistleblower parents have told the Queensland opposition that at least 23 students have left Rochdale State School because of this asbestos incident. Director-General, has the department contacted each of these families and sought their feedback?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I am not aware that we have carried out an inquiry into all of those departures, just going back to the minister's previous response about the changes in enrolments at Rochdale State School and where those figures have landed, but happy to check whether we have done that, member, and come back to you in the course of this hearing.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, if that has not been done, do you commit to following up with those parents to get their feedback?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. We are always happy to follow-up with people around a whole range of incidents. That is an important part of the work we do. I think there has been a lot of interaction between these families and certainly the school principal and other regional staff during the course of that activity. I will determine whether I think that is sufficient in terms of the feedback we have required on this matter.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, who made the determination that parents would be reimbursed only \$150 to replace asbestos impacted stationery packs given that the cost was actually \$250?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the follow-up question. That is a standard procedure we follow about the costs that arise for reimbursement for such incidents.

Dr ROWAN: Okay, so the department, Director-General, is comfortable with a \$100 gap for parents?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member again for the follow-up question. As I have said, this is a procedure we follow in relation to cost reimbursements around these things and I remind everyone that the hygienists have cleared the school for further work. In terms of anything that happens around an increased cost for a family or hardship on all sorts of issues, people can approach the principal about that and have a conversation about whether they require further support. Principals are quite expert at determining with families whether there is a need for any further support. In this case if people do require some extra assistance, they can talk to the principal about that.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, will the department reimburse the Rochdale State School P&C for the \$12,000 it donated to cover the \$100 gap per student?

Mr De'Ath: As I have said, people are welcome to contact the principal where there are elements of hardship, and that includes the P&C.

Dr ROWAN: Are you willing to follow that up as director-general with the principal given the fact that the Rochdale State School P&C has covered the gap? Is this \$12,000 gap a responsibility or leadership responsibility of the director-general to follow that up with the principal?

Mr De'Ath: We are certainly happy to follow-up with principals on a vast range of matters. We are happy to follow-up on this. It is a local decision by the school. Those things are delegated to principals at the local level and I applaud this principal for how responsive they have been to this entire issue. That principal has been under incredible scrutiny and demand during this period. If there are matters that relate to the need for financial reimbursement or costs, that is a decision at the local level by the principal.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, the Rochdale State School community created a Go Fund Me page to support teachers by restocking their personal classroom libraries and replacing vital teaching resources. Why are Rochdale State School parents being asked to fund the Department of Education's core responsibilities?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. My understanding and the advice that I have been given is that, following feedback from the P&C and the school community, the principal has further communicated with parents that they have options regarding the replacement of materials and that parents could source any required book pack items directly from the school for the remainder of the year at no cost. Alternatively, if parents wanted to source the replacements personally, they could do so and claim a financial refund of up to \$150 without requiring any JP certification. I was advised that the P&C secretary and the P&C president were supportive of this simplified process and that all student and staff reimbursement requests have been processed by the school. However, if there remain concerns about costs, as the director-general has said, principals have the authority to determine those decisions with their school communities. If there are still concerns, then I am absolutely certain and confident and would really encourage the P&C to raise that with me and my office or if the principal had any concerns to raise that with the director-general or with her superiors.

I just want to acknowledge that this was a very stressful situation, as I said, not just because there is asbestos, and of course the school leadership and the parent community want to make sure everything is done quickly and properly and that they are responsive, but there was intense media scrutiny on this issue, including a number of exchanges in parliament. This was a very stressful situation for everybody and we want to make sure that everybody feels fully supported.

Dr ROWAN: Very stressful for the parents and they want their voices heard. Director-General, at 4 pm on 19 March 2024 a meeting was held between departmental representatives and parents of Rochdale State School as well as with teachers and the department's chief health adviser to discuss the asbestos incident. Why did you not attend this meeting, Director-General?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. A whole range of things happen across 1,264 schools every day and I certainly would not be attending all of those, and nor would it be appropriate. I have a very high degree of confidence in my staff and I have a very high degree of confidence in their understanding and their approach to dealing with our procedures around asbestos. We have asbestos throughout so many of our schools and this is incredibly well managed and highly responsive. When I tracked—and I tracked this issue from beginning to end—and looked at our responsiveness, I was very happy with how that was being managed. If I had had any concerns—any concerns at all—about our management of the issue that warranted me to attend the school, I certainly would have.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, parents have expressed concerns to the Queensland opposition that you and the minister attended the Pink concert later that night. Director-General, wouldn't it have been a better use of your time to attend this important meeting and consider not attending the Pink concert?

Mr De'Ath: As I have said, I have a very high degree of confidence in my staff and how they were managing this issue and also other parts of government, I might add. That event was a recognition event to our incredible stakeholders who have played such a critical role in delivering things like our Equity and Excellence plan, our workforce plan in early childhood and the free kindy initiative. There was an opportunity to recognise these people. That event was an important event for us to be acknowledging them and talking with them again. If I had any concerns whatsoever about the management of the asbestos issue at Rochdale State School, I would have been there.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, you were in parliament, obviously, during the 4 pm meeting but you did attend the Pink concert later that night. How soon after attending the Pink concert did you receive your first briefing about the 4 pm asbestos meeting that had occurred at Rochdale State School?

Ms FARMER: I would have to take that question on notice and get back to you through the hearing. I do not recall. I have to say, I have extremely responsive staff and it is very rare that when issues arise I do not hear about them as quickly as possible. Can I say, too, my office took that issue

extremely seriously. In fact, an adviser from my office was quite involved with the school and with meetings at the school to make sure that he was fully aware of the situation and could advise me. As to specific times, I will—

Dr ROWAN: If you could take that on notice?

CHAIR: I think the minister has already said she will take it on notice.

Ms FARMER: Could I clarify, though, that if it was verbal I may not be able to give the member the answer. If it was in an email, clearly I will have a record of that.

Dr ROWAN: If you could furnish us with any information as to how you were briefed or advised—

CHAIR: The minister has given that commitment so I think that is fair enough.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, on the gifts and benefits register you state that the benefit to the Queensland community for you accepting the ticket to attend the concert was that the invite was provided by the minister. Could you give me a further reason or give me a reason, Director-General, why you had to go to the Pink concert?

Mr De'Ath: I think I may have already responded to that. This is a really important group of stakeholders who have played a critical role in the work that we undertake as a department. When it is an event that is of that profile with that level of stakeholders, it is very common that I would be there accompanying the minister.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, how long after parliament did it take for you to get this party started at Suncorp Stadium?

CHAIR: I am sorry, member. I do not think that is exactly in parliamentary form. You might like that to rephrase that to be relevant to the budget.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, with your ministerial diary showing that you attended this concert with invited guests, ministerial staff and department staff, how many people attended the Pink concert with you?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I will get you the exact number of people who attended. The director-general has just given me that number. There were 18 attendees. As the director-general has outlined, at that event were key stakeholders from education, a very new portfolio for me. It was an opportunity to not only speak personally with those stakeholders and really strengthen those relationships, but for them to actually do so together. There were also some youth justice stakeholders there, from recollection. It is very important that our education and youth justice stakeholders have an opportunity to speak to each other. The nexus between the two is critical.

I would hate to impugn your intent here, and I do not believe the member perhaps is attempting to paint some kind of picture that all we do is party.

Dr ROWAN: No, Minister.

Ms FARMER: Could I just say, I would have to personally ask each member but I think it unlikely that any member of parliament has not attended a corporate event. I have certainly been to corporate events where members of non-government parties have been present and enjoying the hospitality of various hosts. It is an accepted way to develop relationships and have the opportunity to network and to learn each other's position on a personal level. It also an acknowledgement of the work that those stakeholders do.

For me as a reasonably new education minister, I had the chance to invite these people to an event to thank them for their contribution. These people work incredibly hard. I have to say, they have been putting so many extra hours in, even in the last few months, to make sure that we get solutions to some issues. To be able to thank them and to have the opportunity to spend that time with them is something that all members of parliament ascribe to.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to the member for Inala.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: With reference to Budget Paper No. 2, can the minister update the committee on the cost-of-living assistance programs available to schools, parents and carers to assist with the costs of education?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I am keenly aware of the cost-of-living pressures being experienced by Queensland families. I know the member for Inala has also heard from her local constituents about how important it is that we use every lever possible to help families with cost-of-living pressures. The Miles Labor government provides extensive support to state school students, parents and carers for out-of-pocket and cost-of-living expenses, including the Textbook and Resource Allowance of \$155 per student for years 7 to 10 and \$337 per student for years 11 and 12.

We provide access to free and subsidised digital devices for learning, with over 42,300 devices provided and around \$30 million invested since 2020, including 150 devices at Glenala State High School—we loved having them here at Parliament House yesterday—and 60 devices at Serviceton South State School amongst others in the Inala electorate. We provide water safety and swimming education grant funding, which recently quadrupled to \$0.65 million.

We provide \$32.1 million over four years from 2022-23 and \$6.4 million per annum ongoing over four years to install, stock and maintain Dignity Vending Machines at all interested state schools, outdoor education centres and student residential facilities, including at Forest Lake State High School, Forest Lake State School, Glenala State High School, Grand Avenue State School, Inala State School, Richlands East State School, Serviceton South State School and Western Suburbs State Special School in the member's electorate. Congratulations to those schools for being so proactive on that really important initiative.

Our \$106.7 million Student Wellbeing Package is providing access to mental health support from GPs, psychologists or similar wellbeing professionals at no cost to students or their families. In 2023-24 there is \$10.2 million to support geographically isolated families through the Living Away from Home Allowances Scheme and, in the last financial year, \$2 million for 861 low ICSEA schools to enhance their school food program, including \$500,000 to non-government organisations to support food programs at 253 schools including breakfast programs across all schools in the Inala electorate. This financial year we will also provide \$10.7 million in funding directly to state schools to enhance the delivery of healthy food and drink to students during the school day. I was so pleased to see that Inala State School was successful in the first tranche of 99 schools announced in 2024.

We know state schools do much more through their P&Cs and the hard work of school staff. Our schools are working hard every day to support students to access education and reduce the cost-of-living pressures on families. We know we are already doing a lot but that families need so much more assistance in these tough times. That is why the Department of Education will be writing to all school principals to advise that we are undergoing a consultation process in relation to fees and charges in schools and how we can best support parents and carers with cost-of-living expenses. We know students should not miss out on things like camps and excursions or activities at school because their families are doing it tough. We acknowledge that many of our schools go above and beyond to respond to individual and local community needs to reduce out-of-pocket expenses and support every student to realise their potential. I want to thank them for their dedication. These programs are on top of the Miles Labor government's \$1,000 energy subsidy; our 50-cent public transport fares, which are starting next week; 20 per cent off car rego; and the FairPlay vouchers, which I know are snapped up the minute that they are announced.

CHAIR: We will go back to the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I have a final question in relation to the Rochedale State School asbestos incident. Just give me a reason why 18 stakeholders were more important than the health and wellbeing of students at Rochedale State School?

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair: imputation.

CHAIR: Can you rephrase that question?

Dr ROWAN: Minister, parents of Rochedale State School want to understand why the priorities of 18 stakeholders were put ahead of the potential health and wellbeing exposure from asbestos at that school.

CHAIR: Sorry, that still has an imputation. Can you rephrase it?

Mr LISTER: Chair, he is asking for an explanation about the minister's priorities. I think that is entirely within scope.

CHAIR: No, it is not. There is a clear imputation in the question. I am happy to allow a question that conforms to the standing orders.

Mr LISTER: Well it is does.

CHAIR: Sorry. I will deal with the member for Moggill, who is actually asking the question. Member for Moggill, can you rephrase the question without the imputation please?

Dr ROWAN: Minister, have you had an opportunity to meet with parents of Rochedale State School in relation to their concerns as a result of this asbestos incident?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. As I advised earlier, one of my senior advisers has been present at a number of meetings at the school including with parents.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: The minister is being responsive to the question.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Chair. The question was specific: will the minister commit to meeting with parents of Rochedale State School in relation to this asbestos incident?

Ms FARMER: Chair, may I finish answering—

CHAIR: Sorry, that is not a point of order; that is a question.

Ms FARMER: Chair, I was asked one question, so I can continue to answer that before I answer the next question?

CHAIR: Minister, you can continue to answer the question that was asked. If the member has follow-up questions, he is welcome to ask them.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. As I was about to say, my senior adviser has met—in fact, was in very frequent contact with the school. My assistant minister attended the school. Immediately, when potential asbestos was identified, the protocols kicked into action—immediately. The areas were cordoned off. Students were removed to safe places in the school. Parents were notified. Remediation work was undertaken—

Dr ROWAN: Have you met with parents?

Ms FARMER:—and hygienists. The school principal has briefed my office and through the department to me her dealings with parents and her communication, and I have been very happy with the actions that she has undertaken.

Dr ROWAN: But you have not met with parents.

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, the minister is being responsive to the question. I will not tolerate interjections when the minister is being responsive to the question that you have just asked.

Ms FARMER: Thank you, Chair. If there had been any question in my mind whatsoever that the situation was not being dealt with in an entirely professional manner—that parents had not been briefed on a regular basis, that there was anything untoward about the process or the communication with parents about the safety of the children; if there had been any question whatsoever that any member of that school community needed me personally to meet with them, other than having the full attention of the department, other than having my assistant minister and my senior adviser very involved in local meetings with the school; if there had been any request from the P&C or from any parent, then I would most certainly have been involved.

Chair, I have already referred to the leadership of the school in this situation. Any principal dealing with identification of asbestos deals with that so professionally according to our protocols. Not many principals have to do that in the full glare of the media spotlight and through extended exchanges in parliament. I find the member's questioning really insulting to the principal of that school that somehow she was not able to deal with this situation. She and her leadership team handled that situation in the most exemplary manner.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair, on relevance: this is all very interesting but we are not asking about the qualities of the principal. The member for Moggill has asked about the minister's engagement with the parent population at that school, and we have been going on for minutes here without answering that question. Can I ask you, Chair, to direct that the minister answers the question that was asked of her?

CHAIR: I thank the member for Southern Downs for his point of order. The minister is being responsive to the question, but I do ask the minister to wrap up her answer.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member. I believe I have answered the question quite thoroughly.

Dr ROWAN: The minister has not met with parents. I will move on. Minister, following the asbestos incident at Rochedale State School, what steps has the government taken to reassure parents and students of the over 140 other schools where there are over 700 confirmed cases of ceiling asbestos present?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. The first thing we did to reassure parents about asbestos management was when we returned to government in 2015 and were able to remedy the LNP's approach to asbestos management.

Dr ROWAN: This is desperate.

Ms FARMER: I know that when the LNP were in government they reclassified low-density asbestos board from friable to non-friable which we reversed when we were in government because it did not reflect the seriousness of the risk. Our overall response is to treat asbestos management quite seriously.

As the member would know, our infrastructure portfolio includes aged assets, with 90 per cent of schools with confirmed, assumed or removed asbestos-containing materials. Many of our buildings were built prior to 1990, so there is a recognition that asbestos exists. We manage our assets to meet the requirements of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and the Queensland Government Asbestos Management Policy for its Assets. Our aim is to minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres at our schools. We provide asbestos awareness to all staff and have a dedicated asbestos management course for staff with facility management responsibilities.

In the last financial year, funding of \$47.6 million was allocated for the removal of ACM and to undertake asbestos audits. Funding of \$56.5 million is planned for these activities in this financial year. Our annual asbestos management program involves audits and removals by QBuild, in addition to responding to departmental asbestos related materials. During the last financial year, 498 asbestos audits were completed as at 30 June 2024. During that financial year QBuild removed ACM and low-density board from 425 buildings across the state—264 under the asbestos removal program and 161 under the low-density board removal program.

Chair, there is a regular audit process. Our program for removing and dealing with asbestos is based on a priority rating scheme. That is the proactive program. Of course, if asbestos is discovered—for example, in the Rochedale situation—outside of that program then there is a very strict regime which applies. Those procedures are put in place immediately including, first and foremost, ensuring the safety of the students and staff at those schools. I am happy if the member would like to go through that process in more detail. Not only do we have a rolling program of asbestos management to make sure we are addressing it, but also our staff, including cleaners, are very well aware of asbestos management.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I want to understand: given these asbestos incidents right across our state, including at Rochedale State School, with reference to the capital program can you explain the more than half a billion dollars in infrastructure underspend in the last two years?

Ms FARMER: Is the member referring to the infrastructure program overall?

Dr ROWAN: If you look the capital program on page 7 of the SDS, there is more than half a billion dollars in infrastructure underspend over the last two years. We have all of these problems with asbestos at Rochedale and schools right across the state. Shouldn't that money have been allocated for remediation works in these schools?

CHAIR: The question refers to previous budgets, whereas we are looking at the current budget. I will give the minister latitude—

Mr Lister interjected.

CHAIR: Order! I will allow the minister some latitude in her response. I will allow the question.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. As I said, around 90 per cent of our schools have asbestos because of the date at which these schools were built. It is not feasible to remove all asbestos at once, especially given that we must have it removed by licensed contractors under the supervision of hygienists outside of school hours. Much of that asbestos does not place people at risk. Member, I can talk about when asbestos is considered a risk, but I assume that every member of the committee understands that. There is a very strict and robust rating scheme which identifies risk for materials containing asbestos, and any that meet or exceed that threshold are prioritised for removal. We have stringent processes for that removal. Over and above identifying those priorities, the audit process continues in a rolling program to make sure that rating scheme is met. If there is any suggestion whatsoever that a school is at risk the protocol goes into place immediately. As happened at Rochedale State School, children and staff are moved to a safe place. Areas of schools which are considered at risk are cordoned off. The specialists move in and remediation work is done.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair.

Ms FARMER: Hygienists must declare a situation safe.

Mr LISTER: A dissertation about procedures is not what the question was about. It was about why the government has not proceeded with more asbestos works when there were funds available and they remain unspent. We have not had an answer to that yet, Chair, and I ask you to please direct the minister to answer the question.

CHAIR: Minister, if you would like to come back to the specific part of the question.

Ms FARMER: Chair, I believe I have answered that question. I am not sure how many different ways I can speak about this. We are getting questions from a party that downgraded asbestos management—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair.

Ms FARMER:—placing more schools at risk because of their classification of asbestos in schools.

CHAIR: Minister, there is a point of order. First of all, member for Southern Downs, if you wish to make a point of order you do not interject on the minister and then raise a point of order: you raise a specific point of order. You are the deputy chair and you know the standing orders, so I ask you to comply with the standing orders. What is your point of orders?

Mr LISTER: In answering the question the minister may not debate the subject of the question and must be relevant. I ask that you direct the minister to be so.

CHAIR: Thank you for your point of order. I think the minister has answered the question. We are going to move on to the member for Rockhampton.

Mr O'ROURKE: My question is of the minister. With reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you please update the committee on the initiatives of the Miles government is undertaking to attract and retain teachers and school leaders in regional Queensland, particularly in specialist training areas and hard-to-staff locations.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I know how closely he works with his local teachers and acknowledge the many conversations we have had on this very topic. The Miles Labor government is steadfast in our commitment to attract and retain a strong and sustainable teaching workforce in regional Queensland. I established an education workforce round table consisting of stakeholders from right across the Queensland education sector, including state schools, independent and Catholic schools, unions and principal associations as well as representatives from universities and government departments to bring to the table ideas to improve teacher attraction, recruitment and retention in Queensland. As a government, we are providing increased funding for key initiatives designed to support teachers and school leaders in rural and remote areas. In the 2024-25 budget we are investing an additional \$54.5 million to support Queensland's education workforce in key areas of priority, including specialist skills and regional, rural and remote communities. That funding includes: \$25.7 million to expand the Turn to Teaching internship program with an additional 200 places; \$10.5 million to expand the Trade to Teach internship with an additional 30 places; and \$18.3 million to provide attraction and retention payments to teachers at regional schools who have met workforce criteria. The member already knows we are establishing Grow Your Own local workforce groups that will include the member's area of Central Queensland because it is an area that has higher than the average number of teacher vacancies. Those initiatives which I just described will be the focus of those three particular priority areas.

The government is investing \$3 million in the rural and remote housing incentive scheme for 2024-25 to provide additional incentives for teachers commencing positions in priority rural and remote schools across the state. Already 64 teacher vacancies have been filled in priority schools since this was announced in June 2024. Under this scheme newly appointed or transferred teachers to one of 27 nominated schools will be provided with incentives to cover reasonable housing costs for 12 months. The incentive runs from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. The schools covered by this scheme in the member's electorate include: Rockhampton state high, Glenmore state high, North Rockhampton state high; along with others in Central Queensland like Sarina state high, Pioneer state high, Clermont state high, Eimeo Road State School, Mount Larcom State School, Toolooa state high and Biloela state high. There are also schools in the Darling Downs, south-west, North Queensland and Far North Queensland included in the scheme, recognising that some areas have a harder time attracting teaching staff. Whatever we can do to make it easy to attract and retain staff in local school communities that is what we will do.

In addition to this important scheme we doubled funding for the Rural and Remote Teacher Experience program for 2024-25. We know that if we can get students out doing prac in regional areas they are more likely to take up positions there. This offers a great one-week experience for urban Queensland state school teachers who might be considering rural and remote teaching. It is such an exciting conversation with people who have done that prac experience: they never look back; they just want to go and stay there. Notably, almost half of the teachers who participated in this program have chosen to transfer to rural and regional areas. We love to hear that, and I would wave the flag for any

teacher who is interested to talk to our Teach Queensland team, which is very good at persuading people to go to those areas. As part of our workforce round table we did announce those Grow Your Own initiatives, which will be a benefit in North Queensland, Far North Queensland and Central Queensland. There will be more announcements to come out of these local groups. I look forward to updating the committee and the local member as they roll out.

In a diverse and decentralised state like Queensland it is critical that we look at creating workforce opportunities right across those areas so those students have the same access to the excellent education provided to students right across Queensland. We believe these initiatives are going to be very important.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you, Minister, for that response. With reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you please update the committee on the investments being made to support students with disabilities in special and mainstream schools and their teachers and families?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I have been to two special schools in the Rockhampton electorate, and what a delight it was to open the new learning centre at Rockhampton North Special School in March. I want to thank principal Dehlia Dawson for being such a wonderful host. What a great example of a school that provides opportunities for all of their students to thrive. With the Premier we visited the building project at the Rockhampton Special School in June. Can I say that you have two great special schools in your local area.

We recognise the important partnership that parents and schools have and how beneficial that is to a child's learning and life outcomes. That is why we encourage all parents to engage with their school community. We have specialised staff, like guidance officers and head of special education services, who can walk alongside parents to assist with supporting students at school.

There is always more to be done. Recommendations from the final report of the disability royal commission do provide a great opportunity for us to continue in our journey to strengthen inclusive education. I welcome the response from the Queensland government to the royal commission that was released by Minister Mullen yesterday. We recognise there are diverse views and the need for ongoing discussion and consultation regarding some aspects of the disability royal commission recommendations, particularly those related to special schools.

I have always advocated for parent choice. As a former speech pathologist, it is something which I have always held quite passionate views about. All parents need to be assured that their children will be welcomed and supported at their local school but that they will also have the option to make other choices for their children if they wish. Our government is committed to implementing responses to the recommendations that provide better support for all Queensland state school students with disability, school staff and families who support all students to realise their potential.

We know that education changes lives. We have laws in place that enshrine the right of every child and young person to have an education, including students with disabilities. To assist Queensland state schools to make the right adjustments at the right time, the budget for this financial year included a record \$2.035 billion for students with disability, an increase of 29.2 per cent from the previous year. This will include providing for 2,000 FTE equivalents of specialist teachers and wraparound services like physios, occupational therapists and speech therapists. We know how important these additional support roles are to supporting not just students with disabilities but their teachers and families.

We know about the reasonable adjustments resourcing model which resources all state schools based on the adjustments teachers report they are making for students in the classroom, regardless of the types of disability. In the 2024 school year, \$1.153 billion of RAR funding was allocated for that purpose.

CHAIR: We will go back to the opposition.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to the capital program, Minister, what level of influence does the CFMEU have on Queensland education worksites?

Ms FARMER: I would have to direct that question to the director-general. I have no knowledge of what goes on on worksites on education department locations.

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I do not believe the CFMEU have influence over us in any way, shape or form on our worksites. I certainly have not met with them in relation to this portfolio in the last year.

Dr ROWAN: Given the director-general's testimony there, Minister, I have been informed by a whistleblower that the CFMEU harassed subcontractors on a school site trying to sign up new members with a handheld EFTPOS machine. Is this acceptable on school grounds?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I have no knowledge of whether that is in fact correct and I need to refer that to the director-general. We expect everybody who is a contractor for Education Queensland or for any government work to undertake that work in an appropriate and ethical fashion. As to that particular, I have no idea whether that is true or not so I really have to refer that to the director-general.

Mr De'Ath: Thank you, Minister. I thank the member. I am not aware of such an incident.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, you have seen the footage from yesterday in relation to CFMEU harassment on a worksite. Can you confirm that no such incidents have taken place on Queensland education worksites?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. As I said, what happens on Education Queensland worksites is not in my purview. It is something that is an operational issue to do with the director-general's area of responsibilities. I think the director-general has already said he is not aware of any matters concerning the CFMEU. Certainly, if such behaviour were to occur, it would be absolutely inappropriate.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, the latest contract disclosure report for the department shows that a combined \$890,000 was awarded to Rork Projects for two contracts in the last financial year. What projects were these funds awarded for?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I will obtain advice on that matter and I am happy to come back on that.

CHAIR: Are you taking that on notice, Director-General?

Mr De'Ath: It is up to the minister to take it on notice.

Ms FARMER: I am so sorry. I was just looking at a note from my adviser. Could you repeat that exchange?

CHAIR: Director-General, can you repeat what you said?

Mr De'Ath: I said that I am happy to look into the matter and get back to the member, which I expect will be at the end of this hearing.

CHAIR: Are you happy with that, Minister?

Ms FARMER: Yes.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, Rork Projects was also involved in a \$564,000 level 12 conference facility refurbishment for the department's Brisbane corporate office to 'transform it into a space that embodies the spirit of Indigenous engagement and inclusivity'. Why would the state government prioritise Indigenous engagement and inclusivity of a corporate office when there are First Nations schools that are below acceptable standard?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I am not involved in the procurement activities of the department. That is the director-general's responsibility so I will refer the member to the director-general.

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. The facility you are referring to is an extremely aged facility, many decades old. I have spent a lot of time in that space myself. It was not a good space at all. The approach to contracting and tendering is a very transparent process. I was kept informed of this given particularly it is a corporate premises. I was delighted that an Indigenous firm actually won this contract. They have done an absolutely beautiful job on this facility and I congratulate them for their efforts and I thank my staff for following comprehensive contracting and procurement processes.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I have a letter which was also sent to you from a grade 8 student at Thursday Island state high school detailing significant decaying toilet facilities, black mould in classrooms, damaged windows and classrooms with a plastic sheet for a roof. The question is: after 10 years in power, how has school maintenance fallen to this level?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I understand that the Department of Education and QBuild have commenced urgent maintenance and infrastructure improvements at remote schools, including Tagai State College, Thursday Island, under our QFIRST service. That is a service to achieve rapid improvements to assets through a trade-based deployment strategy in priority locations. We commenced at Tagai State College on 3 June. I am going to get for you some information in general

on our maintenance budget. It is a critical element of our Capital Works Program. Can I say that there is quite a significant body of work to be completed at Thursday Island primary school. We have seen 108 of those tasks completed at the secondary campus and 79 tasks completed at the primary campus.

In general, more broadly, we manage an asset portfolio with a replacement cost in excess of \$36 billion, covering some 36,000 learning spaces and support facilities. Of the budget just for this financial year, almost \$600 million is budgeted for maintenance. That is 1.6 per cent of the estimated \$36 billion asset replacement value for schools. For this financial year, schools that opened before 2015 received an increase to their maintenance allocation of two per cent. Schools that opened after that time received the same maintenance allocation as in last financial year.

There is quite a process, which I am happy to go into if the member would like, about how the rolling program of maintenance is determined, but where there are emergent issues—I understand this was the case on Thursday Island—additional budget is applied and there are additional actions, which are supported at regional office level. As I said, I am happy to go further into how the priorities are determined, and perhaps the director-general can provide further detail if the member would like.

Dr ROWAN: From your answer, those works began on 3 June in relation to Thursday Island state high school. The letter from the year 8 student was 29 May. The letter, which you have received, details longstanding infrastructure issues. Does it take grade 8 students to write to the minister and the government to get action in relation to school facilities in First Nations communities?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I will get the director-general to talk about when these works were planned, but works of this magnitude do not get planned and executed in a one-week period. Works of this magnitude would have been some time in the planning. Even getting the staff and the equipment to a remote location like Thursday Island would have taken some significant planning—certainly not a one-week turnaround in response to a student. I really commend that student for raising those issues with us. I will go to the director-general to tell us in more detail about the planning for that work and at what point it was instigated.

Mr De'Ath: First of all, can I say that it is wonderful that young people write to ministers and sometimes to me on all sorts of matters. I think it is a really important part of the educative process, the parliamentary process and so on. I think that is a brilliant thing. We get a lot of communication—a lot of advice and a lot of support—from our students.

In relation to what is happening up in that part of the state, I think everybody will appreciate that it is an incredibly challenging part of the state to service. We put a lot of energy and a lot of effort into that. I actually spend a lot of time up there myself checking on how we are going, given the challenges that we face in that part of the state.

I can confirm that the Department of Education and QBuild have commenced urgent maintenance and infrastructure improvements at remote schools, not just at Tagai State College on Thursday Island, under the QBuild QFIRST service, which is the QBuild Fly Inspect Repair Service Team. QFIRST is a service to achieve rapid improvements to assets through a trade-based deployment strategy in priority locations to try to attend to these works and accelerate these works where we can. QFIRST commenced at Tagai State College, on Thursday Island primary and secondary campuses, on 3 June 2024. As at 26 July 2024, 187 of 268 tasks at the Thursday Island primary and secondary campuses are complete as follows: Thursday Island Secondary campus, 108 tasks complete; Thursday Island Primary campus, 79 tasks complete. This is across a wide range of works.

Ms FARMER: Could I—

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Chair, I have a question.

CHAIR: Minister? You got in first.

Ms FARMER: If I could just add, I have some further information. I am advised that the deputy director-general of our infrastructure area actually visited Thursday Island on 17 and 18 April and in fact identified the issues that have been raised and came back and met with QBuild immediately to put in a remediation plan. I want to thank her for taking such prompt action.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, we welcome you to the committee.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. Good morning, Minister and Director-General and staff. My first question is to the director-general. Director-General, the latest Department of Education contract disclosure report lists a management and consultant contract being awarded on 31 August 2023 for \$93,600 to the trustee for J&G Infinity Trust. Why was a contract for almost \$94,000 awarded to this entity when the trust's only business, an advisory business, was not registered with ASIC until two weeks after the contract award date?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I am not aware of the detail about the registration with ASIC. As I have said in previous hearings of this nature, we follow very comprehensive procurement processes. They are very transparent. I will obtain some advice about the claim you have made. I am happy to come back on that in the course of this hearing if I am able to.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. Minister, did you want to add to that?

Ms SIMPSON: I do.

CHAIR: No, sorry. The minister has the call.

Ms SIMPSON: No, my question was to the director-general.

Mr LISTER: The question is to the director-general.

CHAIR: Order!

Ms SIMPSON: You cannot actually break with standing orders in that regard.

CHAIR: Order! Multiple interjections from the opposition seem to be at cross-purposes to your own interests.

Mr LISTER: Chair, I make a point of order.

CHAIR: The minister had just indicated—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR:—that she wished to add something to the director-general.

Mr LISTER: Chair, a point of order takes precedence over other business.

CHAIR: She has got the call for a brief period of time. Minister?

Mr LISTER: Chair—

CHAIR: The minister has the call!

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr LISTER: Are you going to hear my point of order, Chair?

CHAIR: You have a point of order?

Mr LISTER: Yes.

CHAIR: Sorry, that is the first time I have been able to hear you actually say the term 'point of order', because you and the member for Maroochydore were both interjecting at the same time. Now that I can hear you point of order, you can have your point of order. What is your point of order?

Mr LISTER: Standing order 181. There is no capacity under the standing orders for a question put to the chief executive to be handed up to the minister. The minister did not have the call. The next question should have been given to the next member of the committee to ask a question and the minister is not able to—

CHAIR: I am happy—

Mr LISTER:—provide a contribution.

CHAIR: I am happy to move on to the member for Hinchinbrook, who has the next question.

Ms FARMER: I am sorry. I mean—

CHAIR: Sorry, Minister. I have just called the member for Hinchinbrook, so we will go to the crossbench, who have not had any questions yet.

Ms FARMER: I mean no disrespect, but I did promise to get back to the member on an earlier question. That is all. I was asking to update the member on an earlier question. Sorry, I do not mean any disrespect to anyone here.

CHAIR: That is fine. I have called the member for Hinchinbrook, but we will come to that after the member for Hinchinbrook's question. Thank you.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, my question is in regard to behaviour and safety concerns from teachers. It has been raised as one of the top three issues when it comes to retaining teachers across Queensland at the moment. What strategies are in place to increase safety and security for teachers, school leaders and staff members across Queensland?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. That is one of the No. 1 issues facing teachers, and I thank the member for raising it. I know what an active and engaged local member you are, particularly with your local schools.

Teachers are now faced with an increasingly complex environment in their classrooms. If the average person knew of the physical and verbal abuse that teachers experience—that is happening in schools every single day right across the state—they would be shocked. We have put a number of measures in place, including behaviour specialists, as part of our Putting Queensland Kids First program. We have put in place our almost \$300 million youth engagement package, which recognises that not all students can thrive in a mainstream classroom. Often the kids who have faced quite dysfunctional lives are in mainstream classrooms and are not coping with it at all, and they are the ones who are showing behaviour issues.

Our program of creating alternative education spaces so that those young people can be dealt with and can actually thrive in more appropriate environments is absolutely critical. We have put support processes in place at regional level, including expert advice and hotlines to principals and teachers to access support and how to deal with some of those difficult students.

We recognise also that there are two sides to that story which is why a couple of months ago I set up an education round table which is specifically aimed at behaviour. I flagged earlier in my speech that we have been working with people from right across the education spectrum, including representatives from non-state school sectors as well who are equally finding this an issue. You will see me announcing very soon the actions that are coming out of that round table: what are the things that we need to do to actually show that we have zero tolerance on occupational violence, that we have strong boundaries in place to show what behaviour is acceptable and what behaviour is not acceptable.

Also around the table we have not only people who are representing teachers and schools but also the groups who are representing those students who may be exhibiting those behaviours. They are the people representing the young people who are disengaged. Often regarding the people who are getting suspensions, we see high figures amongst First Nations students and students with disabilities. There is a reason for that. We want to make sure we are not only supporting the teachers but also the students to thrive. I do not know any teacher or principal who does not believe that every child deserves the same access to a high-quality education. We recognise that those young people who are disruptive in class can often be causing too much for a teacher to deal with in a mainstream classroom. I want to make it clear we have zero tolerance for occupational violence in our schools.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, following on from the previous question in regard to the trustee for J & G Infinity Trust, a second contract worth \$10,000 was awarded to the same trust. Can you advise the purpose of both this contract as well as the previous \$94,000 contract?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I repeat my earlier response that we will look into the matter and are happy to make every attempt to come back before the end of this hearing.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, this trust is associated with a former acting deputy director-general and former executive director from the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning who left the department just two months before the trust's first contract was awarded. Can you assure this committee that these contracts were awarded in accordance with state government procurement, relevant codes of conduct, ethical standards and former and current employment policies as pertaining to senior public servants?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. Again, we will look into the matter. As I have said, our processes are incredibly robust and if a vital piece of information relating to our policies, procedures and processes was in any way withheld or we in any way have made an error there, then I would be completely transparent about that, but I would like first to check that information.

Ms SIMPSON: Further to that, Director-General, were there any potential conflicts of interest raised prior to the contracts being awarded, and was there a competitive tendering process and who assessed the application?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. There is a level of detail that again I am happy to look into and make every attempt to come back prior to the end of the hearing.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, who signed off on these contracts?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the follow-up question. That will be within our guidelines and delegations. Again, I am happy to check that matter.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, what funding was allocated for a collaborative pilot program involving the Department of Education and Source Global?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. Again there is a level of detail I would have to look into and come back to.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, a number of these issues I am referring to here were in media reports which indicated that this pilot program was to progress last year after direct interaction between former Labor minister Kate Jones and the Queensland state government but it has since been abandoned. Director-General, is this correct; has it been abandoned?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. Again, there is a level of detail I have to check. I can come back to you, though, on your earlier questions and confirm that the employee you were referring to is not an employee of the Department of Education.

Ms SIMPSON: That was not the question.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General—

Ms SIMPSON: That was not the question, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Sorry. Order!

Ms SIMPSON: That actually was not the question that was put to the director-general.

CHAIR: Order! I am speaking and you are speaking over the chair. As a former Speaker, you know that is against the standing orders. I think the director-general—

Ms SIMPSON: Point of order, Mr Chair. I have been verballled—

CHAIR: Sorry. I am speaking—

Ms SIMPSON: That was not the question I put to the director-general at all.

CHAIR: I will take your point of order after I make the point that I am about to make and that is that I gave an undertaking that we would come back to a matter where the minister had information that she had in response to an opposition matter. We were going to go after the member for Hinchinbrook and we did not do that, so we will cover that now and then we will go back to the member for Maroochydhore. Minister, was there further information that you had in response from an earlier opposition matter that you were trying to furnish before, but the member for Southern Downs was taking objection to? Is that information available?

Ms FARMER: Thank you, Chair. To one of those questions regarding dates around Rochedale, I am advised that on 16 May, the principal made the decision to close composite classes and advise parents. This local decision was brought to my office's attention on 22 May after the letter was sent. The regional director contacted the school after 22 May and was advised of the principal's decision. The member will note the Pink concert was on 19 May—of March.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will go to the point for the member for Maroochydhore.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a question for the director-general. The director-general responded that the person, in relation to a question I put, was not an employee of the department. That was not my question. I want to seek the director-general's confirmation that he will answer the questions about what these contracts were for—the \$10,000 and \$94,000 contracts—and whether that is standard procurement processes for a company or a trust not to be registered as such when they are awarded—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore, that is a very lengthy and subjective preamble—

Ms SIMPSON: It is actually following—

CHAIR: Sorry, you will not speak over—

Ms SIMPSON: The previous questions—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Maroochydhore, you will cease speaking over the chair when I am speaking. The director-general has given an undertaking. You have asked a very detailed question of a very large department, and the director-general has given an undertaking to this committee that he will come back with the information when it is available. That is a reasonable answer to the question. You are welcome to ask further questions, providing they do not have lengthy and subjective preambles or arguments, as per the standing orders under 115, and I urge you to stick to the standing orders. As a former Speaker, you know what they are. I will go back to you. You are welcome to ask—

Ms SIMPSON: I do have follow-up questions, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Good. Ask your question.

Ms SIMPSON: I thank you for your assurance that the director-general will come back on all of those questions that I have put which have not been answered. My question is to the director-general and it is a follow-up in regard to the pilot program and whether it has been abandoned. Director-general, have you ever engaged or met with representatives from either Source Global or the Akin lobbying agency?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I do not believe I have.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, have other Department of Education executives ever engaged and/or met with either Source Global or Akin lobbying agency?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the follow-up question. I believe if there had been any meeting with lobbyists then that would have been declared.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, has former Labor member Kate Jones ever undertaken any undeclared lobbying activity with you?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I am not aware of any lobbying by Kate Jones at all. I would like to, if I may Chair, come back with some advice I have received that the Department of Education never agreed to a pilot program for Source. The Department of Education advised Source that they need to submit proposals through competitive tender processes.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, the Queensland Lobbying Register shows two entries in February 2024 when a lobbyist contacted your ministerial office to seek feedback regarding Source Global's meeting with your ministerial office and the department; can you confirm that meeting took place?

Ms FARMER: I have no knowledge of that meeting but I am happy to get back to the member.

Dr ROWAN: It would be good if you could provide some information about that—

Ms FARMER: Sure.

Dr ROWAN:—because there appears to be two entries in the lobbyist register of two phone calls to ascertain what the outcome of the meeting was. Those two phone calls are on behalf of the Akin Agency in relation to their client, Source Global, but the meeting is not in your ministerial office diary and there is not a meeting in the lobbyist register; can you explain that discrepancy?

Ms FARMER: Yes, I am happy to. I am not aware of it. I do not even know who the company is that you are talking about but I am to get those details and come back to you.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, to confirm: there is no Department of Education pilot program that is proceeding with Source Global?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question, I believe that to be so given the advice I have received.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, since 2020 there have been 13,426 teacher and teacher aides who have left the employment of Education Queensland. In that time, the state government has only recruited a net increase of 1,054 teacher and teacher aides according to the latest Queensland public sector workforce profile. That is less than a sixth of what the government's election commitment was. Minister, of the 1,051 teacher and teacher aides who resigned and left the department in the last three months of this year, how many have gone through an exit interview?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. Chair, if I could provide the facts on our commitment: when we went to the election in 2020 we committed to deliver 6,100 FTE new teachers and more than 1,100 FTE new teacher aides. Our commitment was delivered six months early in June 2024 with the hiring of 6,200 FTE new teachers and more than 2,500 FTE new teacher aides, which is more than double our commitment. Our teacher and teacher aide retention is around 95 per cent and 91 per cent respectively. Importantly, our first year teacher retention is around 98 per cent. Our vacancy rate for teachers is around two per cent. My understanding is that this is quite consistent over a number of years. There are obviously always a certain number of retirements and resignations for various reasons.

In 2023, a revised exit survey was launched to baseline and identify workforce departure trends and, of course, it is very important that we know where we are starting from. We have what is considered a high response rate of 50 per cent from permanent teachers separating from the department which we get every quarter. I am led to believe that the primary reasons for teachers leaving are: retirement, 25 per cent; student behaviour, 13 per cent; and leadership performance, 11 per cent. The secondary reasons for teachers leaving are workload, student behaviour and work-life balance. As the member will be aware, many of these factors are issues which I have made it my priority to address in my time since becoming education minister.

CHAIR: We will go to the member for Inala.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: My question is to the minister. With reference to page 10 of the SDS, can the minister update the committee on negotiations of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement with the federal government and how this negotiation affects funding for Queensland state schools in particular?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. As a former teacher, I know this is a subject which is very close to her heart. I know the member is also acutely aware of the need for all state schools to reach 100 per cent funding according to the Schooling Resource Standard. For those who do not know this, the SRS is the amount that was calculated during the Gonski review for funding schools. The Australian government has been negotiating policy and funding arrangements with all states and territories for school education for an agreement from 2025. A successful agreement will involve states, territories and the Australian Government each putting in their fair share of funding and progressing policy reforms that require national effort.

As the Minister for Education, I continue to seek for the Commonwealth to increase its funding from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of the SRS. I stand shoulder-to-shoulder with my ministerial colleagues from New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT in calling for a fair funding deal. For Queensland, that means the federal government filling in the five per cent funding shortfall which equates to more than \$2 billion over five years for Queensland state schools. The Australian government, to date, has only offered an increase to 22.5 per cent of the SRS by 2029, with Queensland to fill the rest of the funding gap created by federal legislation. We do not believe this is fair for Queenslanders. The federal government has a much larger revenue-raising capacity and it is Commonwealth legislation that has created the current five per cent funding gap.

The Queensland government is prepared to come to the table to discuss the state's SRS transition path. We want to work with the Australian government to make sure our state schools are on the path to being funded at 100 per cent of the SRS, but I will not sign Queensland state schools up to a deal that leaves them with a funding gap. The Department of Education is willing to progress policy reforms that build momentum with our evidence-based strategy, Equity and Excellence Realising the potential of every student. This strategy is already seeing a sustained lift in A to E results; however, we do not support targets, reforms and reporting requirements that increase bureaucracy, divert efforts from what we know is making a difference and exacerbate workload in schools.

Yesterday, the Northern Territory announced the finalisation and signing of the next school funding agreement, with the Australian government locking in their provision of federal funding at 40 per cent. We do not begrudge the Northern Territory securing a deal that takes into account the unique circumstances of that jurisdiction. In fact, we welcome that commitment as a sign that the federal government is able to recognise the unique challenge and circumstance of every jurisdiction and we hope they are willing to do the same for Queensland.

In June 2024, the Australian government guaranteed that funding would continue to flow to Queensland schools from 2025, even if Queensland did not sign the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement by the end of this year; however, Queensland has now been presented with an ultimatum—sign the 10-year Better and Fairer Schools Agreement with an additional 2.5 per cent of the SRS from the Commonwealth tied to the implementation of an extensive reform agenda, or sign an alternative one-year agreement requiring delivery of the same reforms with no extra funding. Neither of these options is acceptable to Queensland. Both would mean foregoing an additional five per cent of the SRS from the Commonwealth, which would allow us to deliver large-scale workforce initiatives to improve teaching and learning and to reduce workload on school leaders and teachers.

Queensland will be able to finalise school funding arrangements when the Australian government acknowledges Queensland's specific circumstances and needs. Queensland schools have high levels of student need and operate in some of the most remote locations in Australia. We will continue to invest heavily in capital infrastructure and investment that is not recognised under the SRS. I look forward to settling an agreement with my Commonwealth and interstate counterparts under which all Queensland schools and students benefit.

CHAIR: With reference to page 2 of the SDS can the minister update the committee on how the Miles government is investing in keeping young people engaged in school through the youth engagement reform package?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I acknowledge the many discussions the member and I have had over this very issue and how committed the member is to making sure all students have the best opportunity to access a high-quality education. We know how important it is to keep kids engaged in school and that education is one of the best protective factors when it comes to positive outcomes in later life.

Keeping young people engaged in education improves their life chances and reduces the likelihood of their becoming involved in antisocial behaviour. In fact, we know that while not every child who is disengaged from education ends up in the youth justice system, every child in the youth justice system is disengaged from education. That is why we are investing more than ever to achieve this aim through our \$288 million Youth Engagement Education Reform package, which invests \$120.9 million to expand Queensland Pathways State College from six to 12 campuses across the state to provide alternative learning pathways for young people who would otherwise be disengaged. In March 2024 we opened the first of these additional campuses in Toowoomba and I recently announced the next campus to open in Mount Isa. As I said earlier, planning is underway; I hope to announce the location of our North Brisbane campus very soon.

I was really pleased to visit the pathways college at Bundamba earlier this year and to meet the staff who do an amazing job. Just a few weeks ago I visited the pathways college in Townsville, which I think is maybe my third visit to that campus, where I met Michaela and Crystal, who are two young students accessing this alternative education option to complete their schooling. When I was there principal Kylie Watts—and can I really commend her and her whole team—told me about a young person at their college. They were also excited about the way this young person was turning his life around. He had come out of youth detention, experienced unstable housing and substance abuse and had a very traumatic background. The young person is now going to school every day, has completed multiple qualifications and is on track for getting their QCE. This model changes lives and it is the Labor government that is investing in these alternative schooling options.

We also established an Intensive Case Management Service working with students who had been excluded or suspended to maintain their learning while they are away from school and give them a strong return to school. The first 37 of these managers have now been appointed and 78 will commence by term 1, 2025. A total of 34 new flexi spaces have been onboarded across the state. They are inclusive built environments offering high-impact learning for students at risk of disengagement. In my opening speech I announced that we will open another 24, bringing the total to 110 schools, which is above our initial commitment of 50 additional flexi spaces. I am really glad that we have been able to extend this to a further eight, recognising the unique challenges these schools have.

We are expanding our First Nations attendance and engagement programs to support students to attend schools, and engage in learning and complete year 12. New programs will commence in Cherbourg, Murgon and Beaudesert in 2024. New specialised alternative learning programs will provide intensive support to young people leaving detention or known to the youth justice system. These will be delivered in partnership with non-government organisations in Cairns, Townsville, Ipswich and Mount Isa. We have a tailored alternative curriculum aligned to the Australian Curriculum being developed to suit diverse learners available from term 1 next year. We also have expanded our Education Justice Initiative to a total of 21 court liaison officers and 16 field officers to support the education of young people appearing before Childrens Court.

CHAIR: Speaking of young people, we have in the gallery students from the Hillcrest Christian College. Welcome to the estimates hearing today. It is great to have you here. We will go to the opposition for questions.

Dr ROWAN: Given the minister has mentioned the Queensland pathways, I would like to ask a question of the director-general. In 2023, \$120.9 million was announced for the six additional Queensland Pathways State College campuses—and I understand from what the minister said that two have been delivered—presumably for a combined cost of \$56 million, given the remaining \$64.9 million is included in this budget over three years for the remaining four campuses. My question, Director-General is: will the remaining four campuses be delivered for \$64.9 million, which equates to \$16.2 million each?

Mr De'Ath: I think projecting any infrastructure costs for these sorts of projects would be a brave admission in the current environment. We have provided some cost estimates based on what we think. We certainly would like to be able to deliver these colleges within the budget allocation.

Dr ROWAN: I have a further question to the director-general. Are you able to provide a total estimated cost for those six campuses, what the actual figure will be?

Mr De'Ath: There will be \$120.9 million to expand Queensland Pathways State College from six to 12 campuses.

Dr ROWAN: Before determining to expand the number of Queensland Pathways State College campuses was there any independent evaluation or review into the Pathways State College program conducted and, if so, who was the review done by?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I will look into whether there was any review of that. I can say that we have looked very closely at the pathways colleges and the role and function that they play in our system. I have visited a number of both the existing and the new. I am extremely impressed with the young people I meet there and the outcomes they are achieving. I think it is a matter of quite public record the incredible difference that has made in their lives without even needing to go to a comprehensive evaluation. I will check any work we have done in relation to that.

Dr ROWAN: I understand, Director-General—and from looking at the latest contract disclosure report—that \$152,000 was awarded to Deloitte Access Economics. Are you aware whether this was to look at the Queensland Pathways State College program?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I am happy to come back on exactly what that contract was awarded for.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, we have been informed by a whistleblower that there was a review done by Deloitte Access Economics in relation to this program and that it concluded that the program was costly and provided marginal opportunities for students with limited attendance requirements, limited curriculum and low expectations and that it did not deliver outcomes for at-risk students. Are you aware of this at all?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I would absolutely need to look into those claims. That is not my understanding of what the pathways colleges are actually delivering. As I say, I have had direct engagement with many of those students, the teachers and the head of the pathways college myself.

Dr ROWAN: I have a further question, Director-General. Are you able to advise the committee who made the decision to expand the Queensland Pathways State College from six to 12 campuses?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. We provided some advice to the government on this as part of the comprehensive \$288 million package. I would like to make the point that in the last approximately 12 months I have met with virtually every principal in the state through a series of over 60 meetings. One of the things that those principals talk to me about is the need for a range of different approaches and different initiatives in our system to support students who are grappling with engagement in our mainstream education. That feedback went straight to the minister. That then formed a cabinet submission of advice to the cabinet. A funding decision was made to fund a range of initiatives, which I think people are well and truly aware of as a matter of public record. Of course, within that was the pathways college expansion. That announcement has been extremely well received by principals and that was confirmed with me in the most recent round of meetings only a month or two ago, again, meeting with every principal in the state.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, can you also advise: in relation to the recruitment process for the selection and appointment of the school principal at the Queensland Pathways State College, was it an open, merit-based selection process?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I believe it was.

Dr ROWAN: Were others interviewed for the role?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I cannot recall who the candidates were in that process or the numbers of candidates.

Dr ROWAN: Given the expansion from six to 12 campuses, will the school principal of the Queensland Pathways State College receive an increase in remuneration? In other words, will the role be reclassified to an executive principal level?

Mr De'Ath: Again I thank the member for the follow-up question. We are always looking, where there is expansion of someone's duties, at whether that requires any change in level and what process that drives and then we follow those processes.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to page 7 of the SDS on student and staff health and wellbeing and safety, Minister, in August last year the state government announced that \$5 million would be provided to enable all Queensland secondary schools to have access to the Blurred Minds Academy anti-vaping program. Minister, can you detail the specific funding that is in this state budget for the explicit purpose of combating vaping in Queensland primary schools?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I am advised that all schools have access to the department's alcohol and other drugs education program which uses a harm minimisation approach so that students can develop a greater awareness of the impacts of alcohol and other drugs. Regarding primary schools, I do not have any advice about primary schools and I will hand over to the director-general, but the member will be aware that our preliminary data has shown a very pleasing decline in school disciplinary absences attributed to vaping which I think is a good sign of the impact of a range of initiatives that we have had. For the committee's information, there has been a decline of 72 per cent when comparing semester 1 this year to semester 1 of last year. As I said, that is from a range of different factors, but we are very pleased to see that. Regarding any specific vaping education in primary schools, I will have to refer you to the director-general.

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I have to say thank goodness and what a relief that we are seeing such a dramatic fall in these numbers. There has been an enormous amount of work about raising awareness. I really think our principals and our teachers and our wellbeing staff have done an absolutely terrific job. Programs like those that have been mentioned have assisted and the revised program, which includes vaping, will be available to all Queensland schools later in 2024.

Dr ROWAN: With regard to the specific figure of money that is allocated in this budget for primary schools with respect to eliminating vaping, how much is that dollar figure, Director-General?

Mr De'Ath: Thank you. For 2022 to 2024 \$600 million was invested to review and implement changes to our alcohol and other drugs education program. That was aimed at students in years 7 to 12—\$600,000. Sorry, \$600,000; I apologise, member.

Dr ROWAN: Is that directly for vaping in primary schools? Is that figure, Director-General, for vaping in primary schools?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the follow-up question. It is in relation to alcohol and other drugs education.

Dr ROWAN: So again, Director-General, is there a specific figure for vaping that has been allocated to eliminate vaping in our primary schools in this year's state budget?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. The part response to that is \$5 million was invested to enable secondary students to access the Griffith University Blurred Minds online modules from term 1, 2024 to address the issue of vaping.

CHAIR: Further questions?

Dr ROWAN: So that is secondary students, as I heard correctly. I would like a point of order, Chair, and I would like to know a figure for vaping that has been allocated in this budget in—

CHAIR: That is not a point of order; it is a question and you are entitled to ask that question of the director-general who, I think, is providing a lot of relevant information to the best visibility.

Mr LISTER: The director-general has not been relevant, Chair. He has failed to answer the specific question that the member for Moggill has asked over and over again in relation to primary schools.

CHAIR: Sorry, but I am talking with the member for Moggill. Ask your question again please, member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: I am asking for a specific figure that has been allocated in this year's state budget to eliminate vaping in primary schools in Queensland—a specific figure for vaping in our primary schools in this year's state budget.

CHAIR: That is fine. Director-General.

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the follow-up question. I have in part answered what you are referring to, which is that the revised program will be available to all schools later in 2024. I do not have a quantification of what that will actually involve, but we have made that commitment to have that program across all schools.

CHAIR: It sounds like the figure is within that broader program—is that right, Director-General—or it would be part of that program?

Mr De'Ath: It may well be within that \$600,000. I would need to confirm that.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Dr ROWAN: Could that be taken on notice, Chair, as to the actual figure?

CHAIR: The request is to take it on notice. If the minister is happy to do that, that is fine.

Dr ROWAN: All right. I will move on. With reference to the SDS at page 2 and the department's focus on student wellbeing, Director-General, the *Courier-Mail* has reported increasing incidents of anti-Semitism in Queensland schools since 7 October, including allegations of bullying as well as a teacher making anti-Semitic statements during lessons. What specific action has the department taken to investigate these incidents, including an allegation that a student teacher has been heard yelling, 'From the river to the sea'?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I first make very clear the department's position on this is that racism of any form is unacceptable. Each school has a code of conduct and takes reports of discrimination seriously. We have worked with the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council over the past year and in June this year I co-signed a memorandum of understanding for research into culturally and linguistically diverse inclusion in schools. I have also indicated my willingness to speak with that group again at any time at the relevant minister's invitation and I have previously met with them on two occasions I believe.

Dr ROWAN: Following on from that, Director-General, has there been any disciplinary action taken against any student or teacher who have been found to engage in anti-Semitic behaviour?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. While I would not refer to any particular case as that would be identifying an individual or individuals, I am aware that, where there have been incidents—and there are incidents that arise from time to time; your question is quite specific—then matters are fully investigated and appropriate action taken and things are addressed alongside of the code of conduct that operates for our schools.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, is there any aggregate de-identified data that you are able to furnish the committee with in relation to these matters?

Mr De'Ath: In relation to matters of conduct of racism and discrimination, I would have to come back to the committee on this and I am not sure whether that would even be possible, Minister, within this hearing, but we could certainly attempt to.

CHAIR: Okay, we accept that. So you will come back at an appropriate time given that that is a pretty broad collection of process, right? Okay; thank you.

Dr ROWAN: I refer to the SDS at page 1 and every student realising their potential. Director-General, can you confirm whether there are any plans to cease or scale down Brisbane State High School's academic, cultural and sporting selective entry enrolments?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I am not aware of any intentions to scale down particular programs other than we do have to be very cognisant of managing the network of schools. The entitlement to our state schools is for those communities which exist within the boundaries where those enrolment management plans have to be managed and from time to time we do have conversations with schools about their specialist programs. This is a really important piece of work that the department carries out and we review those enrolment management plans on an annual basis with those schools and in consultation with the principal. What I can say to the committee is that it is an important process, it is an important way of managing the network of schools, it is an important way of giving people equitable access to their local school and their community and it is a very important piece of work. There is also very prudent management of taxpayers' funds quite frankly in terms of infrastructure spend and build.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. We will go to the crossbench. I welcome the member for Maiwar here today and invite you to ask your question.

Mr BERKMAN: Thanks, Chair. I have a couple of questions to the director-general around the overcrowding at Indooroopilly State High School. You would be aware, director-general, that the new learning centre—V Block as it is called—was finished in 2020 and I think they were more or less at maximum enrolment capacity from the time students entered those classrooms. There are still issues with shortages of toilets, student support spaces and staffrooms that are impacting students and staff alike. Director-General, why is it taking so long to deliver new permanent buildings at Indro high and why did it take the potential loss of the school library to get the emergency provision of demountables earlier this year?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. Indeed, I have been very close to this issue. First and foremost, I would like to really congratulate the principal of Indooroopilly high school who had quite a task on his hands in terms of managing and addressing the issue of a lot of out-of-catchment

enrolments and some adherence to the enrolment management plan that needed attention. He has done a very fine job. He is doing a very fine job. He has worked with us very closely. I have spoken with him myself about how we are going and how we are supporting him and the work of the department in doing that.

I am very aware there was a proposal near the end of last year that was not acceptable to the school and the school community. We responded incredibly quickly to that. In fact, I was myself astounded at how quickly we managed to provide a vast amount of classroom accommodation onto that site over that Christmas period so that the school could start in an appropriate way for the coming year.

We continue to work with the principal at Indooroopilly State High School around managing those enrolments. We have made a really strong commitment to continue do that. We will continue to do that and provide the necessary infrastructure along with the appropriate management of their enrolment management plan.

Mr BERKMAN: I have a follow-up question, again to the director-general. I understand that the most recent draft concept master plan from around June this year actually drops the target enrolment capacity from 2,900 in an earlier draft, as largely reflects the current enrolment numbers, to a target enrolment capacity of 2,500 students. Director-General, can you confirm that the enrolment forecasts that the department is relying on are different from the forecasts that the QGSO provided to the department?

Mr De'Ath: What I can confirm is that we are working very closely with the school, looking at a range of pieces of data and information about what the enrolment trend is in the area and within their enrolment management plan. We will continue to work with the school within those boundaries to ensure that is there an appropriate level of accommodation and that roll figure is set based on the evidence that is required to do that.

Mr BERKMAN: With respect, Director-General, the question was very specifically: is the department working with different numbers from those numbers that QGSO forecast and provided to the department?

Mr De'Ath: Again, I have an expectation that the department is working with all relevant data to the issue. It is not just one piece of data that gives us the picture around what an enrolment management plan should look like for a school. If we were to just work on those raw figures and not have those conversations with schools and local government and understand the dynamic of what was happening within those boundaries and outside of those for specialist programs then we would not be doing well. I understand our discussions with the school have been very comprehensive in that regard and look at a range of pieces of evidence.

Ms FARMER: Chair, I wonder if the member wouldn't mind if I add to that?

Mr BERKMAN: Given the limitations of time, Chair, I would prefer to pass my time to the other crossbench member, the member for South Brisbane, who has questions she wants to ask.

CHAIR: Sure. We will have a question from the member for South Brisbane and then I will go back to the opposition. Nick, we will go to you after that.

Dr MacMAHON: Thank you, Chair. My question is for the minister. Minister, you talked this morning about the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. If the federal government are offering 22.5 per cent of school funding, is it the Queensland government's intention to provide the remainder that is needed to get up to 100 per cent?

Ms FARMER: No. As I said earlier in my response to the question from the member for Inala, our position is that the federal government should provide 25 per cent.

Dr MacMAHON: If that is not the case, will the state government be coming in to meet the remainder of funding that is needed to get to 100 per cent?

Ms FARMER: It is our position that the federal government provide 25 per cent.

Dr MacMAHON: What will you be doing between now and the end of September, when I understand that agreement needs to be signed, to get the federal government to lift their funding agreement?

Ms FARMER: I am liaising very closely with all of my colleagues in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT. We are united in our position that the federal government should offer 25 per cent. There is much work going on behind the scenes amongst ministers and amongst officials to

achieve that position. As I said earlier, it is not just the percentage of funding that is provided. It is actually asking about the level of detail that has been put forward by the federal government that should inform that agreement. It is not a level of detail that we agree with. That has been aired quite thoroughly in our discussions. That remains our position going forward.

CHAIR: We will go to the opposition.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, referring to the capital statement for this year's budget, is there any funding allocated for the planning and delivery of a new high school in the western suburbs of Brisbane?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. Certainly, planning for a school in that area is high on the list of priorities. As the member will be aware, there is quite a lot of work going on at the moment to identify potential sites. We hope to actually get information about that. I think that review will be complete by the end of this year. My understanding is that the planning for that site is included in this year's budget. I probably have to get the director-general to verify that, but I can say to you that it is a matter that is really high on our agenda. The difficulties of finding a site in quite built-up areas is obviously significant. Nevertheless, it is something that we will be proceeding with.

Dr ROWAN: Can I clarify, to follow-up on that: is that a primary school or a secondary school or both?

Ms FARMER: It is a primary school.

Dr ROWAN: I asked specifically, Chair, about a secondary school and whether there is any funding or planning in relation to a secondary school.

Ms FARMER: I am so sorry, I missed that. I am not aware that there is any planning but I will get the director-general to verify that.

Mr De'Ath: I think what I am hearing is that there are no plans for a secondary school. No new schools were recommended for the western Brisbane suburbs due to limited projected population growth. I think that speaks for itself.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, the Queensland government has repeatedly said that the Brisbane South State Secondary College would take enrolment pressure off Brisbane State High School. Has this happened?

Ms FARMER: I do not have those details. I do not know if the director-general has. If he does not then we will certainly get back to you. I refer to the director-general.

Mr De'Ath: I think it is pretty clear that if we did not have that particular secondary school then State High would be under enormous pressure. I think the answer is, yes, that has had its necessary impact to relieve the pressure on state high.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS page 3 and early childhood education, Minister, published national register data for Queensland shows that of the 124 early childhood education and care services approved last year only 16 were assessed by the Queensland Department of Education against the National Quality Framework. Minister, why has the Queensland government not progressed the assessment of the other 108 services?

Ms FARMER: That is another matter that I will refer to the director-general. I do not have those details available to me nor do I determine the program of reviews.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General?

Mr De'Ath: With the permission of the chair, I will call forward Tania Porter, Deputy Director-General, Early Childhood, to the table.

Ms Porter: I thank the member for the question. I would need to confirm exactly the numbers that the member is referring to, but I can confirm that new services that are approved by the Department of Education have 12 months before their assessment and rating. For those services that you would be referring to, we provide enough time for those services to be able to make sure that they are working in the best way they can so that they can be approved before any of our officers attend their services. I assure you that, of all of the services that we have, over 94 per cent of our services have been assessed and rated and over 90 per cent are meeting or exceeding the National Quality Standards. Families can rest assured that education care services are well regulated in this state.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, there are 207 services that have been approved since 2020 that are still yet to be assessed for the National Quality Standard including 22 services that are provided directly by the Department of Education. Why have they not yet been assessed and rated?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for question. Again, I will pass to the Deputy Director-General for Early Childhood, Tania Porter.

Ms Porter: There are 137 state delivered kindergartens in Queensland that at any given time, depending on the number of children that attend those services, come in and out of the National Quality Framework. For example, if there are six children, they will be in scope of the National Quality Standard. If there are less than six, they come under the state-based Education and Care Services Act. That means, as you know, in remote locations there are varied numbers of children who come in and out of state delivered kindergartens. That is why the member would see that some services have not been assessed because they do not have the number of children that meet the National Quality Standard.

Dr ROWAN: I might ask a follow-up question to the deputy director-general. Could you outline, Ms Porter, what the key performance indicators set by the department are to ensure that these services are assessed, rated and reported once a service has been granted approval to operate?

CHAIR: Just to clarify, you need to ask that question through the director-general. Director-General, you are deferring, but that is the correct way to ask it.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I will ask you the question. Would you like me to repeat that question?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. Chair, if I may, I refer the question to Ms Porter again.

Ms Porter: As I said earlier, there are over 3,261 services that are under the Education and Care Services National Law and 47 under the state-based law. These regulated services provide education and care for up to 287,000 children. The regulatory authority in Queensland actively supports approved providers to meet their responsibilities by providing information to drive voluntary compliance. They are required to meet the National Quality Standard, of which there are seven standards, but also elements relating to health, safety and wellbeing as related to the regulation; harm and hazard; supervision; and a number of regulations. I would not be able to go through every one of those regulations against each of those different laws. I can assure you, as I said, that over 90 per cent are meeting or exceeding the National Quality Standard in Queensland.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, of the 207 services that are approved but are not yet assessed or rated, they can collectively educate and care for over 14,000 young Queenslanders. Can you assure this committee that none of those children are being put at risk?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. The scrutiny of our early childhood services is quite extreme. Queensland is recognised as a leader in this space. As the deputy director-general has said, there is always a settling in period before services are actually assessed.

We have been aware—unfortunately, they come up quite regularly—and have recently seen some very significant breaches. The level of regulation for our early childhood providers for Queensland and for every provider in Australia is now quite extreme. It is one of the greatest priorities of education ministers at Commonwealth and state level. We are absolutely unequivocal about meeting those standards.

Every service is monitored every year. In fact, I am advised there were 4,134 visits alone in the last financial year. This is an issue we take very seriously. These young people we have ultimate responsibility for. I feel very confident that our early childhood area has all of the regulations right in front of their priorities.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS page 4 and students engaged in learning, Director-General, who within the Department of Education was responsible for oversighting and approving the media statement as drafted by the Department of State Development and Infrastructure which was provided to the *Sunday Mail* on 6 July 2024 indicating that families of East Brisbane State School would no longer have to relocate?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. The department prepared the appropriate information on this matter at the time.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, did you sight the draft incorrect statement or were you involved in the approval process in any way?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. I was not involved in the initial approval process but, when I looked into this matter—as soon as I discovered that there was some misinformation in the media and in the public domain, I immediately took action to inquire within my own department and immediately informed the minister of this—I was entirely satisfied with the information that my department had provided.

Dr ROWAN: To clarify, Director-General, you did not see the media release before it was released?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. There are a lot of media releases that go out without me seeing them. There are delegations within the department for the approval of those matters, and we make a lot of media releases.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, on the Department of Education's own website it states—

The department will work with—

the Department of State Development and Infrastructure—

to understand any future proposals for the Gabba and what this means for East Brisbane State School.

Director-General, are you able to advise what future proposals have been discussed?

Mr De'Ath: I thank the member for the question. It is correct. We are in constant communication with the department referred to. I think we have been very clear and a matter of public record about what was proposed. There has been no change to that other than the current process which is examining options.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, referring to the SDS, would you be able to tell us what percentage of state government funding is allocated to depreciation and non-education expenditure within the department?

Ms FARMER: Yes, I will just wait for a brief to be put in front of me to give you those figures. While I am waiting for those figures, does the member have any other questions? Chair, I do not want to supersede your role, but it might take a couple of minutes to get that information.

Mr DAMETTO: I have a follow-up question to that one.

Ms FARMER: If the member is comfortable with it, I can refer it, through the director-general, to our CFO.

Mr DAMETTO: I am more than happy for that to be answered.

Mr De'Ath: Yes, I certainly will refer this to our chief financial officer for a response.

Mr Anson: I thank the member for the question. In relation to depreciation, what we have seen in recent years is, because of the value of the assets that we have on our balance sheet going up, we have now in excess of around a billion dollars in depreciation each year which is recognised in our accounts. It is important to note that that depreciation is a non-cash expense. The way that funding works is that we receive it in so that we have fully funded expenses and then that funding is returned back to government via an equity withdrawal. Then we get the money back for whatever capital expenditure we need in any given year.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, will Queensland students ever receive fully funded education while non-education costs are allocated to Education?

Ms FARMER: Sorry, could the member repeat that question?

Mr DAMETTO: Will Queensland students ever receive fully funded education while non-education costs are being allocated to the education department?

Ms FARMER: I am sorry. Could I ask the member to clarify? I am sorry but I am not sure that understand it properly.

Mr DAMETTO: The question is in regard to Queensland students being fully funded for their education in Queensland. With other expenses coming out of the portfolio, such as depreciation and non-education costs, will that affect the ability for students to be fully funded in Queensland?

Ms FARMER: Is the member referring to the school resourcing review?

Mr DAMETTO: Yes.

Ms FARMER: Yes. In terms of the negotiations with the federal government, our commitment is to reach 75 per cent funding from the state government.

Currently the federal government provides 20 per cent and the legislation caps it at 20 per cent. They have offered 22.5 per cent. Our position has been very clear. Along with ministers from South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT, we insist on 25 per cent funding. We are in the midst of negotiations as we speak. The 75 per cent that is our commitment from the state government does not even include things like our infrastructure spend and free kindy commitment. These are all significant commitments that we are making outside of the terms of that agreement. I hope I am

answering the member's question appropriately. Our commitment is to 75, and we will stand firm on the Commonwealth government contributing 25 per cent to make up 100 per cent. We insist there be 100 per cent funding of state schools.

Mr DAMESTO: That is what we are all aiming for.

Ms FARMER: Absolutely.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: Minister, with reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you outline to the committee how the Miles government is focusing on early intervention and investment in young children as part of the Putting Queensland Kids First initiative?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. This is something that I know is really dear to the member's heart and mine as well. We know that if we can give our kids the best start in life they will have the greatest chance of a positive life trajectory. I personally have been very pleased that such a spotlight has been put on those early years. The Early Years Strategy which the Premier announced—in fact, it was his first major announcement coming out of his first cabinet meeting as Premier—really signalled his personal commitment to the early years. I am talking about the Putting Queensland Kids First strategy, which is a \$502 million investment. We know there are many children and families who need additional support in those critical early years to make sure every little person is healthy, safe and thriving.

We are starting from conception. We know, for instance, that if mums are drinking heavily during pregnancy then the chances of that baby being born with fetal alcohol syndrome are very high. We are starting from that point and helping mums and parents to be aware of risky behaviours during pregnancy. There are so many other elements to that program as well. We have 36 early childhood coordinators in priority locations, and we have started in the locations where we know families are at highest risk. Those coordinators are going to support families who may need help to navigate pathways into early childhood services.

We have free extended hours of kindy to support up to 600 kindy-aged children residing in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and that builds on our free kindy initiative which rolled out this year. It ensures that every child now is able to start school on a level playing field if they have been to kindy. We are investing \$20 million to establish integrated early year hubs in Kowanyama and Aurukun. We are going to see new investment into the first years of schooling and wraparound supports in some of our most vulnerable communities, building on the success of our GPs in Schools program, which has primarily been in secondary schools.

We are investing another almost \$11 million to place health practitioners in 20 high-needs primary schools. It is a family focused service to provide free primary health care one day a week during school terms. It means that those children will be able to access early intervention and get referrals to specialist services, which really removes barriers for a lot of families. The first five schools commencing are: Bundaberg Central State School, Deception Bay North State School, Flagstone State School, Heatley State School and Raceview State School. Today I am so happy to announce that the next five schools that will have a health practitioner one day a week starting in term 1 next year are: Woree State School, Gladstone South State School, Morayfield East State School, Berserker Street State School in the member for Rockhampton's electorate—I knew he would love that—and Harristown State School.

We are also placing 85 behaviour specialists—the member for Hinchinbrook will recall I was referring to those specialists earlier—in 299 primary schools through an investment of just over \$67 million over four years. They are going to focus on supporting teachers, teacher aides and other school staff to respond to student needs with expert advice and wraparound support. They are going to be starting next term.

We have funding for 84 family support coordinators to work across 219 primary schools to support positive transitions from early childhood education. The first 10 coordinators are going to start in October. These initiatives are going to build on a range of health initiatives aimed at making sure those kids all get the best start possible.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you update the committee on the benefits of the Miles government's investment in free kindy and how this is assisting families with cost-of-living pressures.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. Just before I answer this, can I flag that the director-general has some information to respond to earlier questions from the member for Moggill. Chair, after I have answered this question, could I refer to the director-general?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I know how proud he is of the work his kindergartens are doing. We want to do everything we can to ease cost-of-living pressures for families. We had such a good time at the Rocky South C&K when I visited his electorate. We spoke with Harry and his mum Rachel, who is working and studying. She has two children; both of them have special needs. She told me how much free kindy meant to her family. She said that something would have had to give if that extra support had not been available. I really love meeting those families who are getting so much out of kindy.

As I referred to earlier, most prep and early childhood schoolteachers will tell you that they can tell if a child has not been to kindy. They are literally two different cohorts. If you have not been to kindy it is likely that you are way behind the other children in terms of emotional maturity and learning ability. It is very hard to catch up if you are starting from behind. The free kindy initiative has not just eased cost-of-living pressures; it has meant those children are getting the best opportunity to thrive at school. The program has really been such a tremendous success.

The census data will not be available until later in the year, but we are already getting anecdotal information from our major kindy providers about increases in enrolments. Goodstart Early Learning, for instance, has reported a 16 per cent increase in enrolments due to free kindy. The member might be interested to know that I was at the C&K annual conference dinner only a couple of weeks ago and met up with a number of local kindy directors, including from the Central Queensland area. They were telling me about doubling and sometimes tripling the number of kindergarten classes in their communities, which they are so delighted about because they know about those opportunities.

In Queensland we have 2,200 approved kindy services offering free kindy, which means that 60,000 or more Queensland children are benefiting. As the member knows, it is 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, and it is free. This is just a gut feeling, but I will share it. We know that the cost of living is really biting. As an issue, the difference between the cost of living and most other issues is night and day. Although we already knew about the number of children who were not attending kindy, I have a terrible feeling that if we were not providing it free families may have had to make the decision to withdraw their children. We are talking about a saving of \$4,600 a year, so it may well have been a decision that parents had to make. I have no evidence for that, but in many conversations I have had about this I fear that might have actually occurred.

All of our key stakeholders have praised the initiatives. Dr Sandra Cheeseman, who is the CEO of C&K, said—

Free kindy has reduced a significant barrier to participation. It is great to see more children able to access a kindergarten program in their year before school.

Majella Fitzsimmons, who is president of the Australian Childcare Alliance, said—

Families are taking advantage of this amazing initiative to take part in free, quality kindy deprograms. Free kindy is reducing the financial burden on families when they need it most.

Yvonne Ries, who is the deputy executive director of Lutheran Education Queensland, said—

This important investment will not only benefit kindy aged children and their families but also lay the critical foundations for our future workforce. A skilled, educated, creative, empathetic workforce starts in the early years.

This is a \$2 billion investment over four years from this government. We are eagerly awaiting that official census data that will be available later this year for the official numbers. I know that every member, and I am sure all members of this committee, will be hearing the feedback from their local kindies and their local families about what an incredibly important initiative this has been for them.

CHAIR: Minister, did you have that additional information you wanted to provide in terms of opposition questions?

Ms FARMER: Yes, I refer to the director-general.

Mr De'Ath: First, on the questions in relation to J & G Infinity, I am informed they have been registered since 2009. This contract was oversighted by our chief procurement officer and the initial contract signed by the acting deputy director-general of infrastructure services division at the time. That was in August 2023. I approved a contract extension on 22 March 2024.

In relation to the Queensland Pathways State College, I am happy to inform the committee that the current principal is acting. Recruitment for the permanent principal is underway. Applications close on Sunday. I wish all candidates all the best. The Deloitte review referred to of the Queensland

Pathways State College was in 2019-20. It had a range of findings in it that has helped inform the next steps in terms of the development of the pathways colleges and the advice we provided to government. I can confirm that a full evaluation is included as part of the new reform package on the progress from this point forward.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. We can have a quick question from the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, I have a quick question in regard to homeschooling. When will the issue around home education registration ages be resolved so that they are consistent with the mainstream education system?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. This is an issue with which I think many of us have become involved. As the Minister for Education, earlier this year I introduced the education (general provisions) bill which did propose some amendments around home education. This bill had been the subject of two years of consultation but it became very clear to me very quickly that a lot of people were very concerned about it and I certainly did not see the point of continuing with something that was upsetting so many people. I have since established an expert group and I have commissioned an independent review of the home education sector. The member will be aware that the number of young people who are homeschooling has risen dramatically.

Mr DAMETTO: It has.

Ms FARMER: Can I just say that our Home Education Unit are outstanding people. I have met with them on a number of occasions. They do a great job; however, their job has been really to fulfil a regulatory function. One of the concerns that I had after many interactions with homeschoolers was that perhaps the function and purpose of the unit no longer met the nature and profile of the homeschooling community. I felt it was really important to get some evidence to make sure that we were comprehensively reviewing the needs of homeschoolers so that we understand it. It appears that the reasons that parents homeschool are quite varied. Sometimes it is a philosophical point, sometimes it is on religious grounds, many times it is because parents feel like their children just cannot continue in a mainstream school or through any other distance education or any other purpose. I felt it was important that, before we did anything else, we understood all of those points of view and that any actions we take reflect that diversity of choice.

One of the other things that has made it more difficult to understand the nature of this very rapidly changing sector is that there is no peak body, given the fact that there are so many different reasons that parents choose homeschooling. We have gone out through an EOI process to ask parents to submit their interest in being part of this advisory group. I was particularly keen that the KPIs actually include the ability to represent the views of a broad group of people and philosophies or particular regions so that people could show they were able to gain the views of a broad number of people. Obviously, the selection was undertaken completely independently. We have appointed a very experienced chair and she will oversee the advisory group. They have had their second meeting. She will also be conducting a review. I think there have already been consultation sessions in a couple of places and there will be more and I am expecting—

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, is the consultation taking into consideration the inconsistency between the age restrictions for mainstream education and homeschoolers to align those?

Ms FARMER: The review will take into account every single issue that is being raised by homeschoolers. I know one of the concerns about withdrawing the homeschooling amendments was around that age. I felt it important that we just get the whole picture about homeschooling.

I was just going to say that I am expecting that report back in September of this year. If the member has any views himself or in fact if you would like to make sure that local homeschooling parents in your community have a say, I will be extremely pleased to facilitate that so please let me or my office know. It is really important that we get people's views. I really encourage that interaction.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will have to move on. There were outstanding responses on a couple of issues: a meeting with Source global; the specific amount in terms of anti-vaping in primary schools; and anti-Semitism. Are you able to provide any information today? If not, can you give a commitment to get it later to the committee?

Ms FARMER: Thanks. I can advise on the question about Source Global. I am advised that an adviser from my office met with Source Global on 6 February 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a hydropanel that turns vapour into drinking water. The department has since advised that the product is not suitable for department schools and any plans would be via a competitive tender process. I think the other two questions were for the director-general.

Mr De'Ath: In relation to Rork constructions and the level 12 Education House conference centre refurbishment, this was a set aside under the Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy, awarded to Indigenous supplier Rork constructions, paid in the 2022-23 financial year. The Department of Education held the retention funds for 12 months. Payment was delayed due to Rork going into administration.

There was a further contract awarded for design and construction at AM60 Building at 123 Albert Street. That was for preliminary design works for 123 Albert Street, preliminary works for our Education Futures Institute. Once completed, the design aspect was set aside under QIPP as above due to the administration.

CHAIR: Director-General, is there anything more on those other two matters?

Mr De'Ath: I believe one of the matters was in relation to vaping and I think I have fairly answered that question. I am not able to give a specific figure for primary. It is embedded within all of the work that we are doing.

CHAIR: Indeed. Was there any follow up in relation to anti-Semitism?

Mr De'Ath: I can just reiterate how seriously we take the matters. Matters are dealt with under our code of conduct. We do not have a specific data collection on those particular issues. I do take the member's point in terms of raising that matter. I think it is certainly something worth consideration about whether we deaggregate data or have a specific counting category in relation to those matters, I think particularly given the relevance of how this has been profiling of late. I am very happy to consider that and discuss it with the government.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. I thank everybody who has appeared today. That concludes the committee's examination of estimates for the area of education. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 11.45.

Proceedings suspended from 11.30 am to 11.45 am.



CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister, Director-General and officials. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of youth justice open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I call the deputy chair.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Currumbin.

Mrs GERBER: My first question is for the director-general. The Queensland Audit Office report notes that the last Youth Justice Strategy, the one for 2019-2023, had a key performance indicator to reduce reoffending by five per cent. Can you point me to the target or the key performance indicator in the new Youth Justice Strategy 2024?

Mr Gee: The new Youth Justice Strategy needs to be read in conjunction with the Service Delivery Statements and the department's strategic plan. The Service Delivery Statements has those specific objectives in it. The strategy is a broad-ranging document that outlines a whole range of programs.

Mrs GERBER: Sorry, Director-General. Can you point me to the key performance indicator or the target in the new Youth Justice Strategy 2024-2028? I note that the 2019-2023 one had a key performance indicator to reduce reoffending by five per cent. I am after where that is in the 2024 Youth Justice Strategy. Is there a key performance indicator or target to reduce reoffending in the new strategy?

Mr Gee: I am just trying to provide clarity. The strategy needs to be read in conjunction with the Service Delivery Statements and the department's strategic plan. That objective or performance indicator is in the SDS.

Mrs GERBER: And what is that? What is the target?

Mr Gee: I can take the member to the SDS in terms of our targets. They are: percentage of orders; proportion of young offenders—

Mrs GERBER: Just reoffending. The question is specifically around the target or KPI to reduce reoffending.

Mr Gee: Reoffending is a factor of the proportion of young people who have contact with the youth justice system and the proportion who have another charged offence or are referred by the Queensland Police Service to restorative justice.

Mrs GERBER: To reduce it by what target?

CHAIR: Just let the director-general answer without being badgered. He is answering the question.

Mr Gee: The proportion of young offenders who have another charged offence or are referred by the Police Service to an RJ conference within 12 months of an initial finalisation for a proven offence; the percentage of orders supervised in the community that are successfully completed; the rate of young people aged 10 to 17 who have contact with Youth Justice—of course, that would be initial offending and reoffending—per 10,000 population, which continues to go down year on year; the proportion of young people declared a serious repeat offender under the YJ Act, which of course relates to reoffending; and, of course, the average daily number of young people in detention is a proxy rate for the effect of reoffending.

Mrs GERBER: So in the 2019-2023 Youth Justice Strategy there was a clear target set to reduce reoffending by five per cent. In the 2024-2028 Youth Justice Strategy there is no target to reduce reoffending. Minister, is this government's plan to stop the youth crime crisis to stop measuring targets and reoffending?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. The member will see from the SDS performance measures that, in fact, there are three new measures in amongst the SDS. These are reported now on a quarterly basis. In addition to this, there are a range of other figures which are provided through Police and through my department, quite outside of the SDS performance measures. Some of these are provided on a weekly basis. They are always provided when asked. However, I believe that the key statistics, which I think everyone has found very pleasing to see, relate to the reduction in the number of serious repeat offenders since October last year. As the member will know, around 20 per cent of serious repeat offenders commit over 50 per cent of the crime, so our efforts have been aimed directly at those people. The decrease in the number of those serious repeat offenders in less than 12 months has been quite significant. In addition, the police data shows a 6.7 per cent drop in reported offences and actions against juvenile offenders in 2024 compared to 2023.

The member will also be aware of the evaluations. We have a rolling set of evaluations on each of our early intervention and prevention programs. As soon as these evaluations are made available I announce those publicly, and I have made myself available at every opportunity to go through those and to brief members, politicians and journalists. I am very committed to evidence-based actions and actions that are based on expert advice and have been very clear in my public statements about youth justice that we need to be sure that what we are doing is based on evidence.

We have increased SDS measures on which we report on a quarterly basis and we are reporting on individual programs. It is very clear that we are making all of the information available. We have also said on more than one occasion—and I think it was after the estimates hearing last year—that if there were any other measures that anyone would like to see which would make what we do even more transparent, then we were very happy to listen to those requests.

Mrs GERBER: On that, and I note you have just said it again, when you became youth justice minister, entering into the role again on 18 May 2023, you gave the commitment on a couple of occasions that you would review youth justice programs and stop those that are not working, and you have just given that commitment again. Minister, is it true you have not stopped any youth justice programs since you became minister in May 2023?

Ms FARMER: No, in fact, that is actually not correct. If the member would humour me, I will go to both sides of that statement which is I said that if programs are working, we will do more of them, and if they are not working, then we will stop them. The member will have seen me increase the number of locations, for instance, for intensive case management, for Youth Co-Responder Teams—

Mrs GERBER: Sorry, Minister, which programs then have you stopped since May 2023, specifically; that is the question?

Ms FARMER: The member will be aware of the On Country programs. We had three trials of On Country programs—

Mrs GERBER: That was stopped back in 2021.

CHAIR: Member, you have asked the question. The minister has barely begun answering the question which she is doing and you interrupted. Give the minister a fair go and I will give you a fair go.

Ms FARMER: Thank you, Chair. The On Country program trials were still running when I became minister last year. We have had a look at those programs. There has been one evaluation of them. We felt that there needed to be a lot more work done on that. We have consulted quite closely with First Nations people. The new program has been co-designed entirely with First Nations people. The process we have put in place that led to the announcements we have made today and recently has been based on advice from First Nations groups. Additional programs about what is working or should be changed include our Community Youth Response and Diversion program—

Mrs GERBER: So, have you stopped that program, Minister?

Ms FARMER: Sorry, I am just going onto the next bit about the program.

Mrs GERBER: There was not—

CHAIR: Sorry, to also add, I understand under question on notice No. 16 asked on 9 July 2024, there was a fairly comprehensive answer offered by the minister in relation to that.

Mrs GERBER: I will move to my next question, Chair.

CHAIR: Question on notice No. 16 asked on Tuesday, 9 July of the minister and published. There is a very comprehensive four-page response on that pretty identical question.

Mrs GERBER: Sure, Chair, but that question on notice also does not indicate any programs were stopped after May 2023, which was my question, but that is okay; I will move onto the next question. Director-General, the Queensland Audit Office report states that of seven significant procurements between March 2023 and September 2023, totalling \$6.3 million, five were the result of a direction or decisions from ministers, rather than based on department's advice. Director-General, can you tell me what five programs this refers to?

Mr Gee: Certainly, member. Thank you for the question. Of course, I cannot talk about things that have been discussed within the cabinet process nor the Cabinet Budget Review Committee process, but I am more than happy to tell the committee about those five contracts. From memory, those five contracts would be five of approximately 169 contracts that we have provided in the non-government sector. The contracts awarded, and in no particular order, were: for community sports mentoring and coaching, Big Bounce was awarded and was represented in Budget Paper No. 4 of the 2023-24 state budget. The budget paper noted—

The government is providing additional funding of \$2 million over 2 years from 2023-24, held centrally, to expand the Big Bounce Initiative to provide diversionary programs to youths at risk of offending and rehabilitation programs to youths in detention.

I can also, if we have time, provide figures around the number of young people who have taken part—I think it is roughly 900—in that space. That organisation was awarded \$1 million on 18 August 2023. The organisation was previously funded by the Commonwealth government for the Bounce Back program in Queensland for approximately \$750 million over two years, 2022 to 2024. That initiative will be evaluated by the department in 2024-25 to inform any further advice to government.

Mrs GERBER: Is that the first one?

Mr Gee: That is the first one. The second one was to the Ted Noffs Foundation Ltd Street University. Again, money was provided to Ted Noffs on 1 March 2023, approximately \$782 million. Ted Noffs again, on 16 June 2023—\$1.6 million.

In the 2023-24 SDS—last year's SDS—there was \$4.2 million for the Townsville Street University. That was part of a \$5.1 million program, over three years, commencing from 2022-23.

I think it is well-known, well-published and well-evaluated that the Ted Noffs Foundation—the University of New South Wales has examined their work—has an incredible record of reducing crime. There has been a 42 per cent reduction in crime from their programs. In terms of drug dependence, it is a terrifically successful program—50 to 71 per cent. We intend to evaluate, though, how that is working in Townsville and Caboolture.

There were two others. The first is the Johnathan Thurston Academy—the JTYouGotThis program was announced by the former premier, from memory, in the budget process 2023-24 on about 15 June; I am doing that from memory. Prior to that announcement, the Queensland Police Service had partnered with the JT Academy since 2018 in a collaboration to design an intensive four-day program working with young people. An evaluation of that program had been conducted by Sunshine Coast

University in 2022. I will give you the figures: 5 July 2023, \$253 million to the JT Academy; to the JT Academy, JTYouGotThis program, on 18 September 2023, \$1.9 million. I would point out, though, that we have done a lot of work with the JT Academy to the point of sitting down with Youth Justice and working with that entity to redo their curriculum. I think the numbers from memory, off the top of—

Mrs GERBER: We are only up to three of the five contracts so far. I have Big Bounce, Ted Noffs' Street University and the JT Academy; what are the other two, please?

Mr Gee: There is JT Academy. The first one was on 5 July 2023, \$253 million; the second one, JT Academy, 18 September 2023, \$1.9 million; and the third one, community sports mentoring and coaching, Big Bounce, 18 August 2023, \$1 million; and then Ted Noffs, Foundation Ltd Street University, 1 March 2023, \$782 million approximately; and the fifth one is Ted Noffs Foundation Ltd Street University, 16 June 2023.

Mrs GERBER: So two to Ted Noffs, two to JT Academy and one to Big Bounce?

Mr Gee: Thanks.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, were you involved in any of these decisions?

Mr Gee: As I said, I cannot talk about budget decisions or cabinet or CBRC processes. If they were mentioned and developed in the budget papers for 2023-24—I am looking and all of them were—those budget processes would have commenced well before I commenced back on 19 May, but I remember being briefed as the then premier announced the JT Academy and, of course, I had read the budget papers and been advised as the director-general of the outcomes of the budget process before the budget was tabled in the parliament.

Mrs GERBER: What probity measures did the department put around the minister in terms of making the calls; was there a tender?

Mr Gee: The first point I would make is that it is not unusual, in my experience, for governments, cabinets and CBRCs to look at a whole range of programs. It is not unusual, in my experience for an executive government to make decisions about pilots or well-evaluated programs and to fund them in the budget process.

Mrs GERBER: I have one more question to you, Director-General. According to the Auditor-General's report, in 2018-19 the total number of serious repeat offenders was 442. Can you give us the total for 2023-24—not the average daily number but the total number of serious repeat offenders?

Mr Gee: For 2023-24?

Mrs GERBER: For 2023-24, please.

Mr Gee: I have it here, but I am very conscious of the committee's time. Can I give an undertaking, through the minister, to give you that number in a second?

Mrs GERBER: Sure.

Mr Gee: In 2023-24, the total number of young people who would have been identified as a serious repeat offender—

Mrs GERBER: Not the average daily number.

Mr Gee:—noting that they can come off it and it can go up and down day-to-day. It is a live—

Mrs GERBER: I am happy for you to come back to me, thank you.

CHAIR: If it is last year budget, rather than this year's budget, we are happy to have you come back, that is fine.

Mr Gee: Chair, I have the answer in front of me.

CHAIR: Wonderful.

Mr Gee: It is 736 in 2023. I can give you the 12-month period ending 31 May, if that is okay. The 12-month period ending 31 May 2023 is 736 and the 12-month period ending 31 May 2024 is 717. The average day, at its peak, was 497 in October last year and that has dropped in operational information to about 408 at the end of June so there has been a 14 per cent drop. There has been a promising drop since October.

Mrs GERBER: But there is an increase. Since 2018-19, the total number of serious repeat offenders was 444 and now it is 771.

CHAIR: Member, you will ask your questions through the Chair. You have had a long session so I will go to the member for Inala.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: My question is to the minister. With reference to page 3 of the SDS, can the minister provide the committee with an update about the intensive On Country expansion and how this program will reduce offending?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. The On Country program commenced in July 2020 with trials in Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa. In early 2023, the program was extended in all three locations with a further investment over two years. We know that First Nations communities and elders want their young people to be accountable and to contribute to their community while ensuring that they have strong cultural connections. That is why this program seeks to use cultural immersion and experiences to motivate young people and to create a sense of belonging, purpose, social support, self-worth and identity. It is important to work closely with local communities, elders and traditional owners to try different ways to motivate young people.

We believed, as I mentioned in my response to the member for Currumbin, that there was more that we could do with these programs. It was evaluated by QCOSS, but we all believe that there was more that could be done to not only ensure that the program being away from the person's environment was helping to connect them to culture and country but also that when they returned to that environment—which usually incorporates the root causes of that offending in the first place—they were supported to sustain their new sense of self and culture and community and to continue taking a positive life trajectory. The new On Country programs incorporate what we have learnt from those trials, but, as I said earlier, they have been entirely designed by First Nations people. The process of going out to the community to seek expressions of interest and the tender process has been entirely overseen by First Nations people.

We are looking at taking those learnings and having an intensive cultural and residential experience for a longer period. This program is designed to address the causes of reoffending so there will be an intensive cultural and residential experience for longer periods and/or more often; employment, education and training opportunities; family support including support to improve protective factors and to reduce risk factors; and in-home family support to ensure parents and carers meet the daily living needs of young people and improve safety conditions. Participation can be a condition of bail, or part of a supervised sentence order such as probation.

A couple of weeks ago, I announced that local organisation Mithangkaya Nguli Young People Ahead Youth and Community Services Indigenous Corporation would provide the new trial intensive On Country youth justice program in the Mount Isa region. That contract was awarded following a tender process that attracted strong interest in providing services in multiple communities across Queensland. It was a comprehensive tender assessment that considered an organisation's capability to deliver the services effectively, safely, efficiently and their readiness to receive clients. That program will start with its first client within weeks, with both the Department of Youth Justice and the courts able to refer young offenders to take part.

The organisation has secured the full use of a station property located in the Mount Isa region and they have access to a large acreage on the outskirts of Mount Isa. These properties are both suitable for the successful delivery of On Country programs. I was very proud to announce a new intensive On Country program today in Cairns-Mossman. Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation based in Cairns and Mossman has been selected to undertake the trial in that region. Some of the key components of that region include agricultural training to foster connection and affinity through hands-on projects, working alongside stockmen and addressing the root causes of crime with work to re-establish cultural identity through activities such as heritage and land management.

Critically, the program will also connect young people with education and employment pathways, because we know how integral that is to a positive life trajectory. It will also link young people with health, mental health, and drug and alcohol treatment through culturally appropriate therapeutic services. We are also open to market-led proposals around the intensive On Country model. In fact, we have already had expressions of interest from key Indigenous employers, for instance, who are very keen to provide that follow-up phase of the On Country program. That is about making sure that when young people return to their communities the gains that have been made are actually sustainable into the future. We welcome any of those proposals.

CHAIR: We will go to the opposition next.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, I want to circle back to your answer in relation to the KPIs or targets. Can I confirm from your previous answer that the only KPI to reduce reoffending is the one listed in the SDS, which is to keep offending at the same level? I want to make sure my understanding of that is correct.

Mr Gee: I would not have thought we would ever have a standard that said we would keep offending at the same level. The primary goal of the organisation is to stop offending and keep the community safe. I refer the member to page 34 of the strategy—and I should have saved you a lot of time and pointed you in that direction. The foreword talks about the document being a living document and open to evidence-based approaches. Under the title 'Measures, outputs, research and evaluations' on page 34, the strategy talks about the standards. While I have the floor, Chair, if I can, may I clarify a point? I may have missed something or someone did not hear me say with respect to the JT Academy, but it is \$0.253 million, not \$253 million, and \$0.782 million, not \$782 million. Thank you.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, can you confirm whether a contract disclosure log has been released since May 2023? If it has, where can that be found? Is it on the website?

Mr Gee: That is on the website.

Mrs GERBER: It has been released?

Mr Gee: Yes, it has. Can I clarify to add some further information? We are always wanting to provide as much data as we can. We formed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training in the last machinery-of-government change. To my knowledge, there was a process on 13 June where we took charge again and the MOU ceased. I became aware last week that we were late with some of those and we have published them as recently as today. I think they are available on the Open Data portal.

Mrs GERBER: Sorry, did you say that was only published today? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Gee: There were some that were only published this week. It came to my knowledge that there were some that were not published and they were published yesterday. They are available on the Open Data portal.

Mrs GERBER: All of them are now published?

Mr Gee: They were up to date in December 2023 and to my knowledge we have published all of those up until and including the end of April, early May. From memory, I think it is a 60-day period after that, so there may be one or two that might need to be updated over the next day or so.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General. The Auditor-General noted that the Caboolture watch house was being converted to a specialist watch house for children. Is this a permanent change? If it is not, when is the funding committed to?

Mr Gee: The first thing I would say is that watch houses and their administration is a matter for the Minister for Police and the Police Commissioner. The Police Service has modified and changed operations for the Caboolture watch house to operate as a hub for young people. It is a fantastic facility. The minister and I and many others—and I think you yourself—have visited it. The total funding that was provided was \$59.7 million up until and including 31 December 2024. Of course, it is open to the government or the Police Service to continue anything they want to, but at the moment it is funded until 31 December 2024. We are expecting—and it is being delivered by the Queensland Police Service—a wonderful remand facility out at Wacol. We expect that to be completed at the end of the year and hopefully there will be no need for the Caboolture watch house to be used.

Mrs GERBER: Just so I am clear, it is not being converted to a specialist watch house for children; it is being converted to a hub for young people and the funding is only until December 2024?

Mr Gee: The funding is until 31 December 2024. It is still a watch house. As a matter of law it is a watch house, but it is a watch house that is being used as a hub specifically designed to have services, programs, staff, visitors and oversight for young people to stay there.

Mrs GERBER: Minister, as the law currently stands, a recent Court of Appeal decision upheld a 16-year-old getting seven years detention for attempted murder with only 50 per cent to be served, so 3½ years in detention for attempted murder. Minister, do you admit that this government should have introduced adult crime, adult time years ago?

CHAIR: The minister has discretion to answer that broadly.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. The matter of sentencing obviously falls within the portfolio of the Attorney-General and I would certainly not get involved in the decisions of the courts. I make a few points. One, we know that youth crime is a concern to many Queenslanders. It is why we

are taking a broad approach to not only addressing the root causes of crime but also keeping the community safe by having some of the strongest laws in the country and by establishing capacity in our detention centres—in our current and future planning for detention centres. On any given day we have more children in detention than most of the other states put together. We have those strong laws that are available. I think it is the LNP's fourth slogan, 'adult time for adult crime'. It has actually been criticised by every single stakeholder.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair: as I have stated before, on standing order 118, the minister in answering a question shall not debate the question and shall be relevant. I put to you that the minister is being neither and I ask you to bring her back to answering the question.

CHAIR: I thank you for the point of order. The question did have a very deliberate political jibe, so I am allowing the minister some discretion along the same lines to respond to the question.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. The member was asking about the adult time for adult crime policy. I believe what governments or parties that want to be in government need to do is put policies and programs in place that are going to produce the right outcomes. There is not one single stakeholder who has agreed that adult time for adult crime is the right way to address youth crime; in fact, it is more likely to criminalise young people. Even the member for Kawana in recent years has said that something like the idea that a young person would look at the penalties for an offence they are about to commit and that that would deter them from committing that crime ridiculed that concept, though I imagine he is supporting this new slogan.

What we need to put in place and what we are putting in place is measures that will reduce the number of young people who are committing offences and therefore the impact on the community and on victims specifically. As a result of our comprehensive investment, we have seen a 6.7 per cent reduction in the rate of youth offending in the last year and a 14 per cent reduction in the number of serious repeat offenders since October last year. There is always more to be done. I would not be happy unless there was zero crime, but my responsibility as the Minister for Youth Justice is to show that I have evidence to support the programs we have in place and that they are based on expert advice and that we are monitoring those. Those trends are plain and clear.

Front and centre of this discussion should be the impact on victims. I speak to victims every single day. I know whether you are a victim of a heinous crime where you have lost a loved one, whether you are a victim of someone breaking into your house while you are asleep with your children or whether you are a victim of someone breaking into your car and not even taking anything, that has a lasting impact on that person. We have put a number of programs in place to support victims directly, but our commitment to those victims is that what we do is based on evidence. The idea that adult time for adult crime—

Mr LISTER: The evidence is that you have done it for 10 years and you have failed.

CHAIR: Sorry, but we will not have interjections.

Ms FARMER: The idea of adult time for adult crime sounds good. If you have lost a loved one—if you are a victim of a heinous crime—I can understand that you want that person to pay. I can absolutely understand that, and that is why we give magistrates the discretion to impose harsher sentences than the average. However, we want to see a reduction in the number of people offending in the first place. With adult time for adult crime there is all the evidence in the world that shows that that is likely to increase the chances that the young people will reoffend.

Mrs GERBER: Minister—

CHAIR: I will go to the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mrs GERBER: Minister, I take you to the facts of that—

CHAIR: Sorry, but I just called the member for Hinchinbrook from the crossbench.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I have a quick question, and well done! You announced the intensive On Country program in Cairns-Mossman and the one at Mount Isa just last week. There was an announcement in the *Townsville Bulletin* yesterday regarding an organisation called Helping Our Mob Everywhere going on to do an On Country program. Can the minister confirm that this is accurate and if it is being funded from the \$24 million for the intensive On Country program?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. Do you mind if I just confer with the DG on what I am allowed to say in this process, Chair? Is that okay? Would the member be okay?

Mr DAMETTO: Yes.

CHAIR: Yes, sure.

Ms FARMER: Sorry, but I was just wanting to clarify out of the process that we have just been through. However, the director-general and I just met with that group when we were in Townsville last week or the week before. The member will recall that I said earlier that we have announced those two programs in Cairns-Mossman and Mount Isa. We are very open now to market-led proposals, and I can refer to the DG to give further comment on that. It was certainly a good conversation we had with that group.

Mr DAMETTO: The only reason I ask the question, Minister, is because the member for Mundingburra is photographed this morning with them on his Facebook page talking about the program and I just wanted to know where that money was coming from and if it was fully funded by the state government.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. They are a group that already does good work there. That group and individuals in that group are well known in the Townsville community. I believe the member himself would know them quite well. There are a range of programs that a number of those groups run for youth justice. Not all of them are related to the On Country program, but if the member would like more detail about the discussions I can refer to the director-general.

Mr DAMETTO: That would be great. Thank you, Minister.

Mr Gee: Thanks, Minister. Thanks for the question. HOME are a great organisation that we have only just started dealing with. They are new to the youth justice space in terms of their interest, but many of the people involved are longstanding traditional owners from Townsville from a great family. The process that we have just gone through for the intensive On Country has been extensive. Thank you for your interest and for the opportunity to be able to brief you and other members of your party.

Mr DAMETTO: I appreciate that.

Mr Gee: We have gone through the entire state and we have asked anyone with an interest that had a property, that had a program or had something to offer to come to information sessions. There was an expression of interest process. There were 24 expressions of interest that were reduced to an invitation to offer. We have funded two. There may be more. That process will now close. It has been disappointing for me personally to see that there was not as much significant interest out of Townsville specifically, but the programs that we have funded are in the north and it is open for the courts and youth justice to be able to refer young people to those programs which will take young people under their wing, for want of a better term, for three to six months.

Mr DAMETTO: Director-General, I think there were two from Townsville to be exact that applied, just for the committee's understanding. My next question is with regard to the Street University in Kirwan. Minister, there have been a number of issues around the Street University which I am sure you are fully aware of. There have been a number of pieces of correspondence between my office as well as members of the community and the business community in that area. My question is with regard to duty of care from the department. A number of young adults and young under-age children go to the Street University between the hours of 2 pm and 10 pm. Minister, after the Street University closes at 10 pm these kids are pushed out onto the streets with no way of getting home and no buses. Does the department have a duty of care for those children after the Street University closes for the night?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question and I acknowledge the conversations we have had about this issue. The location of the Street University was, I understand, chosen to directly address the number of young people in that vicinity and the level of offending. My understanding is that there was a lot of discussion with local businesses, certainly when these concerns were raised after the university had been well established and then when some extra concerns were raised, and that the people from the Street University did some quite considerable consultation with local businesses and in fact a number of those businesses were very positive about the impact of the Street University and actually wanted to be part of the solution. I know that Matt Noffs is working with local police and has taken some measures around security and safety and making sure that there were boundaries around the behaviour of the young people. The co-responder team up there is very aware of managing any risks around there and the police are very aware as well. This is a program that is producing really good results. As the director-general said earlier, it is a program which is well established and its outcomes are well established. The Street University operates in a number of jurisdictions—

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, I must disagree. There is drug use happening around the area and a number of business owners have called for it to be removed from the area. I must disagree that it is working.

Ms FARMER: The evaluation of the Ted Noffs work indicates a 50 per cent—and this is an independent evaluation—reduction in drug use, a 71 per cent reduction in psychological distress and a 55 per cent improvement in quality of life which would then prepare young people for work and further education. The department liaises regularly with the Ted Noffs Foundation about the way the university is structured and runs its programs. We are really committed to turning around what is happening in Townsville, and the Ted Noffs Foundation is just one of a number of organisations that is addressing that.

Mr DAMETTO: I am sorry, Minister, but I am aware of the time. I want to find out if there is a duty of care from the state government and the department to make sure that children who are finishing at 10 o'clock at night are not going out onto the streets.

Ms FARMER: Absolutely. I will refer you to the director-general for specific actions. As I said, police, co-responder teams—everyone—are monitoring it very closely. I will refer to the director-general.

CHAIR: Can we have a fairly brief response? Then we will move on.

Mr Gee: The standard in terms of contracts, planning and local government ordinances are all taken care of. Clearly, it is well known where the Street University is. It is well known to our staff and the Police Service. Regular conversations between police, Youth Justice and the foundation occur. Given my experience, it is a good thing that we know where young people are at a certain time and it is a good thing that police have visibility of where they are congregating so that duty of care can be taken care of.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. We will go to the member for Rockhampton.

Mr O'ROURKE: With reference to page 108 of Budget Paper No. 4, can the minister update the committee on the government's Community Safety Plan for Queensland and the role that the Department of Youth Justice plays in that plan?

Ms FARMER: I acknowledge that the member and I have had many conversations about this. I thank him for his engagement in his local community around the community safety plan. We are committed to keeping Queenslanders safe. We recognise that community safety is a concern for many Queenslanders, which is why the community safety plan, a \$1.28 billion investment, is a whole-of-government solution based on evidence and expert advice. We recognise that crime and the root causes of crime are complex issues that cannot be solved with single solutions.

That means an unprecedented investment across criminal justice, policing, housing, education, sport, employment and domestic, family and sexual violence through key strategies like our \$1.65 billion Better Care Together to support Queensland's mental health plan, our \$3.1 billion Homes for Queenslanders plan, our \$288 million Youth Engagement Plan to keep students engaged in education and \$750 million to assist unemployed and underemployed Queenslanders to gain skills and experience to enter the workforce. It delivers more police and more police resources, more funding for the domestic and family violence sector, action to address exposure to family violence and drug and alcohol abuse, and more programs to prevent crime and to intervene early. It is built on five pillars: supporting victims, delivering for our front line, detaining offenders, intervening when people offend and preventing crime before it occurs.

I have to stress that it recognises the impact of crime on victims. We have talked today about the positive trends we are seeing in youth offending, with a drop of 6.7 per cent in the rate of youth offending and a decline of 14 per cent in the number of serious repeat offenders. The strong results we are seeing from our early intervention and prevention programs are really pleasing and they are very important for community confidence. They are the result of our significant investment over a number of years, but we will always need to do more and more. I am conscious that if you are a victim then you are on the wrong side of those statistics and they will possibly be of cold comfort to you. We know that if you are a victim it has a lasting impact on you, which is why we must do all we can to support victims. It is why I am absolutely committed to basing our actions on evidence and expert advice.

The community safety plan is not just about youth crime, of course, which makes up about 10 to 15 per cent of all crime. Your question is about the role of my department in the plan. Members will be aware, and we have discussed today, that since the release of the community safety plan I have released *A safer Queensland: Queensland Youth Justice Strategy*, which builds on the success of the previous youth justice strategy and action plan. It was guided by inquiries into youth justice by the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee and the Queensland Audit Office. It bolsters our focus on prevention, early intervention and detention where needed to support community safety. It includes updated service

delivery and targeted intervention and programs to tackle youth offending and is underpinned by a multi-agency approach to deliver a comprehensive response to the factors that drive youth offending. It has been co-designed with engagement with stakeholders across the non-government sector, First Nations communities and victims groups.

We invest in preventing crime before it occurs through our Putting Queensland Kids First plan, our \$288 million education reform package, our programs and case management approaches to address the causes of offending and break the cycle of reoffending, including intensive case management, the youth co-responders team, On Country, the Intensive Bail initiative and the expansion of electronic monitoring of young people. We have some of the strongest youth justice laws in the country and, as I said earlier, more people in detention on an average day than New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT combined.

Later this year we will open the new youth remand centre, which is being fast-tracked, at Wacol. It will accommodate approximately 76 young people, which will boost our capacity in Queensland from 306 to 382 beds, reducing the number of young people held in watch houses. The Woodford youth detention centre, which is to open in early 2027, will deliver therapeutic design elements. If we have people in detention, we do not want to see them back again. We have seen the success of those therapeutic programs in other places. It will include elements from our recently constructed West Moreton Detention Centre.

Our approach with the Youth Justice Strategy recognises that this is a quickly changing environment, which is why our strategy is agile and adopts an evidence-based approach and expert advice. It is a live document that will continue to be updated as new responses to youth crime are trialled and effective programs and initiatives are expanded.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to the opposition.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you, Chair. Director-General, are you able to tell me what proportion of young people reoffended within 72 hours of leaving detention in the 2023-24 financial year?

Mr Gee: We would have to probably take that question on notice. We do not keep that data nor report on it in detail. That would require access to a live system. The keepers of offence data primarily would be the Police Service so the question more correctly, most probably, should be directed to the Minister for Police and the Police Commissioner, but I am always happy to try to find out what we can.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you, so take it on notice. I confirm that page 34 of the Auditor-General's—

CHAIR: Director-General, were you saying that that is more within police or that it should be taken on notice, just to clarify for the member?

Mr Gee: I think I can provide some information. Across the state, 72 per cent of young people who received a 72-hour release plan did reoffend during the 30-day period following release. The frequency of offending, though, of course, is something that should be considered and the nature of that offending, but 72 per cent I am advised.

Mrs GERBER: Of the young people who are released from detention, what proportion are released after midday on a Friday afternoon?

Mr Gee: That is a very volatile set of data. Frankly, it would take an inordinate amount of time to try to get that data. We could see whether we could get it, I think. Can I ask my deputy to see what the system is capable of doing?

Mrs GERBER: Thank you.

Mr Gee: I am advised that it would take up to a week to be able to get the data.

Mrs GERBER: Can you take it on notice, then?

CHAIR: Sure, take it on notice.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you. You may need to take the next couple on notice, too, because they relate to that data. Of those youths released, in that question that I just posed, how many of those released reoffend within the first 72 hours? I note the Auditor-General has day 1, day 2, day 3 in his report. He has some of those figures on page 34 so that is why I am assuming that we are able to get that data.

Mr Gee: He would have taken it from us. Can I clarify the record? Across the state, 82 per cent of young people who received a 72-hour release plan did not reoffend during the three-day period following release. However, across the state, 72 per cent of young people who received a 72-hour release plan did reoffend during the 30-day period following release. Does that make sense? I think that is very clear.

CHAIR: If it is going to take a week, the responses to questions on notice are due next Monday, so they may not get back in time. It may not be possible to meet that deadline.

Ms FARMER: I know there is a deadline for the hearing process. If it does not meet the rules of the estimates hearing in terms of when we have to get it back, but if the member is happy for us to go past the normal deadlines then I am happy with that.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you. I have a couple of follow-up questions in relation to that. Director-General, you were talking about the proportion of youth offenders on a 72-hour release plan that either reoffend or do not. What I am trying to get at is how many youth offenders released on a Friday afternoon do not get their 72-hour transition plan until the Monday morning—so 72 hours after they are released? Of those, how many young people reoffend before their plans are enacted?

Mr Gee: The simple point I would make is that every child should have a case management plan in place. The 72-hour plans were designed between Youth Justice and the Police Service as an operational tool to focus on that period of risk, and they are put in place. Where courts make quick decisions or unplanned decisions—releases on Friday afternoons—we will have to provide you in that same question some data. Can I get a time period? Would the last six months be okay?

Mrs GERBER: The last question you took on notice was 2023-24, so I am happy for it to be consistent.

Mr Gee: We will give an undertaking to give as much fulsome information as we can.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you, Director-General. From the answer to pre-estimates question on notice No. 17, we can see that there were plans made for 444 distinct young people. In terms of the proportion of young people released from detention who get a 72-hour plan, can you first tell me how many distinct young people spent at least one night in detention in 2023-24 and then the proportion of distinct young people who spent at least one night in detention in 2023-24 that did not receive a 72-hour case plan?

Mr Gee: There were 976 young people in the financial year that were in custody for one or more nights—976. The 72-hour plans were always designed to deal with serious repeat offenders. With those serious repeat offenders I am referring to the index, not declarations. Progressively over the last five years the number of people incarcerated or in detention has progressed from about 45 to 50 per cent of serious repeat offenders up to and including I think about 74 per cent. The point I would make is there is a case management plan for all of those young people.

The percentage of distinct young people exiting detention who are supervised by Youth Justice—this is for the period ending 31 May 2023—was 88.4 per cent. It is about the same in the 12-month period to 31 May 2024—88.1 per cent. Noting that of those distinct young people there will have been more than one plan for people as they may have spent more than one stint in custody.

Mrs GERBER: I want to confirm. Based on those figures, less than half of distinct young people released from detention get a 72-hour transition plan? You said 976 distinct young people were released from detention. Based on the QoN, 444 received a 72-hour plan. Less than half are getting a 72-hour transition plan when they are released from custody. Based on the figures you just said then, there is 20 to 30 per cent that are not even getting a plan.

Mr Gee: I would not say that it is less than half. What I would say is there were 976 distinct young people in detention. About 74 per cent of them were serious repeat offenders. The 72-hour plans are designed for those serious repeat offenders. Off the top of my head, you have 444 of roughly 720 young people. We can throw that into whatever else we have in terms of coming back to you, if that is okay?

CHAIR: With reference to page 3 of the SDS, can the minister update the committee on the recently announced youth justice peak and its role in reducing offending?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. The youth justice peak was a recommendation from the Family and Child Commission that a peak body be established. It is also something about which I have been very determined. Community safety obviously is an absolute priority for our department. We have many excellent stakeholders in the youth justice sector. I want to thank all of those people who are members of my youth justice reference group, which I set up when I was first the youth justice minister and was very pleased to see that it is still happening.

The role of the peak is to work with the sector and representative bodies and the state government to inform policy decisions that improve community safety. We went out and were very clear that any organisation applying to be a peak needed to either be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation or that it partner with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation. That in fact is what we have with QATSICPP.

There are a number of systemic issues in youth justice on which we will be seeking the advice of the peak body which include the capability of service providers in rural and remote locations and those providing services to First Nations and culturally diverse communities by developing and sharing resources and activities. In our expression of interest we asked for them to design and deliver campaigns on targeting community service providers and community groups to develop strategies that promote workforce development.

As the member will be aware, this is an extremely challenging sector to work in. I take my hat off to everyone who is working in this sector. Not only is it tough and challenging, but these people are exposed to extreme disadvantage of the young people they are dealing with. Their resilience and strength in going past that to create a positive life trajectory is absolutely amazing.

There are a lot of really generic policy issues that we are looking to the peak body to develop. We only just announced that QATSICPP would be the successful organisation. They are currently in the process of setting up their structure and are working with stakeholders to determine what their action plan should be moving forward. I want to congratulate them. They are a great organisation, but they will be working with some excellent stakeholders as well.

CHAIR: We will go back to the opposition for questions.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, I just want to quickly round out my line of questioning and pick up on something that you said. I believe you said, and correct me if I am wrong, every serious repeat offender is getting a 72-hour transition plan. I draw your attention to page 34 of the Auditor-General's report where he notes that, of the sample of 77 serious repeat offenders who were released from detention, 28 per cent were released from detention without a 72-hour plan, despite being required to have one. Is the department disputing that?

Mr Gee: No, and I am happy to correct the record. I do not think I said that. What I think I said—and I will say it now—is that for every serious repeat offender the aim is to have an operational 72-hour plan. That is in the context of any young person who is supervised by youth justice should have a fulsome case management plan.

Mrs GERBER: Based on the current data you have given, not every serious repeat offender is in fact getting that.

Mr Gee: That is exactly right. Nor will we be able to, where a court releases a child in custody in a matter of hours, hold the person while we do the plan. I know it seems like an extreme example, but for anyone who has work in the criminal justice system there is a high turnover volume.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, if I can move to detention centres, can you tell me the location of the Cairns detention centre—even a suburb or an area generally within Cairns?

Mr Gee: No, because none has been selected. I think we are on the record as saying that we want to work with community. We have done a lot of work. There was one site identified early on outside of Cairns—

Mrs GERBER: Edmonton?

Mr Gee: In the broader Edmonton area, I think. That is no longer suitable. We continue to work with stakeholders, particularly traditional owners. I know the council has a view, and we will be working with them to make sure we find the best location to get a return on taxpayers' investment.

Mrs GERBER: At last year's estimates you said the same thing. You said that you were going to give advice to the minister imminently in relation to the location of the detention centre. Have you given any advice—and can you share that—in relation to where the detention centre in Cairns will be?

Mr Gee: I have not, to my memory or recollection, given the minister any advice as to where the preferred location should finally be for the detention centre because we are still in site validation and assessment processes. The places we have looked at so far, whilst they looked promising early on, have not stacked up. While I am around we will not be leaping forward with an investment of that size until we can shore up the investment so there is a return for the taxpayer.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, could we get an update on the length of time young offenders spent on remand in 2023-24 for each of the regions that have the Fast Track Sentencing Pilot: Brisbane, Townsville, Southport and Cairns?

Mr Gee: I think that is a question that is better dealt with by the Attorney-General and the department of justice. They will have the records. For us it would be an incredibly manual process that would not be able to be verified very quickly. The department of justice would have the appropriate records.

Mrs GERBER: I might come back to that in a second. Director-General, I want to ask you about the Intensive On Country program. Will the Intensive On Country program have a target or KPIs to reduce reoffending?

Mr Gee: I can answer that very broadly. It is a broad question in some ways. Everything we do is about stopping victimisation and community safety and stopping reoffending, so ultimately that is exactly what we should be doing. The programs we have used have been evidence-based. I would note that, six years ago, if you had walked into this state, cognitive behavioural therapy, multisystemic therapy, let alone the idea of an On Country program, were not discussed nor implemented in this state. We have implemented those. We are evaluating them. The On Country program was designed as a pilot. It took serious, high-risk young Indigenous and First Nations people. The evaluation has shown that it is promising, that offending behaviour has changed. We will be measuring that very closely. We evaluated that and published the On Country program and we will do the same thing for the Intensive On Country program.

Mrs GERBER: How long will the On Country section of the program be?

Mr Gee: That will be dependent on each program, each young person. The two programs that are being funded today intend to have young people in their care for between three and six months. How long they are on country will depend on a whole range of variables. It should be weeks at a time, but it will depend on their ability to continue to maintain access to health services. It is a very good program. Can I just point out that, if you take the Cairns program as an example, young people will be enrolled straight up in a certificate in agriculture and it will move through a whole range of stages through education, drug and alcohol. The important part of the Intensive On Country program is that we already have First Nations and other employers who are very interested and open and have already taken many of our young people through our Transition 2 Success program into employment.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, I come back to the question I asked in relation to the Fast Track Sentencing Pilot and the answer you gave that that is better directed at the Attorney-General. I draw your attention to question on notice 291, where in fact the youth justice department provided the answer for the 2023 year. I want to ask you again, Director-General: are you able to provide me with an update on the length of time young offenders spent on remand in 2023-24 for each of the regions that have the Fast Track Sentencing Pilot—Brisbane, Townsville, Southport and Cairns—as an update in relation to the QoN you provided back on 20 March?

Mr Gee: I might just ask my deputy director-general to confirm. My understanding is that it would be an onerous task for us to track every location. Do you want to add anything, Michael?

Mr Drane: I thank the member for the question. Ostensibly, I understand we have responded in question on notice 291. That was for a smaller sample size than what has been asked for. Those records were incredibly manually intensive to trawl through. As you can appreciate, the department tracks and records young people who are remanded in custody. The court of origin is information held by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. We certainly cross-reference that information, but that takes a significant amount of time and is manually intensive, and I note the chair's comment about timeframes for reporting back.

Mrs GERBER: Bearing in mind comments from the Auditor-General that the department is not tracking crime trends against investment, how are you determining the metric for the sentencing pilot if you are not prepared to give the data in relation to how long they have been on remand for?

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair: the member does need to direct the question. I cannot directly ask the deputy director-general.

CHAIR: I will take that as going to the director-general and you will do as you see fit.

Mrs GERBER: To the director-general, yes.

Mr Gee: The department of justice, I think through a tertiary institution, is evaluating the Fast Track Sentencing Program. I expect that should be published in the not-too-distant future. I thought it was early next year.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, cautions have increased 42 per cent from 2015 to 2023. In 2022-23 there were 1,735 cautions given for acts intended to cause injury. What policies does the government have on the longer term offending impacts of giving a caution for serious offending like this?

Mr Gee: The Youth Justice Act sets out the parameters for how matters should be dealt with. The prosecution process is solely owned by the Police Service in the first instance and then the DPP. The Police Service is the appropriate agency, but particularly the Commissioner of Police in terms of taking questions about police operations, policies, programs and how they implement approaches to cautioning. I would add, though, that in my experience—and the literature is clear—about 75 to 80 per cent of young people who are cautioned by police in the first instance do not return to the system.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, can I take you back to Cleveland Youth Detention Centre? Are you able to tell me how many days Cleveland Youth Detention Centre spent in lockdown, and what measures were put in place to ensure rehabilitation programs were able to be delivered to those youths in detention?

Mr Gee: Bear with me for two seconds, I have that with me. While I get that figure, I might ask the deputy director-general to talk about the operations and the programs that are in place, just to save the committee some time.

Mr Drane: I thank the member for the question. It is a matter of public record that the department did have some systemic staffing shortages, predominantly during and post the pandemic. It is pleasing to say that the department has had really good recruitment and retention outcomes as a result of recent enterprise bargaining and wage uplift for staff, such that we have a total of 118 FTE above strength for all three of our detention centres. We currently have only nine substantive vacancies in the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, which I am sure the member knows was one of the drivers for young people being separated regrettably.

Suffice to say, even during those periods of time, there was no interruption to essential services to young people; we just delivered those services in very different ways. An example of this is there was no interruption to primary health services, access to psychologists, speech pathologists, primary medical care, visitation from families, Court Link, court appearances and contact with families. Education was not ideal in that young people were not able to be moved around the facility to attend classrooms, but education material was provided to every single young person in their room within the accommodation section. The education staff who were in the campus—the education and training centre at Cleveland—were attending those units daily to issue that work to young people and resume it at the end of the day to mark the material and give them progressive material over the coming days.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, if you want to take it on notice.

Mr Gee: Yes, I will get it before 1.15. I have it here somewhere.

Mrs GERBER: Chair, do I have time for one more question to the minister?

CHAIR: Your time is just about to run out.

Mrs GERBER: Well, one more question to the minister then.

CHAIR: I was just going to say: do we have that figure, Director-General, or will you take it on notice?

Mr Gee: Can I clarify the question? I am sorry to be difficult but could you just repeat the question again?

Mrs GERBER: The question was—

Mr Gee: Lockdowns or separations?

Mrs GERBER: Lockdowns. The question was: how many days did Cleveland detention spend in lockdown?

Mr Gee: We will find it before 1.15.

Mrs GERBER: Thank you. Minister, I just wanted to ask you—

CHAIR: I call the member for Inala.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: Minister, with reference to page 108 of Budget Paper No. 4, can the minister advise the committee if construction of the Wacol remand centre is on track and the role it will play in reducing the number of young people in watch houses?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question. The construction of the new youth remand centre is being fast-tracked at Wacol. The project is led by Queensland Police Service and it is on track, as the director-general said earlier, to open in late December 2024. It is on QPS owned land located near the Brisbane and West Moreton youth detention centres. It is an ideal location because it means that we can share the services of those centres. As the member will be well aware, we are applying a therapeutic approach to this remand centre, and those services are actually offered at the West Moreton centre, which is literally across the road from where this new centre will be. It will accommodate approximately 76 young people, which as I said earlier will boost detention centre capacity in Queensland from 306 to 382 beds and reduce the number of people in watch houses.

Almost \$150 million has been invested in services to support stronger access to youth justice interventions, education, health and therapeutic services in accordance with the Community Safety Plan, the select committee recommendations and the Human Rights Act 2019. We made a commitment that we would co-design those services with First Nations people and with our key youth justice stakeholders, and that is happening as we speak.

Young people will receive the same fundamental services as other youth detention centres, including but not limited to: primary and mental health care and assessment; case planning; 48 weeks of school a year delivered by Education Queensland; visits and phone calls with family, kin, elders, peers and other significant supports; sport and fitness programs; behavioural change programs; large cell sizes; common exercise areas; and access to education, medical and therapeutic services. As I said it will be subject to the same oversight protocols as the current youth detention centres, such as weekly visits from the Office of the Public Guardian's community visitors and inspections by the Inspector of Detention Services and other internal and external oversight bodies. As the member is aware, we are in the process of constructing the new youth detention centre at Woodford and that will take that same therapeutic approach. Those services at that centre will also be co-designed with First Nations people.

As the director-general referred to earlier, the Caboolture watch house is nevertheless still a watch house. The refurbishment of that watch house and the services that are provided have been specifically targeted at making it more suitable to young people. In fact I was very pleased when I visited the Caboolture watch house only a couple of weeks ago to talk to the education team there. They were sharing with me some of the quotes from the young people who were going through the education program, many of whom may have been disengaged from education for some time.

We know, for instance, that a third of the young people who go to our youth detention centres literally cannot read at all. They are not just illiterate; they literally cannot read. Some of the team were sharing with me that the kids just want more books and that they were saying, 'I'm going to go back to school after I get out. This has changed my life.' That is really important not just for that young person; for every person who is put on a positive life trajectory, the community is safer. We are looking forward to seeing those similar but broader programs at the Wacol remand centre.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We have a few minutes left on the crossbench allocation so I go to the member for Maiwar.

Mr BERKMAN: Director-General, I want to put my question generally around watch houses. Obviously we are seeing very high numbers of children being detained for pretty long periods in watch houses. While I appreciate that is a matter for police not youth justice, while they are in these facilities there are, as I understand it, various services that visit the watch houses to provide oversight. Director-General, what are the processes for these oversight services to advise the department and subsequently the minister of what is happening in these watch houses, including any incidents like self-harm, assaults, suicide attempts or where significant risks are identified?

Mr Gee: I thank the member for the question. I am more than happy to provide a more detailed out-of-session briefing too. For me, the first point I would make is that everything is on CCTV footage. The processes are in place for those services to be able to not just contractually give us information around the performances and the number of outputs I suppose or widgets they produce—I do not mean that in a derogatory way; there is a strong alignment between the work of the youth co-responders and our youth justice staff who go into the watch houses.

To be very frank, watch houses are designed to limit the number of people in them, and when you are providing services at the intense rate that we are now—very different from how we did five to 10 years ago—there is a logistical exercise for the Police Service, the watch house keeper, to organise all of those services going through. If I use some of the watch houses in the north as an example, you will have meals three times a day but you will also have youth co-responders, Youth Justice and the NGO groups—Murri Watch, YETI and so on—going in and out. There is actually a roster developed between all of those entities and very good local approaches.

I am very proud to say that, post Fitzgerald in this state, there are a number of entities that are tasked with legislative responsibility to overview the process. I think the Inspector of Detention Services is a good step forward. I also mention the Ombudsman's role. On taking up the role, I asked the Ombudsman to look specifically at a few things—use of force, separations and those sorts of things. I know that he has done work on Cairns and a few other watch houses and he is also doing some work on our approach to separations in detention centres. I will let him speak to that.

Mr BERKMAN: I appreciate the information about the range of services, but I am specifically interested in reports to Youth Justice. Are you able to give us any data about how many reports were received by the youth justice department in, say, the 2023-24 financial year, specifically around serious incidents in watch houses including self-harm, assaults and suicide attempts and what proportion of those reports resulted in transportation out of the watch house within 24 hours?

Mr Gee: I also should have mentioned the Office of the Public Guardian and the Community Visitor Program. I was formerly at the Police Service and then took over Youth Justice. We invited in the then Public Guardian, so that complaints process is there. The community visitors and the Public Guardian is a formal process. There is also a range of processes whereby people can make open complaints to us. I do not think, from memory, that we have any about our staff. I think, from memory, in terms of complaints about other entities, most probably the Police Service, there were six for the year.

CHAIR: Are there any responses to be given to questions taken on notice? I am just trying to factor that in. Is there any further information?

Mr Gee: I do not think so—not on that specific question.

CHAIR: We have time for one more question.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with reference to page 111 of Budget Paper 4, has intensive case management been evaluated? If so, what were the findings of the evaluation?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. This is an evidence-based initiative that works intensively with families and young people aged 10 to 17 years who have a high and very high risk of offending to address the multiple factors involved in chronic youth offending. It is based on expert advice and evidence. I so often say that if we see that something is working we will do more of it. Intensive case management is one of those programs. In fact, it has produced some really significant results—a 51 per cent reduction in the frequency of offending and a 72 per cent reduction in the proportion of crimes against the person such as assault and those causing injury. It is currently operating in 16 locations. We are very pleased with those outcomes.

It means that one case manager can work with only up to five young people. We know that every serious repeat offender has a history of one or more of the following: domestic violence, poverty, homelessness, one or both parents incarcerated, disengagement from education, substance abuse, lack of a single person walking alongside them. Their lives cannot be turned around by a dinky little two-week program; they have to have intensive work. You cannot spend 14 or 15 years of your life subjected to those circumstances and change it quickly. This can take up to 12 months, working with that young person and their family to address the specific root causes of their offending.

One of the really important benefits of this program is that while our people are working with families they are also identifying younger siblings who could perhaps be on the same life trajectory. That is an important benefit. We will perhaps never be able to quantify what could have been. In the last financial year we provided case management for 319 young people with a high and very high risk of reoffending and their families. Some 217 of those were serious repeat offenders. Some 220 identify as First Nations people. It is an excellent program. The evaluation, which was conducted by Nous Group in 2022, before it was established across the state, found that 42 per cent of young people who completed the program did not reoffend at all.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the committee's examination of estimates.

Mr Gee: Chair, can I provide an answer to an earlier question? Fourteen was the answer on those lockdowns for Cleveland—a reduction of two-thirds.

CHAIR: Has that covered all of the questions taken on notice?

Mrs GERBER: I do not think it does. There were a couple more taken on notice.

Ms FARMER: To be provided by the end of the hearing? I think they were the ones that will take a week.

Mrs GERBER: Sure.

CHAIR: I think Monday is the date for response.

Mrs GERBER: Director-General, in relation to the number of days in lockdown, did you say 14?

Mr Gee: Sorry, that was the number of centre-wide lockdowns.

Mrs GERBER: No. The question was the number of days in lockdown.

Mr Gee: Single days, so 14 single days—centre-wide lockdowns.

Mrs GERBER: The Auditor-General's report said that Cleveland Youth Detention Centre spent 294 days in lockdown.

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair: the hearing has been completed.

CHAIR: The time for questions is complete. We were on to any commitments that have been given in terms of information to be provided or questions taken on notice. It is not an opportunity to ask new questions. In fact, the opposition has been given well over their time allocation.

Answers to questions on notice must be provided to the committee secretariat by 9 am on Monday, 5 August 2024. You can confirm the exact wording of any questions taken on notice in the proof transcript of this session of the hearing, which will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website within approximately two hours, or by watching the archive broadcast. The committee will now adjourn until 2 pm, when we will examine the estimates for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development.

Ms FARMER: Chair, there were a couple of questions where we said that it would take a week and we sought that member's and the committee's forbearance to go past the prescribed time for responses to an estimates hearing. We would just not be able to provide that information by that prescribed time. If the chair would not mind confirming that we can have a week from today to provide—

CHAIR: I am happy for however long it takes. I think even the member would understand that there are logistics involved. That extra time is granted. We are happy for you to provide that as soon as you are able to bring it together.

Ms FARMER: Chair, could I ask for your humour to thank some people?

CHAIR: Yes, very quickly.

Ms FARMER: Firstly, I thank all of the committee members and all of the Parliament House staff. This is an enormous process. For the public servants and my office who are involved in this, it is absolutely huge. In Youth Justice, I thank Director-General Bob Gee, Deputy Director-General Michael Drane, Fergus Howarth, Ashleigh Edwards, Sarah Baster, and the senior EDs and their teams across the department. In Education, I thank Director-General Michael De'Ath, Sharon Schimming, Duncan Anson, Kathleen Forrester, Megan Barry, Chris Lassig, Tania Porter, Hayley Stevenson, Phillip Brooks, Chris Kinsella, Nick Seeley, Chantal Casey, Jenny Ryan, Lesley Robinson, Kath Messer, Cath Howe, Ben Swan, Erica Harrison, David Miller and Stacie Hansel. I thank my magnificent team: Cathi Collier, my chief of staff; Tim and Gary, my media advisers; Karleigh, Djaisi and Thomas, my senior advisers; Caroline and Kym; Aryan, Aena and Deb. Thank you for your enormous efforts. It is much appreciated.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Director-General and committee.

Proceedings suspended from 1.19 pm to 2.00 pm.

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

In Attendance

Hon. LR McCallum, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development

Mr G Sottile, Chief of Staff

Ms A Ebrahimi, Policy Advisor

Mr M Dougall, Senior Policy Advisor

Department of Employment, Small Business and Training

Mr P McKay, Director-General

Mr S Koch, Deputy Director-General, Investment

TAFE Queensland

Mr J Tucker, Chief Executive Officer

 **CHAIR:** Good afternoon. We will now resume proceedings. For the benefit of those who have joined us, I am Mark Bailey, the member for Miller and chair of the committee. With me is Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair of the committee. Other members of the committee are: Ms Margie Nightingale, the member for Inala; Mr Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; Mr Darren Zanow, the member for Ipswich West; and Mr Brent Mickelberg, the member for Buderim who is joining us as the opposition shadow. The committee is and will be joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today. I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the chair's discretion or by order of the committee.

The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting our witnesses here today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. I ask all present to ensure phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. Please do not be that person. I also remind everyone that food and drink is not permitted in this chamber.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the employment and small business portfolio area until 3.30 pm. We will then adjourn for a short break until 3.45 pm before examining the portfolio area of training and skills development until 5.15 pm.

I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the time specified for the area as was agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House, available throughout the chamber and on the committee's website. I also remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing orders and rules of the Legislative Assembly.

In respect of the government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides that a member may ask any question that the committee determines will assist it in its examination of the relevant appropriation bill or otherwise would assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, all the officials here today and department officers and members of the public who will be watching both live and online. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials and advisers to identify themselves the first time they answer a question, referred to them by the minister or the director-general.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of employment and small business open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish, you may make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the country we are on, the Yagara and Turrbal, their elders past, present and emerging and their custodianship of this country for well over 60,000 years.

Chair, I extend my thanks to you and to the whole committee for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. As a new minister in a new government with a new plan for our great state, I am delighted to share my optimism for the future because the new Miles Labor government's 2024-25 Queensland budget is doing what matters for Queensland. It will ensure: more Queenslanders can access the skills and training they need for good, secure jobs; new and established small businesses can create jobs, grow and thrive; and the delivery of a range of grants, subsidies, employment programs and support measures.

By making multinational mining companies pay their fair share, we have been able to provide an historic \$1.5 billion investment in skills, training and employment and small business to help lower household bills, fight inflation and ease the cost of living by boosting jobs for everyday Queenslanders. Queensland is the nation's employment powerhouse. The fact is we have created more jobs than any other state or territory. I am advised that employment in Queensland has grown by more than 130,000 persons in the year to June 2024. That is the size of a small city and it is not a coincidence, Chair. The Miles Labor government is focused on ensuring our strong economy is delivering good, secure jobs for Queenslanders and our businesses can access the skilled workers they need to grow. Of the nearly three million workers in Queensland, more than one million of them are employed by a small business.

Our hardworking, small and medium-sized businesses are facing the reality of challenges that include natural disaster recovery, inflation and changes in consumer spending under national cost-of-living pressures. We are proud to support them with our new Queensland Small Business Strategy which is a \$250 million war chest of support right when they need it most. This budget delivers help for the state's small businesses to lower costs and fight inflation, including with direct grant support, as well as boosting productivity and new funding for free financial counsellors.

This budget also funds the appointment of a new Night Life Economy Commissioner that will work closely with local businesses, live music venues and entertainment precincts to create a vibrant and safe night-life environment. Just this morning we opened expressions of interest for this position because Queensland needs someone with the vision and energy to harness the incredible potential of our night-life, someone who can amplify the unique spirit of our communities and make Queensland the ultimate night-time destination.

On the training and skills front, we are doing what matters by kicking off Labor's plan to deliver one million subsidised training places for Queenslanders. This budget has locked in \$203.1 million over two years with the Queensland Skills Strategy. That is a plan for Queenslanders to access good, high-paying jobs with funding for more free and subsidised training in health, social services, hospitality, clean energy, construction and other priority areas.

We know that Free TAFE has been changing lives and our economy, so, under the strategy, we are strengthening this flagship cost-of-living support by funding 70,000 places. Thousands more nurses will save around \$25,000 in their training, thanks to \$162.6 million over three years for Free TAFE places in the Diploma of Nursing. Tens of thousands more will have money in their pockets thanks to Free TAFE. To build more homes for Queenslanders, we have also opened free construction apprenticeships to all and are providing \$1,000 worth of Free Tools for First Years through rebates. Today we have celebrated Queensland recording the highest levels of students in vocational education and training in over 10 years. But we are not stopping there. Our new Set for Success initiative is a \$2 million investment in supporting vulnerable Queenslanders who may have had their training pathways interrupted.

Chair, finally, we know the cost of living is putting pressure on Queenslanders. I have met some of our most vulnerable rebounding from very complex situations, including being homeless, health conditions, or simply being heartbroken. Thanks to our progressive coal royalties, our signature Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative has, quite literally in some cases, saved lives by supporting them with a chance at a better life through a pathway to a job and a recognised qualification. For many, this will be the first formal qualification they have ever achieved and, for some, it will be their very first job.

I have also heard firsthand, speaking to the community services sector and our Skilling Queenslanders for Work providers, that they know from experience the damage that cuts by the LNP can cause, so Queenslanders should rightfully be asking serious questions of the LNP about whether they will cut this program again and, for that matter, how much of the \$1.5 billion in the budget for this portfolio will be cut, sacked or sold. Make no mistake, LNP cuts to coal royalties—

Mr LISTER: A point of order on relevance under standing order 118(b), Chair: we are here to examine the budget that has been introduced into the House. We are not here for a political attack on the opposition; we are here to seek the truth from the government.

CHAIR: I think the minister is about to finish.

Mr LISTER: I hope so.

CHAIR: I am sure you will want latitude at some point. It is not unusual for a minister to say something like that in an opening statement but I think the minister is about to wrap up.

Mr McCALLUM: Chair, with that on the record, I would be happy to take the first question.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, last year at estimates the committee considered the impact of crime on small and family business and the fact that there were not any questions about the impact of crime included in the Small Business Strategy survey. The minister at the time said that the impact of crime would be included in further consultation. How have small and family businesses been consulted on the issue of crime since last July, and what measures have the state government implemented to assist small businesses in dealing with Queensland's youth crime crisis?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for Buderim for the question. I can assure the committee that community safety for both households and businesses is a priority of the Miles government. That is why the Miles government has released our Community Safety Plan for Queensland. It is our plan to support victims, deliver for the front line, protect the community, intervene early and prevent crime before it occurs. For home businesses and sole traders, these evidence-based community safety measures will support them in the same way they support households.

For proprietors and small businesses with premises, we have taken some clear steps to help them. Our new \$250 million Queensland Small Business Strategy includes a number of actions that are aimed at increasing the resilience of Queensland's small businesses. Under the new strategy, we are supporting safer retail precincts with funding to deliver a pilot engagement and education campaign in partnership with the National Retail Association that is designed to increase safety in retail precincts, especially for small business workers. The aim of the pilot is to ensure retail businesses and frontline workers are empowered with the knowledge, resources and confidence to manage incidents and to assist the Queensland Police Service with the necessary intelligence to act effectively.

The department's Business Queensland website provides useful information to small businesses on increased safety, including crime prevention and the security of premises. This includes information about money handling, security systems and staff safety. There is a business continuity plan template included, with links to further business security information from the Queensland Police Service. In addition, the latest \$3 million round of the Business Basics grants focuses on resilience, as well as on support for small business to improve their core skills and to adapt best practice. Small business can apply for grants of up to \$5,000 for CCTV to help strengthen their security. That is something that we have been proud to do, and it is based on feedback from small businesses.

One recipient of a Business Basics grant is Cairns small business, StarterStopper, which received \$5,000 to upgrade its website to support worldwide orders and different currencies. I have had the opportunity to meet with the gentleman who started StarterStopper, Nick Bradt. He is a fantastic Queenslander who is doing wonderful things. StarterStopper is an approved engine immobiliser supplier under the current Queensland government's Vehicle Immobiliser Subsidy Trial. StarterStopper's aim is to help prevent crime by protecting as many vehicles in Queensland as possible while, at the same time, creating a work boom in the auto-electrical industry.

In addition, the Queensland Police Service has launched a new crime prevention program called End Knife Violence in support of changes to knife laws from 1 September 2024. This will help make operating a business, as well as our communities, safer. Finally, the member's question referred to insurance premiums—

Mr MICKELBERG: No, the member's question did not.

Mr McCALLUM: I apologise.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, the Small Business Commissioner has held a number of round tables throughout the state in the last year, was crime and the impact of crime on small business raised during those round tables?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. We take feedback from Queensland's small businesses from many sources. I have a Queensland Small Business Advisory Council and, of course, we have a dedicated Queensland Small Business Commissioner. It is important to note when

we consider the development of our brand new \$250 million Queensland Small Business Strategy that almost 2,000 small businesses and key stakeholders across Queensland were consulted in the development of this strategy. This included industry representatives, peak bodies, small business owners, the Queensland Small Business Commissioner, members of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council and, of course, all of the feedback that comes to the hardworking staff of the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training and our staff who are out in regional Queensland—

Mr LISTER: Chair, a point of order.

CHAIR: What is your point of order?

Mr LISTER: My point of order is on relevance under standing order 118(b). The question was specifically about what the industry has come back with in terms of the small business community and crime and the impact on their bottom line. We have not heard anything about that yet. The answer has been very general so we would appreciate it if the minister would answer the question that has been asked.

CHAIR: I thank the member for the point of order. The member has covered some of the question that was asked but the minister might like to return to the specifics of the question.

Mr McCALLUM: I am happy to round out my answer, thank you, Chair. I am advised that the Queensland Small Business Commissioner chairs a quarterly small business lessor round table comprised of commercial lessors with small business tendency interests. The roundtable members have reported on retail crime in shopping centres and its impact on small businesses, including increased security costs, which is why I am happy to see our Business Basic grants of \$5,000 for small businesses to purchase things such as CCTV. The members of that round table have provided feedback that they feel that security guards have limited powers to respond to some of the instances that they are dealing with. This, again, underscores the importance of the partnerships that we have with industry. The National Retail Association are working on pilot programs that include advice and feedback from the Queensland Police Service. Those strong links between small business, government and community safety agencies such as our frontline police are incredibly important.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, how many businesses have been affected by crime in the last 12 months?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. Can I confirm that the member is seeking how many Queensland businesses?

Mr MICKELBERG: Let's be clear that if I talk about a Queensland small business I talking about a Queensland small business—all 482,000 of them?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I do not have that information available. I would suggest that the information and the data that the member for Buderim is seeking would be held by the Queensland Police Service and that the Minister for Police would be far more able to furnish the information that the member is seeking.

Mr MICKELBERG: For the Minister's benefit there is a specific offence called unlawful entry with intent—shop. It is very clear—shop, so it relates to businesses. In 2023-24 there were 3,583 instances of individuals charged with unlawful entry—shop. That has skyrocketed under the Palaszczuk and then Miles government by 132 per cent from 2015 to now. The minister referenced Business Basics grants and \$5,000 for CCTV. For the very small number of businesses that might be able to access a Business Basics grant, will \$5,000 for CCTV address their concerns when it comes to the youth crime crisis that is washing through Queensland?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question, although I would like to seek some further information in relation to the data that was contained in what was a fairly lengthy preamble to the question. Could the member please authenticate or at least offer the source of that data?

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy to do that. That data is from the Queensland government QPS website. I would suggest it is information the minister should already be aware of. To be clear, in 2015-16 on the offence of unlawful entry with intent—shop there were 1,541 instances. In 2023-24 there were 3,583 instances. As I said, there was a 132 per cent increase. The question remains: are \$5,000 Business Basics grants going to address the concerns of small business when it comes to youth crime?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. As I mentioned in one of my previous answers, the availability of business grants for small businesses to put towards CCTV or other community safety measures is based on feedback from small businesses. They have asked for it. It is

not the only measure that Queensland small businesses have to assist them. I have also spoken about partnerships such as those with the Queensland retail association and some really important work that we have underway in collaboration with industry when it comes to this issue.

In relation to the member's question around grants, I am proud to be part of a government that is providing direct grant assistance to Queensland small businesses because under a previous LNP government, the last time the LNP was in government—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair.

Mr McCALLUM:—there were zero grants available.

Mr LISTER: Chair, point of order.

CHAIR: Minister, sorry, there is a point of order.

Mr LISTER: Firstly, Sir, you must deal with a point of order above all other business except for a matter of privilege suddenly arising.

CHAIR: I do not need to be lectured on the standing orders. I have granted—

Mr LISTER: I have had to remind you a number of times.

CHAIR: You will not speak over the chair. I granted you a point of order. Get to your point of order.

Mr LISTER: My point of order is relevance. How desperate is this government to be going on about a government that has had 10 years in the wilderness?

CHAIR: That is not a point of order and you know it. That is not a point of order and if you continue with this disorderly behaviour I will deal with you.

Mr LISTER: It is on standing order 118, relevance. This is an examination of the estimates—

CHAIR: Cease speaking.

Mr LISTER:—not of a government of 10 years ago.

CHAIR: Cease speaking right now. You have made a point of order. It was not a legitimate point of order, as you are aware.

Mr LISTER: I am not aware of that, Sir.

CHAIR: As you are aware. Do not bicker with me—

Mr LISTER: This is an inquiry into the truth. It is not a mangocube investigation.

CHAIR: Order! That was not a point of order, as you are aware. The question had political connotations. The minister is now using some political connotations. I allowed a latitude in the question and I am allowing a little latitude in the answer. The minister is probably getting close to the end of his answer, anyway. Over to the minister.

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair. I will round out my answer by saying there has been a record amount of assistance delivered to Queensland small businesses through grants since 2021—over \$39 million worth of assistance to almost 6,000 businesses. We are doing what matters in supporting Queensland small businesses.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, in relation to state government grants why has the state government cut funding that seeks to link Queensland small businesses to grants and support services?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. As I was just informing the committee, there has been a record amount of support given to Queensland small businesses through grants since 2021. The objective of the small business service area is to ensure that small businesses can seamlessly interact with government and are supported to start, grow and thrive. The grant programs referred to in the majority of the SDS measures include the small business grants programs offered under the Big Plans for Small Business strategy, which have been continued as part of the new Queensland Small Business Strategy. Businesses can use grant funding to increase key capabilities, embrace innovation and capitalise on high-growth opportunities. As I was saying, since 2021 over \$39 million has been allocated to almost 6,000 businesses under these grants programs. The percentage of new or existing businesses reporting increased capability including digital capability—

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: Minister, there is a point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: My point of order is on relevance, Mr Chair. The question was quite specific about a cut. To be clear, the 2023-24 budget had \$33.4 million allocated for grants and the 2024-25 budget has \$22.7 million, so there is a cut of \$10.6 million. My question was not about the effectiveness or otherwise of those grants. My question was: why has there been a cut of \$10.6 million in funding to a service that seeks to connect Queensland small businesses to grants and support services?

CHAIR: Can we come back to the specifics of the question please, Minister?

Mr McCALLUM: Indeed. As part of Small Business Month in May, which was after the initial response to assisting small businesses that were affected by the extreme weather events at the beginning of the year, a grant round for each program was opened. That was opened in May or shortly after with around \$8 million. Obviously May is an important milestone in the small business calendar. With the addition of another round of the basics grants to be opened later this year, the \$11 million in budgeted funding is anticipated to be fully allocated in the 2024-25 financial year.

CHAIR: The next question is by the member for Inala.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: My question is of the minister. Minister, with further reference to SDS page 2 and the record cost-of-living relief being provided by this budget can you outline what the Miles government is doing to help ease the cost of doing business for our hardworking Queensland small business owners?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. We are proud to be supporting Queensland small businesses with our new \$250 million Small Business Strategy. This is a strategy which is going to provide real assistance to Queensland small businesses to deliver a range of actions over three years to help them start, thrive and grow and to combat the pressures associated with the cost of doing business. The three-year strategy will deliver 20 actions across four key focus areas designed to lower operating costs, boost opportunities, build resilience and capability, and grow diversity in the sector. I would also like to acknowledge the member's advocacy on behalf of the small businesses in her community of Inala, an electorate that is very close to mine.

This cost-of-living relief that we are delivering—record cost-of-living relief—starts with our \$650 rebate on electricity bills that is being delivered by the Miles and Albanese Labor governments for around 205,000 eligible small businesses. We also know that a motor vehicle expense can have a big impact on the bottom line for Queensland's hardworking small and family businesses, especially those that run a fleet, so our new Miles Labor government will slash 20 per cent off light vehicle registration fees—a move that has been welcomed by those who need to keep the motor running to keep doing business. We also know that rising costs are a challenge for small businesses. Whilst this is a national issue, we are looking forward to seeing outcomes of things like the Insurance Affordability and Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Taskforce being led by the Commonwealth government. This is real, practical help for small businesses that need it.

This budget also extends a vital lifeline to Queensland's small businesses. Available throughout Queensland, free financial counselling and wellness coaching will continue to help small business owners tackle challenges and find solutions with free one-on-one, targeted support. So important are these positions that just yesterday the Miles and Albanese Labor governments unlocked a further \$6.9 million in our \$13.4 million small business support program to extend the Small Business Support Network over the next two years.

While our measures are providing more support to small businesses than ever before, we see right across the nation that there is, unfortunately, a harsh reality that not every small business will thrive or survive. I refer to reporting from the ABC's *Stateline* from this Tuesday, 30 July 2024 in an article titled 'Opposition leader David Crisafulli ran a training company liquidators believe may have been trading insolvent'. I am happy to table that if the committee requires. It reports that on 1 December 2015—

David Crisafulli ... ran a training organisation liquidators believed may have been trading insolvent from the day he started as a director.

This raises a number of serious questions that remain unanswered.

Mr LISTER: Chair, point of order, please.

CHAIR: It had better be a genuine point of order.

Mr LISTER: It is a genuine point of order; you can be certain of that. I say again that the minister must speak to the estimates and the appropriation before us. The actions of an identity in the opposition or a government 10 years in the wilderness are not relevant to this appropriation. It is taking up time—time that we could be using to get to the truth of things—so can I ask you please to bring him back to relevance?

CHAIR: Member, the standard I have applied for opposition members as well as government members is some latitude—

Mr LISTER: It is irrelevant!

CHAIR: You will wait until you hear my answer. I have allowed your colleague the member for Buderim and other colleagues of yours latitude to speak of things other than those related to the current budget. What you are asking me to do will actually truncate the breadth of questions of your own side if I was to—

Mr LISTER: No, I would be quite happy if you brought him into line, Sir.

CHAIR:—apply it, and you will cease speaking while I am—

Mr Lister interjected.

CHAIR:—giving you a ruling.

Mr LISTER: It is irrelevant.

CHAIR: You are warned. You got it? That is not a genuine point of order and the minister has the floor. He is answering a government question and he is answering the question that was asked. Minister?

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair. It raises a number of serious questions. As sole director of SET Solutions, did he knowingly trade while insolvent, in contravention of the Corporations Act? If not, why not? How can it possibly be plausible that the sole director of a company is unaware that it is trading insolvent? It also raises serious questions for Queensland small businesses under a future LNP government. How can our small business sector have confidence in a state led by someone who may have been trading while insolvent? It also seems that government grants for small programs with limited data and large money were integral to Southern Edge Training's business operations. The ABC said—

They also cited that Victoria's education department—which had a funding agreement with the training business—rejected a registration renewal request in March 2016, meaning the company 'could not obtain any further funding from this date'.

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: There is a point of order. Member for Buderim?

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. I just seek your guidance. The House has agreed to break this session into employment and small business, and training and skills development. The minister is now speaking about registration matters as they relate to a vocational training entity. I would have thought that was relevant to the training section but not potentially the employment and small business section of this examination. I seek your guidance on that, please.

Mr McCALLUM: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: To the point of order? Yes?

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair. I am simply speaking in relation to the operations of a small business.

CHAIR: Okay. Minister, if you will come to a close to your answer, that would be helpful, but I do note that it is both about a small business and training, so it can be read either way, but, Minister, you have the call.

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair. Our cost-of-living measures are aimed at lowering business operating costs and putting more money into the pockets of Queenslanders so that they can spend more at their local small business.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with respect to cost-of-living relief in the budget handed down by the Miles government and page 3 of the SDS, can you please outline to the committee what support the government is providing to vulnerable Queensland jobseekers, including in my electorate of Rockhampton, and are you aware of any risks to these programs?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I think the member is referring to the Skilling Queenslanders for Work—

Opposition members interjected.

CHAIR: Order! The minister has the floor.

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order then, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: It had better be a point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: This will be exactly the same point of order I raised earlier. The minister himself has just foreshadowed that this question addresses Skilling Queenslanders for Work, which is a training program, not a small business program. It is most certainly within the training portfolio.

Mr McCALLUM: Point of order: it is actually an employment program.

CHAIR: Yes. I think you are verballing the minister there, member. Good try, but the minister—

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

CHAIR: Good try, but the minister does have the floor and I ask you to simply allow him to answer the question, which he has had very little opportunity to do at this point due to your point of order. We will let him answer the question.

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the member for Rockhampton for the question and for his support of this key employment initiative helping our vulnerable. The Miles Labor government is doing what matters for Queensland, and there are few greater examples of this than providing another \$8 million in cost-of-living relief by sponsoring thousands of Queenslanders with free qualifications, paid traineeships and putting them on a path to employment.

Funded by progressive coal royalties through this budget, up to 15,000 vulnerable jobseekers will be given the opportunity with community-based, not-for-profit organisations to get on-the-job training through the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative. We know that the cost of living is putting pressure on Queenslanders. This initiative provides essential support to help people secure ongoing employment and to improve their livelihoods. For many it will be the first formal qualification they have ever had and for some their very first job.

If it pleases the committee, I can also provide a direct update to the member for Rockhampton on a recent success story through this program. A Miles Labor government funded employment project called Planting the Seed is growing the potential of Rocky land providing unemployed and underemployed locals, including First Nations people, young people and people with a disability, with pathways into the workforce. Trainee Kaya Webb, a mother of five who overcame homelessness, is gaining invaluable skills and confidence through the project, setting her on a path to secure, long-term, meaningful employment. I got to meet Kaya, who said—

This program has changed my life.

She continued—

I was at a point where I didn't know what to do and nobody would see me for me and see the potential I had. This program spotted it straight away and now I'm here and so much a part of it.

I am pleased to update the committee that Kaya has successfully completed all training modules for a Certificate I in Conservation and Ecosystem Management. She has now secured employment with a local real estate agent and on completion of the project her hours will increase to over 25 per week. However, her story also comes with a really strong warning. She said—

If you don't give disadvantaged people a chance to prove themselves, they're never going to get anywhere—it's just going to breed social injustice and economic failure.

The first round of this funding in 2024-25 will invest \$44.6 million to open doors to over 5,500 jobseekers who may be experiencing social isolation, learning difficulties or mental health challenges to find meaningful work through our Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative. Across 94 organisations and 166 projects statewide, jobseekers will gain qualifications and real-world experience across a range of priority industries including construction, education, retail, community services, health and hospitality.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go back to the opposition.

Mr MICKELBERG: In the same vein, Minister, on Skilling Queenslanders for Work, given that it is an employment program as you say. Director-General, I refer you to estimates question on notice No. 13. What length of employment tenure is used to assess if an individual in Skilling Queenslanders for Work has gained or maintained employment after completion of the program? How many days does someone have to work to be considered employed after completing Skilling Queenslanders for Work?

Mr McKay: The survey is undertaken 12 months after completion of the program. It relates to their employment at that point in time.

Mr MICKELBERG: Just to be clear, Director-General, an individual would need to be employed for 12 months; is that correct?

Mr McKay: That is right. At the survey point, 12 months after their completion of the program.

Mr MICKELBERG: So they were in a job for a day at the point it was assessed—is that correct—12 months down the track?

CHAIR: I am sorry: can you clarify that? I was not clear what you were saying then.

Mr MICKELBERG: The survey is done 12 months after the completion of the training. If they are employed on the day that they are surveyed then they are considered to be employed, even if that employment is only for the day of the survey; is that correct? My question is quite simple: does an individual need to be employed for 12 months? You have referenced the 12-month mark as being the survey date. Does an individual need to be employed for 12 months or one day to be considered employed after a Skilling Queenslanders for Work program is finished?

Mr McKay: The issue is that they have to have been employed within that 12-month period.

Mr MICKELBERG: For one day, at any time. They could also be self-employed; is that correct?

Mr McKay: I believe that is the case, yes.

Mr MICKELBERG: They could be self-employed for one day in 12 months and that is employment; is that your answer?

Mr McKay: I can clarify that. I believe that is the case.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you very much. On a separate issue, Minister, earlier this week I met with a business in Nambour that is leased by an entity called Walter's Artisan Bread. The owner, David Mares, has invested a considerable amount in the Nambour community. He has signed a 10-year lease. He has been told by Energex, after he signed the lease, that they cannot provide enough power for him to run his equipment so that he can start baking and trading. Minister, how does your department support small businesses like that of David's that are having difficulties with other Queensland government departments?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. My department will assist small businesses in the best way that they can, whatever the issue is. We also have the dedicated Small Business Commissioner. We have a wide range of supports that are available out there for Queensland small businesses where we can assist them, whether it is to navigate their way through government and perhaps facilitate contact with another government department or whether it is helping small businesses with things like leasing matters. Whether it is the Small Business Commissioner, this department or the hardworking staff who are in our regional offices, they are there to support small businesses, including with other government agencies.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a follow-up question to the director-general. Director-General, the minister just referenced the Small Business Commissioner being able to intervene in these sorts of measures. I note that the instance or issue—

Mr McCALLUM: Point of order, Chair. That is a mischaracterisation of my answer. I said that the Small Business Commissioner was—

Mr MICKELBERG: What is the point of order?

CHAIR: I am sorry. There is a point of order. I try to hear your points of order in silence, other than when you interject on me. The minister is entitled to outline his point of order. Minister?

Mr McCALLUM: What the member for Buderim has just said is his interpretation of my answer. He has done it a couple of times now. I wanted to bring that to the committee's attention.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr MICKELBERG: To the point of order, Chair? I am more than happy for the minister to correct the record if he thinks I am verballing him.

CHAIR: That is not a point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: The minister has raised a point of order. I am talking to his point of order.

CHAIR: Let us move on. These procedural interjections are not assisting.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy to move on. I was halfway through my question. I had not finished yet.

CHAIR: Let us move on, but let us move on using accurate information.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, I will continue with the accurate information that was just articulated by the minister. The minister referenced the Small Business Commissioner as providing support for small businesses. My specific question was in relation to a small business that is having an issue with a government department or a GOC, and in this case it is Energex. How does the Small Business Commissioner assist a business like Walter's Artisan Bread, in this instance, that is having challenges with an entity such as Energex?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. Certainly the role of the Small Business Commissioner is to act as an advocate. That is included in the powers and functions of the Small Business Commissioner established under her act so she would have some latitude to advocate on behalf of small businesses. Certainly also the department exists to provide support to small businesses and to provide a liaison point with the Small Business Commissioner. The Small Business Commissioner and I have a regular meeting where issues of concern are raised. If there are any issues where the Small Business Commissioner felt she was unable to get traction with a government department on behalf of a small business, that avenue exists for her to raise that with me and for me, in turn, to raise that with my colleague directors-general.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, it is true, though, that the government expressly excluded the Small Business Commissioner from mediating in relation to disputes between businesses and government departments in the legislation that was introduced establishing the permanent Queensland Small Business Commissioner. Aside from advocacy, which you and I and everyone in this room can do, what powers does the Small Business Commissioner have to intervene in an instance such as this?

Mr McKay: The Small Business Commissioner's statutory objectives were set out under the Small Business Commissioner Act when that was enacted. That did provide a range of powers. Those powers related, in dealing with disputes, to matters such as those retail tenancy disputes and the like that I think you mentioned and those other powers that are set out in the legislation.

Mr MICKELBERG: So for retail tenancies but not for disputes between a government department and a small business?

Mr McKay: That is correct. Those are not in the powers of the Small Business Commissioner under her act.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, when a business or a prospective business owner is given advice from a state government department or a state government owned entity, should they have confidence that the advice they are given can be relied on to make a business investment decision?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question, but I am not quite sure of the nature of the advice.

CHAIR: That seems to be fairly hypothetical in nature, I would have thought. Can you rephrase that?

Mr MICKELBERG: I will ask the minister. Given the minister can answer a question with an opinion, I will ask the minister. In this instance, the small business owner was given advice that the business premises he has signed a 10-year lease on would be able to support the energy consumption that he needs. He was given that advice by Energex. How can any small business owner in Queensland have the confidence to invest if they cannot rely on advice provided to them by state government departments and government owned entities like Energex?

CHAIR: It is a hypothetical question. I will give the minister latitude in terms of his response.

Mr McCALLUM: It is a hypothetical question about—

Mr MICKELBERG: Not for David, it's not.

Mr McCALLUM: If I could finish my statement, it is a hypothetical question about a government owned corporation that is outside the purview of my portfolio as well as this committee. I am sure the member for Buderim knows that.

For any person or small business that is seeking some support with matters like energy, there is an Energy and Water Ombudsman. I make this point: whether it is the department or the Small Business Commissioner, there are other avenues of support available right across government that small businesses can call on. Since the member's question did relate to small business and energy matters, I would like to inform or remind the committee of the \$650 energy rebate for eligible small businesses but also—

Mr MICKELBERG: David would be stoked to get that if he could actually get electricity.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr McCALLUM:—investing in programs such as ecoBiz to help small businesses reduce—

Mr MICKELBERG: Once again, Chair, my question—

CHAIR: Order!

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order—

CHAIR: It would be helpful if you stopped interjecting before you made a point of order. Is it a genuine point of order?

Mr MICKELBERG: It is a genuine point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: Then make your point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: I do not know where the minister is getting ecoBiz or anything relevant to ecoBiz from. My point of order is on relevance. My question was very—

Mr McCALLUM: Broad.

Mr MICKELBERG:—explicit. You say it is a hypothetical. I would suggest David would not suggest it is a hypothetical, given that he is living this. My point of order is on relevance. EcoBiz is not remotely relevant to the question that I asked or, for that matter, to David's situation, given he cannot even turn the electricity on.

CHAIR: You are now debating it. The minister will come back to the question.

Mr McCALLUM: As I said, the member's question relates to Energex, which is well outside of the portfolio matters that I have responsibility for.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, I take it from your answer, then, that you do not believe that your department has a role in supporting David and Walter's Artisan Bread in this circumstance?

Mr McCALLUM: No. Once again, that is your interpretation and a political interpretation at that. That is the member's interpretation, and a very deliberate political interpretation, of an answer.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go to—

Mr MICKELBERG: Chair, with your latitude, I have a direct follow-up question.

CHAIR: No. We will go to member for Inala.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: My question is of the minister. As an educator, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of education and employment. With reference to page 2 of the SDS, can you update the committee on the progress of the Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032, and are you aware of any alternative views?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question and for her fierce advocacy for employment outcomes in this state. When it comes to employment, it goes without saying that the Miles government is completely focused on doing what matters for Queenslanders. We are doing that by ensuring our strong economy is delivering good, secure jobs for Queenslanders and our businesses can access the skilled workers they need to grow.

Queensland is the nation's employment powerhouse, adding nearly 400,000 jobs since March 2020. That is more than any other state or territory in the nation. Outcomes like this would not have been possible without initiatives such as the Queensland Workforce Strategy. The Queensland Workforce Strategy is the only whole-of-government workforce strategy in Australia, unlocking the full potential of our workforce and delivering real outcomes for Queenslanders.

It is guiding workforce related investment and support across our Big Build and a broad range of sectors including clean energy, health, advanced manufacturing and other traditional and emerging industries. It also informs key government workforce and cost-of-living support such as our investment in training and key initiatives like Free TAFE and Skilling Queenslanders for Work.

Supporting the Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy is the first three-year action plan. The action plan is strengthening partnerships between industry, community and government to deliver 33 actions across five key focus areas. This includes \$70 million for new and expanded initiatives that build upon the extensive suite of existing government support for our state's workforce. If it pleases the member, I would be happy to update on the 33 actions which have all been completed or are underway.

There are 10 actions under 'Workforce participation' to enable all Queenslanders to participate in the workforce and support employers to rethink their employment practices and grow a more diverse workforce. One of these is the Industry Workforce Advisor program, which I am advised is fully established. The Industry Workforce Advisor program provides workforce planning assistance to employers in small and medium sized businesses, enabling them to address workforce challenges, diversify their workforces, and support businesses and workforce growth.

A network of 11 industry workforce advisers is supporting employers across a range of industry sectors to connect them with relevant government and industry grants, programs and initiatives to address their workforce needs. I am pleased to report that more than 1,000 businesses have been supported through the program to date, with 52 per cent of these in regional Queensland. Small businesses that engage with an industry workforce adviser may be eligible to also get support through the Workforce Connect Fund's HR Support Grants if they identify an immediate need for human resource solutions that support addressing their workforce challenges.

There are five actions under 'Local solutions' to implement locally focused and led workforce planning and initiatives and coordinate efforts across industry, the community and government at all levels to focus on regional and local workforce priorities. One of these is increasing cost-of-living relief, which I am happy to update is underway. The Labor government has increased the allowance rate to offset travel and accommodation costs for eligible apprentices and trainees to access training. From 1 July 2022 we increased the daily accommodation rate from \$30 to \$57 per day, and the interstate rate increased from \$72 to \$109 per day, with these new rates applying for travel on or after 1 July 2024. We have also increased the subsidy for road travel from 26 cents per kilometre to 33 cents per kilometre.

CHAIR: We will now go to the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, other than financial burdens on small business, supply chain issues and staffing, complicated red tape, as it has been described, or the regulatory and legislative burden created by government, government departments and local government seems to be one of the concerns of small business. What, if anything, is your department doing to reduce the regulatory and legislative burden on small businesses to alleviate costs and the financial burden as well as free up time for small businesses?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. It is an important question. We want to make it as easy as possible for small businesses to do business in Queensland and to create the right settings for them to grow and thrive. That does mean that governments should always talk to industry about how we can do things better.

Effective regulation not only protects consumers but also provides a level playing field for small businesses, ensuring they do not have to compete against any unscrupulous competitors. For the committee's benefit I will outline an example of what I mean by that: things like the labour hire licensing regime. We are taking action to help back small businesses that are doing the right thing by creating a level playing field for all businesses.

In his question the member referenced councils. The Small Business Commissioner has a Small Business Friendly Program. Councils sign up to that program. It is about working with councils to promote the right framework when it comes to local regulations for small businesses to grow and thrive. It also recognises there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to small businesses. What works in Ipswich might be different to what works in Cairns, which will be different again to what works in Rocky.

Some of the actions we have taken to reduce the regulatory burden include the Small Business Commissioner, dispute resolution and advice on regulatory reform, which has helped over 2,440 businesses in 2023-24. We have our Business Launchpad initiative, which is helping businesses navigate and find regulatory information easily. I am advised it has delivered almost \$57 million in time savings for businesses with more than 98,000 users as at 30 June this year. I mentioned the Small Business Friendly Program, which is reducing red tape between small businesses and local government. Forty-nine councils have signed on to that. The program introduced members to the West Australia Small Business Development Corporation's approvals program, which Townsville City Council might find of interest, delivering significant improvements to their town planning processes, improving decision-making and significantly reducing the number of complaints.

The Queensland Outdoor Activation Action Plan is delivering an improved regulatory framework, supporting outdoor business and activities, and of course we have our small and medium enterprise procurement policies and targets which are helping make it easier to do business with the Queensland government itself.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, you mentioned that one size does not fit all. Can you point to anything that is being done specifically for regional and rural Queensland when it comes to helping small business, whether it is through a grants program, the Small Business Commissioner or any other programs you have available for rural and regional Queenslanders in small businesses?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question and I acknowledge his passion and advocacy not only for his community of Hinchinbrook but also for rural and regional Queensland. I sincerely acknowledge that.

In the member's electorate of Hinchinbrook, 63 recipients have been awarded small business grants since 2021. We have dedicated grants programs for small businesses that either have been impacted and/or are still recovering from extreme weather events in rural and regional Queensland. In the previous question I went through some targeted regional and rural programs for local councils through their Small Business Friendly Program. Yesterday we announced the next stage of financial assistance and free support for small businesses that were affected by Tropical Cyclone Jasper. Grants of up to \$20,000 are now available for eligible small businesses that experienced a significant loss of income, and that can be stock, wages et cetera. It is a joint program with the federal government. These grants are part of a \$13.4 million Small Business Support Program, which also includes the extension of the Small Business Support Network.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, I have one last question regarding the cost of electricity in North Queensland. There were some previous answers regarding that earlier. The grant that is available to every person across Queensland for electricity is now in everyone's electricity account. Can you please speak specifically about what the minister's portfolio is doing right now to try to alleviate the cost of electricity for small businesses, noting that for cafes, bars and restaurants it is their No. 1 bill at the moment.

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I thank the member for acknowledging the record levels of cost-of-living relief we are providing through the energy rebate of \$1,000 for each and every Queenslanders, no matter where you live. I know that a lot of Bundamba locals have seen that \$1,000 credit from the Miles Labor government appear on their electricity bills after 1 July, and there are constituents in every single member's community who are receiving the benefits of that rebate. That will go up to \$1,300 with federal rebates and can increase to \$1,672 if you are a senior or concession cardholder. I will move to small businesses in a moment, but I do want to point out that it is extremely relevant for small businesses that this cost-of-living relief is being delivered because it means that small business customers have more money in their pockets through the savings they have of at least \$1,300 for each and every Queenslanders to support small businesses—to go and shop at their small businesses, to maybe buy that cup of coffee, maybe head to the bakery. This is extremely relevant and it is certainly consistent with the feedback I am getting from small business owners. When it comes to helping small businesses, there is a \$650 small business rebate for around 204,000 Queensland small businesses. In other states and territories that rebate is only \$325. In Queensland it has been doubled thanks to the Miles Labor government. That is very significant cost-of-living relief for small businesses as well as their customers.

CHAIR: We will go to the opposition.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what were the total administrative costs for grants and support programs administered by your department in the last financial year?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. I do not have the detail of that to hand, but with the minister's agreement we could get back to that. So that is the total administrative cost of all grants administered for the department?

Mr MICKELBERG: Correct, for the last financial year. I am happy for that to be taken on notice, Chair.

CHAIR: That is fine.

Mr McCALLUM: We will get back to the member.

CHAIR: Do you think you will have that today?

Mr McCALLUM: We will endeavour to get that information by the end of today's hearing, yes.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the SDS shows that for every \$1,000 allocated by the state government for small business grants \$178, or 17.8 per cent, is eaten up by administrative costs. Why are administrative costs so high to administer grant programs under your department?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. The member is right: in 2023-24 the administrative cost per \$1,000 for small business grant program support was \$178, which is a variance of around 37 per cent from the target. The main reason for that variance is the timing of program rounds and changes to the structure of milestone payments for some of those grant payments.

As the member would be aware, grant programs have varying payment cycles with either up-front and/or milestone payments, so some of that will depend on the structure of the grants that go out in a particular year. Grants such as the Business Basics grant are paid up-front, so the payment is paid immediately, whereas others would have a milestone payment. The Business Growth Fund, for example, is a 50 payment split at three months and on acquittal and can often then be spread across financial years.

One important element to note, I think, is that in the 2022-23 financial year there was in fact what I call the bonus round of Business Basics grants. There was an additional Business Basics grant round of about \$5.7 million that was paid up-front and was paid in about the middle of June last year. If you look at that, you see the significant drop from the target down to about \$100.67, because so much more was paid in that year.

If we look at this year, the timing issue was that, because that bonus round was paid at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, in order to maximise the impact of the grant program and to get information to all small businesses, we made the decision to open the business grants round funding in May 2024 to coincide with Small Business Month. We thought that was the opportunity to get maximum impact. There is a high interest, so we always want to make sure that as many small businesses as possible know that small business grants are coming so they have an equal chance to be in there. Because they opened in May and are now under assessment—we have just over \$8 million worth of grant funding in assessment at the moment that will start going out the door into small business bank accounts in the coming weeks and months—that was not paid last financial year but will be paid in this financial year and, therefore, has had a negative effect on the target for last year but we are projecting will have a very significant positive effect on the target for the coming year.

If you look at the spread of the payment of grants, there has been around \$39 million worth of business grants paid out over the last financial year, the one prior to that and the one coming. If you look across that, we should be about on target, but the lumpiness of the payment of grant rounds means that some years it will be over target and some years it will be under. This year, unlike the year before and hopefully the year we are in, it has been over the target.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thanks. Director-General, I take your point with respect to the timing differences. Regardless, even in the best case example which you described, about 10 per cent of that funding grant allocation was spent on administration, and your own target is that about 13 per cent of grant funding allocated is spent on administration. Does the fact that so much is spent on administration mean that Queensland small businesses are able to access fewer grants?

Mr McKay: One thing I would say about that is that we are talking about a payment of a pool of a significant amount of public money to small businesses. I would think there would be a high level of interest in the probity around those payments.

Mr MICKELBERG: Indeed.

Mr McKay: There are a couple of elements of that. One is that, if we did not have the probity we did have, we might see instances where there were significant numbers of fraud matters. I think in the last 12 months we have seen no fraud matters in relation to any of our grant payments, which is a wonderful position to be in. If we did have significant amounts of fraud, I think there might be a public interest in asking whether we should be continuing to make grant payments such as these if they are being used fraudulently and not for the purpose that the government intends and the public makes the money available to us to do.

The other component of that, I suppose, is that there is a cost of the grant happening. One part of that cost is borne by the person applying for and hopefully receiving the grant and the other part by the person who gives the grant—that is, us. What we really try to do is make sure that, as far as possible—particularly given they are small business grants and particularly, I think, for the Business Basics grants, which are \$5,000—the small business operators who are busy running their own small

businesses do not spend their life making an application. We want to make that bit as simple as possible. The quid pro quo, back to my issue around probity, means we have to do more work at our end to make sure that is quite appropriate.

Mr MICKELBERG: Understood.

Mr McKay: I would say that, whilst I understand the member's point that it does seem high, I think it is an important element. The fact that we now have these grant programs to a point where we are not seeing cases of fraud means that the money we are spending on administering these—whilst, as you say, it might seem to some to be high—does represent, I think, good value for money.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. Director-General, earlier the minister—or it may have been you—spoke about the volume of businesses supported by the Small Business Commissioner, and I think the number was 2,440 in the last financial year. Do not quote me; I am not trying to verbal you, Minister. Has the department received any request for additional resources—whether that is additional staff or funding—in relation to the services provided by the Queensland Small Business Commissioner in the last financial year or for this financial year that we are considering here in the Appropriation Bill?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. Are you talking about requests for advocacy from small businesses for financial—

Mr MICKELBERG: No. I am talking about from the Queensland Small Business Commissioner or the commission itself. Presumably, they know their workloads. Has the department received any requests for additional resources to support the work of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. The 2023 budget provided funding of \$3.46 million for the operation of the Office of the Small Business Commissioner, and that would include the sorts of general increases that have been made available to other areas of the portfolio for funding.

Mr MICKELBERG: Sorry, to the specifics of my question, Director-General: has the department received any requests for additional funding outside the funding you just articulated, which I acknowledge was in the budget last year? Since that time, has the department received any requests for additional staff or funding allocation for the Queensland Small Business Commissioner?

Mr McKay: I certainly have had a conversation with the Small Business Commissioner around the budget of the Small Business Commission and the budget cycle. As I would expect, my deputy directors-general, the Small Business Commissioner and others within the entity are strong advocates for wanting to do more. The Small Business Commissioner has said that she would like to continue the discussion with me around what the budget future might look like for QSBC and how we might tie that into budget requests that occur at budget time or at the midyear budget review.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, it is a pretty straightforward question. Yes or no: have there been any requests—formal or informal—from the Queensland Small Business Commissioner for additional resources?

Mr McKay: In terms of formal requests, I have had that conversation with the commissioner. I would not necessarily consider that to be a formal request. I have been in the portfolio for six or seven weeks. I am not aware that there has been a formal request prior to that. The other thing I would say is that budget deliberations are done through the CBRC process and those budget deliberations would hold the confidentiality that attaches.

Mr MICKELBERG: Understood. Director-General, do I take it from your answer that the department has not sought additional funding through the CBRC process for the Queensland Small Business Commissioner?

Mr McCALLUM: Point of order, if I may: the member seems to be asking a question about cabinet-in-confidence processes.

CHAIR: Member, can you rephrase, just to ensure you are not doing that?

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. Has the department made a submission to Treasury for additional funding for the Queensland Small Business Commissioner?

CHAIR: Again, I think that would be part of a budget process.

Mr MICKELBERG: The entirety of this process is part of a budget process, Chair.

CHAIR: Yes, but matters to do with cabinet and CBRC are not matters on which a director-general can brief the estimates committee, as you know, member.

Mr MICKELBERG: No worries. I will rephrase it, Chair.

CHAIR: Either rephrase or move on.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the government and the opposition have acknowledged the work of the Small Business Commissioner. Small business owners also acknowledge the important work of the Small Business Commissioner. Given that you have told me that in the six or seven weeks you have been in the role you have had a conversation about additional resources for the Small Business Commissioner, why is there no funding in this budget for the Queensland Small Business Commissioner's work?

Mr McKay: There is funding of \$3.4 million—

Mr MICKELBERG: Additional funding, to be clear.

CHAIR: Just let the director-general answer the question.

Mr McKay: Sorry, member. I understood that the question was whether there was money in the budget. If the question is whether there is additional money in the budget, as I indicated there are things such as additional funding for enterprise bargaining increases and the like that would apply generally to any staffing related costs.

The Small Business Commissioner's powers and functions were set when the act was passed only a couple of years ago. Those powers and functions remain. There has not been any further evaluation of whether there needs to be any changes to those functions. In the absence of any change—I have not seen a business case for change but, as I have indicated, I have said to the Small Business Commissioner that I am happy to continue a conversation with her to make sure that she and her office have the resources they need to do the very important work they do, bearing in mind that the office is supported by staff of the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, so we do have some capacity to share resources and provide additional support where that is required. It is a very important function. I am more than happy to continue to work with the commissioner to make sure she is adequately supported.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, I am sure you are aware that there are many Queensland small businesses that are in distress. The support for many of those businesses that are in distress has been provided for much of the state by the southern Queensland Small Business Financial Counselling Service, a team of eight financial counsellors that I have been advised are working considerably over their capacity. I acknowledge that the government funds that program for this year. What is the average wait time for a small business to receive assistance from one of those financial counsellors?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. There are a couple of elements there. We have seen some growth in demand. That is driven by particularly the natural disasters that occurred, that the minister mentioned earlier, around Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the South-East Queensland storms around Christmastime. As part of that \$13.4 million support package agreed between the states and the Commonwealth and announced by Commonwealth and state ministers recently, there is \$6.9 million in funding, out of that \$13.4 million, that is available for an additional cohort of small business financial counsellors and wellness coaches. They will be split between Far North Queensland and South-East Queensland. We hope that alleviates some of the burden on that service that has started to be stretched particularly in those areas because of that. The network certainly records very high levels of satisfaction with the service that they receive. We look at those managing approximately 30 cases at any one time.

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, Chair: I am mindful of time. I realise that there was a preamble to my question, but my question was fairly specific at the end. What is the average wait time that businesses are waiting for that support?

Mr McKay: I do not know that I have an up-to-date figure available at the moment, but with the minister's agreement I suspect that is something we can get hopefully before the end of this session.

Mr McCALLUM: I am happy to endeavour to get a response to that question by the end of the hearing today.

CHAIR: I refer to the cost-of-living budget and page 2 of the SDS. Minister, can you update the committee on conditions for Queensland small businesses and the relief being provided through the Queensland Small Business Strategy, and are you aware of any risks to these measures?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank you for the question and your continued strong advocacy on behalf of our small businesses. Because Queensland's small businesses are the engine room of the economy, they are the heart and soul of our communities. There is no better place in the nation to be a small business owner, operator or worker than Queensland.

I was very proud to launch the Miles Labor government's new Queensland Small Business Strategy in regional Queensland at the Small Business Friendly Conference. This new strategy will help ensure Queensland's small businesses can continue to be innovative, adapt, grow and succeed. With economists acknowledging that small- and medium-sized businesses are hardest hit with changes in consumer spending under national cost-of-living pressures, this new strategy from the new Miles Labor government is a \$250 million war chest of support when they need it most.

The new strategy helps to lower costs and ease national cost-of-living pressures on small business, including with direct grant support as well as boosting productivity, and commits new funding for small business financial counsellors. It will also help maximise procurement and supply chain opportunities in our infrastructure Big Build. We have over 200,000 small construction, technical professional and real estate businesses that can benefit from Queensland's infrastructure Big Build of housing, energy, hospitals, schools and transport.

I am pleased to update the committee that the new strategy has 20 key actions over three years to power small businesses to take full advantage of the record investment that is occurring in Queensland. That includes simplifying procurement processes for smaller projects, a small business action plan and the appointment of a dedicated small business procurement adviser. While this strategy is for the owners and operators of the more than 480,000 Queensland small businesses, it will also help to support the jobs of more than one million Queenslanders.

CHAIR: That concludes the committee's examination of the estimates for the employment and small business portfolio areas. The committee will now adjourn for a break and resume at 3.45 with the examination of estimates for the portfolio areas of training and skills development

Proceedings suspended from 3.30 pm to 3.45 pm.



CHAIR: Welcome back to the minister and officials. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of training and skills development open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

There are no opening statements, so we will go straight to questions from the opposition. Member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, with reference to question on notice 857 which was published on 14 June, the minister advised in that question on notice that it was not possible to provide details on the allocation of funds from the \$41,417,000 aggregate number. How did the department arrive at the figure of \$41,417,000 if the costings had not been finalised?

Mr McCALLUM: Chair, while the director-general is getting ready, in response to the questions that we endeavoured to get back to the member for Buderim on, before we get into these, in relation to administrative costs, I can advise that the total administrative cost of small business grants and support programs administered by the department is \$0.67 million. Small business grants are given as public moneys. It takes up just as many resources to appropriately administer large grants as it does small grants.

CHAIR: Your question was to the director-general?

Mr MICKELBERG: To the director-general, yes.

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. I will ask the Deputy Director-General, Investment, Steven Koch, to respond.

Mr Koch: I thank the member for the question. Member, in terms of developing our planning for the capital program that we have on TAFE campuses as part of the department, we work in a tripartite arrangement with TAFE Queensland as the primary lessee and tenant on those campuses, as well as with QBuild that we work in a partnership to do the project management, design of projects and also subcontracting on behalf of the department as well. That figure you refer to is our estimated annual training infrastructure program for the next financial year. That is derived through our governance structures and our estimates of projects that are going through various stages of budget qualification, concept design, costing and tendering. We do multiple-year planning for TAFE infrastructure projects as well so that we can have a forward pipeline of work going forward. That figure is our estimate for the coming financial year across over 40 campuses across the state.

Mr MICKELBERG: Given you have just told me that that is an estimate over 40 different projects, is the department now in a position to provide a breakdown, as I asked originally, for that aggregate amount expressed by project? It is a fairly specific number. You have arrived at it based on, I

understand, some predictions and projects at different stages, but ultimately it relates to different projects that you have aggregated. Director-General, you may wish to refer this question, but is the department now in a position to be able to provide that information to the committee?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. I probably will pass for some of the detail to the deputy director-general as well, but I would say that over the scope of that \$41 million or thereabouts, as I think the deputy director-general was indicating, they are at various stages in that detailed costing process. Some would have a detailed cost set against it and some would still be in the planning. It might be a matter of if there were specific projects, we could perhaps indicate whether or not they were at that fully costed point, but I will pass to the deputy director-general.

Mr Koch: I thank the member for the question. In terms of that and then supporting what the director-general has just outlined as well, there are some projects within that program that do carry over from the previous financial year into this financial year and do have some costing available for them, and there are some that are yet to even commence the process around the concept design, the costing, then tender and so on. It is something that we manage through our governance process, member. If I could just add, I should have mentioned earlier as well that in terms of the \$41 million, or just over that amount, that is comprised our annual appropriation that we have for capital which is just over \$20 million per annum, as well as cash reserves that the department has in its capital program, and can include those projects that span multiple financial years as well.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-general, my question remains: you have the information. I accept it is in different stages of readiness, but you have the information because that is how you arrived at the number. Is the department in a position to provide that information to the committee?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. I do not think we are at a point where we could, with the level of certainty that we would want to have, break it down to individual project-by-project initiatives.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear: we are talking about a number that is down to thousands of dollars—\$41,717,000 off the top of my head. Forty-one million is a very specific number. I accept that you need to make assumptions with respect to the planning and with respect to the stage of different projects. Different projects will be at different points. I understand that there will be different allocations, but, ultimately, you have come up with a number that you have indicated the department intends to spend on those projects. What I am hearing is that you do not have enough confidence to share that information with the committee because it is not at a stage of readiness. To be able to fully examine the appropriations, we should understand what the entirety of that aggregate number is. Now if 20 of those projects comprise \$1 million of that expenditure because they are at very early stages, it would be entirely reasonable for the department to aggregate that, but if one is \$20 million, for example, it is entirely reasonable that the Queensland public understand where that \$41.7 million is allocated. The question stands—a yes or no is fine—if the answer is no I will take that on face value, but is the department in a position to provide that information?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. I do not believe I have the breakdown available to the point that it would be appropriate to share with the committee, but it is perhaps a matter that we can discuss during the session and come back with a further answer.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, I will move on.

Mr McCALLUM: Before we move on, if I could seek some clarity from the member for Buderim because the question on notice refers to the aggregate amount reported separately by location, project and amount. It would be helpful to know if the member is still seeking the location, project and amount or a shorter subset of that—so not the location but maybe the project and the amount.

Mr MICKELBERG: Chair, I am happy to address that. The amount was \$41,417,000 not 717—I correct myself. The intent of my question is to identify how those funds are allocated. If there is a program within those funds that covers a number of different campuses, then an aggregate that details what that project is would be fine. If there is a significant project at a given location or that spans a couple of different locations that should be split, to my mind. That is why it was worded that way. Ultimately, what I think we as representatives of the Queensland public want is information as to how you have arrived at that number and what it is going towards because \$41 million is a big number. I am more than happy to have any information that the department is prepared to provide to that end.

CHAIR: There is a commitment that has been given. We will wait for that information to hopefully be provided.

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, that is helpful.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, on page 6 of the SDS, it shows that your departmental income is to be cut by \$191 million for financial year 2024-25. Why has the state government cut \$191 million in funding for your department?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for Buderim for the question. As the budget papers indicate, we have a record budget of, off the top of my head, \$1.567 billion. Yes, I confirm that I am advised that the department's 2024-25 budget is indeed \$1.567 billion. The department's main income streams include: state appropriation; Commonwealth appropriation, including the new National Skills Agreement which we were very happy to finally sign up to under the Albanese government; Fee-Free TAFE and other revenue sources such as TAFE Queensland's contribution to the South Bank training precinct PPP; Small Business Recovery and Resilience, disaster recovery funds; and the hiring of training infrastructure sites and other revenue charges. I am advised that is a record budget for this portfolio. It is important to note that in 2023-24, the department's budget was impacted by the December 2023 machinery-of-government change with youth justice transitioning out of the department.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, you have used a curious choice of words there in saying that it is a 'record budget'. I think you are correct—it is a record budget but it is actually a \$191 million cut on actual expenditure in the last financial year.

CHAIR: Member, do not debate the point. Let's not have a lengthy preamble.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question remains: why have the government cut \$191 million of funding to your department?

Mr McCALLUM: Chair, I thank the member for the question. I am advised that appropriation revenue—as I was saying in my previous answer with reference to the machinery of government—decreased from 2023-24 estimated actual to the 2024-25 budget by \$190.5 million, rounded up.

Mr MICKELBERG: A cut of \$190.5.

Mr McCALLUM: Mainly due to the machinery-of-government change with youth justice which meant that \$178.6 million transitioned out of the department as a result of changes to the Australian government's Job Trainer Fund.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, I draw your attention to the SDS and the footnote on page 6 that specifically says that the departmental budget summary is prepared on a 'post machinery-of-government basis'. Given your previous answer that it is due to machinery-of-government changes, that has not addressed the \$190.5 cut is not as a consequence of the machinery-of-government changes; why has there been a \$190.5 million cut to your departmental budget?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I have already given an answer in two parts in relation to this. I accept that the member might not like my answers, but I have already answered this question. We are absolutely proud in the Miles Labor government to be delivering through things like our brand new Skills Strategy record levels of opportunity through funding for Queenslanders to take up the training and skills that they need for the good jobs that we are creating through things like free TAFE. We have had over 90,000 Queenslanders since last year take up the opportunity of Labor's signature free TAFE. This is getting people the qualifications that they need to get into the good jobs that we are creating through things like our infrastructure big build. We have nurses being trained, saving up to \$25,000 in—

Mr MICKELBERG: But there is still \$190 million less in the budget, yes?

CHAIR: There will not be interjections. The minister is answering the question. Minister?

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you, Chair. I might ask the director-general if he can provide any further details that might assist the member in addition to the answer that I have already given in relation to the funding.

Mr McKay: I am happy to add a couple of points to the minister's comments. The minister is correct in saying that on page 6 of the SDS under the expenses for the service areas, the service area of youth justice was added to the adjusted budget due to the September machinery-of-government change and it was then adjusted again and backed out of the budget as a result of the December machinery-of-government change. You will see there is nothing listed for the service area of youth justice in the 2024-25 budget.

There are two other elements that I would also add. That budget summary does not indicate two areas of support within the department's budget. The first of those is that there is an additional \$15 million in revenue to come to the department over a two-year period for cybersecurity support for small business, and that is held centrally. That is a budget allocation that has been made by the state

but held centrally to be provided to us on the execution of the contract for cybersecurity support for small businesses. The other element of that is that there is now the additional \$13.4 million in disaster relief funding that will come into the budget as a result of the agreement between the Commonwealth and the state announced recently.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. We will go to the member for Rockhampton for a question.

Mr O'ROURKE: My question is of the minister. With reference to pages 1 and 2 of the SDS and media reports this week of training companies engaged in untoward behaviour in Queensland, will the minister advise the committee of the Miles government's approach to ensuring a high-quality and robust training system in Queensland and are you aware of any alternative approaches?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for his question and for his deep commitment to doing what matters for his community of Rockhampton and for all of Queensland. Speaking of things that matter, a job matters and the quality training to get one makes the difference between a good job that you can rely on and one you cannot.

I am advised that around a quarter of a million Queenslanders complete training with a Skills Assure Supplier including public, private, not-for-profit and dual sector entities. That is why I am proud that Queensland is the only state in the nation with its own independent Training Ombudsman. That is because the Miles Labor government is committed to quality training with reputable small businesses and our training providers and to building up a strong TAFE and training system with integrity. Queensland's training system is strong and thriving. TAFE is chock full of students doing free TAFE qualifications to become personal carers, enrolled nurses, construction workers, hospitality staff and so much more. Plus our Skills Strategy funds a million places of subsidised training with our credible and honest Skills Assure suppliers.

It is regrettable that we have had to come such a long way to get to this point. Our training system went backwards under the LNP when the Newman government sacked over 2,100 TAFE workers and closed campuses with plans to close 30 more. In cahoots with the then federal government, they also unleashed a wave of dodgy operators to rip off kids trying to get a good start in life through a legitimate registered training organisation. Tick-and-flick practices under dodgy RTOs were rife in Queensland. To use a turn of phrase, under the LNP dodgy RTOs were handing out qualifications in cereal boxes. This was the result of conscious decisions that were made around the Newman LNP cabinet table. They treated students looking for a better future as cash cows and starved industry of properly skilled workers.

Labor will always reject and repudiate this approach to skills and training, but not everyone has. I, again, refer to the reporting from ABC's *Stateline* this week of the member for Broadwater running a training company that liquidators believe may have been trading while insolvent. The member advised parliament in 2018 that he left his tenure as a director of this company 'without a single mark of wrongdoing against my conduct or actions'. However, as the ABC has revealed, according to liquidators his RTO could have, indeed, been trading while insolvent.

I am advised that under section 588G of the Corporations Act 2001 trading while insolvent is an offence—not a civil offence but a criminal offence—that is punishable by up to five years imprisonment. What does it mean for Queensland's training system if the potential leader of the state ran a wound-up training organisation? What is the future of Queensland TAFE students in a state led by someone who gutted TAFE as a Newman minister and then went on to run a collapsed RTO? How can someone manage our state's budget if they cannot even manage their own training business? After this shocking report these are all legitimate questions and ones that remain unanswered. They are very serious questions that need to be answered because Queenslanders deserve to hear the answers. Right now there is a deep, dark cloud hanging over the LNP in employment, small business, skills and training.

Let's be clear: the leader of the LNP opposition was the sole director of a company for four months. Shortly after he left it went into voluntary liquidation. Why join, invest in and become the sole director of a failing company? Surely this raises reasonable questions around both competency and judgement. There were only 24 words for skills and training in their leader's budget reply. The LNP has no plan for our health system or to manage our multibillion dollar infrastructure spend or to reduce cost-of-living pressures. Their leader's credibility on competency is now shot. If he could not run a small business, he cannot run the great state of Queensland.

CHAIR: Minister, I have a question for you. With reference to SDS page 2 and this cost-of-living budget can you outline for the community how the \$370 million funding to help kickstart the new Good Jobs, Great Training: Queensland Skills Strategy 2024-2028 is funding more free and subsidised training for Queenslanders in priority industries?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question and for your commitment to doing what matters for Queenslanders looking to get the skills they need to build a career and a better life. I am advised that employment is projected to grow by 7.6 per cent across Queensland to 2025-26. That is a lot of good jobs. While this is a prospect to be optimistic about, we need to be very intentional with our investment to take full advantage of this opportunity. In the biggest skills and training reform in almost a decade the Miles Labor government will fund one million training places for Queenslanders, easing cost-of-living pressures for those who want to train, upskill, reskill and pursue careers in the state's priority industries. The Good Jobs, Great Training: Queensland Skills Strategy means more free and subsidised training for Queenslanders so we can all benefit from good jobs when costs are high. The strategy extends Labor's signature free TAFE program, funding up to 70,000 free TAFE places, including 30,000 new places, to bring down costs for Queenslanders to get into better paid jobs or start a career in high-demand industries.

We will also fund one million publicly subsidised training places in health, social services, hospitality, clean energy, construction and more. The strategy will skill Queenslanders for good jobs in priority areas like construction training delivered from facilities such as TAFE Queensland's Acacia Ridge campus—the biggest trade training centre in the Southern Hemisphere spanning more than 22 hectares. One of those Queenslanders who is studying there is 23-year-old Jack from Moorooka who is studying a free Certificate III in Plumbing. Jack, one of your constituents, Chair, said—

TAFE is awesome, I love it. This is a great trade where you get to earn and learn.

Even better, he added—

I've got brothers and sisters who've gone to Uni and they're in debt, whereas I'm being paid and coming out with a qualification, which is awesome.

When he finishes his apprenticeship, Jack is going back to do his certificate IV to continue progressing his career. There are thousands more just like Jack whom Labor is sponsoring into a high-paid, highly skilled, hi-viz career through our Big Build.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will go back to the opposition.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. Minister, in the controlled income statement on page 9 of the SDS it shows that employee expenses—and, to be clear, they are expressed in a post machinery-of-government basis—in the last financial year were \$199,287,000, but for this year employee expenses for your department will be cut to \$85,349,000. What employee expenses are the state government going to cut given your departmental expenses will only be 42.83 per cent of what they were last year?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. It is somewhat hypocritical for an LNP member to be asking a question about employee reductions when that is—

Mr MICKELBERG: You could just answer it, mate.

CHAIR: Let the minister answer.

Mr McCALLUM:—the party—

Mr MICKELBERG: You could just try answering it.

CHAIR: Sorry, but there will not be interjections, so order. Sorry, Minister, but you might like to start again.

Mr McCALLUM: This is from a party when the last time they were in government they sacked over 14,000 hardworking public servants. Once again in relation to the member's question, I am advised that the reason for that difference is a machinery-of-government change where at the end of 2023 this department previously included youth justice. There was a machinery-of-government change at the end of last year where youth justice changed to the now Department of Education and youth justice. I am not sure if the director-general has anything further to add in relation to that.

Mr McKay: Thank you, Minister. Perhaps before I do, if I could correct the record. Before I think I said the \$15 million that was held centrally for cybersecurity infrastructure support was over two years. It is in fact over three years, so I correct the record and apologise.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr McKay: Just to add to the minister's comments, the footnote in the SDS on the departmental income statement indicates that the decrease in total revenue from the 2023-24 estimated actual to the 2024-25 budget is due to the recent machinery-of-government change with youth justice services transitioning out of the department.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear, Director-General, this question was not about that. This question was about employee expenses on the controlled income statement and the footnote on that page, as opposed to the one you cited, specifically says—and it applies to the entirety of this page—

The 2023-24 Budget and 2023-24 Estimated Actuals information disclosed is presented on a post-machinery-of-government basis.

So why is there a cut of 42.83 per cent for employee expenses on what it was last year?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. The footnote is indicating that the youth justice figures for employee expenses are included in the SDS only for that period from July to December.

Mr MICKELBERG: No, it is not, Director-General.

CHAIR: Let the director-general answer the question. Director-General.

Mr McKay: I am done.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, I put it to you that it is not indicating that; it is indicating quite the opposite in that they are expressed on a post machinery-of-government basis, so it excludes the machinery-of-government changes.

Mr O'ROURKE: I have a point of order under standing order 236 regarding repetition. It is the same question over and over again. The minister and the DG have explained that the youth justice portfolio was transferred through a MoG change.

CHAIR: I think the previous answers outline multiple MoG changes, did they not?

Mr McKay: Thank you, Chair. There was in fact a machinery-of-government movement into DESBT of youth justice to make DEYJSBT and then of youth justice out of that department into its own department and DESBT being reformed with the same service areas that it had previously. The footnote around employee expenses from the controlled income statement indicates that employee expenses decreased from the 2023-24 estimated actual to the 2024 budget mainly due to the recent machinery-of-government change with youth justice transitioning out of the department.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Mr MICKELBERG: I will move on, Chair. My next set of questions is to the TAFE Queensland CEO.

CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Tucker.

Mr MICKELBERG: Welcome, Mr Tucker. How much payroll tax does TAFE Queensland pay to the state government? To make it easy, how much payroll tax did TAFE Queensland pay to the state government last year?

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. With regard to TAFE Queensland's finances, we are a big organisation with complex finances. That information I am sure we can get for you, but I do not have it at hand with me right now.

Mr MICKELBERG: No worries; thank you. To aid the line of questioning, I know what it was in 2023 given that you published it in your annual report. It was \$25,875,000. The follow-up to that question then to the CEO is the Queensland Skills Strategy 2024-2028 allocates an additional \$88.98 million in public funding for TAFE Queensland this financial year. Given that TAFE Queensland, if we just use the 2023 number—presumably your payroll tax number is going to be higher next year, but let us just use the 2023 number—paid \$25.874 million in payroll tax in the financial year 2022-23 and that your wages have increased considerably presumably since that time, does that mean that TAFE Queensland will be required to pay at least \$25 million in payroll tax to the state government this financial year?

CHAIR: It is a hypothetical question, so I will give you some scope in terms of your answer to it.

Mr Tucker: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the member for the question. My understanding of the question is in relation to the coming year, yet those sets of accounts are not audited at this point in time—

Mr MICKELBERG: Because you have not spent the money yet.

Mr Tucker: Yes, so I do not have that information that I can give in terms of this review.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear, you know the rate of payroll tax and you know how many employees you have, so unless you are going to cut employees or payroll tax is going to go backwards you are going to pay at least the same as you did in 2022-23, but I will move on. Minister, given that

TAFE Queensland will be required—because they are now—to pay the state government at least \$25 million in payroll tax this financial year coming, shouldn't the public funding allocated in 2024-25 for TAFE Queensland read \$63 million, not the \$88 million that you have detailed in your Skills Strategy?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. The TAFE Queensland CEO has made it clear that he will wait for the audited figures for this year when it comes to the expenditure that the member is asking about. When it comes to the Skills Strategy, I am very proud and indeed the entire Miles Labor government is very proud that our Skills Strategy puts TAFE firmly at the heart of our training strategy.

It is a proud, publicly owned provider of vocational education and training right across our state, including in many regional and rural areas where there are not a lot of providers. TAFE has a very proud history in our state that goes back over 140 years. I have already mentioned some of the investments that we have made, including when it comes to backing TAFE through the Skills Strategy with significant funding so that it can offer an additional 30,000 free TAFE places for Queenslanders.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, the fact remains that, while you might be giving TAFE Queensland an additional \$88 million in public funding, you are going to take \$25 million at least back in payroll tax.

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I will not wax lyrical about competitiveness in the market, but I am 100 per cent proud to make sure that we are backing TAFE with the funds that it needs to deliver the high-quality training that it is renowned for and is delivering right across Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, like with the energy rebates, isn't this just the state government giving with one hand and taking with the other?

CHAIR: That is a very broad question, Minister. You might like to answer it pretty broadly.

Mr McCALLUM: I really thank the member for the question.

CHAIR: We needed some levity.

Mr McCALLUM: I will talk about both the energy rebates and TAFE. They are two points of very clear contrast between Labor and the LNP. Let us take the energy rebates, delivered because we still own our energy assets—

Mr MICKELBERG: And Queenslanders are paying 20 per cent more for electricity.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr McCALLUM:—assets that the LNP tried to sell the last time they were in government until they were absolutely rejected by Queenslanders. Under Labor, they will always remain in public ownership. We are proud to be delivering record levels of cost-of-living relief right now to Queenslanders through our energy rebates, right when they need it most. It is the largest cost-of-living relief package in the nation. That includes free TAFE. Now, let us move on to TAFE.

TAFE is an organisation that was utterly gutted under the Newman LNP government. There were TAFE campuses that were closed down, some of them in the electorates of members who are on this committee, from both sides. Over 2,100 TAFE workers were sacked. Campuses were closed. There was a report that was accepted by the then Newman government that outlined plans to close over 30 more campuses. You cannot get a clearer contrast between Labor and the LNP than when it comes to public ownership of energy assets, when it comes to TAFE and, frankly, when it comes to backing Queenslanders.

Mr ZANOW: Director-General, how much did TAFE spend on advertising and sponsorships in the last financial year?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. That might be better directed to the Chief Executive Officer of TAFE Queensland.

Mr ZANOW: I am happy to refer that.

Mr Tucker: Thank you, Director-General, and I thank the member for the question. At TAFE we seek new and innovative ways to maintain our brand and profile and engagement in the vocational education and training sector. In the 2023-24 period, TAFE Queensland continued to invest in statewide enrolment and, indeed, brand awareness campaigns. Campaign efforts focused on communicating TAFE Queensland as a market leader in VET and promoting free TAFE to the Queensland market. TAFE Queensland ran student campaigns throughout the year, promoting new course offerings, diploma and certificate courses, higher education courses and, of course, online learning and short

courses across the gamut. Over the past 12 months, TAFE Queensland focused on repositioning its brand into positions of being innovative, progressive and authentic to entice even more Queenslanders to undertake VET training.

Mr ZANOW: Point of order, Chair: specifically how much in the last financial year, please?

Mr Tucker: In the 2023-24 year, TAFE Queensland's advertising expenditure, including media planning, buying production et cetera, was equivalent to \$48 per student enrolled.

Mr ZANOW: How much in total, including sponsorships as well?

Mr Tucker: That was a total of \$6.99 million.

Mr LISTER: Minister, over long years your department and the University of Southern Queensland have had a joint venture to run the Queensland College of Wine Tourism. That has been a great thing for Southern Downs. It is my understanding that USQ is pulling out of that. What are you doing to assure the future of the Queensland College of Wine Tourism in my electorate?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the honourable member for his question. I acknowledge his longstanding advocacy in relation to the college and his commitment to both the college and the Stanthorpe community where the college is located.

Chair, I can advise, as the member has indicated, that the Queensland College of Wine Tourism is a joint venture between the University of Southern Queensland and the Queensland government. As the member will be aware, it has supported local industries and the Stanthorpe community since 2007 so it has been around a while, which is a good thing. The college was envisaged as a means to support winemaking and the winemaking industry in the region through specialist industry training, which is what the joint venture is. It has a commercially operating winery, vineyards, a restaurant and events menu. The commercial operations of the college and, in particular, the restaurant, winery and vineyard remain an extremely important part of the local community. I want to assure the member that there are no plans for this to change.

However, since the pandemic, the training arm of the college has faced difficulties in relation to attracting local students. This is in part due to students meeting their training needs elsewhere, making choices. We want to make sure the community is getting the most out of the college in light of its evolving role. As the member is no doubt aware, extensive stakeholder consultation was undertaken in 2023 to assess the operations of the college and the needs of the community. I want to thank the member for his participation in that consultation and his role as a community advocate and a community leader.

The department continues to work closely with the University of Southern Queensland with a view to working out a long-term solution. I understand that the department will undertake further consultation with the member. That is scheduled in—which is a good thing. We want to make sure that we continue the good dialogue that we have with the member going forward because this is an extremely important matter. I am advised that the department will also meet with the mayor. While these consultations and discussions are underway, the operations of the college and the local Stanthorpe community will continue to be supported because we want to ensure that Stanthorpe residents have access to both the college and quality training.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister in regard to a piece of work this committee did last year. Earlier this year we tabled in parliament report No. 1 of 2024, *The delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland*. Off the back of the 10 recommendations in the report, what work has the minister's portfolio or the department done to date to make sure that we are delivering on those 10 recommendations?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for Hinchinbrook for his question. This is an extremely important topic. The delivery of high-quality vocational education and training to rural and remote Queensland communities is absolutely paramount for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it means that rural and remote Queenslanders are able to get the qualifications they need to be able to stay in their communities and get a good job.

In relation to the parliamentary report that the member referred to from February this year, seven of the report recommendations have been accepted in full, with three accepted in principle. I have referred to our Good Jobs, Great Training: Queensland Skills Strategy. As part of that strategy, making sure that we are delivering training, including subsidised training places, to rural and remote areas is absolutely key.

One of the actions in the Queensland Skills Strategy is a new rural and remote vocational education and training pilot, which is in line with the recommendations in the report. We have invested \$10 million into this new rural and remote pilot for North and Central Queensland. It means that almost 2,000 Queenslanders living in rural and remote Central and North Queensland will have access to much needed face-to-face training. This is more face-to-face training in lieu of online training through a new Miles Labor government initiative that is aimed at spreading the benefits of progressive coal royalties to our rural and remote regions.

The pilot will see government partner with registered RTOs to provide high-quality face-to-face training. There are 14 training providers participating in this project across 25 regional and remote local government areas. They are offering a range of courses including early childhood education, community services, health, tourism and agriculture. Over the next 12 months as this pilot rolls on, it will focus on identifying if the delivery of vocational education and training to rural and remote students increases when face-to-face training and support services are delivered locally in communities which will help inform action into the future.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, I sit on the Hinchinbrook Employment and Skills Development Reference Group, which was formed about two years ago when we started a journey with the department and TAFE to breathe life into the Ingham TAFE campus. Over the last couple of years we have seen some improvements, but we are long way from where we want to land. I have heard that there is some exciting news and there is some development happening at the TAFE campus. Are you able to update me on that or pass the question down the line eventually to Mr John Tucker, who may be able to answer that in more detail?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I again acknowledge his longstanding and very genuine and passionate advocacy in relation to the Ingham TAFE. Thank you for all the time and effort that the member has put in to working on the future of both the Ingham community as well as the delivery of vocational education and training.

When it comes to the TAFE specifically, as the member knows, we have an excellent facility at the Ingham TAFE where there are courses available in foundation skills, construction white card, early childhood and care. Since 2017, no doubt in part thanks to the member's advocacy, there has been almost \$50,000 spent on capital improvements and almost \$700,000 on works at the site. We have consulted with the local community about making sure that we are getting the most possible out of the TAFE. Again, thank you to the member for his participation in relation to those consultations.

I am pleased to advise the member that QBuild is progressing works to have the interior of the campus repainted, the garden beds replanted, lighting upgraded where that is necessary and new TAFE signage along the main frontage. We are hoping that this will occur very shortly—so a bit of a spruce up for the Ingham TAFE.

The department and TAFE are also working with the Hinchinbrook Shire Council and the Country Universities Centre to support a Country Universities Centre at the campus. I look forward to being able to update the member for Hinchinbrook formally very soon with some further details about the outcomes of the consultation and the discussion with the community and the TAFE.

Mr DAMETTO: During the tour that we went on for *The delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland* report, we had an opportunity to visit the Torres Strait. What we noticed in the Torres Strait was that the TAFE building was ailing quite significantly and a lot of feedback was that money needed to be spent up there. How much in capital works will be spent on TAFE buildings and equipment in the Torres Strait in this year's budget?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I will defer to the TAFE CEO shortly. I had the opportunity to join the member for Cook very recently on Thursday Island. It is always a pleasure; it is such a beautiful part of our state. When I was on Thursday Island with the member for Cook one of the things we did was announce a new joint project between the Miles state Labor government and the Albanese federal Labor government to deliver an upgraded health training hub at the TI TAFE. It is a very exciting project. I am sorry I cannot remember the exact dollar value, but it is a number of millions of dollars that will be invested in TAFE up on Thursday Island thanks to a joint funding arrangement between the state and federal governments. It is a very exciting initiative to train more locals in the Torres Strait so they can get the skills they need to deliver healthcare services back in their communities without having to leave and travel outside TI to get access to state-of-the-art training facilities. It is an absolutely fantastic initiative. I will now defer to the CEO of TAFE for any additional information.

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. I have some additional comments around the very important work that TAFE Queensland does on Thursday Island and around the Torres Strait. I visited the island with the member for Hinchinbrook at one time and other members of the committee.

As the minister mentioned, a health hub is being developed on the island which includes a five-bed clinical practice ward. As the minister said, it will prevent students having to travel to the mainland, to Cairns or other places. Those things are going ahead. Areas of study offered at the Thursday Island campus include a broad range including construction, automotive and, very importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health. The staff on Thursday Island do such a fantastic job up there. They are probably watching online today. The committee might be interested to know that the top five course enrolments are Certificate II in Maritime Operations, Marine Radio Operator's VHF Skill Set, Certificate II in Health Support Services, and Certificate II in Resources and Infrastructure and Work Preparation.

The question the member had was specifically around assets. We work in partnership with the department to ensure the assets are fit for use and fit for purpose at all times. The Thursday Island campus is one that I am very proud of. It is an important part of the campus structure of TAFE Queensland and it does very important work up there.

Mr McCALLUM: I was going to inform the member that the project I mentioned is a \$3.5 million joint project with the federal government for the Thursday Island TAFE.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: Minister, after spending years as a nurse I have seen firsthand the transformative power of training for good jobs in the Queensland healthcare sector. With reference to the cost-of-living relief provided in the budget, can you outline for the committee how free TAFE is supporting Queensland's future skilled workforce by funding quality skills, pathways and opportunities and bringing down costs for Queenslanders?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for the question. I acknowledge her previous role as a nurse and her commitment to doing what matters for Queenslanders who are in need of cost-of-living relief while they are pursuing their career dreams through TAFE.

With new, extended and record funding on the table, the new Miles government is building on Labor's success and creating more opportunities for Queenslanders to train and upskill, secure a good job and contribute to our diverse and dynamic economy. Our industries need more workers with higher skills, and the Miles Labor government is committed to putting Queenslanders at the front of the line for those good local jobs. The new Miles government is making the most of this golden decade of opportunity by funding training places for one million Queenslanders through our new Skills Strategy. This is what Labor is all about: getting more Queenslanders into good jobs with better pay quicker. From health and social services to construction, clean energy, tourism and more, it will ease cost-of-living pressures for those who want to train, upskill, re-skill and pursue careers in our industries.

Labor's free TAFE has changed lives. People who were facing homelessness, mothers returning to work and young people who had not finished high school have all completed free TAFE courses and come out with good jobs. Queensland's free TAFE program—extended until 2026—allows eligible Queenslanders to study priority skill sets and qualifications, providing opportunities to upskill, re-skill or start a career in high-demand industries. An additional 30,000 free TAFE places have been funded through the Queensland Skills Strategy, taking the number of available free TAFE places to over 70,000 over the three-year period. There are over 70 free TAFE courses and 130 free apprenticeship qualifications and skill sets available.

I am pleased to update the committee that, of the tens of thousands of Queenslanders undertaking free TAFE, there are hundreds of them in each of your own electorates. I am advised that around 628 Miller constituents have commenced free TAFE since 1 January last year. In Inala that number grows to 968 and in Rockhampton it is even higher, at 1,171. I am further advised that 1,059 Hinchinbrook constituents have commenced free TAFE since 1 January last year. The member for Southern Downs will no doubt be pleased to know that 741 of his constituents have commenced free TAFE since last year, while the members for Ipswich West and Buderim have had 1,102 and 1,065 local constituents benefit respectively.

Mr MICKELBERG: My next question is to Mr Tucker, the TAFE CEO. For the last financial year, how many external third-party arrangements did TAFE enter into with external providers who were delivering training?

Mr Tucker: I will have to get that specific information for you. I am sure we can uncover that for you in amongst our data.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a few more for you. I can give them to you in a block if you like, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Keep going.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am also after: the qualifications those third-party providers delivered; where those third-party providers delivered that training; whether or not there are any third-party arrangements entered into with external providers like RTOs to deliver fee-free TAFE; and whether there have been any of those third-party arrangements for fee-free TAFE delivery. Finally, are the enrolments where the training is delivered by an external third-party provider expressed within the data held by TAFE as a TAFE enrolment or as an external RTO enrolment in such instances?

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. In terms of our third-party arrangements, I can give you some general information. There is a lot of data there to be uncovered. I am sure we can uncover that through our systems and data. As an RTO, TAFE Queensland subcontracts training services to third parties to deliver specific training services. That is some of what we do. TAFE Queensland ensures these arrangements are consistent with the current Skills Assure Supplier Policy and ensures we are compliant with that as well.

Third-party arrangements benefit TAFE Queensland by providing access to skills, knowledge and experience of industry experts and access to particular student cohorts or locations where TAFE Queensland would not otherwise have a presence. TAFE Queensland ensures that all those third-party arrangements undergo due diligence checks and they are quite rigorous prior to executing any agreement. They must also complement the delivery of training and/or assessment of products already existing on TAFE Queensland's scope of registration. Third-party arrangements are always systemically supervised, monitored and supported throughout the term of their agreement to ensure continued compliance with legislative and regulatory arrangements. The majority of TAFE Queensland's third-party arrangements are schools that deliver on our behalf.

For some of that specific detail that the member asked for, as at 30 June this year, TAFE Queensland had 95 third-party arrangements. Of those arrangements, as I said, 52 of those are schools. As a further clarification because the member did ask in terms of Fee-Free TAFE, we do not have third-party arrangements for Fee-Free TAFE.

Mr MICKELBERG: Chair, through you, I know I asked for a fair bit of data there. With the minister's consent, is it possible to take that on notice?

Mr McCALLUM: We are happy to endeavour to get back to the member by the end of this session.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, noting that the majority of TAFE's buildings and assets are owned by DESBT, how much does the department allocate for repairs and maintenance of DESBT owned land and buildings for the financial year 2024-25?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. If you bear with me for a moment, I will get that figure. In 2023-24 DESBT's annual maintenance program expenditure was \$24.3 million including work on roads, car parks, buildings, gas, heating, ventilation and air conditioning, building management systems, fire services, lighting, CCTV and security, electrical and data services. In 2024-25, the Queensland government has approved additional funding of \$101.7 million over four years, with \$26.4 million per annum with annual CPI increases ongoing as part of TAFE big build to continue to maintain and renew state owned TAFE facilities.

Mr MICKELBERG: Where is that \$101 million number you just rattled off captured within the budget papers? Can you direct me to where I can find that?

Mr McKay: I thank the member for the question. That will be captured within the operating expenses.

Mr MICKELBERG: No worries. Mr Tucker, I understand that student numbers are up about 80,000 in the last financial year for TAFE Queensland. Can you tell me how many students TAFE Queensland delivered training to in 2023-24?

Mr Tucker: I certainly can, and I thank the member for the question. Overall in 2023-24 TAFE Queensland proudly delivered training to 144,000 students.

Mr MICKELBERG: How does that reflect on the year prior?

Mr Tucker: I will get the exact number for you, but that is a significant increase on the previous year.

Mr MICKELBERG: It is about 14 per cent off the top of my head.

Mr Tucker: Give or take.

Mr MICKELBERG: To that end, the public sector workforce profile from March 2023 shows an increase of TAFE teachers and TAFE tutors of only 146 additional TAFE teachers delivering training across Queensland compared to March 2020. Given the significant increase in student numbers that you just articulated at TAFE, why have teacher and tutor numbers not increased at a similar rate?

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. Across the state, TAFE Queensland is an employer of choice. We enjoy really high levels of staff satisfaction. I am really proud of the 2,500 or so educators who work across our organisation and across the state. As the member has said, we have seen significant increases in the number of students enrolling to study at TAFE Queensland. Where needed, TAFE Queensland has been scaling up its educator workforce as well and implementing other strategies to ensure that we can meet the additional demand for training. Some of the difference between last year and the previous year has been a matter of filling classes that were perhaps under capacity so an additional educator is not required in that particular example. There is some of that impact across-the-board as well.

In terms of recruitment for educators, we are in market to recruit educators frequently. In fact, in some areas TAFE Queensland works in the same labour market that our industries are working in and the communities that we serve. Understandably, this brings some additional challenges in sometimes securing industry professionals to educate the next generation of workers. While TAFE Queensland offers excellent employment conditions, sometimes it is a bit hard to compete with the pay and conditions that they are achieving in the workplace.

To the previous part of the question, it was 126,500 students last year so that is a significant increase of about 14 per cent, as the member said.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. Mr Tucker, I should add that I have had this feedback one-on-one with TAFE teachers. Surely the fact that student numbers have increased so significantly above TAFE teacher numbers—I acknowledge they have increased but not nearly as much on a percentage basis as student numbers—is placing pressure on your existing workforce given the increase in student numbers.

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. Our staff are coping with the additional student volume. It is placing extra demand, to the specifics of your question. We have been scaling up our educator workforce, implementing other strategies to ensure we can meet that additional demand for training. A portion of our current educators have agreed to do overtime, for example, to meet that demand so that certainly is a factor. We continue to monitor our educators and ensure that those additional requests do not impact their health and wellbeing of course. While that is occurring, we are undergoing a range of recruitment initiatives that I mentioned before. Interestingly, frequently now our educators remain employed in industry as well and sometimes come and work for us on a part-time basis. There are a range of different strategies to cope with that additional demand.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. In your first answer to this block of questions, you spoke about other strategies and then you spoke about having undercapacity classrooms and ensuring they are full. Are there instances where enrolments are overcapacity—where TAFE Queensland have made a conscious decision to take on additional students and additional classroom sizes, for want of a better description, than you would ordinarily do so to cope with demand?

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. There would be some examples of that. A thing that comes to mind there is our ability to deliver to large class sizes in an online environment. Examples would be studies in business—a certificate II or III in business—where the educator can use technology and cope with a larger cohort than they might normally do in, say, a trade class that is very practically focused.

Mr MICKELBERG: Understood. Mr Tucker, under the Fee-Free TAFE initiative, from the period 1 April 2023 to 21 May 2024—the reason for that timeframe is that is the answer to the question on notice I got—there were 606 commencements for a Certificate III in Accounts Administration but only 36 completions, so 5.9 per cent. Noting that it was a certificate III and they typically take somewhere between six to 12 months, that is concerning. If I look at a Certificate III in Community Services, there were 1,029 commencements but only 241 completions, which is about 23 per cent. As I said, given it takes about six months to complete a cert III, why have so few students completed those qualifications? I just cite those two examples because they were two important courses with sufficient liquidity in numbers to be able to make an informed judgement.

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. TAFE Queensland is, of course, committed to the delivery of high-quality training that leads to employment or further study for our students. The students at TAFE Queensland undertake training in various different ways—on campus, online, in a workplace capacity—with multiple intakes each year, so they can be studying on a part-time basis and take quite a long time to complete their qualification. Not all complete in the duration of a full-time student. We ensure that full-time and part-time options are available so that students can undertake their training in a timeframe that suits their specific needs. Particularly at the moment, with a very full labour market, students are frequently combining work and study. It is worth noting that in the 2023-24 year the successful unit of competency completion rate for TAFE Queensland students was 87 per cent. If you apply that to apprentices and trainees it rises to 96 per cent. That is students completing the unit of study that they enrolled in.

From January 2023 to June of this year, 11,000 TAFE Queensland students were awarded their qualifications through free TAFE. The success of free TAFE includes increased part-time enrolments and enrolments in high-level qualifications which, by their nature, are over a much longer duration. This means that the vast majority of free TAFE students are in many cases still yet to complete their training.

Many more Queenslanders have taken the opportunity to enrol in training through free TAFE programs. In some instance they have achieved their training goals prior to the completion of the full qualification—that is, they had completed all of the intended training, learned the skills they needed for a job or achieved their training goals and exited at that point.

Mr MICKELBERG: Mr Tucker, I note you cited the completion rate on units of competency and not on qualifications—two different things. Hence, the question was about qualifications. Do you have any data in relation to the split between enrolments for full-time and part-time, given your comments that the part-time enrolments have increased?

Mr Tucker: I thank the member for the question. We would have some data that would go to that question. Again, though, I would caution looking at the data in pure terms because sometimes the intent of the student changes. They may have enrolled in a full-time program and then life or work has got in the way and they have changed to a part-time mode. I do not have information on the specific numbers in front of me. We would have some data to indicate intent, but I highlight the caveat that intent changes.

Mr MICKELBERG: Understood. That intent, though, would be true year on year. Every year there are some individuals who have those circumstances, so the trend, I guess, is what we would be able to look at. If you have data that maybe looks at it year on year and we are able to make a comparison, that would certainly be useful for the committee. If you do not have that data now, I would be happy for you to take it on notice or get back to me in 15 minutes.

Mr McCALLUM: We will give it a go.

Ms NIGHTINGALE: Minister, with reference to SDS page 2, can you outline for the committee how the additional funding of \$101.7 million over four years and \$26.4 million per annum ongoing for the TAFE big build will continue to maintain state owned TAFE Queensland facilities and keep our essential training services publicly owned?

Mr McCALLUM: I thank the member for her question and for her passion in the value of providing publicly owned training and skills development for Queenslanders. Before I turn to the substance of the question, I would like to acknowledge the fantastic work of all of our TAFE teachers and our TAFE staff, who have significantly scaled up the training of Queenslanders since particularly the beginning of 2023. Every member of this committee will have TAFE teachers, educators, leaders and support staff as constituents. I trust that you all acknowledge their incredible work at our publicly owned provider, TAFE Queensland.

Queensland's vocational education and training sector, specifically public providers or TAFE providers, play a critical role in meeting Queensland's skill needs including meeting priority and emerging industries' skills and regional workforce needs. As the largest provider of vocational education and training in Queensland, TAFE has supported more than 144,000 students in 2023-24, including those from urban, rural and remote locations across a very large and decentralised state. This is a 14 per cent increase, which is outstanding and shows that our public provider is absolutely up to the task of delivering free TAFE to Queenslanders. It also shows that, with historically low unemployment and a jobs boom, Queenslanders are still lining up to get a quality education at TAFE in so many different industries, whether it is health, education, construction, manufacturing and so many more.

Labor is proud to tell Queenslanders what we stand for and that we will work hard each and every day for a Queensland where every family is helped to pay the bills to make ends meet, where every student can gain skills without being saddled with crushing debt, where our essential services stay

publicly owned. We will put people before profits, where they should be. With TAFE owned by Queenslanders, delivered from more than 60 locations across the state, the Miles Labor government is backing them to lead the way. I am happy to update members on the activities of our publicly owned providers in their patches.

Chair, while your constituents in Miller are serviced by many campuses, the geographically closest is South Bank, which offers a comprehensive range of study areas. They include health care, building design and decoration, business and justice, child care, community services, engineering, general education and training, hospitality, IT, beauty and hairdressing, sport and fitness, tourism and events, and visual and creative arts. I am proud to report that the Labor government has invested a great deal into this campus, not only because we should but also because we had to after the Newman government shut your Yeronga and Chelmer campuses.

The member for Inala will be happy to know that her local TAFE Queensland campus of Inala has a relatively high student volume and is offering the Commonwealth Adult Migrant English Program and SEE program. The member, I hope, will also be pleased to hear that there will be many of her constituents getting the skills they need for a good job at better pay at the publicly owned TAFE Queensland flagship trade training centre at Acacia Ridge. At 22 hectares, it is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. It offers trade courses in automotive, building and construction, electrotechnology, engineering, manufacturing and design, resources and mining, transport, and utilities.

In Rockhampton, Central Queensland University operates as the public provider delivering vocational education and training programs and is the only dual-sector entity in Queensland. We are backing them in that they receive 16 per cent of our \$100 million Equipping TAFE for our Future fund for infrastructure upgrades to support the delivery of quality training and skills to locals, especially in emerging and growth industries.

For the member for Hinchinbrook we have an excellent facility at the Ingham TAFE, where I am advised that courses are available in foundation skills, white card construction, and early childhood education and care. It is incredibly important to both TAFE and my department that we are getting the most out of all of our training infrastructure and attracting as many Queenslanders as possible to get that great training.

The TAFE Queensland Warwick campus is located in the electorate of Southern Downs. The Warwick campus offers courses across a range of study areas including aged care, agriculture, automotive, business, engineering, child care, cookery, first aid, general education, nursing and hospitality. Of course, we have the College of Wine Tourism, in particular the restaurant and the vineyard, which will remain a very important part of the community.

In a somewhat ironic twist of fate, Chair, constituents from the member for Ipswich West's electorate must now travel to my patch in Bundamba to get the TAFE training they need after the LNP shut the Ipswich City campus, but I am pleased to say they would not want to be anywhere else. With manufacturing the largest industry in Ipswich, hundreds of locals in engineering and manufacturing qualifications are now training at a new state-of-the-art Metal Trades, Manufacturing and Robotics Centre that I had the pleasure of opening earlier this year. The centre will support more than 380 students currently enrolled at Bundamba campus, including a broad range of courses offered through Fee-Free TAFE.

Finally, the member for Buderim—and Kawana—will be pleased to know that the publicly owned TAFE Queensland Mooloolaba campus is servicing hundreds of his constituents. Mooloolaba is a full campus with an emphasis on general education and training, community services, health, sport and fitness, hospitality and cookery, and business. Chair, I have been there. It is a wonderful campus, a far cry from the dark days of the LNP who closed several TAFEs across Queensland, including near the member's patch in Nambour. Thanks to this Labor government, that campus is now open again and operational to support Queenslanders to get the skills they need for a good job with better pay—Queenslanders, like Bailey Loenneker, an air conditioning and refrigeration apprentice at TAFE Queensland's Nambour campus. Bailey is currently benefiting from one of Labor's free apprenticeships for under-25s and, excitingly for both Bailey and TAFE Queensland, he made the regional and then the National WorldSkills Competition in 2023 and will be headed to Lyon, France to compete on an international stage later this year.

Chair, our skills strategy is our blueprint to transform the skills and training sector by unlocking billions of dollars in state and federal investment. One of the five focus areas of the strategy is TAFE for all Queenslanders, had putting TAFE at the heart of the training system and broadly recognising the

role of public providers to deliver skills which support local communities and economies, emphasising our ongoing commitment to supporting public providers. The strategy supports the implementation of a new funding framework for TAFE Queensland and is delivering quality training to Queenslanders.

The new Miles Labor government is dedicated to maintaining public ownership of TAFE facilities. This ensures every aspiring Queenslander seeking to improve their skills can access high-quality education without the burden of overwhelming fees. Until then, I am pleased to inform the committee that TAFE is performing well, beating targets for four out of five performance measures. I am really impressed that over 93 per cent of employers are satisfied with the quality of TAFE graduates. These results put TAFE far ahead of the state and national average which employer satisfaction with vocational education and training outcomes. It shows that TAFE really is delivering state-of-the-art training.

Chair, publicly owned TAFE is a cornerstone of our community, providing opportunities for all, regardless of background or financial status. But under a Liberal and National Party government, they would dismantle our public TAFE system and slam the door on countless Queenslanders who simply want a fair chance at a better future. I thank the member again and look forward to being able to celebrate the success of far more Queenslanders taking up training at our proudly publicly owned TAFE Queensland.

CHAIR: We have now reached the end of the time allocated to examine the proposed expenditure for the training and skills development portfolio area. We have a number of questions for end of session. I am checking in with the minister and the director-general for those. The first one was average time to receive support from financial counsellors, and that is in the small business realm. Do we have any info on that one?

Mr McCALLUM: Yes, Chair. I am advised that yesterday an announcement was made to expand the program from 14 to 20 small business financial counsellors across Queensland. This is complemented by the expansion of state funded wellness coaches from six to 10 across Queensland. Wait times for these services can vary from client to client. Counsellors provide in-depth advice on cash flow, marketing, support, legal advice, financial planning and minor works. Both service providers across Queensland aim to deal with all clients as quickly as possible. Our southern Queensland service provider responds to all inquiries within a week and appointments made, if necessary, on an average of six to eight weeks time. Our provider in North Queensland responds to clients within 48 hours and appointments made, if necessary, within one to two weeks time. It is important to note that financial counsellors triage their clients based on need so that those in urgent need are supported sooner.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. There are a few other areas. TAFE payroll taxes 2023-24?

Mr McCALLUM: In relation to payroll tax questions, Chair, I note that payroll tax relates to a different portfolio, notwithstanding that it is in relation to the TAFE organisation.

Mr MICKELBERG: You know TAFE are the ones paying it?

CHAIR: That is not an area that you administer under—

Mr MICKELBERG: TAFE most certainly is, Chair.

CHAIR: It is, but the payroll tax would come under Treasury, I imagine, as an area of administration.

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, Chair. The question was how much payroll tax has TAFE paid. The question was not what would the rate of payroll tax be, or does Treasury intend to change the rate of payroll tax. The question was how much does TAFE pay. Surely that sits within the minister's portfolio.

CHAIR: We obviously do not have that information now. How would you propose to deal with it, Minister or Director-General?

Mr McCALLUM: I am advised that the 2023-24 payroll tax expense, which is unaudited, is \$29.48 million.

CHAIR: That is the best we can do today. That is great. The third matter was TAFE third-party trainers. Do we have any additional information there?

Mr McCALLUM: I am advised that unfortunately the third-party providers requires a lot of work. All qualifications, all locations, all external providers across a lot of contracts—Chair, clearly this would have been much better asked as part of a prehearing question on notice. It is not achievable or reasonable in the 15 minutes or so that we have had.

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

CHAIR: Will the minister take it on notice?

Mr McCALLUM: Happy to take it on notice.

CHAIR: The last matter is trends in TAFE enrolment part-time and full-time.

Mr McCALLUM: I will take that on notice because that is in exactly the same category as the previous question. It requires more work than we have had time to consider.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Director-General. Answers to questions taken on notice must be provided to the committee secretariat by 9.00 am on Monday, 5 August 2024. You can confirm the exact wording of any questions taken on notice in the proof transcript to this session of the hearing which will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's webpage within approximately two hours or by watching the archive broadcast.

We have now reached the end of the time allocated for consideration of the proposed expenditure, the areas of responsibility administered by the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development. Thank you, on behalf of the committee, to the minister, the director-general, officials and department officers for your attendance. Minister, would you like to thank anybody before we close?

Mr McCALLUM: Thank you for the opportunity, Chair. I certainly would like to thank every single member of the committee. I want to place on record my sincere thanks to the director-general and his senior leadership team and all of the hardworking staff at the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training who have so diligently, capably and expertly served the people of Queensland.

I extend my deep thanks to the CEO of TAFE Queensland, the Small Business Commissioner, the Queensland Training Ombudsman and their teams. I want to thank my dedicated and hardworking staff, who are well aware of my appreciation for their work.

Chair, it is not lost on me that this is the final session of this year's estimates hearings. On behalf of all Queenslanders, I acknowledge the hard work of the parliamentary staff and the committees, particularly yours, Chair, over a longer period than we have sat here over the last two weeks. It is an honour and privilege to serve the people of Queensland to do what matters.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes this hearing of estimates for the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee for 2024. I also would like to thank my fellow committee members and the visiting members who have participated in the hearings today. Thank you to our Hansard and our parliamentary broadcast staff, together with all of the parliamentary staff, including committee secretariat, who have been so helpful in assisting here today. I declare the hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.20 pm.