

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Mrs D. A. Reilly (Chair)

Ms J. H. Jarratt

Hon. V. P. Lester

Hon. K. R. Lingard

Ms C. Male

Mr R. J. Quinn

Mr S. G. Rodgers

EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, YOUTH AND THE ARTS**IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. M. J. Foley, Minister for Employment, Training and Youth and Minister for the Arts

Arts Queensland

Ms N. Deeth, Acting Director-General

Mr K. Boyne, Policy Advisor

Mr P. Willett, Executive Manager, Business Resources Unit

Mr R. James, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Film and Television Commission

Department of Employment, Training and Youth

Mr K. Smith, Director-General

Mr P. Clarke, Senior Policy Advisor

The committee commenced at 9.01 a.m.

The CHAIR: I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee C now open. I welcome the minister, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2002 for the areas set out in the sessional orders of 18 April 2002. The organisational units will be examined in the following order: Employment, Training, Youth and the Arts; Industrial Relations; and Education. The committee has also agreed that it will suspend the hearings for the following breaks: lunch 12 noon to 1.15 p.m. and afternoon tea from 3.45 p.m. to 4 p.m. We will possibly break again around 6 o'clock for 10 or 15 minutes.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute, and the answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning, and a double chime will sound at the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time for answers may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. For the benefit of Hansard I ask departmental officers to identify themselves before they first answer a question.

These proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 195, any person admitted to a public hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by the order of the committee. The sessional orders provide that a member of parliament who is not a member of the committee may, with the committee's leave, ask the minister questions. I note here that Mr Ted Malone, the member for Mirani, and Mr Stuart Copeland, the member for Cunningham, will be asking questions of the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth and Minister for the Arts, with Mr Copeland commencing with the Arts program.

In relation to media coverage of the Estimates Committee C hearing, the committee has resolved that still photographs and silent television film coverage will be permitted for the first five minutes of each department and the Arts. My final request is that if you have a mobile phone would you please make sure that it is turned off, and if you have any phone calls to make please do so outside the chamber.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Employment and Training and Arts Queensland open for examination. The time allotted is three hours. Questions will be directed to the Arts for approximately the first hour followed by the remaining organisational units in the department. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr FOLEY: Yes, please. Madam Chair, I acknowledge that we gather here on the traditional lands of Aboriginal people. The greatest challenge facing our community remains the scourge of unemployment, which blights the lives of so many Queensland families. That is why the top priority of this government remains jobs, jobs, jobs. Jobs, skills and Queensland's future are inextricably linked in today's complex labour market. The government's key vehicle for delivering on its commitment to vocational education and training is Queensland's TAFE institutes. Each year our 15 institutes provide high-quality training to around 250,000 Queenslanders in 86 locations across the state and on line. This training investment is backed up by the government's labour market programs, especially the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative and the Worker Assistance Program—both crucial to creating jobs and reducing the impact of long-term unemployment.

Our focus on the interrelationship between vocational education and training and employment initiatives comes together in our partnership with Education Queensland in developing key themes in the *Queensland the Smart State: Education and Training Reforms for the Future* green paper. We encourage young people's involvement in government decision making through the Youth Participation Strategy, support the Youth Affairs Network as a link between young Queenslanders and government on issues of importance and encourage a positive community attitude to young people.

The innovative \$470 million Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative has already delivered more than 40,000 jobs to Queenslanders of all ages since its introduction in October 1998. It is on track to reach its goal of 56,000 jobs over six years—well ahead of schedule. In 2002-03 the initiative will inject more than \$107 million into Queensland communities to keep up the good work. That funding will help create more than 15,600 jobs and training opportunities. I am pleased to be able to announce today an expansion of the initiative's private sector employment program to allow employers to take on extra apprentices and trainees in skill shortage industries and recognise new growth industries with emerging skill shortages. These skill shortage industries, such as the arts and entertainment, food processing, tourism and community services, are crucial for Queensland's development in the decades to come.

To ensure that we meet the demands for skilled labour in the exciting world-scale construction project set to transform central Queensland, the state budget allocated \$4.3 million towards the \$5.5 million central Queensland training and employment strategy. Importantly, industry will contribute \$1.2 million to this strategy, which will create some 2,700 training opportunities in the year ahead. When we came to office in 1998 we pledged to re-establish TAFE Queensland as a reliable public provider of vocational education and training and restore the financial viability of individual TAFE institutes. I am delighted to say that in the financial year just past there was a \$14.95 million turnaround in TAFE Queensland's financial performance and a 2.3 per cent increase in training delivered.

The government's record \$61 million training and infrastructure allocation for 2002-03 to meet the state's growing demand for information technology skills will help TAFE Queensland to do its job. The Queensland government has invested a record \$196 million in arts and cultural activity across the state through the Arts portfolio this financial year. That investment is delivering social and economic outcomes for Queenslanders. Almost \$100 million in funding is provided to 60 organisations, including the cultural statutory authorities as well as groups as diverse as Dance North in Townsville, Arts West in Blackall and Youth Arts Queensland here in Brisbane. These organisations generate jobs and provide cultural activities that are enjoyed by more than three million people each year.

The government, through the Pacific Film and Television Commission this financial year, will invest over \$8 million in the film and television industry, which is expected to generate more than \$100 million in film production expenditure in Queensland. Queensland's international reputation is borne out by a recent invitation from the Japanese government to the Queensland orchestra to represent Australia at an inaugural Tokyo festival in September.

As an example of the government's commitment to enhancing information services, in August the State Library of Queensland will open the first five of 31 indigenous knowledge centres planned for Cape York and the Torres Strait. This government recognises the value of the arts to our economy and its value in enriching the lives of all Queenslanders, and that value is reflected in the priorities set out in the budget.

The CHAIR: The first period of questions will commence with government members. I call the member for Whitsunday.

Ms JARRATT: What benefits have projects assisted under the Regional Arts Development Fund delivered to the Whitsunday electorate?

Mr FOLEY: The Regional Arts Development Fund is a fantastic program which involves cooperation between state government and local councils throughout the state. In broad terms, we put in \$3 million, local councils put in in the order of \$1 million. In the case of the Whitsunday shire, the contribution from state government of \$16,500 has been supplemented with council's contribution of \$12,000. Major initiatives for the spending of that \$28,500 include increasing grants in the area of music with the new local radio station, Reef FM, promoting local artists; training for the RADF committee; and increasing the funding rounds from two rounds to three.

By way of specific examples, the Proserpine Community Centre Association has been helped over the last year, engaging four professional art workers to present creative workshops for primary school-age children in arts and crafts during the Easter school holidays with the support of some \$1,500. It also employed four professional artists to tutor at four workshops from October to December last year with assistance in the order of \$2,000. I am pleased to say that the art exhibition at the 90th annual Proserpine show was supported in cooperation with the Proserpine Agricultural Pastoral and Industrial Association.

An important issue, particularly for women, is the quilting movement. I am pleased that the Whitsunday Quilters conducted a major workshop in the Whitsundays. Kay York from Proserpine was supported in the sum of \$1,000 to attend a summer school at the University of Southern Queensland at Toowoomba in the saxophone. The Whitsunday Ecumenical Choir was assisted, as well as the Proserpine Historical Museum Society and Art Whitsunday Incorporated. Jellena Demartini was assisted to attend the summer school in Toowoomba. Felicity Mahoney was assisted through marketing and posting a CD of original material to record companies. Those examples basically illustrate what it is all about. It is grassroots. It is targeted. It is cooperative with local government. It is a very good program in terms of developing arts and cultural initiatives throughout regional Queensland.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, could you please inform the committee about the successes of the 2001 Queensland Biennial Festival of Music?

Mr FOLEY: I think its principal success is that it recognises the great cultural strength of Queensland, which is its diversity. We often speak of the value of biodiversity, but we often ignore the great value of cultural diversity. One of our great strengths is that we are a decentralised state. The Queensland Biennial Festival of Music runs a festival every two years in Townsville, Mackay, Brisbane, Barcaldine, Rockhampton—all around the state—and it plays a unique role in the artistic life of the nation. I have to say that it was re-established in 1999 after having been abolished by the previous government in its previous form as the Brisbane Biennial Festival. When it was re-established we reinvented it as a regionally based festival that covered the whole of the state.

The 2001 festival last year featured more than 110 performances over 10 days in 13 centres; 62 per cent of the music was Australian, including 12 world premieres and 10 Australian premieres. Significantly, the very first symphony written in honour of an Australian city was performed. It was, of course, the Rockhampton Gardens Symphony, based on the work of a local poet and a local composer, Elena Kats-Chernin, and local poet Mark Svendsen—a Rocky boy, incidentally. That illustrates what the festival is about. It is about affirming the value of the arts, not just in the winter palaces of the capital cities but throughout regional Queensland, in places such as Barcaldine, Cairns, Chinchilla, Esk, St George, Roma, Townsville, Brisbane, Toowoomba,

Logan, Mackay and Longreach. That festival, I think, has been very successful in artistic terms and in community development terms.

Ms MALE: Some concerns have been raised in the media about job losses at the Queensland Museum. Could you inform the committee about any change of staff at the museum?

Mr FOLEY: The museum is going through a period of change and growth. There has been an increase in net jobs at the museum but the museum is changing in accordance with its proper role. Years ago, the Queensland Museum was simply based in Brisbane. Now it has a major presence in Townsville and Toowoomba and is soon to open in Ipswich through the Ipswich Railway Workshop Museum. The board of the Queensland Museum has developed a new strategic plan. That plan involves better services for regional Queensland, creation of the Ipswich campus, improved electronic delivery of information and services, maintenance of opening hours across the museum network and a new science centre is being relocated across to South Bank. Significantly, a new indigenous cultural centre is being established. I strongly welcome the emphasis that the museum is placing on this area. In the last week I have had the great honour and pleasure of opening two very significant indigenous cultural exhibitions there. The first, Native Title Business, sets out the cultural dimension behind native title. The other exhibition deals with Aboriginal languages – the Yugambeh language and the Gungarri language of south-eastern and south-western Queensland. This is indicative of the direction that the museum is going in, affirming the importance of an indigenous cultural centre.

The museum will also establish a fundraising foundation. That is something that the Art Gallery has had for a long time that the museum has not had. That involved change. It involved a number of voluntary early retirements at the South Bank. At the same time there has been a consolidation of the position particularly in Townsville at the Museum of Tropical Queensland. I think it has been a very important and significant period of growth. There are things like the Museum Magnet, which the museum carries out in conjunction with schools and with the Smithsonian Institution. The Queensland Museum is doing a very fine job in redefining itself because Queensland's cultural heritage is not to be found simply within the four corners of Brisbane city, it is to be found throughout the whole of the state and that is reflected in the campuses of the Queensland Museum

Ms MALE: The State Library of Queensland has announced a new strategic direction. Can you inform the committee about the benefits to Queenslanders that follow from this new strategic direction?

Mr FOLEY: Yes, the strategic direction is all about the role of libraries in the Smart State. Being a Smart State is not really optional. The alternative is to be the dumb state and there is no future in that from a jobs point of view or from a cultural point of view. I think that the State Library has done a good job. It is creating a smart library network to meet Smart State priorities as a result of extensive community consultation with input from government, education, library, community, arts and cultural sectors. The smart library network will be an integrated network of physical and virtual community spaces. It will creatively link diverse groups of Queenslanders to information, to knowledge and to each other. It includes the initiative that I announced at the start in regard to the establishment of indigenous libraries. One of the great scandals is that there are many communities in Queensland that do not have access to a public library other than the school library. That is not good enough. We need to change that and that is exactly what we are doing. Over the next couple of months we will be opening five libraries, or the communities prefer to call them indigenous knowledge centres. They will be opening in late August again in New Mapoon, Wujal Wujal, Lockhart River, Mabuiag and Erub, which is Darnley Island.

This reflects the strategic direction that the library has a mission to deliver to people whatever their walk of life and wherever they live in Queensland. Queensland's public libraries play a vital role. Queenslanders make 21.4 million visits to libraries each year, and a total of 1.7 million people are formally registered as public library members. Significantly, the library at South Bank will double in size as a result of the major extensions that are being constructed and that are due to open in 2005. The Queensland information portal Eclectus will provide significant access for clients to the information and collections of the State Library as well as the important work of the John Oxley Library, which does a fine job, particularly with the historical records.

The CHAIR: Could the Minister please give details of the expansion of jobs in the film industry on the Gold Coast?

Mr FOLEY: I am delighted to do that because the film industry on the Gold Coast has been one of the success stories of the last decade. We have seen some 75 per cent to 80 per cent of film and television production in Queensland occurring on and around the Gold Coast. That equates to an average of \$75 million of film production expenditure on the Gold Coast per year, which translates into some \$228 million in annual economic impact based on the 1996–97 ABS output multiplier for film and video production and distribution of just over three times. Using the ABS multiplier of 37 jobs per \$1 million production budget, this translates into the creation of 2,775 full-time equivalent jobs. Since 1991 productions with combined budgets of over \$1 billion have been made at the Warner Roadshow Movie World Studios at Oxenford of which \$503 million has been spent in Queensland, and exports to the value of \$509 million have been obtained for Queensland. Over 150 new privately funded service businesses are now located on the Gold Coast due to sustained film and television production levels, an increase of some 30 to 40 from a decade earlier. On 19 March this year the Premier during his trade mission to the United States announced that the Queensland government through the PFTC would provide the Warner Roadshow Movie World Studios with a combined grant and loan facility of \$8 million to expand the studios. It is anticipated that the studio expansion will support an average of 2,500 new jobs.

One of the great things about the film and TV industry as far as the Queensland economy is concerned is that it helps to diversify our base. Traditionally, we have had a base of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and commodities, and we need to look after that base. But, we also need, if we are going to have a secure future for our kids, to have a diversified economy, one that is based in the sunrise industries, the information industries, the knowledge industries. The film and TV industry is a highly competitive business but the Gold Coast has demonstrated that it can compete with the world's best and we are seeing that, for example, with the forthcoming production of *Peter Pan*. It is a great success story and one that is very good for the jobs on the Gold Coast and also the whole diversification in the economic base of Queensland.

The CHAIR: Could you also detail the benefits to the Gold Coast from the expansion of the RADF scheme?

Mr FOLEY: The Regional Arts Development Fund, to which I made reference to the Whitsunday before, has previously not been available to the Gold Coast and that is a shame. I must say that as a consequence of a fairly vigorous representation from the chairman of this committee and a number of other newly elected members on the Gold Coast, the poor old Arts Minister found himself subjected to considerable pressure about this matter. I recall visiting Eagleby with the member for Albert in connection with an employment program. When I posed the question to the member for Albert, 'Why on earth isn't the Logan City Council doing something to support cultural activities here in Eagleby?', she enlightened me that it was, of course, part of the Gold Coast city which did not receive RADF funding. That was a fairly cutting riposte and one that has really focused us on the question of why not. The answer is that we have changed it and we now contribute \$50,000, matched by the Gold Coast City Council, and I welcome its partnership.

This is all about supporting the 300 arts and cultural organisations on the Gold Coast. I think there has been a bias against the Gold Coast. I think that, frankly, there is a popular image that arts and culture on the Gold Coast are nothing more than people in penthouses swilling champagne at sunset and looking over the beach. The truth is a bit more complex than that. The truth is that the Gold Coast has a very interesting and diverse artistic and cultural life. The communities both along the beachfront and in the hinterland deserve the support of the Regional Arts Development Fund and I am very pleased that that is occurring this year. I hope that the \$100,000 will help to support and stimulate the work of theatre groups, the work of poets, the work of a whole range of artists and artistic groups on the Gold Coast, and I think that it is not before time.

Ms JARRATT: Only last week I turned the first sod in the construction of stage 2 of the Proserpine Historical Museum. Could you provide the committee with details of this project?

Mr FOLEY: The Proserpine Historical Museum has been allocated \$100,000 from the millennium arts regional initiatives for the development of stage 2 of the Proserpine Historical Museum. The society will also receive a grant of \$37,500 under the cultural facilities program from Arts Queensland. This is part of a \$15 million regional arts infrastructure package for regional Queensland as part of the millennium arts project. The millennium arts project is not just the Gallery of Modern Art and the extension to the library on the South Bank, it is also the very significant work being done throughout regional Queensland. Stage 2 works of the Proserpine

Historical Museum will include an extension to the existing museum building to house a large machinery collection including a World War I cane loco and tractors. It will also include workshop facilities for the care and restoration of museum artefacts. The total cost of the works is estimated at \$252,874, including GST. This includes in kind support estimated at \$58,100 from volunteers, transport and crane usage, professional assistance, and the provision of land by the Whitsunday Shire Council. Additional funds of \$46,401 have been provided by the Commonwealth government and by the Proserpine museum. It is anticipated that the project will be completed by October this year. The project will provide a much needed expansion of the Proserpine Historical Museum, which has done an excellent job of preserving local artefacts for future generations.

This support for historical museums is based not merely on principles of access and equity. It is not simply a question of giving the regions a fair go, it is a question of enriching the cultural diversity of the state and recognising that culture is not simply something that belongs to an elite in the winter palaces of the capital city. Our geographic diversity is one of our main cultural strengths and we should acknowledge that and support it where we can, and that is what the regional arts infrastructure package is about, in particular this fine project at the Proserpine Historical Museum.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Cunningham.

Mr COPELAND: I thank the committee for granting leave for me to appear at these hearings. I refer to page 2-13 of the MPS, which lists the Pacific Film and Television Commission as an administered body which administers the Revolving Film Finance Fund. Queensland was very disappointed to hear that Peter Beattie's last film, *The Last Man*, will not be proceeding. Can you inform the committee when this production will begin? Will it still be located in Queensland, as initially promised? What is the total of money that has been awarded to *The Last Man* production by the Pacific Film and Television Commission?

Mr FOLEY: It is a highly competitive industry, and the basis on which the decision is made to proceed is always a commercial basis for each production. As we know, *Peter Pan* is to go into production, and that will be a very significant boost for jobs. There is no certainty at this stage that *The Last Man* will proceed here in Queensland. That reflects the highly competitive global nature of the film business. Any funding from the PFTC through the Revolving Film Finance Fund depends upon production. Apart from the normal business of informing people about locations and so on, the business of the Pacific Film and Television Commission through the Revolving Film Finance Fund is all based on production.

I understand that the Premier did not in fact confirm that *The Last Man* was to go ahead. That was a possibility and it is a possibility that has not crystallised. The basis on which substantial funds are made from the Revolving Film Finance Fund is the basis of production. I am informed that very little has gone into that proposal for *The Last Man*, though I have to say that the investments that have been made with regard to attracting the international film industry here have been very successful.

Mr COPELAND: You have said there have been only small amounts of money. Could you confirm how much money has been awarded to *The Last Man*? What remittal process is in place to recover any funding that has been awarded in the grant process to, for example, *The Last Man* should it not continue? Similarly, what remittal processes are in place to recover any funding to failed projects generally?

Mr FOLEY: The acquittal of grants is a very disciplined business in the PFTC. Each grant or loan, as the case may be, is made dependent on strict conditions. Part of its job is to administer those conditions, which it does very firmly but fairly. I will ask Mr Robin James, Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Film and Television Commission, to give you the details of that.

Mr JAMES: In relation to *The Last Man*, we are hopeful the production will continue next year. There has been no confirmation from the production company, which is Warner Bros, that it will not continue. The expenditure on *The Last Man* is minimal. The only money that has been expended on it, to my knowledge, is on the survey for that production to help confirm it to Queensland. The incentive program that it would be eligible for does not apply until that film goes into production, so the expenditure has been absolutely minimal. As a final comment, I would say that we are still hopeful that that movie will proceed next year.

Mr COPELAND: I refer to page 2-13 of the MPS and the allocation of grants by PFTC. How many grants administered by the PFTC have been awarded to Cutting Edge Post Pty Ltd and

how much funding did Cutting Edge Post Pty Ltd receive for the production of the film *Blurred* on the Gold Coast?

Mr FOLEY: The PFTC has contracted Cutting Edge Post Pty Ltd for various services, including the production of VHS and Betacam dub tapes, telecine services, the production of show reel compilation tapes and hiring of specialist equipment. In 1998-99 the PFTC funded an intern to work at Cutting Edge Post through the internship scheme, which subsidises up to 80 per cent of an intern's wages to work with an industry, provided to learn skills relating to an area of film and TV identified by industry to be in demand. I will get Mr James to provide you with some further information. The basic arrangement is that PFTC tries to attract film producers and then advises film producers of the availability of post-production services. So the bulk of the dealing is between producers of the film and the post-production company, in this case Cutting Edge. I will get Mr James to expand.

Mr JAMES: The minister's comments in relation to Cutting Edge are correct. The Pacific Film and Television Commission has invested in the film *Blurred*. The Pacific Film and Television Commission also developed the film with the producers. However, the arrangements between Cutting Edge Post and the production are between the production company and Cutting Edge. They are not between the Pacific Film and Television Commission and Cutting Edge.

Mr FOLEY: The PFTC has acted in accordance with the ministerial statement made to the parliament by the Premier in regard to not entering into further contracts after the date of the—

Mr COPELAND: Thank you, Minister. This morning I lodged an FOI request regarding those grants. I assume nothing will come back as a result of that, given the answer. Is it true that the film *Blurred* was co-produced by John Patrick Lee of Cutting Edge, which Mr James has just referred to, and Pictures in Paradise Pty Ltd, of which Christopher Hambley Brown is a director? I have the ASIC search if you would like to see that information.

Mr JAMES: I am not aware that Cutting Edge was a co-producer of *Blurred*. I will have to get advice on that. Pictures in Paradise were the producers, to my knowledge. I am just advised that John Patrick Lee of Cutting Edge provided some production services to the company and, rather than be paid for those services, he took a co-producer role in the production, which means he gets a financial benefit once that film has been sold and distributed.

Mr COPELAND: Can you confirm that Pictures in Paradise were the co-producers as well?

Mr JAMES: Pictures in Paradise were the lead producers of that film. I should make the point that PFTC has no control over what the production company does in relation to its films except where we have contractual agreements and we have defined what our controls will be. We are an investor in that film, along with other organisations and other companies.

Mr COPELAND: How many grants or funding arrangements has PFTC awarded to Pictures in Paradise?

Mr FOLEY: I will ask Mr James to give you those details, if we have them.

Mr JAMES: We do not have those figures to hand; however, we estimate that there would have been about five development grants provided to Pictures in Paradise. Pictures in Paradise is one of the leading Queensland production companies. We have an expectation that it will continue to produce films that we are currently working on. So there are about five development grants, and we estimate it would be approximately \$60,000.

Mr COPELAND: Is that per grant or in total?

Mr JAMES: That is in total. They are development grants. According to the contractual arrangements PFTC has with the company, if those films go into production then that money is repayable once the production commences. So it converts from a grant into a loan which becomes repayable. If the production does not proceed then it is a grant.

Mr COPELAND: So there is no way of remitting those grants if the production does not go ahead?

Mr JAMES: No. It is part of the development process that the government has committed to in terms of helping develop a local film industry.

Mr COPELAND: I refer again to the same section of the MPS. What is the total amount of money that was allocated by the commission to the film *Inspector Gadget II* and what portion of this money was allocated to post-production work? Considering that these grants are made to film companies to spend money in Queensland, create Queensland jobs and create industry for local

artists, is it true that the post-production work for the music for *Inspector Gadget II* has been outsourced interstate to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and recorded at Studio 301 in Sydney?

Mr FOLEY: I will ask Mr James to respond.

Mr JAMES: *Inspector Gadget II* is a movie for the Walt Disney company in the United States. It was attracted to Queensland by PFTC. The expenditure by PFTC on that film directly includes the location survey costs that were associated with getting that movie into Queensland in the first place and then expenditure on incentives, which includes a cast and crew incentive. The way the cast and crew incentive works is that if the company uses Queensland residents who can confirm that they are Queensland residents and are eligible under the PFTC's program, there is a rebate of their salaries to the production company. If the production company does not complete work in Queensland, for example in the area of post-production, to which you referred, there is no rebate payable. So if the company chooses to do as it has—to record its music track elsewhere—then there is no rebate from the PFTC payable for that particular part of the production.

Mr COPELAND: So what amount of money was given to *Inspector Gadget II*?

Mr JAMES: Crew subsidies would be probably in the area of \$100,000, but we would have to confirm the exact amount.

Mr COPELAND: I understand that one of the reasons that has been given for *Inspector Gadget II* not to record its music locally—the reason the Queensland Orchestra was not used—is that there was not an adequate recording studio in Queensland for the work to be done. Is that the case?

Mr FOLEY: I will ask Mr James to respond. I think in broad terms that is correct. It is always possible to record in less than ideal circumstances, but the difficulty we have is that the facilities available elsewhere are considerably superior to those that are available here. Sometimes when the government does invest, as for example on the Gold Coast, to provide infrastructure for increased opportunities for films we are the subject of misguided, ill-informed criticism, which discourages us. I think your question illustrates the importance of investing in infrastructure of this kind. I will invite Mr James to answer in more detail.

Mr JAMES: The minister's comments are correct. We do not have the facility that I am aware of or a suitable facility to record a music soundtrack for a major motion picture, which *Inspector Gadget* is, for a major global studio. I am hopeful that in due course we will have that capacity, but we do not have it at the moment.

The point that I would like to make in response to your question is that there is no question that the Queensland Orchestra does not have the creative skill and capacity to record that soundtrack; it is simply a matter of suitable facilities to record the soundtrack.

Mr FOLEY: Indeed, as I mentioned earlier this morning, one of the recent achievements of the Queensland Orchestra is to be invited by the Japanese government to participate in a major performance in Tokyo. We will certainly keep your views in mind and I look forward to the National Party's support for any future government investment in developing infrastructure in the film industry. I hope that you are able to convince your colleagues of the great importance of doing so.

Mr COPELAND: I note the invitation that has been extended to the Queensland Orchestra, and it is a compliment to not only them but the talent that we have here. But it is my understanding that the Queensland Conservatorium has a recording studio that has a capacity for 90 players in Ferry Road, West End, which was originally the ABC orchestral studio, that it is one of the best in the country and that the Queensland Orchestra has done all of its international recordings in that studio. Surely that studio is available and able to be used for recordings such as this.

Mr FOLEY: We would certainly encourage all concerned to support the Queensland Orchestra and to do their recording here. Ultimately, we cannot control that. As Mr James has indicated, the rebate structure is based on the proposition that if you employ people in Queensland, that is how you get a rebate. If you choose to take your business elsewhere, you do not get any support for that from the Queensland government.

The recording facilities here, we would encourage people to use, but at the end of the day it is a matter for the producer of the film to make an assessment as to what they want and how it suits their purposes. Part of our job is to sell Queensland. We do that both in terms of moral

encouragement and in terms of financial encouragement through the rebate structure that has been mentioned.

Mr COPELAND: I have asked a number of questions regarding the grants that have been given by PFTC. Really, there has been no answer on the number of grants or quantum. We will have to check it out. Can I return to the question of how many grants have been given to Cutting Edge Post and how much money that is as grants?

Mr FOLEY: I am just checking those details for you. Let me say that I reject your suggestion that answers have not been given. I make every effort possible to answer questions fully and accurately. If you have any relevant questions, we are happy to answer them.

I will set out the reference to the internship. With regard to PFTC's dealings with Cutting Edge, I am informed that there has been nothing in the way of a grant, but there have been a number of fees in respect of services provided as follows, if I have the time: \$144.60 for a locations show reel digi transfer; \$189.90 for an *Ocean Girl* digi tape; \$5,748.49 for an internship scheme; \$1,000 for audio, two by two hours, first film; \$384 for tapes for short film for first film; \$202.30 for VHS and betacam tapes; \$95.20 for *Limbo* trailer; \$938 for dubbing EPK—electronic press kit—and tape for *Fufu the Worldweary*; \$1,972.30 for dubbing *Catherine* documentary and EPK; \$3,196.45 for a production montage show reel; \$280 for QNFA digital suite one hour plus one diskette; \$81.10 for two VHS 60-minute tapes *Arac Attack* scout; \$103.02 for a betacam location show reel; \$2,139.50 for fast film transfer tapes; \$631.40 for show reel compilation tapes, eight betacam and one VHS; and \$27.50 production cost for *Flying Tigers*, one VHS and DV 60 minutes.

With the indulgence of the committee—and particularly I am going to invite the honourable member to withdraw his suggestion when I am finished—I want to answer his question as fully as I possibly can.

The CHAIR: If the member for Cunningham agrees to an extension of time for the answer?

Mr COPELAND: Absolutely.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you. \$27.50 for production costs of *Flying Tigers*, one VHS and one DV, 60 minutes; \$265.10 for show reel dubs; \$88, two 15-minute dubs and two 90-minute tapes for location scouts; \$132 for documentary production tapes, six VHS, 15 minutes; \$82.50 for a VHS dub of the *Bouliá* documentary; \$5,273.51 for the Brisbane International Film Festival EPK telecine six show reel tapes; \$2,113.43 for short film show reel six tapes—

Mr COPELAND: Can I perhaps request that the minister table that document and we will have the information to hand.

Mr FOLEY: I have got about 10 to go: \$1,100 for BIFF; \$3,602.50 for BIFF; \$47.36 for one VHS dub, *Ghost Soldiers*; \$1,182.50 for telecine and one light for *Back* by Mark Chapman; \$126.50 for two VHS 180-minute *A Good Death* and *Wilds*; \$3,025.00 for QNFA provision of equipment; \$352.00 for quicktime graphics for cineposium presentation; \$55.33 for VHS NTSC 15-minute documentary show reel for overseas use; \$49.83 for one VHS 15-minute documentary show reel tape; \$148.83 for a show reel compilation tape. I would ask you to withdraw your suggestion.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you. I simply said that for the number of films that I had requested the exact details of the money that had been given as grants had not been there. We had estimates of it.

The CHAIR: Can I remind the honourable member that the minister may answer the question in whatever way he or she deems proper and that under sessional order 27(4) the minister has the right to decline to answer a question. I think he has answered those pretty comprehensively for your information.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has now expired. There are six minutes remaining for the examination of the Arts. Under the sessional orders, this will be divided equally between the government and the non-government members. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mr RODGERS: Recently, you secured an increase in funding for the Museum of Tropical Queensland. Can you please provide details of the arrangements put in place for this significant feature of north Queensland cultural life?

Mr FOLEY: We have boosted it from \$1.5 million a year to \$2.1 million a year. The reason for that is to ensure its financial viability to make sure that it supports its research work and to make sure that it provides the world-class facility that we promised to the Queensland people when Premier Beattie opened it in June 2000.

I am very pleased about this. It is a 40 per cent increase to secure its growth. It was necessary, because the predictions for revenue that were made during the term of the coalition government were wildly unrealistic and put the Museum of Tropical Queensland in the position where it was chronically underfunded. As a government, we were not prepared to tolerate that and I am pleased that the government has moved to support the Museum of Tropical Queensland in that way.

Basically, this cements its position as a research facility. It will assist it in its marketing. It means that they can get on with the job of planning for the future without the sort of financial burdens that they have had over the recent past.

Mr RODGERS: There are a lot of young people in the Burdekin area with an interest in music. Recently, I held a battle of the bands for National Youth Week. This generated a huge response from the community for young people wanting to hold similar events and seeking programs to help them show off and improve their talents. What programs are available for communities and youth that may help them to promote their ideas and talents?

Mr FOLEY: We place a very high emphasis on supporting young people in the arts and we do that through a range of programs. There is A Venue, the Tute Music Program and developing radio traineeships. A Venue provides young bands and musicians with the support that they need to make their mark on the contemporary music scene while the Tute Music Program ensures greater access to contemporary music tuition for young people who want a career in the contemporary music industry.

In addition to this, Q-Music, with funding from Arts Queensland and the Department of State Development, has established the music business advisory service—the first of its kind in Australia. This service will provide business advice, training, a mentorship and a database of music business activity throughout Queensland, increasing the opportunities for music management events, venues promotions and labels. Over 3,000 young people have registered for the A Venue and the Tute Music Mentor Program.

Young people in the Burdekin area can also access the Youth Arts Mentoring Program, which is funded by the Queensland government and delivered by Youth Arts Queensland. This program helps young artists in developing and establishing a professional career. Of course, young people can also apply through Arts Queensland for the major grants and to the monthly grants rounds. In addition, they can apply locally to the Regional Arts Development Program, which sees the Queensland government providing \$24,000 to the local council for disbursement to the community.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Cunningham, if he has further questions.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, you referred earlier—or Mr James may have referred earlier—to minimal funding that had been given to *The Last Man*. Is there any way that we can quantify that amount of money?

Mr FOLEY: I will invite Mr James to answer that.

Mr JAMES: In response: yes, we can. We can estimate the money that has been spent on the survey process and the money spent on attracting that production to Queensland. I repeat that we are still confident that that production will come to Queensland in due course—hopefully in the new year.

Mr FOLEY: I think that it is important to understand that—and we are happy to get those details for you—this is not money that the PFTC has actually given to the producers; this is money that they have expended in seeking to attract that business by way of survey and so on; that is, it is part of what the PFTC's role is, namely, to try to drum up business from the international and the local film industry. In answer to your earlier question about remitting the money, I am informed that the money did not go to the producers.

The PFTC has an extremely good track record in attracting international and local film production, but part of its business is to try to sell Queensland locations and Queensland film-making infrastructure to producers. That is of its nature not always going to result in a successful outcome, although we are optimistic in this case.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you, and thank you for the offer to provide that information to us at a later date—and if we could include perhaps the other two movies that we were discussing, *Inspector Gadget II* and *Blurred*, the details of the funding that has gone to those two?

Mr FOLEY: I am happy to do that. I do not think that you asked for that before. I am happy to provide it.

Mr COPELAND: On page 2-1 of the MPS it is stated that there is \$8.2 million in investment in film and television through the PFTC. Considering that \$8 million has gone to Warner Roadshow from that fund, will there still be a chance for other producers to obtain finances through the Revolving Film Finance Fund?

Mr FOLEY: I think, with respect, you are confusing operational funding with loan funding. The \$8.2 million is operational funding; the \$8 million is a loan. It is two completely separate propositions.

Mr COPELAND: So could you perhaps advise how much money is in the Revolving Film Finance Fund in addition to the \$8 million that has gone to Warner Roadshow?

Mr FOLEY: Sure. There is a \$45 million budget for the Revolving Film Finance Fund. Approximately \$4 million is on loan, about \$8 million has been allocated for Warner Roadshow, and the uncommitted balance as at 30 April is \$33.8 million.

The CHAIR: Order! The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates expenditure for the Arts has now expired. The committee will now move to examine the remaining organisational units in the minister's portfolio.

Sitting suspended from 10.01 a.m. to 10.04 a.m.

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms JARRATT: Minister, page 1-1 of the MPS refers to the role of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative in reducing long-term unemployment. How many jobs is the initiative expected to create in 2002-03?

Mr FOLEY: This program has been very successful in helping employers with the cost of employing apprentices and trainees and with a whole range of efforts to generate jobs. There will be a number of amendments to assist in eligible skill shortage and growth industries. Up until 30 April, incentives totalling just over \$23.7 million had been paid to private employers for taking on an additional 13,557 apprentices and trainees in skill shortage or growth areas.

What we found, though, was that the current list of industries that needed to be addressed with skill shortages needed to be changed. So the growth in traineeship commencements and the introduction of a broad range of new training packages has created some capacity for introducing new industry areas under this program. This has facilitated a shift of focus of the program from the traditional blue collar trades experiencing skill shortages to an increased support of growth and emerging industries.

As from 1 July, the list of eligible skill shortage and growth industries has been expanded. Private employers and group training organisations will now receive incentives of up to \$2,000 for employing additional apprentices or trainees in most qualifications under the entertainment training package, the film, TV, radio and multimedia training package, the tourism training package, the community services training package, and pharmaceutical manufacturing and wine occupations.

The Breaking the Unemployment Cycle is a terrific initiative and I salute my predecessor, Paul Braddy, and the Premier, Peter Beattie, for introducing it. One of the big differences between the Labor government in this area and coalition governments is that we believe in intervening in the marketplace, in the labour market. I only wish that the Commonwealth government would provide more assistance in this area, because not only is it a question of compassion for those in need of work, it is also a question of economic sense in terms of skill shortages in industries that can provide people with jobs.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, page 1-20 of the MPS refers to TAFE Queensland's lead role in enhancing student transitions from school to further education. Could you please inform the committee of the articulation arrangements that have been negotiated between TAFE Queensland and the tertiary sector?

Mr FOLEY: It is very important that we have articulation for TAFE students to be able to go into uni and for uni students to be able to go into TAFE. In fact, there are more uni students going into TAFE than vice-versa. Just yesterday, for example, I was at the opening of the launch

of the new campus for the Australian Catholic University at Banyo. They have an arrangement in place with TAFE in respect of the articulation of students from TAFE into their university. We hope to build on that so that we are not just in articulation arrangements but also in some shared arrangements with regard to teaching. There are complementary areas, for example, regarding information technology, regarding hospitality and in regard to aged care and nursing where there are opportunities for a lot of cooperation between universities and TAFE colleges.

At Caboolture, with QUT and the Northpoint Institute of TAFE, we actually have a common campus. I think that is going to be a model for a lot of campuses throughout Australia. In Mount Isa we have an education precinct where the high school and TAFE are working together. In the northern corridor of Brisbane there are around 44 government and non-government schools working together with Brisbane and Northpoint Institute of TAFE, QUT and the Caboolture Shire Council. We are finalising an MOU with Griffith University for the establishment of credit transfer arrangements with TAFE. Current arrangements have been negotiated in the areas of business, justice, information technology and hospitality. That MOU is the result of months of negotiation.

The bottom line is this: we simply cannot afford the luxury of a university paddling its own canoe and TAFE paddling its own canoe and not talking to each other. We need to have a system which is focused on the needs of students and focused on the needs for proper career path development, and that is what we are working towards.

Ms MALE: Minister, page 1-10 of the MPS refers to the Community Jobs Plan. How does that program assist local communities in Queensland?

Mr FOLEY: It assists communities in two ways. It provides jobs for long-term unemployed and disadvantaged people and it also helps provide community infrastructure. It is a very good program. I was very disappointed to hear the Opposition Leader some months ago in parliament referring to these programs merely as 'painting rocks white' because in his own electorate considerable work had been done with the Toowoomba Show Society through this program.

This is about identifying community projects that are needed. I am sure the member for Cunningham, being a former employee of the showgrounds there, would endorse my remarks—if not publicly. What it is about is reaching out, with the cooperation of community groups, to do worthwhile local projects. Take, for example, at Hervey Bay where they have got a horseriding facility for people with a disability. It is providing people with real job opportunities which gives them something on their CV so that when they go to an employer, it is not a case of their saying, 'Well, you have not been employed for two years; we do not want you.' This is about giving them relevant jobs and training.

I am grateful for the community organisations which have worked with us. It was difficult at the start and now we have a surfeit of riches with a number of community organisations, and more community organisations coming to us than we are able to actually fund to carry out these projects—which is, I guess, on the whole a good problem to have.

Experience teaches us that it is very important to give long-term unemployed people a chance at work because employers will take those who have the most recent experience. In this year alone, 1,385 long-term unemployed people and those considered most disadvantaged in the labour market have been paid to work for up to six months on 127 public works, environmental and community projects worth \$15.74 million throughout Queensland. Just over 50 per cent of these projects and jobs have been in rural and regional areas.

Ms MALE: I refer the minister to page 1-10 of the MPS. The government in 2001 introduced two new programs to assist mature-age workers. Have these programs been successful?

Mr FOLEY: The mature-age worker issue is a very important issue. The mature-age unemployed are in many ways the forgotten unemployed. These programs really try to do two things. They try to help people get skills and they try to provide a financial incentive to employers. In terms of providing skills training, career advice and information technology skills, that program is well on track to achieve the target of 1,000 people to be assisted. The program has assisted people in 40 locations throughout Queensland, including all major centres along the coast, as well as areas such as Charleville, Charters Towers, Dalby, Gayndah, Morven, Tambo and Goonyella.

Now, the second part of it, the employers—frankly, we would like more employers to make applications. It seems odd that we should be asking to give away money here, but the truth is that we are not getting enough applications from employers to put on mature-age unemployed people. We have tried to address that by changing the eligibility requirements from 12 months unemployed to six months unemployed to broaden the pool, but we are keen to hear from any other employers who would like to put people on through the Experience Pays wage subsidy

program. When we launched this program one of the long-term unemployed fellows put it this way. He was about 48 years of age and experiencing long-term unemployment. He said that all his life the only things he needed to get a job were a pair of dirty boots and a pair of strong hands. Now when he applied for a job they asked him for his resume. He said, 'What's a resume?' He was told to 'do it up on your computer'. So, doing a CV or a resume are basic things that have to be learnt. They are not easy, and that is what this program helps people to do. We do say to employers that the money is not the main thing. The main thing is that mature-age people bring maturity. They bring experience and, on the whole, get along with people in the workplace a little better than do younger people.

The CHAIR: Page 1-12 of the MPS refers to the Worker Assistance Program. Has the program achieved its objective of assisting workers caught up in large-scale redundancies?

Mr FOLEY: Yes, it has. The great thing about this program is that it provides help quickly. Where there has been a major downsizing, for example the Ansett workers, it means that officers of my department go in and try to provide help quickly. Experience teaches us that, if we can get people assistance quickly in their moment of crisis, it is worth a lot more than approaching them six or 12 months down the track. As at 30 April, 1,019 people accessed assistance, with expenditure of \$434,964 for seven interventions including: Ansett, 805; Flight West Airlines, 115; Gate Gourmet, 109; Besley and Pike, 12; Harris Scarfe, 21; and Thalanga mine, 29. It is about providing some job preparation assistance, training, employer wage subsidies or relocation assistance. The costs are approximately \$1,000 per participant. That is money we would prefer not to pay, because we would prefer all these people to stay with their companies but it is a fact of economic life that companies fold. There are redundancies. The question is: who will help them? We believe it is part of the business of government to reach out a helping hand. This program is a good program. It offers modest support. We are not talking about sheep stations, but it is support which is timely and which helps people get back on their feet at a time when they often do not know where they are heading.

The CHAIR: Page 1-21 of the MPS refers to apprenticeship and traineeship commencements. Will the minister inform the committee of the level of traineeships and apprenticeships in 2002?

Mr FOLEY: This is an area of very significant growth. The level of apprenticeships and traineeships as at 30 June was 56,693. That is terrific. It is a growth of around three per cent over the 55,140 in training as at 1 July 2001 and an increase of over 16 per cent on the 48,890 in training as at 1 July 1999. It boils down to the fact that 161,511 apprentices and trainees commenced training since the election of this government in 1999. To put it in perspective, that means that there are 3,365 apprentices and trainees commencing each month. Compare that with 2,102 per month under the coalition government. It is a 60 per cent increase—2,102 per month under the coalition; 3,365 per month under the Labor government. That reflects an increased commitment on the part of the Labor government to support apprenticeships and traineeships. We think that it is essential that there be an investment in this area if we are to have a Smart State. Apprenticeships and traineeships are a very important part of the Smart State. This opening up of opportunities to public sector and private sector parties to put on apprenticeships is important. It is also extremely important that there be school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. We lead the nation in this area. One of the huge problems is this transition from school to work. We need to support even further the development of children having, say, three or four days a week at school and one or two days a week in the workplace. Since the 2001 election we set a target of 10,500 additional school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Since the introduction of this initiative, 12,714 students took advantage of it. There are currently 4,814 school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in operation. Queensland currently has around 50 per cent of all school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia, something of which Queensland is very entitled to be proud.

Mr RODGERS: I refer to page 20 of the MPS, specifically the Central Queensland Training and Employment Strategy. Will the minister outline the strategy?

Mr FOLEY: This strategy is to ensure that we use the central Queensland industrial boom as a nursery for skills growth into the future. Over this coming year we will invest \$3.25 million out of the \$5.5 million Central Queensland Training and Employment Strategy, ensuring a skilled work force for the estimated \$8.8 billion of projects planned for the region. We are looking at something which is Queensland's version of the Snowy Mountains scheme. We have seen a number of major projects coming together to provide a fantastic opportunity. We have worked on a coordinated whole-of-department, whole-of-government response. The Central Queensland

Institute of TAFE is working with those companies in order to ensure that we focus on entry level training. We have an accelerated apprenticeship training model. We upskill existing workers. We provide the workers with existing competencies the opportunity for upskilling. We have been working with Aldoga, Comalco and AMC in this area, because this is not just a terrific challenge but a terrific opportunity. These projects will make a real demand on skilled jobs but also provide us with fantastic opportunities. We will do our level best to see that they provide apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for young and mature-age Queenslanders to have a go, because this is an extremely exciting area of industrial development. We do not want it simply to be a flash in the pan; we want it to be an investment in the long-term upskilling of the Queensland work force.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Cunningham.

Mr COPELAND: Can I say at the outset that I hope in next year's MPS we might have a discrete section for youth to give youth the focus on issues that they deserve.

Mr FOLEY: That is entirely in the hands of the committee. That is not a matter over which I as minister have control. This is a parliamentary committee. There is a separation of powers involved here.

Mr COPELAND: I mean in the MPS. It is lumped in with vocational education and training. Perhaps that might be something looked at for next year.

Mr FOLEY: It is part of the Department of Employment and Training. As part of the administrative responsibilities in government, it is reported to the parliament in that way. Although there is a discrete Office of Youth Affairs, as the member is well aware, the nature of it is such that it must be reported to the parliament as part of the department of which it is a part.

Mr COPELAND: I refer to question on notice no. 8. The minister stated that the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy was led by Queensland Health; however, page 1-16 of last year's MPS states that the Office of Youth Affairs has the lead agency role. Could the minister explain the difference between these terms? What is the allocation of funding between the departments of youth and health for the suicide prevention strategy?

Mr FOLEY: The Department of Health is the lead agency in coordinating a range of activities with respect to youth suicide. Of its nature it involves education, training, housing and activities right across government. The Office of Youth Affairs transferred to the Department of Employment and Training under the machinery of government changes following the 2001 state election. The state government allocated funds in the order of \$50,000 in 2000-01 and \$95,000 in 2001-02. But if I could take the member to last year's MPS, the member has, with respect, misinformed himself or misread the document. The document last year at page 1-16 does not say that the Office of Youth Affairs has lead agency role with regard to the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy; it says that it has the lead agency role in the coordination and management of seminars about that strategy. There were a number of seminars. In fact I believe I attended the concluding seminar at the Yungaba facility at Kangaroo Point. With respect, the member is confusing the strategy as a whole with the seminars. The strategy as a whole for obvious reasons is led by Queensland Health. I guess there is a good reason why the Office of Youth Affairs would coordinate the seminars, because it is part of its business to liaise with young people and to make sure it has good contacts with young people.

Mr COPELAND: I refer to the same question on notice where it was revealed that the budget for the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy under the Office of Youth Affairs was \$95,000, as the minister just referred. However, in question on notice no. 9, part D, it is revealed that the reason for the increase in that year was because the department spent nearly \$40,000 contracting out a report to a consultancy firm. Why was there not an increase in funding from the ground resources, and will there be funding allocated for these purposes in the forthcoming year?

Mr FOLEY: The member has really answered his own question. In 2000-01 it was \$50,000. Then there was funding in respect of the consultancy with Mellish and Associates for the engagement of young people, the development of the Queensland government Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy in the sum of \$37,500 and a consultancy with the same firm for an operational plan with the Office of Youth Affairs in the sum of \$3,250. The consultancy of its nature is not something which would be done on a recurrent basis. Just to clarify the point, I am informed that in fact the \$37,500 for Mellish and Associates is in fact additional to the \$95,000 for the Office of Youth Affairs. That reflects a significant commitment on the part of government.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you, Minister. I thank you and your departmental staff for your answers for both this and the previous session. I will hand over to my colleague.

Mr MALONE: I refer to page 1-1 of the MPS of last financial year and to 'Strategic Issues', which states—

The government remains committed to implementing a range of programs and policies aimed at meeting its target of reducing unemployment to 5% by 2003.

I particularly note that this year the statement does not exist in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. In light of your projected date for reaching the unemployment rate of five per cent being only 12 months away, if Queensland does not obtain the unemployment rate of five per cent by this date what new targets will the minister set or will you remain committed to that specific unemployment rate? Do you admit that you have failed to live up to the 1998 election promise?

Mr FOLEY: What we expect is the prediction given by the Treasurer in the budget, that is, an unemployment rate in the order of 7.5 per cent. The unemployment rate is a measure both of the number of jobs created and of the increase in population in this state. Let us identify a couple of things. The target of five per cent was an ambitious target. We were determined to do our level best to attack unemployment and we are still determined to do our level best to attack unemployment. What we are concerned to achieve is a growth in jobs in this state, and that is what we have been achieving in a range of areas. If you look, for example, at the rate of jobs growth during this term of government you will see a rate of full-time jobs growth of 20,451 per annum as opposed to 11,657 full-time jobs per annum during the term of the previous coalition. It was because of the abysmal failure of the coalition government to take the issue of employment seriously that we needed to put in place a—

Mr MALONE: This is after five years?

Mr FOLEY: If you want to talk about the unemployment rate under the coalition, I am more than happy to do so, because what we saw under the Borbidge government was a terrible state of affairs where unemployment ballooned out of control. What we have seen in the course of this government has been a focus on attacking unemployment—an attack on long-term unemployment, youth unemployment and mature-age unemployment in particular. That prediction of 7.5 per cent contrasts with the 6.9 per cent of Access Economics. We prefer the more modest prediction. We remain determined to be the centre of jobs growth in Australia.

Mr MALONE: As Minister for Employment, are you satisfied with the Treasurer's indication that a 7.5 per cent unemployment figure is factored into the books for this coming year? I know that you have strategies in place, but it appears that currently they do not seem to be biting. This government is still languishing, as I have said previously, with the worst unemployment figures in mainland Australia. Considering the fact that the figures are not coming down and you are not meeting the targets, what strategies do you have in place to turn that around quickly?

Mr FOLEY: The honourable member is quite wrong. The figures are in fact coming down. They are coming down from the high that they were under the coalition. But in answer to your earlier point about whether I am satisfied with a target of 7.5 per cent, no, I am not. As I indicated at the very outset of my remarks, the scourge of unemployment is the greatest challenge facing our community. I do not think there is any room for complacency whatsoever. I want to make sure that we do not go back to the figure of 9.5 per cent that occurred during the coalition government.

Mr MALONE: When the national figure was 11 per cent.

Mr FOLEY: The honourable member refers to national comparisons.

Mr MALONE: That is right.

Mr FOLEY: I am delighted that he does refer to national comparisons, because if we look at the creation of jobs during the term of the Beattie government we see a situation where Queensland is leading Australia with job creation. The fact of the matter is that unemployment has reduced to 7.5 per cent as at May 2002. When we took over, it was 8.4 per cent, in June of 1998. It peaked at 9.5 per cent in February 1997 under the coalition government. It is an appalling state of affairs. But let us not focus merely upon the failure of the coalition government. The honourable member is quite right to be dissatisfied with a level of 7.5 per cent. We do not regard it as something that we should be complacent about at all. That is precisely why we are spending considerable sums of public money in order to fund the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. It is why we are targeting youth. It is why we are targeting mature-age and long-term unemployed and it is why we are supporting the central Queensland industrial boom in the way that we have. The significant growth in jobs during the term of the Beattie government is

something of which we are entitled to be proud, but there is absolutely no room for complacency in this area.

Mr MALONE: I have to agree with you. We will continue this discussion in the parliament. I refer to question on notice No. 6 and ask: what is the total number of contracts awarded to private registered training organisations for the 2000-01 and the 2001-02 financial years, and how many of those contracts do you expect to renew this coming year?

Mr FOLEY: Is that a reference to the User Choice contracts on the part of registered training organisations?

Mr MALONE: I am referring to the private registered training organisations and asking about the number of contracts that have been provided both last year and this year. How many of those are you going to renew this coming year?

Mr FOLEY: I am not quite sure that I follow you. You referred to question No. 6. Question 6(a) deals with the 60 largest private sector recipients of grants under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle. Are you referring to that or are you referring to the provision of User Choice contracts to registered training organisations? I am not clear what your question is. Perhaps I can provide some assistance to the committee. A total of 139 private registered training organisations—and that includes TAFE institutes from other states and other government registered training organisations—have been awarded contracts totalling \$41,851,269.51. This represents 42.3 per cent of the market share. Under the 2000 to 2002 programs, private registered training organisations were awarded contracts to the value of \$41.892 million per annum, or 44.5 per cent of the market share. I am not sure if that is the information that you were seeking.

Mr MALONE: I am referring to the answer in (d). The pertinent point I am really trying to get to is: how many of those contracts are going to be renewed this year?

Mr FOLEY: I guess the answer to your question is that there are more traineeships being offered throughout Queensland, which would in fact increase opportunities for private providers. Since the first election of the Beattie government, some 161,511 apprentices and trainees have commenced training. This means that over 3,365 apprentices and trainees have commenced each month compared with 2,102 per month under the previous government. This represents a 60 per cent increase. The amount of funds available in the User Choice program is somewhat larger than it was last year—about 10 per cent larger than it was last year.

Mr MALONE: Going back to the question—and you may have to take this on notice—what I am asking is: how many contracts were put out last year, how many were put out this year and how many are you going to renew? It is not about dollars, it is about the number of contracts?

Mr FOLEY: I guess part of the difficulty arises because the assistance to which you are referring is not actually part of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program.

Mr MALONE: I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr FOLEY: I think we can deal with it. I will ask my director-general to clarify the point for you, if you may, through you, Madam Chair, with the indulgence of the committee.

Mr SMITH: There are two different sorts of contracts with private training providers. One form of those contracts is for training, and those contracts previously were for a two-year period that finished at the end of the financial year June 2002. There were, as the minister mentioned, 138 private training providers who accessed those contracts. For the new contract round, 139 private training providers will enter into contracts for User Choice. With respect to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle and the answer and attachment to the question on notice, they are not contracts but subsidies to companies, including group training schemes, to engage apprentices and trainees in skill shortage areas. The question under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle does not relate to contracts but subsidies. The contracts with private training organisations are actually under the training program and provide direct training to people.

Mr MALONE: In summary, under the training programs there will be one more private training provider this year than there was last year? There will be one more contract than there was last year?

Mr SMITH: These are contracts with private training providers to provide training under User Choice arrangements, which is separate from the number of registered training providers in the state, which is 1,648. Those providers include the 15 TAFEs that are part of that network as well as the four agricultural colleges.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Ms JARRATT: Page 1-19 of the MPS refers to the Community Training Partnerships program. Can you please inform the committee how this program works?

Mr FOLEY: Community training partnerships, as the name suggests, are partnerships between the government and the community. They seek to address local or regional employment opportunities or issues that require some skills development that cannot be adequately met through mainstream vocational education and training measures. Basically, this is a long-term strategy that seeks to empower communities to undertake research into the needs of their residents and local employers to coordinate appropriate training, skills development and employment responses. The issues for response by the training system are identified and prioritised through the department. To 30 April, 31 projects have been approved with funding of \$4 million under the program to deliver community based training to over 3,147 people throughout Queensland. Apart from these direct assistance outcomes, the program has also contributed to the achievement of other government priorities like building Queensland's regions.

The industries that have benefited through community training partnerships have included tourism, agriculture, fruit and vegetable, marine, sugar, meat, community services, health and hospitality. In other words, it is a group of local businesspeople who get together, identify that they really need to up-skill an industry and talk with officers of my department about ways in which they can put together a package that responds to the need of that community in a more flexible way than is otherwise the case. For example, they have developed a strategy to identify current and future employment opportunities in Caboolture and Morayfield to identify the skill needs of local residents to enable them to access opportunities. Training to address the entry skill level requirements of the food processing and pharmaceutical industries has been delivered in Goodna as well as language, literacy and numeracy, occupational health and safety, basic life skills and work readiness skills.

Training in literacy and numeracy, supervisory skills, office administration, food production, et cetera, have been put together to address future growth and employment opportunities in the food and beverage industry in the Noosa area. There are other examples, such as refugees on temporary protection visas and individuals in local ethnic communities where training is being targeted to respond to their needs to maximise their employment potential and things like the training needs of people in Wujal Wujal, Cooktown, Hope Vale, Laura and Lakeland Downs communities. So it is about working at a regional level trying to build partnerships between community and government.

Ms JARRATT: I refer now to page 1-17 of the MPS which refers to the Cape York Training Strategy. Can you please inform the committee of progress with that strategy?

Mr FOLEY: This is a terrific strategy. It is about trying to bring together the art of Cape York and the administrative skills to enable Aboriginal people to develop and market their art without being ripped off by get-rich-quick merchants on the way through. One of the big problems with indigenous art in the Northern Territory has been the extent, or lack of it, to which the money from the artworks gets back into supporting local artists in the local community. So this is a partnership between the Department of Employment and Training, Arts Queensland and the Queensland Art Gallery. What it is about is putting together a major exhibition in Cape York as part of the Queensland Art Gallery's work.

I should say that I am concentrating just on the art training part of the strategy. It is far broader than that, because the whole of the Cape York Training Strategy is about working in partnership with a whole range of areas like cattle handling, livestock feeding, marketing cattle, vehicle operation, enrolled nurse training, visual arts, office administration and computer skills. This is basically trying to ensure that we have sustainable employment in Cape York, and the Cape York Training Strategy is part and parcel of that. The example which I started with—namely, the art example—is a good example of recognising that some of the industries which will support sustainable employment in Cape York are not just the traditional ones of cattle and fishing but areas that are important in the economy of the future.

Ms MALE: Page 1-2 of the MPS refers to the Youth Access Program. Could you advise the committee of the purpose of this program?

Mr FOLEY: The purpose of the program is to give youth at risk access to training and the necessary skills to gain access to employment. This program provides alternative pathways to employment, further education and training. Let me give you an example. On the Gold Coast there are numbers of young people who have been excluded from a range of schools and who

are being given an opportunity to attend TAFE. Indeed, I visited there with the chair of this committee and a number of other people going back about a year ago. It is about reaching out to those people to make sure that they do not get lost in the system. It is about trying to make sure that, in that case, the Gold Coast TAFE was providing access to them to come and do training and get the skills and the self-confidence that is necessary.

Unfortunately, not all young people cope with school or not all schools cope with all young people. We need to develop better pathways. This program is a part of developing that pathway. It is about better preparing young persons entering apprenticeships and traineeships. It is about higher school retention rates. It is a part of the government's agenda set out in the green paper on education and training reforms for the future. In this allocation through the Youth Access Program, where we allocated \$1.7 million in the 2001 school year, there are a total of 612 of Queensland's most at-risk youth participating, with 517 successfully completing training and 329 transitioning into further education, training or employment. I attended the concert at the end of the program at the Gold Coast TAFE college and was enormously impressed with the enthusiasm of people whose self-confidence had obviously increased dramatically over the course of the program.

Ms MALE: Page 1-1 of the MPS refers to helping Queensland's regions become stronger and more capable. What is the department doing to achieve this very worthwhile aim?

Mr FOLEY: The department tries to work with regions in a whole range of areas. In the Youth Access Program we provide funds for regional school students at risk. I have made reference to allocating \$3.25 million out of the \$5 million for the Central Queensland Training and Employment Strategy. We have assisted in the completion of skill centres at Proserpine, which no doubt will bring joy to the heart of the member for Whitsunday. Proserpine seems to be doing well with museums and skill centres at the moment.

There are other skill centres at Cunnamulla, Woorabinda, St George, Goondiwindi and Rockhampton to address niche training requirements and to assist in student transitions from school to work. We have spent funds in helping with career planning for women in rural and remote communities. I mentioned a little earlier the Community Training Partnerships program. There is a distribution of \$10 million regionally for community responsive training programs such as community capacity training and employment initiatives linked to literacy and numeracy and adult community vocational education and training programs. While some of the highest areas of unemployment are in Brisbane and Moreton, such as Inala, Logan and Ipswich, the economic strength of the regions has to be addressed as well. We think it is particularly important that Queensland's regions receive as much assistance as they can to ensure that we have a strong skills base right throughout the community.

The CHAIR: I refer to page 1-10 of the MPS and specifically to the Indigenous Employment Policy, and this may refer again to regional parts of the state. Can the minister inform the committee of the objectives and achievements of this policy?

Mr FOLEY: The objectives are to help indigenous Queenslanders get jobs, and we are trying to do that in practical ways. The Indigenous Employment Policy was implemented as at 1 May. It means, for example, that if a government builds a health centre or a school or a police station on an indigenous community we expect that 20 per cent of the construction will use local labour and, of that, half—that is, 10 per cent—have got to be apprentices or trainees. The Indigenous Employment Policy is about providing jobs and job opportunities. Approximately \$100 million will be spent on building and construction projects over the next five years in indigenous communities. What this policy is about is trying to ensure that the funding provides not only housing and civil infrastructure but also employment and training opportunities for local indigenous communities.

The government agencies involved ensure that that happens, and in particular I pay tribute to the Department of Public Works in this regard, because it has been very helpful. We need to ensure that we do not just have fly in, fly out arrangements with subcontractors in the building of infrastructure. I have raised this issue with the federal minister, Brendan Nelson, and I have urged him to get the Commonwealth to come to the party with this policy, because it would be great if the Commonwealth would cooperate with us on this and make it a requirement of its building construction that it actually employs local indigenous people on projects rather than just fly in, fly out subcontractors. We have received a sympathetic hearing from Brendan Nelson, but I hope that we also receive some practical help, because I think it is something that the Commonwealth could make a big difference on. Queensland is leading the way in this regard, but we have to be active because there is such a significant problem with Aboriginal unemployment.

The CHAIR: Page 1-17 of the MPS refers to the Youth Reconnected initiative. Can the minister advise the committee of the objectives and achievements of that initiative?

Mr FOLEY: This is a package of six local initiatives to maximise young people's education and training opportunities. Funding of \$306,622 has been committed to six locally developed Youth Pathways projects in Brisbane's south, the Gold Coast, Mornington Island, Innisfail, Townsville and Toowoomba. This is about partnerships between TAFE institutes, regional offices, schools and the community. In Toowoomba, for example, mature-age people are mentoring young people to develop a more positive attitude to learning. In turn, the young people are using their knowledge of computers to teach their mentors about the technology; and together they will be producing a publication. This two-way program helps to build confidence and competence. On the Gold Coast, specialist teachers are working with individuals and small groups of young people. The aim of this project is to develop literacy and numeracy skills and set personal goals to enable these young people to successfully undertake the certificate 1 in vocational access and to move on to further education, training or employment.

This whole business of the transition from school to work is absolutely fundamental to the government's priorities. We have 10,000 young people aged 15 and 16 who are out of school, out of work and out of training. Now, that is a scandal. We have to do better. That is what the green paper is all about: education and training reforms. It is what these programs are directed towards. It is about trying to get the system to be more responsive to these young people, to provide opportunities for them to empower themselves with the benefit of education and training. That will be different in Toowoomba from the way it is on the Gold Coast and from the way it is in other parts of regional Queensland. That Youth Reconnected initiative is one that I think shows considerable promise.

Mr RODGERS: Minister, I am aware that recently you launched the Youth Charter, which is referred to on page 18 of the MPS. Could you inform the committee what the charter involves?

Mr FOLEY: Yes. The Youth Charter is all about involving young people in government decision making. It is a formal document adopted by cabinet and published to the world at large that guides the government when developing programs, policies and services that impact on young people. It is consistent with the Youth Participation Strategy commitment to promote the participation of young people in government decision-making processes. I would like to record my thanks to the State Youth Advisory Council, which took a leadership role in developing the charter. Consultation was carried out with young people from across the state as well as government and the community. Together with the State Youth Advisory Council, the Office of Youth Affairs will monitor the implementation of the charter, and I will be providing regular reports to cabinet.

To support the adoption and assimilation of the values and beliefs laid out in the charter, kits have been distributed to state government departments to provide practical information and resources to assist them to incorporate young people in the everyday business of government. Workshops will be run across government to train officers of government departments to implement the charter in practical ways. Information is also being provided to young people and community organisations informing them of the implication and opportunities the charter brings for young Queenslanders.

This is about sending a message to all government departments. The Health Department, when it is planning programs for young people, has to consult. The Police Department, when it is looking at things like move-on powers affecting young people, has to consult. I pay tribute to Police Minister McGrady, who actually came along to the State Youth Advisory Council and had a talk with them about the way in which the move-on powers were working at the local level.

One of the big challenges we have is that many young people feel alienated and remote from the business of government. We have to find ways and means of engaging with them. What the Youth Charter does is set out certain principles which are government policy; and whether you are developing housing, training, education or health, there are certain minimum standards that government departments are expected to follow to make sure that we engage with young people. That is no substitute for other things like the Generate web site or other youth participation engagements. It is really, I guess, a way of us trying to educate ourselves to lift the standard of government to make sure that we do not neglect young people, not just for their sake but for everybody's sake, because government functions best when we get the benefit of the values and ideas of young people, their vitality and enthusiasm.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions from government members has expired. I call the member for Mirani.

Mr MALONE: Minister, I refer to question on notice No. 1 with respect to—as we understand it now—139 contracts with registered training organisations. I would like to ask about the user choice funding that is given to private registered training organisations. Firstly, how are those funds administered? How do you actually administer the funding to those organisations? Secondly, what checks and balances are in place to ensure the integrity of the scheme, in particular to the new providers entering the Queensland market?

Mr FOLEY: I am sorry, but question on notice No. 1 refers to consultancies.

Mr MALONE: Yes. In that second paragraph you talk about engaging solicitors to work with contracts, particularly for registered training organisations, in the provision of legal advice and litigation expertise in contract and statutory law.

Mr FOLEY: Sure, but that is a reference to the contract for services to provide assistance in the management of contracts with other bodies such as registered training organisations. I am happy to answer your question, but I do not think, with respect, it is in any way directly relevant to question 1.

Mr MALONE: It is the integrity of the contracts.

Mr FOLEY: I am perfectly happy to answer your question, but it does not seem to have anything to do with question on notice No. 1.

Mr MALONE: I beg to differ, Minister.

Mr FOLEY: I am indebted to you for your advice. The user choice contracts—as the name suggests—are about giving people a choice in who their training provider is.

Mr MALONE: Can I help you, Minister? My concern is the number of—

Mr FOLEY: I am not sure whether you can help me.

Mr MALONE: I hope I can. I am concerned about the training organisations moving in from the southern states and the integrity of the contracts. That is the basis of the question.

Mr FOLEY: Okay. There are a couple of things. I will ask my departmental officers to go through the administrative arrangements in respect of the awarding of the contracts. There are a couple of aspects of quality control. Under the Training and Employment Act there is a body called the Training Recognition Council, which is responsible for registering or deregistering training organisations generally. Forget about the actual contracts with government; this is a base quality control body which is a regulator whose job it is to make sure that registered training organisations comply with the act, standards and so on. With respect to the procedures for awarding of user choice contracts, there is a set of strict procedures.

Mr SMITH: I can provide some background information. In Queensland there were 1,648 registered training providers as at the end of March. Those registered training providers do not all operate on government contracts, but many of them provide accredited training on a fee-for-service basis. The user choice contracts to which the minister referred relate to users—mainly employers—having some choice in the training provider, particularly for an apprentice or trainee.

With respect to training providers that can manage user choice contracts, there is a tender process and contracts amongst those 1,648 registered training providers who can then be assessed to take up government contracts. As to the most recent contracts—there was a two-year contract for the period 2000 to 2002, which I mentioned expired on 30 June of this year. The new contract period, which had been tendered, was for the financial year 2002-03. Of those registered training providers that progressed through the tendering arrangements, the 139 private training providers that I mentioned plus 15 public providers and four agricultural colleges will enter into contracts.

Mr MALONE: You are probably missing the point a bit. I am concerned about the integrity and the background checks that your department does on the providers, particularly concerning those moving in from interstate. That was the basis of my original question. What background checks do you do on the integrity of the companies?

Mr SMITH: Quite extensive background checks. There is a quality framework in place nationally to which each of the states and territories have agreed, that is, the Australian Quality Training Framework, the AQTF. Every provider needs to be registered under that arrangement. Every provider to be registered must go through an initial audit, and there are regular follow-up audits on all registered training providers and through the Training Recognition Council, which is

an independent statutory body under the minister's portfolio. But the audit arrangements are very stringent, and on a regular basis—as a result of either regular audits or audits on complaints—action is taken to correct any quality issues with respect to registered training providers.

Mr FOLEY: And people get struck off; if they do not shape up they get struck off.

Mr MALONE: I would hope so.

Mr FOLEY: Absolutely—as they should. The Training Recognition Council has my strong support in being firm about that, because the bottom line is that if Queenslanders go along and enrol with some training organisation they are entitled to expect that it is going to be accredited, proper and aboveboard. That is one of the reasons why, when Paul Braddy introduced the Training and Employment Act, we set up the Training Recognition Council as an independent statutory body. For example, in 2001-02 the estimated actual number of audits was 626—146 of them contractual audits and 480 compliance audits within the Australian Recognition Framework and the Australian Quality Training Framework.

The honourable member is right to have a concern, because with the growth of the competitive market over the last decade a whole lot of people came into the training industry, not all of whom were of a high quality and not all of whom were able to deliver the service. That is why it is important to ensure that we have safeguards in place both in terms of the general registration through the Training Recognition Council—whether they are government contracts or not—and also, as the director-general has indicated, that there are strict procedures in regard to accessing of government funds in respect of any registered training organisations.

Mr MALONE: I am pleased to hear that, Minister. In answer to another question you actually indicated the amount of funding that had been allocated to training providers across the state for both 2001 and 2002 and, obviously, 2003. Can you actually divide that up between public and private training providers?

Mr FOLEY: The 2002-03 user choice tender process and outcomes has not been designed for—nor has it resulted in—a significant increase in public provider allocations at the expense of private providers. A total of 158 registered training organisations were offered contracts, of which 139 are private registered training organisations. This represents 42.3 per cent of the total allocation, which is comparable to previous user choice allocations.

Mr MALONE: Do you have dollar amounts for that?

Mr FOLEY: The total amount of the department's user choice budget for 2002-03 is \$97.6 million, which is a 10.7 per cent increase on 2001-02. We are looking at 42.3 per cent of \$97.6 million. It is \$41.892 million.

Mr MALONE: I return to the subject of private training providers. When was the cut-off date for final tender processes to be delivered to the department? What was the date to finalise the terms and amounts for the user choice funding contracts awarded to the registered training organisations? I would like to know the cut-off date and when the final tenders were released. Was that a similar date to that applying last year?

Mr FOLEY: The 2002-03 user choice tender was advertised in February 2002 and closed on 2 April 2002. Due to the overwhelming response to the tender process—there were \$230 million of requests—and budgetary constraints, even with the more than 10 per cent increase to \$97.6 million, there needed to be a careful allocation process to ensure maximum entry level training outcomes. Delays were experienced in communicating results to registered training organisations. Basically, we are dealing here with a huge volume of applications.

Mr MALONE: What I am getting at is the budgetary implications of the final notifications being made after the budget period.

Mr FOLEY: We are talking about the budget for 2002-03?

Mr MALONE: That is right.

Mr FOLEY: All of the existing teach-out has been honoured under the existing arrangements. Here we are talking about the tenders for the financial year that has just started. In terms of the students and the trainees, their position is straightforward.

Mr MALONE: Could I have the date on which the contracts were finalised? Do you have that date? Were they all finalised together or was there a cut-off date?

Mr FOLEY: As I understand, the department has made offers to the registered training organisations concerned and now negotiations are under way as to the final level to be approved.

We had an overwhelming response to the tender process—\$230 million worth of requests into the public purse—and all of those requests simply will not be paid on demand. We have to ensure that we get value for money, that we maximise the value of the Queensland taxpayers' dollar. The department has made offers back. They total \$97.6 million, which is up 10.7 per cent on last year. We want to make sure that we get value for money, and that is what the offers and the negotiations are about. Just to clarify, that is not stopping any new enrolments or new people coming in.

Mr MALONE: There was not a common date for all of the contracts to be finalised? Can you actually extend the date to accommodate some negotiation between those private providers and the department? In other words, is there a flexibility there?

Mr FOLEY: There is a strict tender process that was advertised in February 2002. It closed on 2 April 2002. Those are the tenders. The department advises me that it has gone through an allocation process, considered what it considers to be a reasonable way of maximising the value for money and has then made those offers to the training providers. Negotiations are in the process of being finalised.

Mr MALONE: By your saying 'negotiation', I assume there is some flexibility there. We seem to be at cross-purposes. You were saying that the contracts were finalised and now you are saying that there is—

Mr FOLEY: The total amount of budget has been finalised—the \$97.6 million. We are not going to make any more available. We are not going to break the bank and offer them \$230 million. That is the sum the department has gone back and offered. Before you have a contract, the parties concerned have to accept the offer. That is what has been done. They ask for the sun, the earth and the moon and if they are being offered the earth they may not want to settle for that.

Mr MALONE: That is not really what I am talking about. I am talking about flexibility, rather than extending the budget period. I am talking about the flexibility for the providers to negotiate with the department about providing the service, within budgetary constraints obviously.

Mr FOLEY: I will ask the director-general to speak to that.

Mr SMITH: Obviously, if there are any issues associated with flexibility of delivery and delivery arrangements, they can be negotiated but, as you mentioned, there is an overall budget constraint. I think it is important to put on record that Queensland's investment in the competitive market is double the rate of investment in the competitive market of New South Wales, for example. The increase that has been made to the budget is quite significant, but there still are budget caps.

Mr MALONE: Page 1-9 of the MPS refers to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program, in particular to funding provided to the Gold Coast. I refer to question on notice No. 430 asked on 8 May 2002 regarding funding for the Gold Coast region under various community employment programs. The reply shows that there has been an average of \$1,241 per person spent to provide assistance in their employment endeavours. Do you consider the amount of \$1,241 per person an efficient allocation of taxpayers' funds?

Mr FOLEY: We try to place these funds where they are needed. Funds are made available throughout the whole of regional Queensland. The point that is often missed with regard to the Gold Coast is the one I made before. The Gold Coast is not just millionaires quaffing champagne in penthouses in Surfers Paradise. There are a lot of people on the Gold Coast who are unemployed and who are doing it tough, particularly in the hinterland. I see the member for Mudgeeraba nodding.

Mr MALONE: I am sympathetic to the situation on the Gold Coast. There is no doubt about that.

Mr FOLEY: I think there is a real misperception of the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast is the sixth biggest city in Australia and it has considerable needs. I am satisfied that our assistance there is well justified, if that is the thrust of the question. A major study was done through the urban renewal project of Minister Schwarten's and Minister Bligh's departments. It recommended action to assist in vocational education and training and employment with regard, for example, to some training and employment projects to help people get access to the river, to provide a walkway and so on. I am happy to go through the projects with greater particularity, but I reject any suggestion that somehow the Gold Coast is undeserving of assistance.

Mr MALONE: I will take that up later, Minister.

The CHAIR: I might take it up myself. The time allocated for questions from non-government members has expired.

Mr RODGERS: Page 20 of the MPS refers to direct grant funding for the agricultural colleges. Could you advise the committee what role the colleges play?

Mr FOLEY: Agricultural colleges provide a very important service in helping people make that transition from school to work and in providing skills. The Australian College of Tropical Agriculture in the Burdekin is a fine example of it, and one which I know is close to your heart. There is also the Dalby Agricultural College, the Emerald Agricultural College and the Longreach Pastoral College. These colleges play a role in providing the sorts of skills that are necessary for Queensland's rural industries. I have talked during the course of the estimates hearing about the importance of supporting the new industries such as film and TV, but we do not want to lose sight of the traditional industries—the rural industries. I see the member for Mirani well and truly agreeing with me.

I think the colleges do important work. There is some legislation before the parliament, which I will not refer to in any detail, basically designed to make sure that their mission keeps up with the demands of contemporary society and also that we play a role. I know that the Australian College of Tropical Agriculture in the Burdekin has been playing a role with overseas students. That is a potential source of revenue and it plays an important role for the regions.

In light of the previous question about funding for the Gold Coast, I note that the member for Robina is a member of the committee. A number of Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives have gone into the electorate of Robina, which I hope are not the subject of complaint by the member for Mirani. I am happy to detail those because the unemployment rate in Robina, for example, is above the state unemployment rate.

The CHAIR: Are you seeking leave to table that document?

Mr FOLEY: I think it is sufficient if I note that since the start of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program many people have gained jobs and many people have been considerably assisted. The agricultural colleges have been an important link between the day-to-day world of agriculture and the training system. I think we have much to learn from it.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, you referred previously to the important role of TAFE Queensland as a public provider of training. You also recently mentioned the importance of international students to Queensland. Is it the department's intention to continue to grow this particular export market?

Mr FOLEY: Yes, we are doing our best. The export of education and training is as important, if not more important, to Australia than the export of coal and wheat and wool. This will become of increasing importance as society becomes more mobile, as the needs of the Asia-Pacific region grow and develop.

Take, for example, TAFE Queensland's role in China. There, students are completing their diploma studies through TAFE Queensland's operations and articulating it into universities across Queensland. The Queensland college in Shanghai will soon enrol an additional 270 students, bringing the total to just below 600. A number of students are choosing to complete their TAFE program in Queensland before progressing on to university. Recently, the joint Open Learning Institute/Nanjing Polytechnic College, graduated 29 students from another successful program in China, each of whom is continuing to bachelor studies at the University of Queensland, Griffith University or the Queensland University of Technology.

My department has established a vocational education and training export office and we work together with the Education Department and the Premier's Department in its trade division to get a coordinated approach to the export of education and training. Back in the period 1992 to 1995 when I last had the honour of serving in the Employment and Training portfolio, I signed an agreement with Shanghai in order to have this link. That has borne fruit over the years. The enormous economic growth of China is one that we ignore at our peril. We are well placed in the provision of training, whether it is in business activities or whether it is in things like hospitality training, to ensure that we are among the best in the world in the provision of education and training.

Ms MALE: Page 17 of the MPS refers to the creative arts training initiatives. Can you inform the committee of the goals of this initiative?

Mr FOLEY: Yes, it is to create jobs and to create the skills necessary to get jobs in one of our areas of important growth, which is the arts and entertainment industry. It was interesting that just last night I opened a conference on the music industry called Big Sound down at Fortitude Valley

where a whole lot of people through Q-Music are having discussions about that industry. The creative arts training initiative involves an allocation of half a million dollars in 2001-02 and the same amount this year to provide practising Queensland artists with access to employment related training in technical, business and marketing skills. Let me give you some examples. The allocation of just over \$47,000 provided indigenous artists in Bowen with the opportunity to revisit their cultural background and to draw inspiration. The skills that they gained in promoting their works will also improve their employment prospects. In the Sunshine Coast area, just under \$60,000 was allocated to arts training through this initiative. One of the programs offered by the Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE focused on meeting and events management. The skills gained through this training will increase the professionalism of local events including the Woodford Folk Festival, the schoolies festival, the Gympie Country Music Muster, and so on.

Arts means jobs and, like any other industry, the arts industry has a focus on training. We have a unique opportunity, with the Arts portfolio and the Training portfolio being within the one ministry, to get some progress. Frankly, there are too many people in the arts industry who do not engage with the training industry, with the training programs. Perhaps that is because the training system has developed so many acronyms that you need to be a rocket scientist to find your way around it. But it is time that we learned each other's language, because the availability of jobs in that industry is going to be an important source of strength for our kids in the future.

Ms MALE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to page 11 of the MPS and make reference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Public Sector Employment Development Unit. Can you tell us what the purpose of this unit is?

Mr FOLEY: The purpose of the unit is to give Aboriginal people a fair go in getting jobs in the Public Service. I must say that I was very disappointed because back when I was minister the last time, we had such a unit, and I am ashamed to say that it was abolished during the term of the coalition government. We restored it.

It is really important that powerful institutions, whether they are the courts of the land or the Public Service, be accessible. To do that, you do not just put up barriers and say, 'Anybody can apply.' We have to look at what is going on. The opportunity for Aboriginal people to get jobs in the Public Service depends upon reaching out, it depends upon ensuring that they get a go. So we have set up this unit called Wal-Meta. It embodies the state government's commitment to the reconciliation process and improved economic and employment opportunities. It is a proactive effort to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people valuable public sector workplace experience. We encourage each agency within the government to develop their own strategies to recruit and attract indigenous people.

I would like to pay tribute to the Hon. Dean Wells. On Mabo Day, I attended a ceremony outside the museum where the Environment Protection Agency was honouring a number of Aboriginal rangers who were engaged in that department. We need to make sure that indigenous people are given a fair go. It is no use just wagging our finger at the private sector and telling them to lift their game; we have to look at our own backyard. We have to make sure that the public sector does the right thing. We do not do that simply by reciting slogans; we have to help people to make sure that they have a fair go in making an application and that they have access to appropriate support and training to make a go of it once they get in the Public Service. The Public Service is not always the easiest environment to survive in and to thrive in.

The CHAIR: Or to enter.

Mr FOLEY: Or to enter. That is right. But I say this: it is important that, once people have entered, to then provide ongoing support and advice and assistance, because if you are going to have a career path, it has to be one that has some prospect of security. So I am very proud of this unit. We have a long way to go, but we are making an effort.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr RODGERS: I worked in the building and construction industry for a few years after I finished my apprenticeship as a boilermaker. I refer to you page 1-10 of the MPS, which refers to the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund. Can the minister inform the committee how successful this fund has been in increasing skills levels within the industry?

Mr FOLEY: Yes, I thank the honourable member. This training fund is important. The building industry has been a classic example of boom and bust. During the boom time, everybody grizzles that they cannot get a skilled tradesperson. During the down time, everybody grizzles that

they are too broke to put on an apprentice. We have to find ways of breaking that cycle. That is what the Building and Construction Industry Fund is about.

As at 30 April 2002, the fund had provided incentive payments to employers of 594 apprentice and trainees against a target of 755 for the full financial year 2001-02. The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund was introduced in 1998 as part of the state government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative. The Building and Construction Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Act 1991 was amended to enable 25 per cent of all money collected by QLeave to be given back to the industry in the form of this BCITF. This is equivalent to 0.05 per cent of moneys outlaid on building and construction activities in Queensland.

It provides funds for other programs in the industry such as the upskilling and cross-skilling of existing workers. The most notable feature of the program is the capacity to provide training opportunities to existing workers to create additional tradespersons and to support the employment of apprentices and trainees. I am able to report that even as we speak the Queensland government is bringing the unemployment rate in this state down. The figures just released indicate a modest but pleasing reduction in the unemployment level of 0.1 of a per cent down to 7.4 per cent. That is a spectacular contrast, I remind the committee, to the 9.5 per cent that it was during the term of the coalition government. In Australia there has been no move, staying at 6.3 per cent. Although 7.4 per cent is too high, it is pleasing to see that the unemployment rate continues to trend down as a result of the significant economic growth and of the investment of this government in trying to generate employment.

Mr MALONE: You have got a while to go to get that.

Mr FOLEY: A while to go, and I agree absolutely. We have a long way to go and we are determined to treat it with the absolute highest priority. We are making progress. We are generating jobs, but any community that has a significantly high, chronic level of unemployment cannot afford to be complacent.

The CHAIR: I thank the minister for providing such up-to-date information to the committee members. I bring you back just for a moment to the TAFE Queensland system. You are probably aware of my background in TAFE Queensland and my particular fondness for the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE. While there is a bit of conjecture between the honourable members and myself about which TAFE is the best in the state—we are not in agreement on that—I remind the minister that GCIT is a Queensland Training Awards award winner. I was just wondering if you could describe in a little bit more detail some of the innovative programs and unique achievements that you may be aware of that the GCIT has become known for.

Mr FOLEY: When you mentioned the best TAFE in Queensland, I thought immediately of Yeronga, of course. But I could not for a moment allow my parochial interests to colour my answer as the minister.

I have to say that the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE has done a terrific job. At the Queensland Training Awards in 2001, the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE was recognised as being Queensland's largest training provider. It is a reflection of the innovative programs and courses developed at GCIT and the quality of vocational education and training. I might just say this, too: they have always kept on top of their budget, unlike some of the TAFE institutes. Because they have done that, they have been able to reach out into some very worthwhile programs like helping those young people who are at risk that I mentioned before. That is one of the reasons why we have to be a bit strict with the budget—to ensure that people live within their budgets so that they have funds to reach out and do the things that are necessary if we are going to achieve the social justice outcomes of the government.

Not to put too fine a point on it, I have to refer to the acupuncture partnership with Victoria University that the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE formally announced on 5 December, delivering a one-year undergraduate degree conversion program in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The partnership is a first between two of Australia's leading education and training institutions.

The CHAIR: Thank you for pointing that out, too.

Mr FOLEY: I stand impressed by your observation. The role of the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE with international students is also significant. They reached an agreement with Japan's Seinan University in Fukuoka to send between 50 and 100 students each year, commencing in February 2002, to undertake four weeks of ELICOS. The Gold Coast TAFE was selected over the University of Technology, Sydney, and Melbourne University as the preferred destination, due, I am told, to the quality of current international students' feedback and the dedication exuded by the teaching staff. I think this brief was written by the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE.

The CHAIR: It sounds like something that I wrote when I worked there.

Mr FOLEY: I have been very impressed with the quality of TAFEs around the state. One of the experiences that I have had the honour of having as a minister is to come back to this portfolio after nearly a decade, starting in it in September 1992. There has been enormous progress made. Places like the Gold Coast are making a very significant contribution.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Mirani.

Mr MALONE: We were discussing the Gold Coast as time ran out and we were talking about \$1,241 for individuals on the Gold Coast. In relation to that, I see there are seven organisations that received funding on the Gold Coast where there was no recorded outcome. Why is this so?

Mr FOLEY: What document are you referring to there?

Mr MALONE: We are back to MPS 1-9. I asked a question on notice, 430—which you probably have not got—early in the year. The question is fairly simple. There were seven organisations that received funding and there was no recorded outcome. How can this be, and how do you assess whether the funds that have been provided are spent wisely?

Mr FOLEY: The question, with respect, is a bit ambiguous. I am not sure of the particular organisations to which you refer and I am not sure under what program they received funding—if, indeed, they did. I guess I would ask the member to provide further and better particulars.

Mr MALONE: The reference is MPS 1-9, Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program, particularly the funding provided to the Gold Coast. I do not have a list of the actual organisations. I do not have the bureaucrats that you have behind you.

Mr FOLEY: I have in front of me page 1-9 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and I cannot see anything on page 1-9 that refers to organisations on the Gold Coast.

Mr MALONE: I referenced it to question 430 on 8 May. I am happy to take the question on notice, if you can identify those organisations and what your government is doing to make sure that funds are spent efficiently. That is really what the question is all about, because there was no recorded outcome.

Mr FOLEY: Okay. I do have a copy of the question on notice No. 430, and the answer. I am informed by my department that where there is an outcome that is unrecorded, that is because the program has not finished or had not finished at the relevant time. Take, for example, the Baptist Union of Queensland, the Gold Coast Christian Family. I am not sure if what you are suggesting is that we are throwing money away to the Baptist Union for no good purpose, but if you look at the answer, it relates to a Gold Coast youth skills project. This project will involve various construction and landscape activities on Batten Recreational Reserve in Nerang. Participants will gain experience in administrative and nursery farm work and any fruit and vegetables produced will be given away to needy families. Under the heading 'Employment Outcomes and Training Outcomes', the answer is zero and zero. That means the program has not finished. I do not know whether you are suggesting that the Baptist Union would get \$135,840 and not deliver on its—

Mr MALONE: I am just asking the question. You have answered it adequately.

Mr FOLEY: Well, with respect, the question was based upon a plain error of fact and involved a false imputation against both departmental officers and against the recipients of those grants at the Gold Coast. In my experience, groups such as the Baptist Union of Queensland and the other groups who have received funding through the—

Mr MALONE: Point of clarification, Minister. The point I made was that the answer to the question that you have indicated there gave no outcome. The outcome should have been answered in the respect that the program was not finished. I think we will both agree to leave it there. I mean, you could have indicated that on the answer, that the program was not finished.

Mr FOLEY: Well, with respect—seeing as how we are expressing our mutual respect—the answer does say that. It recites the activities which I have just read into the Hansard record; namely, experience in administrative and nursery farm work and the giving of fruit and vegetables to needy families. I would have thought that that was as plain as a pikestaff.

Mr MALONE: I move on to refer to MPS 1-3 and the \$63 million expended for 28,000 apprenticeships and trainees, and I ask: are you, as minister, aware of any instances where companies have registered longstanding employees in managerial roles as trainees in order to collect state and federal government or state government funds?

Mr FOLEY: There were reports of that during the time of Minister Santoro's custody of the portfolio. There was some suggestion that squadron leaders and medical specialists had been enrolled, at public expense, in these training programs. The basis on which our funding of traineeships proceeds is that they are for new employees, not for existing workers. That is important because funding for training is there for just that—namely, training; it is not there simply to enable some employer to restructure their work force to put their wages on the public payroll.

It is important that we keep a vigilant eye so as to ensure that the training dollar is spent for proper training outcomes and not as a de facto form of industry subsidy. I have to say that for the most part or for the very large part, the problem is the other way around; we do not get enough industries putting on apprentices and trainees. But certainly our funding, or the state government funding, goes to new employees.

Mr MALONE: So you are not aware of any manipulation of the funding at the current time?

Mr FOLEY: Let me say a couple of things to that. I think there is a concern, not so much in that area as in the area of user choice contracts, where it has been suggested that some firms may simply put on trainees, not for the purpose of actually providing a skills base for their company but merely for the purpose of getting the subsidies, paying low wages and then not engaging them at the end of the traineeship.

If you look, for example, at the percentage of trainees who were unfunded—that is to say, the ones who were not being funded by the government—when we came into government or as at 30 June 1998, that was only 0.5 of a per cent. That is to say, 99.5 per cent of all trainees were funded. Since then, unfunded trainees have risen to 25 per cent. In other words, we are funding 75 per cent, not 99.5 per cent. The reason is that we fund for new employees and where there is a public interest. Some of the unfunded ones, where the company simply funds themselves—

Mr MALONE: Have you got any ongoing investigation into this? Have you got a standing committee or an organisation within your department investigating the proposal that there could be some flouting of the rules? Have you got an oversight committee?

Mr FOLEY: Every application for registration is processed by regional staff of the department. With regard, for example, to user choice contracts, I mentioned before the \$230 million of applications for funding compared with the budget allocation of \$97 million-odd. So there has to be some selection and allocation process. But, basically, there are guidelines that set out the purpose for which these training funds are applied. That is what the officers of the department are there to administer. If there is any instance that anyone is aware of, we would be grateful to hear about it and we would be happy to investigate it.

Mr MALONE: Thank you, Minister.

Mr FOLEY: That is what the training officers are there for. If there is any misleading of the department, well, the contract will be cancelled.

Mr MALONE: Thank you. An issue dear to my own heart, and you have raised it in answer to a previous question, is in terms of ag. colleges. As you well know, agriculture is at the cutting edge—greater technology, GPS, fast-tracking of implements and equipment, very expensive technology—and there will be a need to expand the ag. colleges in the future into the technological era.

I am concerned that you may be contemplating allowing some of the more, you might say, traditional roles of ag. colleges to be transferred over to TAFE. I did not get the answer to that. You did not specify that in your previous answer. Is there some linking between the TAFE colleges and the ag. colleges and the traditional roles that ag. colleges play in agriculture throughout the state?

Mr FOLEY: We want them to work together. Just as I spoke before of the importance of TAFE working with universities and not sitting there paddling their own canoes separately, so we want TAFEs to work with the agricultural colleges. I think, and the government thinks, agricultural colleges are important and do a good job. The amendments to the legislation that I have before the parliament are designed to strengthen their role, but we expect them, as with any recipient of public funds, to work sensibly together with other colleges. I know there was some concern that you expressed about Dalby, I think, recently.

Mr MALONE: Yes.

Mr FOLEY: There are no plans to abolish the Dalby Agricultural College, if that was the basis of the concern. What we do want to do, though, is to make sure that if there is a TAFE facility

there and an agricultural college facility down the road, they talk to each other, they co-operate, they share resources and they work together, basically, to produce outcomes for students.

In fact, I am reminded that we are allowing ag. colleges to move into areas of training that TAFE has been involved in, rather than necessarily the other way around. Frankly, my concern is not, at the end of the day, whether TAFE is better than ag. college or ag. college is better than TAFE, and so on. My concern—and I am sure it is shared by the honourable member—is to make sure that whoever is getting public money works together in the most efficient and cost-effective way to deliver an outcome for the people needing job training and for the industries concerned. That is where we are coming from.

I might say this, though, in reference to their traditional roles: life is changing. Take, for example, Longreach. I was very pleased to see the terrific new accommodation facilities in Longreach. When I went there back in 1993 or 1994, they were very bad indeed. I think the whole need to provide better pastoral care to students is something that we cannot ignore and ag. colleges are just as much a part of that. We have got special responsibilities because many of them are residential students and we have got to make sure that they have got proper facilities and that they have got proper pastoral care. So in that respect, like everything else in the education and training system, their role is changing, just as agriculture is changing. But they do a good job, they have got their own act and I have got no intention of abolishing them.

Mr MALONE: I guess I get a bit parochial now and talk about my region. I talk quite frequently to the private employment providers and they ring me quite frequently. One called the other day who had job positions for nine people, advertised stringently around the area, and was only able to get one qualified person to fill the job—mostly in the mining area. That is a common theme. Where hundreds of workers are required, there are no trained people to take the jobs on. I reflect back on what you were saying earlier. I suspect we have missed the boat in a lot of ways. A lot of our highly trained people will take years to train to get to the level that is required in the mining industry.

I make the point also that we are terribly short of nurses. It is a current situation. Yet for a person in Mackay to actually do a certificate of health in the nursing area, the closest college is the Rockhampton college. There was 94 applicants for 20 places. That person is not able to go to Rockhampton to train. There is no position available at Mackay within the TAFE course. Externally, that person would have to do a TAFE course in South Australia, where there were 180 applicants for 70 positions. This is an issue that I have raised with the minister on numerous occasions in terms of providing training for jobs that are there now. I need some clarification on where we are going with this.

Mr FOLEY: Certainly. For example, in and around Mirani, there are TAFE campuses at Mackay and at Moranbah. They offer a range of programs. I am aware of the member's concern about the need for computer training at Sarina, and the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE responded to that need—

Mr MALONE: It was excellent, Minister. I was very pleased; thank you very much.

Mr FOLEY: This is part of the process of feedback from local members and of local industry being responsive. We can never afford to sit on our laurels and be complacent. In that regard, from September 2001 two weekly evening computer classes have been conducted in Sarina utilising Sarina State High School facilities. The advice I would offer comes to me from the experience of my departmental staff in Cairns when I was in this portfolio last. In the period 1992 to 1995 there were major skill shortages. Employers would come into the Cairns office of the Department of Employment and Training campaigning about the lack of training. We had some terrific staff there who would listen attentively. By the time those employers were out the door, they were signed up for half a dozen apprentices and were on three committees to provide training. My suggestion to anybody who has a complaint is that, yes, we do want to hear about it and respond to it; but maybe we can get them on the case and get them as employers to use their resources to put on some apprentices and trainees, to get on a local committee and to see what we can do to plan for job and training opportunities. As I mentioned with the Sarina computer training, this is a dynamic situation. We have to respond. In the coming few years the situation will be quite acute, because there will be a huge demand for labour as a result of developments in central Queensland industry. That will be felt right around the state, including in Mirani. We need to turn our problems into opportunities and get those employers who have a concern signed up and doing everything we can to train people.

Mr MALONE: I have written to the minister in regard to the training of nurses in Mackay and await a response on that matter. Obviously Rockhampton is unable to do the training. As I said, there are 94 applicants for 20 places. Of course, right now we are desperately short of nurses. It is an area that the minister's department should look at fairly quickly.

Mr FOLEY: If there is one subject that we are keen to be responsive on at the moment, it is nurses. I thank the member for his letter dated 3 July 2002 which was received by my office on 8 July. My department is on the case. We will certainly look at it and do whatever we can to help. Part of the task that faces TAFE is that a lot of these human service areas are growing. There is now huge demand for aged care workers. In fact—

Mr MALONE: This is the very area we are talking about.

Mr FOLEY: Yes. At the opening of the Australian Catholic University we were involved in the nurse training. North Point Institute of TAFE is involved in the provision of training for aged care workers. There were some obvious synergies that we hoped to be able to work together. I thank the member for drawing that issue to my attention. I assure the member that my department is on the case and that we will get back to the member as soon as we can.

The CHAIR: The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of the expenditure for the Department of Employment, Training and Youth and the Department of the Arts has now expired. Before dismissing the officers, I remind them that the responses to questions taken on notice are required to be returned to the committee by 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 17 July. If the time line is unable to be met, I would appreciate it if I and/or the deputy chairman could be notified.

Mr FOLEY: May I take the opportunity to extend my thanks to the officers within the Arts portfolio and within the portfolio of Employment, Training and Youth. As will be apparent from those present, a great deal of work is done by many departmental officers. Many of the officers from Arts Queensland and the cultural statutory authorities have already gone, but I place on record my appreciation to those officers who have laboured hard and long to ensure that the accountability of the Executive to parliament is carried out to the highest possible standard. I thank my director-general, Ken Smith, and my acting director-general, Norelle Deeth, for their assistance.

The CHAIR: I concur. Recognising many familiar faces, I testify to the hard work that they do put into these processes. I thank them for attending.

Sitting suspended from 12.07 p.m. to 1.15 p.m.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. G. R. Nuttall, Minister for Industrial Relations
Mr P. Henneken, Director-General
Mr J. McGowan, Deputy Director-General
Mr B. Walker, A/Director, Business Services Unit
Mr D. Hyde, Director, Division of Public Sector Industrial Relations

The committee resumed at 1.16 p.m.

The CHAIR: The next item for consideration is the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Industrial Relations. The time allocated is 2.5 hours. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute, and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning, and a double chime will sound at the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time for answers may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. For the benefit of Hansard I ask departmental officers to identify themselves before they first answer a question.

These proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 195, any person admitted to a public hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by the order of the committee. The sessional orders provide that a member of parliament who is not a member of the committee may, with the committee's leave, ask the minister questions.

In relation to media coverage of the Estimates Committee C hearing, the committee has resolved that still photographs and silent television film coverage will be permitted for the first five minutes of each department. My final request is that if you have a mobile phone would you please make sure that it is turned off, and if you have any phone calls to make please do so outside the chamber.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Industrial Relations open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Mr NUTTALL: I would like to do that. The Department of Industrial Relations is only in its second year as a stand-alone authority. I am pleased to report that significant progress has been made in making workplaces across the state fairer, safer and more productive. These significant achievements, I would hope, are not lost in the media coverage of the argy-bargy that is to be expected in the current enterprise bargaining negotiations, because these achievements go to the heart of improving the way in which all Queenslanders work.

Our biggest challenge remains to keep pace with the dramatic change we have seen in the past decade and the very nature of the workplaces here in Queensland. By that I mean not just changes in technological innovations but in work patterns such as the growing number of part-time and casual positions, the growing number of women in the work force and the increase in the number of working hours each week. That is not to mention the social and economic changes, such as the impact of these changes on our commitment to our families, our communities, our workplaces, in the form of health and safety, psychological and psychiatric injuries or indeed bullying.

I am pleased to say that the Queensland Labor government is leading by example. We have conducted more policy analysis and development into this New-Age work force than any other state in the country and we have carried out some major reforms as part of this commitment. This government is exploring new and better ways to work with employers, employees, unions and industry to address these issues and, most importantly, the issue of the balance between work and family life. Queensland has the highest rate of casualisation in the country. One in three

workers is now employed on a casual basis and almost 60 per cent of casuals in Queensland are indeed women. A ministerial task force on work and family and a work and family unit within the department have both been established to help Queensland families juggle their increasing commitment to work with their commitment to family members and the broader community.

In the last year my department has also introduced an updated work and family package, giving long-term casual employees access to unpaid parental, carers and bereavement leave. Public sector employees receive paid adoption leave, paternity leave and prenatal leave as part of the government's commitment in setting a leading example among the state's employers. This is particularly relevant for women workers, because most casual workers are women and most of the work associated with the role of a carer and parent falls to women. Nearly 55 per cent of dual-income families and 45 per cent of sole parents now in the work force care for dependants.

Women employees are also benefiting from the government's commitment to improving gender pay equity in this state. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, with the government's backing, has established a pay equity principle for future hearings. The government is in the process of lodging an application before the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for the creation of a Queensland minimum wage—another recommendation of the pay equity report and one that will bring into play a further safety net for those workers on the lowest wage levels, who are often women.

The government is concerned, too, that the state's future leaders get the best possible start in their first steps in the workplace. Young inexperienced workers are better off now thanks to the new Young Workers Advisory Service. This service has been allocated \$300,000 each year for three years and will provide information and advice for young people in the workplace that will prove vital in helping them learn about their rights and their responsibilities as employees.

Of major concern to Queenslanders is the lengthening working week. Almost one-third of Queensland employees are working more than 45 hours per week and more than half of these are wage and salary earners. That is why my department is developing industry codes of practice on reasonable working hours. We would like to give workers more time with their families while reducing unsafe levels of overtime and improving worker productivity for Queensland business. This is the Smart State and we want Queensland workplaces to work smarter, not just longer.

The CHAIR: The first period of questions will commence with government members. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mr RODGERS: Minister, I realise that you are in the middle of enterprise bargaining negotiations, but can you provide details of public sector wage agreements reached between 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2002? Also, what were the increases agreed upon and the duration of those agreements? What public sector organisations have finalised agreements and when do their agreements expire?

Mr NUTTALL: Queensland public sector workers are covered by certified agreements according to their occupation and the agency in which they work. These agreements are negotiated with unions according to the specific needs of each agency and its employees. As a result, the agreements across the public sector are for various periods of duration and contain varying conditions. The nominal expiry dates for public sector agreements negotiated in the last round generally fall between 31 December 2001 and 30 June 2003. There are, though, some small agreements that actually fall outside that time frame. I think we have approximately 50 enterprise agreements throughout the public sector.

During 2001-02 the last round of bargaining concluded and the next round commenced. A number of agreements reached their nominal expiry date immediately before the end of the 2001-02 year. They include Health, the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service, AFCOM and QLeave. The majority of public sector wage agreements do not expire until the 2001-02 financial year.

There are five government agencies that have finalised wage agreements between 1 July last year and 30 June this year and they provide for wage increases averaging three per cent. The Building Services Authority was nine per cent over three years, with parity with core agreement rates. The Residential Tenancies Authority was nine per cent over three years, with parity with core agreement rates. The Queensland Institute of Medical Research was 8.3 per cent to 9 per cent over two years and one month. The Parliamentary Service was nine per cent over three years and the Queensland Performing Arts Trust was six per cent over two years.

QLeave has finalised negotiations with unions to join the core agreement after its current agreement expired on 30 June this year. This will provide employees with an increase of not less

than three per cent from 1 July to bring their rates up to the core. Safe Food Production Queensland has finalised negotiations with new wage agreements. It provides for a wage increase of six per cent over two years—again, three per cent per year. That is in parity with the core agreement. There are eight public sector agencies that have not finalised agreements—State Government Security, Q-Build, Project Services, the Department of Main Roads, Queensland Health, the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service and AFCOM. Negotiations are continuing with all those agencies in order to reach some satisfactory settlement. My department is working closely with each agency in order to ensure that agreements can be finalised in a manner consistent with the government's wages strategy.

Mr RODGERS: Also in relation to enterprise bargaining agreements, which I know is a topic in the community, I ask: can you inform members of the committee about the review of enterprise bargaining in the Queensland public sector?

Mr NUTTALL: As you would be aware, on Tuesday of this week the Premier announced that the former Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, will soon commence a review of the system of enterprise bargaining in the public sector. The need for this review is consistent with a resolution of the state ALP conference held in June of this year. I think we all acknowledge that there are problems with the current arrangements for enterprise bargaining and it is now time to look at ways to improve the system. Cabinet approved the review after considering the current public sector industrial relations environment and the impact some rather rigorous bargaining rounds are having on the Queensland community. I think we should be particularly pleased that Bob Hawke has accepted the government's invitation to undertake the review. We think that we will be able to utilise his great experience in both industrial relations and as a former Prime Minister and president of the ACTU.

It is clear that the current system that we have in the public sector is not productive. The unions that are affiliated to the party agree with that. They passed a resolution unanimously in support of a review. Unfortunately, though, they have now indicated that they do not want to participate in that review. So on the one hand they want to have the review and now they say they do not want to have the review. It is a bit like, in my view, a dog chasing its tail. I am not quite sure where they are coming from, but I will persist with the unions in an endeavour to encourage them to participate in the review. I, frankly, do not understand their logic or their reasoning. They say that they were not consulted. Let me say this: we have asked the former Prime Minister to do the review. We have got some terms of reference. We now want to talk to the unions and have them involved, and they are saying that they are not being consulted. It beggars belief why they would say that. I do not understand the logic in that argument. I mean, surely the consultation takes place when you are actually doing the review? What is there to consult about prior to commencing the review? There is nothing to consult about. The terms of reference are broad enough to encompass any needs or aspirations that they have.

I spoke to the trade union movement last year and asked them to have some input into some sort of new system. They have not been able to come up with any new system. They have passed a resolution at our party conference that they want to have a new system, yet they now say they will not participate in that. So on the one hand they do not like enterprise bargaining, yet on the other hand they do. The problem that they have, as members would know, is that not all affiliates of the Queensland Council of Unions are affiliates of the Labor Party. The major public sector unions, such as police and the QPSU, are not affiliates of the Labor Party. That is the difficulty that we have. I think that the union movement itself has some difficulty in reconciling the problem that they have—that not all affiliates to the QCU are affiliates to the Labor Party. I do not understand it when you have a group of unions at a Labor Party conference from the Right and the Left saying, 'We don't like enterprise bargaining; we want the government to do a review,' and we set things up to do a review, and then they want to boycott it! As I said, I think it is a dog chasing its tail.

The CHAIR: I take note of that answer and I refer the minister to page 8 of the MPS where it states that a central bargaining unit will be established to oversee wage negotiations across the public sector. Given the announcement of this review can you inform the committee of the future of this central bargaining unit?

Mr NUTTALL: I thank the chairman for the question because it is an important issue. In September of last year we established a central bargaining unit within my department to be responsible for overseeing negotiating wage outcomes for Queensland public sector employees. This system was established to ensure senior negotiators along with senior agency management would be responsible for negotiating agreements and jointly delivering outcomes at an agency

level. Three senior negotiators were appointed late last year and they have been involved with the development and the implementation of the government's public sector wage policy, as well as conducting agency negotiations on behalf of government.

Agreements were negotiated to cover employees of Queensland Rail in December of last year and a number of other agreements covering government statutory bodies will be negotiated this year, which I outlined in an earlier question. Senior negotiators have also been extensively involved with negotiations with nurses, other health workers, police, ambulance officers, Main Roads employees and employees of Public Works. Initially, senior negotiators sought to negotiate a different approach to wage arrangements in the public sector by separating out wages claims from productivity items. This involved the rollover option of existing agreements where the quantum of wage increases could be negotiated separately and other conditions could be addressed at an agency level. Unfortunately, yet again, all public sector unions did not accept this option. After the rollover option was rejected senior negotiators were then forced to revert to the more traditional approach to enterprise bargaining by pursuing a productivity based agenda within individual agencies in order to secure funding for any additional wage increases sought by the unions.

It is not the most favourable option for this government, for its employees or for the community. Obviously in recent months it has become quite apparent that the climate within the public sector has reached a stage where, with the number of ambit claims from unions and protracted disputes, there has been little progress in the negotiations. Again can I say that negotiations are a two-way street. It seems to me that we go along and we put our offer on the table; they put their ambit claim on the table, but if we do not meet all of their demands we are not negotiating in good faith. I mean, it is called bargaining. That means give and take from both sides. All we get at the moment is the trade union movement coming to the bargaining table – let us take Health as an example—saying they want 18 per cent over two years. Inflation is slightly under 3 per cent. Nominal wage outcomes in both the public and private sectors throughout Australia are between three per cent and three and a half per cent but they want 18 per cent over two years and refuse to budge. Yet, it is our fault for not negotiating! It is simply unfair and it is simply not responsible, in my view, for unions to adopt that attitude.

The Police Union has put a log of claims on the table. We made our initial offer of three per cent. They have come back and said, 'When are you going to give us another offer?' There is nothing about negotiating in good faith as the act says. They simply sit there and say, 'We want more.' I have to say that I do not think public sector unions have a decent check on reality. Let us take the private sector and the rural sector. Farmers, particularly sugarcane farmers, would die to get a three per cent return. All those people in those sugar towns throughout the length and breadth of this state who rely on the sugar industry and who are in the private sector are all struggling. Public sector employees are amongst the best paid employees in this country in all sectors. Not only that, their working conditions are better than anybody else's in this state. Yet, they continue to procrastinate and say that this government does not care. It is unfair and their position does not stack up. If you look at what this government has done for its work force in the last 18 months, we have been head and shoulders above any other Labor government in this country in terms of the way we have looked after our work force.

The CHAIR: On another topic, I refer you to page 10 of the MPS and your previous answer on notice about workplace bullying. Can the minister outline what initiatives are being taken to reduce the incidence of workplace harassment for public sector employees?

Mr NUTTALL: Given that I was accused of being a bully yesterday, I thank the chair for that question. As members of the committee are aware, the government commissioned Australia's first independent inquiry into workplace bullying in late 2001 as part of an election commitment we gave in the last election campaign. Workplace bullying has become an increasingly visible problem in modern day workplaces. It is estimated to cost Australian employers up to \$13 billion each year in lost productivity, including costs associating with absenteeism, staff turnover, legal and workers compensation, management time and decreased workplace productivity. The cost to individuals and to the community is difficult to quantify but it is an unacceptable practice that employer's, employees and the community need to address.

The inquiry was undertaken by a tripartite task force comprising employer, union and community representatives, as well as the deputy director-general of my department, the Public Service Commissioner and a member of the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission. The report was given to government in April of this year and the task force provided a detailed report of its findings and recommendations, and indeed there were some 19 recommendations made

for change. The government has made that task force report publicly available. We have also established an interdepartmental working group to oversee the implementation of changes arising out of the report. The Public Service Commissioner and the deputy director-general of my department jointly chair this working group. The recommendations under consideration span a number of areas but in essence will focus on establishing preventive programs through education and awareness.

A workplace health and safety advisory standard will also be developed outlining the rights and obligations of employers and workers. There are also a number of changes to ensure that there are proper processes in place for dealing with serious disputes by mediation before the state commission. For the public sector itself the report has made a number of specific recommendations. I will not go into those but they are quite detailed. It was further recommended that the Office of Public Service Merit and Equity be responsible for monitoring and analysing workplace harassment grievance data and working with individual agencies to stem the evidence of workplace harassment grievance across the Public Service.

My department, particularly the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and the Office of Public Service Merit and Equity, are also to work together to establish a work force management network to coordinate a whole-of-government education and prevention strategy in relation to workplace harassment and to raise awareness about these important issues across the public sector. We will, as the government, be seeking to lead the way for other employers to help eradicate this unacceptable practice and to make workplace behaviour more acceptable for all.

Ms MALE: The MPS states that Workplace Consulting Queensland assisted a number of public sector agencies in a range of areas. How do the activities of Workplace Consulting Queensland assist the government to achieve its objectives?

Mr NUTTALL: Thank you for the question. Workplace Consulting Queensland actually plays a fairly important role in assisting the government to achieve its objectives by providing professional consultancy and training services to the public sector agencies. Workplace Consulting Queensland services align with the government's objectives of more jobs for Queenslanders, skills and innovation. Workplace Consulting Queensland focuses its activities across the public sector, assisting agencies to improve their businesses performance and employee relations. The unit particularly specialises in human resource management, business improvement, strategic and business planning, employee and industrial relations training, development and coaching. The unit has a quality accreditation standard that has been approved, and there is a flash number for that. It designs and delivers products and services to a high standard. It is a fee-for-service unit within my department. It comprises a director, four senior consultants and an office support person.

Last financial year Workplace Consulting Queensland provided services to over 95 Queensland public sector organisations, completed over 70 individual projects and training courses and provided 10 advisory retainer arrangement services. Client evaluation of projects and client participant evaluation of training have shown it to be continuing to achieve more than a 85 per cent client satisfaction rating.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Keppel.

Mr LESTER: I refer to page 6 of the MPS, Industrial Relations Services, and to the third paragraph where it says that the Division of Public Sector Industrial and Employee Relations major responsibilities are to improve and review public sector wages and bargaining and employee relations policies. Given that, (a) why do we need Bob Hawke and, (b) does not the fact that you have called in Bob Hawke indicate a total failure of the function of this division of your department?

Mr NUTTALL: I thank the honourable member for that question. No, it does not. Enterprise bargaining is 10 years old now and I think that the reality is that it is long past its use-by date and we do need a new system. There is an acknowledgment from everybody that we need a new system. The argy-bargy is about what sort of new system we have. At the moment we have people locked into a three-year agreement and over that three-year period they get frustrated about a whole range of issues that they have to deal with. I think we need a new system but to establish a new system we have to have a review. We felt that Bob Hawke, as I said, being a former Prime Minister of this country would have a broad knowledge of how government works. He is also a person who was president of the ACTU for a number of years and who has a broad knowledge and understanding of how trade unions work. For these reasons, we thought he would

be the right sort of person to do the job. The forthcoming review will actually determine the best model to deliver wage arrangements for government agencies but will not include government owned corporations. We need to make that very clear. They in themselves are required to compete against many private sector operators on a commercial basis and that is why we will not include GOCs.

We have identified at this stage three models but are not restricted to those three models. The first model that we are going to look at is an annual economic wages adjustment where the unions will be able to apply to the State Industrial Relations Commission for work value or special cases. The second model is an annual arbitration of awards and increased wages. The third model is using a public sector arbitrator to actually adjust wages. As I said, other models may be identified in the review process. I again take the opportunity today to ask the trade union movement to review its decision not to participate in this process and to actively get involved and work with the government to find a model that will work for public sector unions and public sector employees.

Mr LESTER: Minister, are you really saying that your own people in your own department cannot do this job and that is why we need an outsider?

Mr NUTTALL: No, not at all. If we are going to do a review, we need to bring in as much talent and people with as much knowledge as we possibly can to get a new model that will work. It is not going to be easy in trying to determine a new model. As I said to you, I have spoken to the trade union movement in the past. It has not been able at this stage to come to me with a model that might work but, as I said to you, my department has inherited a system of enterprise bargaining that is old and tired and worn out. We need a new system.

When I first became the minister last year I spoke with a number of senior union officials in this state. I indicated to them that the last thing I wanted was to see what is happening now with the Nurses Union and that we needed to try to avoid that. I had numerous meetings and discussions with union officials over the 12 months of last year seeking their assistance in trying to change what we had. But, unfortunately, they have chosen to stick with the current system of enterprise bargaining that we have. It needs to change, because it just simply does not work. I do not think that the font of all knowledge lies within my department, and that is why we are prepared to bring in some outside assistance to help us find a new model.

Mr LESTER: Really what you are saying is that there is not enough talent within your own department.

Mr NUTTALL: I could come up with a model, but I do not know if it would be accepted. The problem with the scenario that you paint is that the trade union movement would then say, 'The government's just rolling over the top of us,' and that is why we needed to bring someone in from outside. I think it would be unwise of us to say, 'The government will find a new model and this is what the model will be.' We want to use the trade union movement as much as we can in terms of developing a new model.

Mr LESTER: I am aware of your comments earlier, but quite a number of people are telling me that they were not consulted and the first they knew about it was when they read about it in the paper. I would have to query the real situation there.

Mr NUTTALL: There are two things. In terms of not being consulted, all that has happened at this stage is that the Premier and I took a submission to cabinet on Monday of last week. The submission that was approved by cabinet was that, yes, we should do a review and, yes, we should try to engage Bob Hawke if we can. It approved the terms of reference, and the terms of reference are broad enough to allow the trade union movement to come up with a model if it wants. There are three models, but if it wants to bring up another model it can do that. So that is when the consultation, as I said earlier, should start.

I again say that I do not quite understand why the trade union movement is taking that view, but can I just say this: I assure members of the estimates committee that we will be working over the next few months to develop a model for the public sector that balances the need to provide fair and equitable wages and conditions for public sector workers, to provide a model that will consider economic and budgetary factors, provide services throughout regional Queensland and protect the community from damaging industrial disputes. That is the model that we want and that is the model that we are going to work towards.

Mr LESTER: You are off to a bit of a rocky start, but anyway. In relation to the relevant section within your department, will this section be abolished because of its failure? If so, will there be enough savings left to pay for Bob Hawke?

Mr NUTTALL: In terms of the central bargaining unit, what its future holds will depend on what the outcome of the review is and what sort of model we have in relation to future public sector bargaining. To answer your question, I cannot say whether it will be there or whether it will not be there, but it will depend on the model that we produce as to whatever the new public sector wages arrangements are. We will need to wait and see. If the central bargaining unit is no longer required, obviously those public sector employees will go to other positions. But it still may be there. I just cannot answer that at the moment until we know what the outcome of the review is.

Mr LESTER: Will they go to other departments or will they be offered a redundancy?

Mr NUTTALL: No, they will be allocated within the department.

Mr HENNEKEN: Minister, if I may, the unit that the member for Keppel refers to has got a broader role than just enterprise bargaining. There is a whole range of conditions that are established through various directives of the minister. For example, there are conditions to do with travel and mileage allowances, locality allowances and so forth. There are a range of policies relating to recruitment and selection in the Public Service. There are a range of issues to do with best practice human resources management. There are also a range of issues relating to future planning for the future of the Public Service. So that unit will be kept very busy in terms of developing a human resource and employee relations framework for the Public Service.

Mr LESTER: What happens if it is abolished? Where do we go?

Mr HENNEKEN: If I could reply to the member for Keppel, the bargaining function within that unit is only a small part of that unit's functions.

Mr LESTER: We fully appreciate that Bob's job is not to look at the nurses, even though according to a gentleman who gets some comment from time to time—Bill Ludwig—it is the biggest industrial dispute in 100 years. They are Bill's words.

Mr NUTTALL: I did not know Bill was that old.

Mr LESTER: Bob's job is really to look at the whole system. I have already asked why you did not bother to tell the Nurses Union he was coming. Do you think that keeping a secret is good industrial relations? If you do not think that it is good industrial relations, would you agree with Bill Ludwig's assessment of your—I do not know what he means—performance or the government's performance or whoever's performance, but he gives you one and a half out of 10?

Mr NUTTALL: My mate Bill. Bill is entitled to his views, and that is fine. But, again, Bill's union was one of the unions at the party conference that called for the government to do a review of public sector bargaining. His union, which was led by him at that party conference, supported that concept. We want to go down that road. Bill said that the current system does not work. If it does not work, Bill should get involved with the review to help us find a model that does work.

Mr LESTER: There seems to be a little bit of a crossed line in communications by the look of it. I refer to question on notice No. 3. In relation to the proposed review to be undertaken by Mr Hawke, what are the terms of reference for this review? Will the findings be made public? What performance measures are in place to assess Mr Hawke's review of the industrial relations system in Queensland in relation to this aspect and to ensure that we receive full value for moneys paid?

Mr NUTTALL: I thank the member for the question. Can I just emphasise that the review will have no implications for private sector bargaining in the state or GOCs, as I said earlier. The review will consider the best model to deliver wage arrangements for government agencies, but as I said it will not include government owned corporations. Three models have already been identified for consideration during the review, and I will just go through those again. The first one is an annual economic wage adjustment with unions being able to apply to the State Industrial Relations Commission for work value or special cases. The second one is annual arbitration of awards to increase wages. The third one is using public sector arbitrators to adjust wages. We are prepared to look at other models that may also be identified during the review process if they are put forward by relevant parties.

The key factors that the review will be required to take into account are obviously public interest, the current and future public sector industrial relations environment, the overlaps between the state and federal industrial relations jurisdictions, International Labour Organisation conventions—the ILO conventions—and wider economic and budgetary implications. I want to assure all honourable members of the estimates committee that we will be working over the next few months to develop a model that balances all those needs and all those requirements. In

terms of Mr Hawke, his contract is with the Premier's Department and not my department, just to let you know.

Mr LESTER: It might be with the Premier's Department but—

Mr NUTTALL: I am just advising that the contract is with the Premier's Department.

Mr LESTER: I would hope you would have a say in that, though.

Mr NUTTALL: The Premier has consulted with me on a regular basis on this matter.

Mr LESTER: Better than Bill Ludwig has consulted with you. You have paid great accolades to Mr Hawke along the way today.

Mr NUTTALL: He is a former Prime Minister. He should be treated with respect.

Mr LESTER: I am sure you do not pay the same accolades to every former Prime Minister, but you have paid great accolades to Mr Hawke today. Will you fully implement those recommendations made by Mr Hawke?

Mr NUTTALL: I cannot say that. He has not even started yet. I am not going to give a commitment here today that we will implement every recommendation that is brought forward as a result of this review. That will be a matter for government and my cabinet colleagues. I would be required to take some submission to cabinet once the review is completed. That will be debated around the cabinet table. It would be improper of me to give a carte blanche undertaking to you today that we would implement all the findings of the review.

Mr LESTER: If so, Minister, what funds have been earmarked by your department to implement any proposed changes that result from Mr Hawke's review, bearing in mind that the government is carrying an \$883 million budget deficit?

Mr NUTTALL: Obviously we would not at this stage be aware of what the cost implications of the review would be. We would have to look at that. From my point of view, if there were any costs involved in my department we would have to reallocate funds from another area. We need to wait and see what the findings of the review are. We need to wait and see what cabinet decides to implement. Before it would agree to implement anything, we would be seeking Treasury advice on cost implications and how we would fund that. At this stage it would be wrong of me to say to you what the costs were because we simply do not know at this point in time.

Mr LESTER: Does this mean in effect that this \$25,000 that is going to be paid to Mr Hawke could be for nothing?

Mr NUTTALL: Not at all. The Premier has indicated that that is an approximate fee that his department will be paying the former Prime Minister. I think that when we get the report from him, and obviously when he gets here, he will consult widely with both government and union people—if they are willing to participate. I think that at the end of the day, as the Premier has said, he is doing it on the cheap. Those were the Premier's words.

Mr LESTER: But you really have not indicated that the recommendations will be fully implemented. In fact, from your answers you cannot guarantee that anything will be implemented from Mr Hawke's review.

Mr NUTTALL: As I said to you, I have not even seen the findings of his review yet. I am not prepared—nor would it be proper of me—to say that we are going to implement the findings of his report in total. We may well do, but let's first see what the report has to say, let's see what the findings are, then let's analyse that in a proper fashion. Let's cost it and take it from there. I think you just have to do it one step at a time.

Mr LESTER: So it is up in the air at the moment?

Mr NUTTALL: No, it is not up in the air at all. It is a review that is being done by Bob Hawke. We will have a look at the findings of that review, and the government will deal with them in a proper manner.

The CHAIR: The time allotted for questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Glass House.

Ms MALE: Establishing a public sector Industry Training Advisory Board was a key election commitment by this government. What progress has been made on this commitment, and how is the Industry Training Advisory Board assisting the public sector in supporting the Smart State initiative?

Mr NUTTALL: Public Sector Development Queensland is an industry training advisory body for the Queensland public sector. It was established early last year and became an incorporated

association on 21 August last year. The advisory body has a board of directors comprising 16 members representing both employers and unions. The board has representation from 10 government departments, three union organisations, a private sector organisation and one university. The board has met on seven occasions. The board of directors is supported by a full-time four-person executive team. The team is responsible for initiating and implementing research and the development of projects as well as the general operational activities associated with an incorporated association.

The establishment of Public Sector Development Queensland Incorporated highlights the government's commitment to a highly skilled work force that is responsive to government priorities and equipped to serve the Queensland community. Public Sector Development Queensland receives funding through a government grant of \$250,000 for the first three years commencing in July last year. The Department of Employment and Training provided \$160,000 in the year 2001-02. The federal government, through the performance and funding agreement, has reduced the financial support for all ITABs. Consequently, the support for Public Sector Development Queensland for 2002-03 will decrease from \$160,000 to \$130,000. The mission statement for Public Sector Development Queensland expresses the commitment to providing leadership and direction on the vocational education and training needs of the public sector in Queensland. By providing this leadership the government's vision is a public sector work force in which employees are able to operate effectively in the current and future knowledge economy, that is, the Smart State. Over the last six months Public Sector Development Queensland has commenced building strong partnerships and networks, both locally and nationally. The organisation is positioned to play a leadership role in promoting education and training as an investment into the future. The key purpose is to ensure the integrity of vocational education delivery and that the qualifications gained by public sector employees are maintained.

Ms JARRATT: Could you please inform the committee of ways in which the government is using innovative solutions to address the skills development needs of the Queensland public sector?

Mr NUTTALL: The Smart State is about positioning Queensland to take advantage of the opportunities and face the challenges of the modern world. Central to the realisation of the Smart State vision is the role of the Queensland Public Service. We need a highly skilled and knowledgeable Public Service that will support the delivery of government's priorities to the Queensland public through appropriate service delivery and innovative policy development. A key commitment in the last election of the government was to support the Smart State vision, and that involved the implementation of an online college.

The online college project—Government Online Learning Delivery, or GOLD—will provide access for public sector employees to online learning programs from TAFE Queensland. In the long term it will provide learning and development programs for agencies and other training providers such as universities and private registered training organisations. With the enhancement of the online college capability, agencies will be able to place learning materials into the new learning environment. It will improve access to learning and development opportunities not only in our own agencies but also throughout the whole of government. There is an implementation steering committee that provides advice to the government through my department and through the Department of Employment and Training. The committee represents a whole-of-government focus on agency needs, information technology, industry and the provision of an online learning system, that is, TAFE. The director-general of my department and the director-general of Employment and Training both sponsor that project.

TAFE Queensland Online is playing a key role in developing technical infrastructure to support this project. A three-year technical infrastructure plan has been developed and is currently being implemented. TAFE Queensland has developed vast experience through its e-learning delivery. The investment in TAFE, building on the current infrastructure, has minimised costs and avoided duplication, providing better returns. There is a project web site which was commissioned in January of this year. It is obviously continually updated. It provides a means of receiving feedback from end users that is used to inform the developers of the technical infrastructure. Focus group testing also was conducted to ensure that the proposed web portal met the needs of all stakeholders.

Ms JARRATT: The MPS states that there have been changes to an administrative arrangement relating to the transfer of funding to the Department of Employment and Training for the delivery of the regional component of Employment, Training and Youth services. Could you please tell the committee about the impact of this change?

Mr NUTTALL: In February last year there was a machinery of government change which saw the separation of my department from the Department of Employment and Training. So we had actually two departments. At that time the departments put together a memorandum of understanding that my department would retain the administrative responsibility for the delivery of regional services for both departments through the network of our six regional offices and 20 district offices. So basically we are still using the same offices. We are still sharing the same offices right throughout the state to try to keep costs down. Under that agreement the Department of Employment and Training reimburses my department for managing this administrative responsibility.

Following ministerial reviews into the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and the Electrical Safety Office last year, the government endorsed a number of the review's recommendations, including regional workplace health and safety managers, having direct line management accountability and reporting to the state office. The regional model for industrial relations was also reassessed in line with the recommendations from that review.

In accounting terms, my department's user charges revenue will be reduced by \$14.8 million during the next financial year, and of course there will be a corresponding reduction in our outlays. This represents an administrative change. Both my department and the Department of Employment and Training remain committed to maintaining and progressing efficiencies that are available through sharing corporate support service delivery arrangements in regional and district offices where we think it is appropriate to do that. The government recognises that unfocused and uncoordinated regional corporate support and service delivery wastes scarce resources; it confuses or frustrates clients and limits the overall effectiveness of the government's service delivery.

I think that when the departments were split we felt it really important to try to keep our costs down throughout regional Queensland. We met with the Department of Employment and Training. The fact that we have been able to share the same offices while having two separate departments has been very beneficial to the government in terms of cost saving and beneficial to people in regional Queensland being able to get access to government offices.

Mr RODGERS: In February 2002 you announced plans for new electrical safety legislation. How will your department support the proposed new electrical safety legislation?

Mr NUTTALL: This is a fairly important question for me. I will just go through a few things. On 11 February this year cabinet actually approved the drafting of a new electrical safety bill. The bill provides a comprehensive framework for electrical safety in Queensland homes and workplaces. It aims to reduce the human cost to individuals and families in the community caused by death and injuries. The development of stand-alone electrical safety legislation will result in fairly significant reforms on the way in which electrical safety is administered and enforced. The establishment of a Queensland wide electrical safety inspectorate is an essential component to support the new act and in achieving improved electrical safety outcomes.

Specialist electrical safety inspectors will be located throughout Queensland to audit electrical contractors and the way they do their work. They will also investigate electrical incidents. Seventy per cent of shocks and 40 per cent of electrocutions occur in domestic residences, and electrocutions occur in regional and rural areas at over twice the rate of the south-east corner of the state. We now have 22 positions for senior electrical safety inspectors. They were advertised in the *Courier-Mail* and regional Queensland newspapers in late May this year. We will locate these inspectors in this way. In north Queensland there will be two; Townsville, two; Mackay, one; central Queensland, two; Wide Bay, one; south-west, two; Sunshine Coast, three; north Brisbane, three; south Brisbane-Ipswich, four; and the Gold Coast, two. So we are spreading them right throughout the state. These new senior electrical safety inspectors will have a primary focus on safe electrical installation and safe electrical work practices. They will need to do incident investigations, electrical contractor audits, appliance audits and unlicensed or unsatisfactory work investigations. The new inspectors will be in addition to the 16 electrical safety officers recently recruited by my department, increasing the number of electrical specialists employed by my department by 38 in just over a year.

In view of the high rate of electrical incidents occurring in domestic and rural premises, the development of information and education strategies designed to promote safe use of electricity and minimising the risk of electrical injury in the community is considered a key priority for the government. We have had the worst record in the country for electrical accidents and deaths, and our aim is to make us best practice and the best in this country. Hopefully, this new electrical safety act will go a long way towards that.

Mr RODGERS: The MPS states that substantial progress has been made towards a stronger and more effective electrical safety system. What were key achievements in this important area during the 2001-02 financial year and what is planned for the next financial year?

Mr NUTTALL: The quality of electrical safety investigations by the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and the Electrical Safety Office have been heavily criticised by the state Ombudsman. The investigations occurred between 1995 and 1999 and a series of reports were brought down, last year and this year, that were fairly critical of the government. We have a very high, unacceptable rate of electrical accidents in this state. When we were re-elected in early 2001 we started taking major steps to reform electrical safety. As I said in my previous answer, we will have a new electrical safety act.

The Electrical Safety Office and the Division of Workplace Health and Safety became part of the newly formed Department of Industrial Relations. In 2001-02 we did a full independent review of the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and a review of the Electrical Safety Office. A number of recommendations were made—legislative, structural and organisational. I have taken those submissions to cabinet and cabinet has endorsed a whole range of reforms. We have nearly completed the new bill. We are hoping to have that introduced into the parliament within the next few months. The Workplace Health and Safety Division within my department carried out an audit on electrical safety as part of its targeting strategy using a whole variety of indicators including injury data, fatality information and a whole range of other things.

We have worked really hard in the last 12 to 18 months to try to improve electrical safety. I have just outlined to you a whole range of things we will do in terms of the act and with 38 new staff. Now we need to conduct an education program. When this new act is put in place we will have to travel throughout the state and talk to electrical contractors, workers and electrical authorities such as Ergon, Energex, Powerlink and so on to make sure they understand the act and to reinforce to them the commitment the government has to improving electrical safety in Queensland.

The CHAIR: Given the changes and the restructuring that have taken place, can you give some detail about enforcement activities of the Electrical Safety Office and the Division of Workplace Health and Safety in the last financial year?

Mr NUTTALL: In April of last year I commissioned an independent review of both the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and the Electrical Safety Office. I did that because the Ombudsman had been very critical of the way government had conducted its investigations into fatalities in particular between 1995 and 1999. Once those reviews were finished I met with the Ombudsman and we went through some of the recommendations of that review. He was happy with the direction we were taking.

The review's recommendations contained four key components—improving investigations and prosecutions, streamlining organisational and accountability structures, enhancing skilling and the profile of the inspectorate, and a new legislative framework. We have been able to do that. As I said, a whole pile of recommendations were given to us. We have gone through those and I have taken those to cabinet. Some of the review recommendations were aimed at increasing the competency and the profile of our inspectors, both in the Division of Workplace Health and Safety and in the Electrical Safety Office.

The department has a 20-week induction program for all new inspectors. That will be supplemented by modules relevant to whatever specialty areas inspectors are involved in. We have put on another 19 specially designated investigators. They have been appointed to a lead role in investigating high priority workplace accidents leading to death or serious injury. These investigators will receive additional training in advanced investigation techniques.

While I am sometimes critical of things that are done in government, I am particularly pleased with the way the unions, my department and the departmental staff have worked towards these changes and the commitment they have made to trying to improve the way we do our workplace health and safety inspections.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 6 with respect to conciliation in the current nurses dispute. What budget do you have to play with and what is the range of outcomes that have been budgeted for?

Mr NUTTALL: The budget for the nurses dispute is a matter for the Department of Health; it is the one that pays nurses' wages. The package we put on the table was \$190 million, which

represents a three per cent per annum increase over three years. In addition to that, the government placed \$60 million on the table for a nurse retention package. We have been working with the Nurses Union over the last two years to develop a new career structure for nurses. The new structure has been agreed to by all the parties. The additional \$60 million was to give nurses through those levels an increase in salary beyond the three per cent. In actual fact, 80 per cent of nurses would receive an increase of between 11 per cent and 13 per cent.

In addition to the salary package there was a range of other issues they asked us to address, and we have been addressing those. It needs to be pointed out that the package this government has put on the table for nurses would make our nurses, despite the procrastinations, the highest paid nurses in the country. That is something we have worked very hard at in terms of trying to keep nurses in the profession. We understand the pressures that nurses are under. That is why we have worked with the nurses to develop a retention package. That is why we have spent two years working with the nurses to develop a new career structure for nurses.

Half the problem we are seeing in this enterprise bargaining process with nurses is frustrations with local management issues. When I was in Cairns recently, when the Premier opened the refurbished Cairns Hospital, I met with the nurses who were protesting. I spent half an hour or so with them and I spent another three-quarters of an hour with them at the community cabinet meeting. More than half of the issues they raised with us were local management issues; they had nothing to do with the round of enterprise bargaining. Those local management problems nurses face have spilt over into this enterprise bargaining dispute. That is why we are seeing the type of dispute we have at the moment.

Mr LESTER: Thank you, Minister. In the event of failure to achieve a settlement within the desired range, are you under instruction to tough it out? You have said there is \$109 million available.

Mr NUTTALL: \$190 million, and then another \$60 million.

Mr LESTER: And that means three per cent.

Mr NUTTALL: And then another \$60 million.

Mr LESTER: That is in relation to other issues.

Mr NUTTALL: Well, it is above and beyond the three per cent.

Mr LESTER: What happens if you do not come to an agreement?

Mr NUTTALL: Both the Premier and I have made it very clear that we believed the package on the table was fair and reasonable and met community standards. We have on three occasions increased our offer to the Nurses Union. At no stage in formal negotiations has the Nurses Union been prepared to budge on its request for an 18 per cent pay rise over two years. That is nine per cent per annum, which is way above and beyond the norm.

Yesterday the Nurses Union and this government were in conciliation in the federal commission. We are hoping that the federal commission will be able to assist the parties to reach a resolution. The parties are back before the federal commission today. Late last night the federal commission ordered the nurses to lift their bans for a 48-hour period. The nurses will have their day of protest tomorrow, and that is fine.

It needs to be realised, though, that the nurses were not the ones who tried to seek conciliation in this process. It has been the government all the way through that has moved ground, made offers and done all sorts of things to try to seek a resolution to this dispute. But it takes two, and at this stage the Nurses Union is of the view that unless we give it 18 per cent over two years it will not settle. I am hoping that in conciliation we will be able to reach a resolution.

The federal commission has asked the parties to try to not make statements that would inflame the situation, and I do not want to do that. I want to seek a resolution. I want to make sure patients are put first. This dispute has gone on long enough, and it is now important to allow the federal commission to deal with this dispute and try to help the parties reach a resolution.

Mr LESTER: Minister, what I need to know is how much money you have to play with. I am aware of the \$190 million, et cetera, but sometimes a deal can be struck a little outside those parameters. Do you have a fund that you can play with? Currently we are at a situation of 'That's it, no more,' end of story.

Mr NUTTALL: We are in the commission at the moment. The commission has asked us not to inflame the situation and we do not want to do that. I have indicated to you that the package the government has put forward is a package of \$250 million over three years, which would make

our nurses the highest paid in the country. That is the government's position and I think the Premier has made it very clear that both he and I believe it is a very fair and reasonable offer that meets community standards and meets the needs of nurses in terms of retaining them in the profession.

Mr LESTER: I accept that they are in the commission and I accept all of those things that you say, but I also point out to everybody that we are in estimates.

Mr NUTTALL: That is right.

Mr LESTER: Surely you must have planned for an eventuality that might be perhaps slightly outside what you have indicated. We need to know how you fund it or if there is any suggestion of how you fund it. Is there a problem between you and the Health Department?

Mr NUTTALL: Two things: we have a very clear plan in terms of where we are going with this dispute. We have a very clear strategy in terms of how we are going to deal with this dispute. But as you pointed out, we are in estimates and in terms of funding any package, that is in the portfolio of Health, not in my portfolio. In terms of the money—not in terms of the dispute, but in terms of the money—that is allocated to the nurses' package, that is in the Health portfolio, not in my portfolio. I am happy to talk about the dispute—do not get me wrong—and I have done that, but in terms of the package money, I have indicated to you what the money is on the table. The rest is not in my budget.

Mr LESTER: That is a bit like being in the big ocean in a boat without any oars.

Mr NUTTALL: I do not think so.

Mr LESTER: It really is. I refer to question on notice No. 6 in regard to enterprise bargaining agreements and specifically again to the current nurses dispute. I ask the minister: why have you refused to allow the dispute to go to arbitration? At this point it is not at arbitration. What advice have you received from your department to support your decision and could you table it? What other departments have had input into any decisions that you might have made so far?

Mr NUTTALL: In terms of the dispute, I have continued to have discussions with the Premier's Department, the Department of Health and my department. The reason that we are not in arbitration is that the parties have agreed to continue to negotiate all through the process. Even though we have not agreed around the negotiating table, they have continued to meet and continued to agree to try to negotiate and find a solution. Failing that, we then made an application to the federal commission to conciliate or to mediate and assist us in terms of finding a resolution. The mediation broke down. We then sought a formal order from the commission to help us in conciliation. That is where we are.

The difficulty that we have is the federal act. The Nurses Union is covered by the Workplace Relations Act. They are covered by two federal awards. They are not state awards. The federal act does not give the powers to any industrial commissioner that the state act does to its state Industrial Commission. That restricts the federal commission from being able to assist the parties as readily as what state commissioners would do under the state act. That is where we are.

Mr LESTER: I still think you have got your hands tied a bit. There has been a certain amount of money allocated and at this point you cannot go over that. Surely that makes it extremely difficult to negotiate.

Mr NUTTALL: It makes it difficult to negotiate. Again, I have to be careful because the parties are in conciliation and the commission has asked us not to inflame the situation. But it does make it difficult when the other party is not prepared to move from its initial offer. Their initial ask was \$750 million, which is way and beyond the norm. But can I just say this: we are in conciliation, and while we are in conciliation we have been able to have an order placed on the Nurses Union by the federal commissioner to have the bans lifted until 5 o'clock tomorrow. That enables the parties all day today and all day tomorrow to continue to negotiate and discuss with the assistance of the federal commissioner to try to reach agreement. As long as we are around that table, we are eternally hopeful as a government that we will be able to reach a resolution. It is our aim and our desire as a government to reach a resolution to this dispute as quickly as is humanly possible, but we are restricted by the law of the jungle in the Workplace Relations Act, which is a federal act.

Mr LESTER: We were talking about tables before. I did ask in section B of the question what advice have you received from your department to support your decision and could you table it.

Mr NUTTALL: I cannot table it, because most of the advice that I have received has been verbal advice. This is a dispute that is fluid to the extent that it changes all the time. It changes on

a day-to-day basis. I am not about to table before this estimates committee the strategy that we have in place in terms of dealing with this dispute. I have given the estimates committee full details of the history leading up to where we are at the moment and why we are in the commission. I have given you as much information as I possibly can. The commissioner has asked for both parties not to inflame the situation. I need to be mindful of the request of the federal commissioner in terms of that and I want to abide by the federal commissioner's request so that we can try to get a resolution to the dispute. But I just think that it is a bit rich to have questions coming from the honourable member for Keppel when I think the honourable member might have been the IR minister in the SEQEB dispute.

Mr LESTER: And might I remind you that there has not been one hour of industrial dispute since that time in the electricity industry. So whatever I did, I did very well, and I included my department in all of the discussions. I did not get Bob Hawke in to help me out or Malcolm Fraser or anyone else.

Mr NUTTALL: But I do not intend to sack all the nurses, either, like you sacked all the SEQEB workers.

Mr LESTER: You have got me a bit worried here. I have got to ask: have you got a strategy? One minute you are saying that it changes from day to day and then you are saying, 'I have received only verbal advice.' What have we got? Surely to god your people would write things out.

Mr NUTTALL: What I said was that the dispute changes from day to day. We have a very clear strategy, and my people and I meet daily to evaluate what has been happening. Our strategy is very clear; our plan is very clear. We know the direction in which we are heading, but like anything, it is fluid. If the dispute changes from one direction to the other, we have to be flexible enough to maybe change the direction we want to take in terms of trying to get a resolution to the dispute. That is what I have said.

Mr LESTER: You are just saying that you are fluid, but in the next statement you are saying that you will not budge. You have got a certain amount of money there and that is it.

Mr NUTTALL: No, I said that the dispute is fluid. We know where we are heading. The dispute is fluid.

The CHAIR: Shall we move on to another question?

Mr LESTER: So you will not budge on tabling the advice?

Mr NUTTALL: That is right.

Mr LESTER: All right. You will not budge. You will not table the advice, and it is verbal and it is fluid. I refer to question on notice No. 6 and in particular I refer to enterprise bargaining agreements that expired on 31 December. These include Project Services, Q-Build and state government security, and I ask: why have these negotiations been expired for some six months? When will these negotiations be completed? What is the current status of these negotiations?

The CHAIR: Has the minister not already answered that?

Mr NUTTALL: No, I am more than happy to follow through.

The CHAIR: You are confusing me here.

Mr NUTTALL: All of those agreements that you mentioned; did you say that the agreements expired on 31 December?

Mr LESTER: Yes, I did.

Mr NUTTALL: We commenced negotiations with a number of those areas beforehand to try to reach agreement. What we have got here at the moment—I have to be honest and say that from my point of view we have not been able to reach agreement with any of those, as my department is advising me, and the reason that we have not been able to reach agreement is that it is my view that a number of unions are unwilling to reach agreement until they see what happens in the nurses dispute. They are basically sitting back and waiting to see how this dispute pans out and what sort of wage increase the nurses will get.

To some degree—and I say this publicly—it is my view that the Nurses Union is being used as the battering ram on the government so that if we capitulate, all of the other unions will come in over the top. At the moment they are unwilling to negotiate or reach any agreement with us until they see what happens in the nurses dispute. That makes it difficult for us as a government. It makes it very difficult. As I have said to you, that is why we need to review the enterprise bargaining process, because it is simply worn out, past its use-by date and does not work.

I also made a statement earlier about unrealistic expectations by union officials. I fail to understand, to be quite honest with you, why some union officials cannot sit down and negotiate a deal. When you have got a fair and reasonable offer put on the table, surely you should be able to sit down and negotiate a deal through it.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Glass House.

Ms MALE: I have two important issues that I would like to raise with you. The first one is: what actions have been or are being implemented to reduce the unacceptable number of electrical incidents inside Queensland homes?

Mr NUTTALL: Thank you for that. Between July 1992 and December last year, 42 people died in domestic electrical incidents in this state. That is an average of about four a year. In addition, there were 2,185 injuries reported as a result of electrical incidents in domestic residences during that same period. So we have 42 people who have died, 2,185 who have reported incidents, and heaven only knows how many that were not reported.

We believe that one of the ways to avoid that—we put out a range of issues papers and a range of discussions with industry—was to target electrical safety switches in homes. They are about \$200 each. Any home that was built from 1992 onwards was required to have a safety switch put in it. Homes prior to 1992 were not. Our best estimate is that half a million homes do not have safety switches.

We have received a number of submissions about that. Twenty-five out of the 27 submissions supported the installation of safety switches in all homes. In July last year, I launched an electrical safety switch campaign and there was a major television and media promotion—mind you, without me in it; I make that very clear—with key themes promoting safety switches and the dangers of do-it-yourself electrical work around the house. In addition, there was a full-page advertisement in *TV Scene* that went to about 700,000 Queensland homes. We have been encouraging people to put in safety switches.

Electrical safety officers have been ensuring that electrical appliances meet design safety requirements and are safe and without risk before being sold to the community. During 2000-01, the electrical safety officers examined and approved more than 1,800 electrical appliances. Obviously that was a record number. So we are working hard and we are working with the electrical authorities in trying to encourage people to put electrical safety switches in those homes that do not have them.

Ms MALE: The second issue I am interested in is what action the government is taking to protect workers' entitlements, for example, superannuation, long service leave, annual leave, et cetera.

Mr NUTTALL: Good question. The Queensland government actually views the protection of workers' entitlements in cases of business insolvency as a priority issue. We made an election commitment to pursue the implementation of an appropriate national scheme. Workers should be able to be certain that their wages, their accrued annual leave, their long service leave, their superannuation and all their other entitlements that they have worked hard for are guaranteed, even if their employer becomes insolvent.

Last year at the workplace relations ministers council—that is, all the IR ministers throughout the states, with the federal minister—I successfully called for the establishment of a working party to look at those issues. We pressed for initiatives that minimised the risk of workers losing their hard-won entitlements and we sought the establishment of a scheme that would ensure the entitlements were covered so that employees would get a hundred per cent if the employer became insolvent.

The working party has met on a number of occasions concerning the flaws in the existing scheme. This is a scheme of the federal government. It is called the Government employees entitlement support scheme. We have never been satisfied with that support scheme because it is inadequate and it is unfair. What we asked the federal government to do was to establish a national scheme that covers all workers and, as far as possible, that the scheme should ensure full payment of entitlements, that payments from the scheme should be timely and that employers should meet the costs of the scheme but those costs should be minimised as much as possible.

We are pleased that the federal government has responded to our lobbying on this issue. They have revised their entitlement scheme to cover full payment of wages, notices of

termination, annual leave and long service leave. The redundancy payments, though, are capped at eight weeks and the maximum annual wage for the purpose of calculating the entitlements is \$81,500. We have never been content to let this just sit, so we continued to pursue it with the federal government.

The Queensland Industrial Relations Act 1999 also contains innovative provisions that allow the executive officers of corporations to be prosecuted for unpaid wages and employee entitlements. I will leave it at that.

Mr RODGERS: The sugar industry is going through hard times in north Queensland, and over the years workers in the sugar industry in north Queensland and especially in the Burdekin—a lot of whom are seasonal workers—in some cases find it hard to access the employment benefits that they are entitled to when they are terminated at the end of the season. Can you assist these people to get these entitlements?

Mr NUTTALL: Most of the seasonal field workers are engaged in the harvesting and haul-out of sugarcane during the crushing season and they are employed on what they call piecework rates. The Sugar Industry Award—State sets the rates for weekly employees with penalties and overtime. Pieceworkers are provided for in the award, subject to certain provisions. With the advent of continuous crushing a number of years ago, the sugar mills made payments to compensate for weekend crushing. Some employers pass all or part of this payment on to their employees, while other employers do not pass on the payment.

There is some confusion among employees as to whether or not they are entitled to receive a portion of the mill overtime payments. As long as the piecework rates enable the employee to earn at least 20 per cent in excess of the award rates throughout the season, the employees have no automatic entitlements to any extra payments. In some instances the provisions relating to an agreed price or rate under the Industrial Relations Act may apply. Sugar employees who work these sort of working arrangements are entitled to the benefits of the award in relation to public holidays, weekend penalty rates and overtime.

Agreements for piecework may be entered into between employers and employees working in the field sector of the sugar industry. All pieceworkers shall receive a minimum piecework rate sufficient to equal the payment for the actual hours worked, based on both ordinary time and overtime, plus a loading of 20 per cent. Such piecework agreements should be in writing and signed by both parties. A copy of the mutual agreement should be provided to the local official of the AWU. Pieceworkers are specifically excluded from the provisions relating to annual leave and sick leave in the award.

If the employees do not receive their entitlements, there are a number of options that are available. They can lodge a complaint with either my department or the AWU—if they are a member of the AWU—or they can proceed through their own solicitor or an industrial advocate. My department has a network of district offices—including one in Ayr, actually—to ensure that employees receive their correct entitlements. From time to time, the industrial inspector's office in Ayr receives complaints from employees in regard to piecework arrangements. These complaints are dealt with on their merits. Where claims are established, the inspector attempts to secure voluntary compliance from the employer. If it is not possible to secure voluntary compliance, then legal proceedings will be considered to look after the employee's interests.

Ms JARRATT: Could you please outline the activities of the Department of Industrial Relations in the Whitsunday electorate with regard to the enforcement of award wage standards?

Mr NUTTALL: I am happy to do that—a place I need to visit more often! Through our IR service program, the department provides a range of services such as compliance, advisory and education throughout the state. We have got six regional areas; one in north Queensland, one in central Queensland, one in Wide Bay-Sunshine Coast, south-west Queensland, north Brisbane, and Brisbane south and Gold Coast. We have got 19 district officers and they are located in those regions. Last year we collected over \$6 million in arrears of wages for employees in the state.

The Industrial Inspectorate and Wageline, Mackay, principally serviced the Whitsunday electorate in relation to compliance and advisory services on industrial relations entitlements. This office received approximately 25 per cent of its advisory telephone traffic from the Whitsunday area. There you go.

Ms JARRATT: Yes.

Mr NUTTALL: During this contact, employers and employees received advice in relation to award entitlements and industrial laws generally. Compliance activities conducted in the Mackay district recovered in excess of \$450,000 in arrears of wages last year. The nature of these complaints ranged from incorrect award rates, unpaid overtime, non-payment of penalty rates and pro rata annual leave. Of these complaints, about 85 per cent are from the hospitality or tourism industry, with the balance coming from the small business sector. During the investigation of such complaints, over \$60,000 in employee entitlements are recovered each year. Additionally, employers are given advice in relation to award entitlements and industrial laws generally.

A general inspection was conducted recently in the Airlie Beach area. At this stage, adjustments totalling just in excess of \$3,000 have been made. Follow-up inspections are continuing and these inspections should be finalised in the next few weeks, with further adjustments we envisage will be made.

As a result of the success of this campaign in the Wageline office at Mackay, we have put in place measures to continue to gather intelligence through our advisory service so that the problem industries in this area can be identified and we can conduct regular blitzes to address them.

Ms JARRATT: Thank you, Minister. I am sure the workers in my electorate appreciate those services.

Mr NUTTALL: That is very good. Pleased to hear it.

Ms JARRATT: The MPS refers to the establishment of a work and family unit and a ministerial task force on work and family. Could you please outline to the committee the major achievements to date regarding work and family?

Mr NUTTALL: This is a really important area because I think we are the first state to actually really address this, and there are some important things that I need to outline to the estimates committee here today. Obviously work and family and the relationship between them are important issues facing not only families but also business, workers, governments and the community in general. Policies and practices that recognise these issues by supporting family relationships and improving work practices and arrangements are essential to the state's future.

There are economic implications arising from declining fertility rates, the ageing population and the labour force participation of carers. The issues require consideration of structural factors and prevailing community attitudes about how people work and how they combine work and family responsibilities in the community. These types of issues and their solutions have significant consequences for economic growth, productivity and standards of living for Queenslanders.

The relationship between work and family also impacts on Queensland businesses in a large number of ways. Where workers have difficulty combining their work and family responsibilities, businesses may experience negative effects such as lower productivity, higher staff turnover and higher accident and injury rates. Conversely, where workers can successfully combine work and family, business benefits from improved staff loyalty and commitment, higher productivity, staff retention and fewer workplace accidents. The ability to successfully combine work and family also impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals and families.

The government has made a number of commitments to improve work and family for Queenslanders. In the Queensland Families First and Putting People and Workplaces First policy document, our commitment to work and families includes establishing a work and family unit to promote family-friendly practices in private and public sector workplaces; running pilot programs in up to 10 workplaces to evaluate the most effective family-friendly initiatives; establishing a ministerial task force to assess industrial legislation and ways to assist workers with family responsibilities; improving legislative entitlements to family leave, particularly for casual employees; and updating work and family packages for public sector employees.

We established a work and family unit in my department in July of last year. Their activities have been involved in promotion, consultancy, liaison, research and policy development, and we have got a ministerial task force on work and families which we established last year, so we are working hard on that project.

Mr RODGERS: Page 10 of the MPS refers to the establishment of a Young Workers Advisory Service. Can you expand on the operation of the service and what achievements are expected?

Mr NUTTALL: Yes. I actually launched that service earlier this year. One of the government's election commitments was to establish a youth employment rights service to assist and support

young workers under 25 years of age by providing them with information, advice and assistance about their rights and obligations at work. The types of issues that the service has been established to deal with include wages and conditions, unfair dismissals and discrimination at work, including sexual harassment and workplace bullying.

Documentation inviting public tenders to operate the service was prepared and advertised in the *Courier-Mail* and on the Internet in August and September of last year. Six tenders were received and the Queensland Working Women's Service was selected by a committee of departmental officers as clearly the best, on the basis of their past experience in offering similar services to women as was envisaged for this service. To operate this new service for young people, the Queensland Working Women's Service established the Young Workers Advisory Service—YWAS, as it is more commonly known—as a stand-alone organisation under their sponsorship. As I said, I launched that service earlier this year during National Youth Week. The Young Workers Advisory Service is funded at \$300,000 a year for three years from within my department's funding. The service agreement has been executed between the parties. As part of the agreement, there is an agreed set of key performance indicators. That is to be reviewed on a six-monthly basis. Continued funding of the service obviously is contingent upon satisfactory achievements in relation to those performance indicators.

The service has been established to provide a complete and specialised service focused on broader employment rights issues of particular concern to young workers and to provide services that are not otherwise available to them. As funder of the service, my department is actively encouraging the Young Workers Advisory Service to network and to form cooperative links with unions, government agencies, community organisations, schools, TAFE colleges and universities in the expectation that this will both strengthen the effect and widen the scope of industrial relations services available to young people. The service is expected to refer on inquiries to organisations already offering relevant services rather than compete with or re-create services already available with unions, government agencies or community organisations. The service agreement negotiated between my department and the service includes a written obligation by the service to network and refer all relevant matters to organisations already operating in the field of industrial relations services for young workers.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members is about to expire, so I call the member for Keppell.

Mr LESTER: In regard to question on notice No. 7 regarding training of ministerial staff and bullying, what programs are in place to educate ministers within the government about workplace bullying issues? Has the minister's department allocated any funds towards the education of ministers regarding workplace bullying? If so, how much, and what processes are in place to assist the level of effectiveness of this training? Does the minister have any information about the number of workplace bullying complaints or claims for workplace stress that have been made by staff in ministers Barton's, Rose's and Foley's offices?

Mr NUTTALL: I will answer that as best I can. The Premier and all cabinet ministers take seriously the issue of workplace bullying. The Workplace Bullying Task Force presented its report in April of this year, and this report has now been made available publicly. An implementation team co-chaired by the Public Service Commissioner and the Deputy Director-General of the Department of Industrial Relations, together with senior officers of the departments of the Premier and Treasury, has been established to oversee the implementation of those recommendations. There are a number of legislative changes to the Industrial Relations Act and probably the Public Service Act which will be required. Importantly, the Division of Workplace Health and Safety has commenced work on the development of an advisory standard on workplace bullying. I am aware of some public comments from the State Secretary of the Queensland Public Sector Union in which he has made unsubstantiated allegations against ministers, including ministers of the previous coalition government. In fact, I met with the secretary of that union, Mr Scott, on 20 June to discuss his concerns. All 89 members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly are required to abide by the code of ethical standards, which is prepared by the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. That code has a section on workplace harassment, but it may be that that section needs reviewing to include the advice and the responsibility of members in the treatment of government employees, including the issue of workplace bullying. I reiterate that workplace bullying is a serious issue and that the government is giving consideration to the QPSU's request for a policy or a protocol, but a referral to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee is the preferred option in order to preserve a bipartisan approach to the behaviour and the responsibilities of all members of the Legislative Assembly, including cabinet

ministers. In relation to any claims about ministers Barton, Foley and Rose, I have no knowledge, nor are they my responsibility. There was no expenditure from within my department regarding this issue.

Mr LESTER: As Minister for Industrial Relations, whose responsibility is it if a claim is made about bullying?

Mr NUTTALL: If claims are made regarding bullying in relation to ministers, that is a matter for the Premier.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 7 in regard to workplace bullying. In regard to the successful WorkCover claim by minister Rose's former driver and this government's refusal to accept the success of that claim as proof of bullying, what would constitute workplace bullying in the context of a successful WorkCover claim?

Mr NUTTALL: That question is a matter for WorkCover. It is a claim to WorkCover. The claim made by minister Rose's former driver was to WorkCover. The fact that the claim was either accepted or rejected is not within my control as the minister. WorkCover will assess that claim in its own right. I will try to get some further information on the question the member has raised. I do not have any more information. I will get information that WorkCover is prepared to release. That is all I can undertake at this stage.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 7 regarding WorkCover claims lodged with the department. In regard to compensation claims due to stress lodged by teachers, is the department strengthening mechanisms to ensure applications lodged by teachers are legitimate? If so, what are these measures? What will be the cost of these measures?

Mr NUTTALL: It is important to note that psychiatric and psychological claims, given their high profile, account for only a small number of claims in the overall workers compensation scheme. In the 2000-01 financial year, psychiatric and psychological claims accounted for only three per cent of all statutory claims lodged. However, these claims are more expensive because of the longer duration than other claims for physical injuries. Some 23 per cent of these claims are rejected, which is a significantly higher rate than rejections in the scheme overall of 2.8 per cent. The Department of Industrial Relations has implemented an initiative to provide management advice and direction both to public and private sector employers on strategies to drive a reduction in psychiatric and psychologically related workers compensation costs. In addition, the government has commenced a three-year prevention program in all departments which will deliver a managed approach to the reduction of occupational stress. This program—it is the first of its kind in Australia—requires agencies to systemically identify and assess the specific risks in their organisation. Agencies develop strategies to reduce the exposure to and the consequence of staff experiencing psychological and psychiatric injuries. Workers compensation claims for psychiatric and psychological injury are clearly a symptom of the growing level of work intensity and of course pressure in the workplace. To counter this trend, my department and WorkCover have implemented a number of initiatives to address the way in which those claims are managed, and they include: point of claim intervention by WorkCover, and that includes improved assessment and case management involving closer relationships between the treating doctors, the employers and the injured workers; reducing decision times for claims through the streamlining of administrative processes; and addressing shortages of psychiatric professionals in rural and regional areas through the use of technology and the provision of specialist consultation services. We will continue to work towards reducing the number and duration of psychological and psychiatric claims. Only one-quarter of the total claims for psychological and psychiatric injuries come from the public sector. In relation to the specific issues in the Department of Education, which the member raised in his question, I am not trying to avoid it but they really are a matter for the Education Department.

Mr LESTER: How will the minister ensure that this program is implemented? I know that the minister explained that partly. How much money has been appropriated for this process?

Mr MCGOWAN: We can get the specific allocations made available through WorkCover on notice. We can also get the objectives and scheme involved in that as well as the strategies that need to be developed by Education which need to be approved and then reported to government in the normal course of events. If we could take that on notice, we will get that specific information.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 7, particularly where it states that the machinery of government changes make it too onerous a task to assess stress relief claims within the Department of Industrial Relations. I note that these changes have been effected throughout

the 2000-01 financial year. Therefore, how many stress relief claims were made in the Industrial Relations Department in the 2000-01 financial year?

Mr HENNEKEN: The issue is that in 2000-01 there was no Department of Industrial Relations. It was part of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. There was one for corporate services arrangements. There was one unit looking at the support for the director-general. The regional services were combined. To go back and reconstruct exactly which officers were in a notional department of industrial relations would take a considerable amount of time. In terms of the number of claims within the Department of Industrial Relations, they are particularly low. It is my judgment that the number of claims for the related parts of the previous Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations would also be low.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 8 in regard to the seven per cent of respondents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with the levels of consultation conducted by the minister's department. What steps is the minister taking to improve the level of consultation undertaken by his department? Will any extra funding be allocated to improve the level of consultation in the minister's department?

Mr McGOWAN: That survey is conducted by AC Nielsen on behalf of the department as part of the Managing for Outcomes budget reporting process. If you read the answer, a figure of seven per cent being dissatisfied with the consultation I would think in normal terms would be regarded as an excellent result rather than a poor one. The issue in relation to that question, if there is a concern, is the number of people who did not answer the question. Some 57 per cent thought the performance was satisfactory or very satisfactory. Only seven per cent indicated any dissatisfaction with it. The balance of that was the issue about people making a 'three' comment out of a rating scale of five or not commenting at all.

One of the things that is true of this particular question is that it was asked as a separate question to the rest of the questions asked as part of the survey. In future it will be contained within the broader survey. But in general terms you will see from the answer that the performance of Public Sector Industrial and Employee Relations was rated the highest of any part of the department, with a rating of 4.1 out of a five-point scale overall. That was a significant improvement on previous years. While those people who answered 'satisfactory' or 'very satisfactory' were only 57 per cent, you need to take into account the fact that the converse is that only seven per cent actually indicated some dissatisfaction. I would think that in general terms it would be very hard to reduce a figure as low as seven per cent in future years, but that would be part of the strategy or objectives of that part of the division.

Mr LESTER: Again with reference to question on notice No. 8, I ask: would extra resources in this area result in better outcomes during the negotiations phase of enterprise bargaining agreements and what areas in particular within the public sector were dissatisfied with the level of departmental consultation?

Mr NUTTALL: We have increased the resources in that area by establishing the central bargaining unit. We have put on three people at senior officer level to deal with that. We have poured more resources into that area. There was a second part of the question? I am sorry, I missed it.

Mr LESTER: What areas in particular within the Public Service were dissatisfied with the department's level of consultation?

Mr McGOWAN: We cannot identify that. It was a survey conducted by a company and people were told that the results would be confidential rather than identified by work unit or whatever. But they were all public sector contacts that were made as part of that survey.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 2 and in particular to your response that there were no major communications, public relations or advertising activities undertaken for the Public Service this financial year. Would better communications via this area serve to help the public sector be better informed on current issues?

Mr NUTTALL: Most government departments have their own newsletter. There is also the *Sectorwide* magazine. A wide range of communication is available to Public Service employees through various government agencies in terms of newsletters highlighting what is happening in various government departments.

Mr McGOWAN: There is also an electronic newsletter that goes from the public sector division called *PSI News*, which is electronically distributed to all departments as information, plus the web site, which does not actually cost money to run. In general terms, this is about public

advertising, and the communication between our department and other departments is normally done by internal newsletters or communications of that type, for example, advice sheets if awards change—that type of information.

Mr LESTER: This question is not in any way meant to be cynical. What you are doing is fine, but sometimes letters and communications like that are not read as well as they could be. I think both the minister and I would agree that even some of our election letters are not read as well as they could be at times. Is there anything we can do to make it more readable?

Mr NUTTALL: In the nurses dispute, we wrote to every nurse outlining the offer on the table, because we felt that nurses were not fully aware. It was for the reason you raised that the department put out a newsletter outlining what the offer was and so on. I agree with you; people tend not to read those in a lot of cases. That is why we wrote to them personally to say what we were doing. But other than writing to people personally, I do not know what you can do to encourage people to read newsletters and the like in terms of keeping them informed of what we are doing. It is very difficult. If you have got a new method, I would be pleased to hear it.

Mr LESTER: Perhaps we can talk about each other's election letters! Ours must be working reasonably well.

Mr HENNEKEN: In terms of policy development, which I suppose was the tenor of your previous question, there is an extensive amount of face-to-face consultation with various agencies in the development of policy and there is also a network, which is run in conjunction with the Office of the Public Service Commissioner, of HR directors whereby both the department and the OPS communicates regularly about important matters to do with industrial relations and human resource management in the sector.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. There are about 20 minutes or so remaining for the examination of Industrial Relations. Under the sessional orders, this will be divided equally between government and non-government members.

As big a fan as I am of public communication, as you know, I will move on to another topic—reluctantly, I might add. Page 6 of the MPS refers to amendments made to the Industrial Relations Act in 2001-02. Could the minister please expand on the purpose of these amendments?

Mr NUTTALL: A number of amendments took effect from 3 December last year. They were primarily to implement some election commitments that we made in the last campaign in the document titled *Putting people and workplaces first*. We were committed to introducing a work and family package to give casual employees access to unpaid parental leave, carers leave and bereavement leave for 12 months service, and protecting all casuals from dismissal on discriminatory grounds or because of their family responsibilities; and implementing the outcomes of the pay equity inquiry, which I have spoken about earlier this afternoon, conducted by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, which found that there is a continuing gender pay gap between men and women in Queensland workplaces. In addition to that, the legislation also introduced amendments to clarify the intention of the legislation and ensure that it does operate efficiently.

In summary, the package of amendments reduces the qualifying period for access to unpaid maternity leave for casual employees from two years to one year; it provides long-term casual employees with two days unpaid bereavement leave and five days unpaid carers leave; it prevents casuals from being dismissed on discriminatory grounds or because of their family responsibilities; it ensures that awards and agreements provide for equal remuneration for men and women employees for work of equal or comparative value; it provides that at least once a year the full bench of the commission make a general ruling about a Queensland minimum wage for all employees; it specifies the circumstances in which legal representation will be permitted before the state commission; it clarifies that the awarding of costs in proceedings before the Industrial Court and the state commission may include costs for representation by persons who are not lawyers and include witness and other expenses; it clarifies the state commission's role when using its arbitration powers when parties are seeking to make a certified agreement; and it ensures that time and wages records and pay statements actually contain the name of the employer.

The work and family package offers significant benefits for both employees and employers. It enhances job security for casual employees, encourages fair dealings and provides for a more stable and efficient work force. In recent years, the number of casual employees in Queensland and throughout Australia has soared. I mentioned those figures earlier on. The work and family

package also introduced unpaid carers leave for casual employees with 12 months service. Prior to those amendments, only permanent employees could take leave to support, care and provide for household members when they were ill. These are the kinds of family-friendly policies that Queensland families and our community need, we believe, to balance the demands of work and family life.

Ms MALE: Page 21 of the MPS refers to a project to improve workplace health and safety in indigenous communities. Why is this project necessary, what are its key features and how will it lead to improved health and safety?

Mr NUTTALL: Our department identified a need to improve workplace health and safety in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to try to increase productivity and the general welfare of people who live in those communities. The project aims to provide a community based training and support program that will assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in addressing workplace health and safety for indigenous and non-indigenous staff in workplaces. The object of the project was to develop suitable training programs that would reduce workplace related injuries and disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, improve rehabilitation and return-to-work outcomes, improve skills in the management of workplace health and safety and workers compensation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and assist my department to develop strategies for ongoing partnership arrangements between my department and these communities.

This program will include assisting community councils in promoting safe and healthy workplaces by identifying major workplace hazards. The project will deliver appropriate workplace health and safety workshops in each of our 36 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Also, the project will be responsible for the training of selected individuals from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that a sustainable network of workplace health and safety officers can be established in each of those communities.

My department has consulted with and issued a project information sheet to the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, the Cape York partnership, the Island Coordinating Council and the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. All of these organisations have indicated their support for the project.

Stage 1 of the project involves extensive consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by the indigenous staff involved in the project. All of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been audited and a comprehensive database listing all of the identified workplace health and safety issues has been completed.

Stage 2 of the project involves the development of an appropriate training program including the production of culturally sensitive and culturally friendly training materials, and stage 3 of the project involves the delivery of the training program to each of these 36 communities in consultation with their community councils. We will have appropriately qualified indigenous personnel. They have been identified and they will deliver the training program to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Following the completion of the community reviews, the recommendations from the communities supported a revised training program. All in all, it was a program that we thought was particularly important and we have been very pleased with its progress.

Ms JARRATT: Tractor roll-overs are a particular hazard in all farming communities. If I can be just a little parochial in my final question to you today, I would ask you to outline measures that have been taken to reduce the risk of tractor roll-over in the electorate of Whitsunday?

Mr NUTTALL: Thank you for that. You are right; they are a serious farming hazard. Your electorate is obviously one of those areas where you have a significant number of tractors, farms and the like. They are one of the primary causes of fatalities on our farms. Nearly half of all tractor related deaths are caused by roll-overs. We believe that most of these deaths would have been prevented through the use of a roll-over protection structure, called ROPs, and of course a seat belt.

In 2000 a National Occupational Health and Safety Commission report on work related tractor fatalities suggested that between 1989 and 1992 Queensland had more tractor related fatalities than any other state or territory in Australia. My department is aware of 38 deaths at workplaces in Queensland between 1990 and 2000 caused by tractors rolling over. Of those, 28 involved tractors without a roll-over protective structure. The roll-over protective structure provides a zone of protection for the operator of a tractor and reduces the operator's risk of being crushed in a tractor roll-over. ROPs on tractors are effective in preventing or minimising not only death but

serious injury. In Victoria an analysis of 34 roll-over fatalities that occurred between 1986 and 1995 revealed that only two were known to have occurred when the tractor had roll-over protection.

Unlike most other states, Queensland does not have specific workplace health and safety legislation in relation to tractors used at workplaces. Approximately 40,000 tractors in Queensland are estimated not to have roll-over protection structures fitted out of a total fleet of about 100,000. Recently, the Queensland coroner has made recommendations for the installation of ROPs on tractors, as the present requirement for risk assessment does not appear sufficient to avoid roll-over tragedies. We have released a regulatory impact statement on that. We asked for public comment from 14 September and that remained open until 29 October. That regulatory impact statement was advertised widely throughout the state. Over 300 copies of it were distributed and almost 2,000 hits were recorded on the Internet site. Once the regulation is approved, we will hold information sessions for the public and primary producers across the state, including your electorate.

Mr RODGERS: The sugar industry is an important part of Queensland's economy and a significant source of employment in regional Queensland. How will the workplace health and safety sugar task force recommendations lead to improved health and safety in that industry?

Mr NUTTALL: The government recognises the importance of the sugar industry, as I have said earlier today, for both the employment and the economic benefits that the industry provides to Queensland. We believe that the health and safety of workers in that industry must be protected. As part of our commitment to that industry, we established a Sugar Industry Workplace Health and Safety Task Force in December 2000. It was a tripartite group—that is, made up of the union, the employers and the government. There were a substantial number of terms of reference. Some 20 recommendations are being actioned by the department to have a positive impact on health and safety, but there are three key recommendations which will have the most impact. They are: a review of sugarmilling operation industry codes of practice, the development of an industry code of practice for the cane rail sector, and the development of an audit tool for the sugar industry and a system which requires regular audits for sugar mills in the industry.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allotted for government members' questions has expired.

Mr LESTER: I refer to question on notice No. 1 and to the consultancy undertaken by ACIL Consulting for the national competition policy review of the electrical licensing provisions of Queensland electricity legislation. What was the outcome of this report in terms of national competition policy payments received from the federal government? What recommendations from this report specifically relate to industrial relations matters?

Mr NUTTALL: I might hand that over to my director-general.

Mr HENNEKEN: There are a number of aspects of the Electricity Act which are the responsibility of our department, specifically the safety aspects of our department. The particular issues relate to things such as the definition of electrical work and whether electrical workers should be licensed. The key findings of the report to the department, which the government is currently considering as part of the new electricity legislation, were that the current objectives of the Electricity Act and regulation are appropriate and the consultant did not propose any reduction to them. However, it was suggested that the objectives of the act be broadened to include consumer protection, and this will be addressed in the Electrical Safety Act. The consultants identified that the current definition of electrical work under the act should exclude extra low voltage works, 50 volts AC and 120 volts DC. It is proposed that this will also be addressed in the Electrical Safety Bill 2002.

The consultant, having considered alternative broad regulatory approaches including deregulation, simple registration with negative licensing and mandatory codes of conduct, considered that continuation of a licensing regime is justified to ensure the electrical safety of workers, customers and the general public. The consultants identified a number of areas where the existing licensing system could be improved to maximise its benefits and minimise its costs by ensuring that restrictions are focused on those areas where potential harm is greatest. A working group of key stakeholders is being established to work through these areas and make recommendations to the minister. These areas include consideration of a rationalisation of existing electrical worker licence classes to more closely align with what happens nationally, some adjustments to the qualification requirements with a view to a more competency based approach, and a reduction in ownership restrictions on electrical contracting businesses to make the system

more consistent across other business forms. This would allow a person who was not a qualified electrical mechanic to own and operate an electrical contracting business. Electrical work would still need to be performed by a licensed electrical worker.

Mr NUTTALL: Madam Chair, the honourable member for Keppel asked me a question earlier in relation to what we are doing for WorkCover in terms of education and the payment of moneys. I have those answers. In terms of education and the psychological/psychiatric stress claims you asked about, there is \$330,000 per year for three years as an initiative funding. It is only payable on implementation of claims management and stress prevention strategies that the Department of Education will introduce. In terms of the whole of government, there is \$3.1 million per year over a three-year period, which comes to a total of \$9.36 million, which will be given to government departments to deal with the reduction in stress through prevention strategies within their workplaces.

The other issue the honourable member raised with me regarded WorkCover claims—and you mentioned that—that arose out of the question regarding Minister Rose's former driver. The WorkCover acceptance criteria for a psychiatric/psychological injury claim are determined by the WorkCover legislation definition of an injury. That includes the requirement for a relationship at work as a significant contributing factor and that the injury does not result from reasonable management action. A cornerstone of WorkCover legislation is its no blame basis—that is, the acceptance or rejection of a statutory claim that does not involve or confer a judgment of blame.

Mr LESTER: What is considered proof of workplace bullying? Is a WorkCover claim ever applicable?

Mr HENNEKEN: Member for Keppel, the issue is whether an injury has occurred. The injury is assessed by WorkCover. The injury needs to, as the minister has mentioned, result from the workplace or the workplace has to be a significant contributing factor to the injury and it cannot result from reasonable management action. That is the standard approach that WorkCover takes to all injuries which are of a psychological or psychiatric nature.

Mr LESTER: So psychological injury is not regarded as an injury?

Mr McGOWAN: WorkCover compensates for an injury. Workplace bullying is actually an action which is something that needs to be addressed in the workplace as distinct from the consequences of it. In the case of the driver, the claim was accepted. It was accepted for the stress of the individual. No judgment about the workplace bullying element of that is required by the workers comp system.

Mr NUTTALL: Her claim was accepted.

Mr LESTER: So we are saying that Minister Rose is totally exonerated?

Mr NUTTALL: That has got nothing to do with me. You asked me about the claim and I said the claim was accepted.

Mr LESTER: Your answers are a bit interesting, to say the least. Minister, you have done some work recently dealing with electricity accidents in the home. What do you have to report in relation to safety switches and what you were talking about?

Mr NUTTALL: As I indicated to you, all houses from 1992 onwards have to have an electrical safety switch installed. It is mandatory. Homes built prior to 1992 are not required to have a safety switch in them. We have identified there are some 500,000 homes that do not have these electrical safety switches. We put out a regulatory impact statement to get some responses to look at how we might deal with the issue of those 500,000 homes that do not have safety switches in them. We are still assessing the responses to that and the government will look at those responses and obviously make some announcement in due course in terms of how we are going to deal with that.

In terms of the rest of the electrical safety issues that you raise, we are now putting on 22 new electrical safety inspectors. We are going to put them on right throughout the state, not just in the south-east corner. That will bring to 38 the number of additional electrical specialists employed by my department over the last 12 months. I just want to repeat where we are going to put those additional people: Cairns, two people; Townsville, two; Mackay, one; Rockhampton, two, which you would be pleased about—

Mr LESTER: You could split them up, though, and put one in Yeppoon.

Mr NUTTALL: The remainder are Wide Bay, one; south-west, two; Sunshine Coast, three; north Brisbane, three; the south Brisbane/lpswich region, four; and the Gold Coast area, two. So

we are playing a very key role. As I said earlier, new electrical safety legislation will be introduced into parliament shortly.

Mr LESTER: When are they going to start, Minister; do you know?

Mr McGOWAN: The jobs were advertised in May. They will be trained and then in place for the start of the new electrical safety legislation, which is to go through parliament—

Mr NUTTALL: Before the end of the year, we hope.

Mr McGOWAN: But the recruitment exercise has started.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Industrial Relations has now expired. I understand that there are no questions on notice. I thank the minister, officers and staff for their attendance.

Mr NUTTALL: Madam Chair, just before you suspend the hearing, could I just thank you for the way you have conducted the estimates hearing for my department and thank all members of the estimates committee for their courtesy to both myself and my departmental officers. I want to put on the record my appreciation to my ministerial staff and my departmental staff for assisting me today in these estimates hearings. Thank you all.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will resume at 4.00 p.m. for Education.

Sitting suspended from 3.45 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.

EDUCATION**IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. A. M. Bligh, Minister for Education
Mr J. Varghese, Director-General
Ms B. Griffiths, Senior Policy Advisor
Ms R. Logan, Director, Finance Support Unit
Ms J. McCarthy, Senior Policy Advisor, Executive Services Unit
Mr G. McGowan, Manager, Early Childhood Unit
Mr N. Whittaker, Assistant Director-General, Resource Services
Mr T. Mould, Director, Asset Renewal

The CHAIR: The next item for consideration is the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Education. The time allocated is three and a half hours. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute, and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning, and a double chime will sound at the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time for answers may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allotted to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. For the benefit of Hansard I ask departmental officers to identify themselves before they first answer a question.

These proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard I remind members of the public that in accordance with standing order 195 any person admitted to a public hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. The sessional orders provide that a member of parliament who is not a committee member may, with the committee's leave, ask the minister questions.

In relation to media coverage of the Estimates Committee C hearing, the committee has resolved that still photographs and silent television film coverage will be permitted for the first five minutes of each department. My final request is that if you have a mobile phone would you please make sure that it is turned off, and if you have phone calls to make please do so outside the chamber.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Education open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Ms BLIGH: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to make an opening statement. As members would be aware, this will be a landmark year in education as the state government progresses one of the most significant packages of reforms for the Queensland school system. The package, known as Queensland the Smart State: Education and Training Reforms for the Future, includes substantial investment and information and communication technologies, a trial of a full-time preparatory year of schooling and a discussion paper on raising the school leaving age.

The 2002-03 budget takes the next step towards making these plans for educational excellence a reality. The reform package builds on the goals of Queensland State Education—2010, the state government's strategy to strengthen the state education system. To meet this commitment, around 25 per cent of the state government's total general government sector budget will be spent on education. Recurrent expenditure has been increased by 5.8 per cent, taking the total recurrent budget for Education to \$4.2 billion. The capital budget is \$230.2 million, which is an 11.6 increase on last year's capital works budget.

Queensland's investment in this vital portfolio measured as a proportion of its gross state product per capita is higher than the national average. Highlights of the 2000-03 budget include

the following: firstly, a \$158.3 million investment over four years for the reforms, including more computers in schools, updating and replacing outdated machines, improved ICT training and technical support for teachers, connecting another 1,600 classrooms to the Internet, and increased support for secondary students to improve retention rates. The sum of \$60 million will be spent over four years to provide improved services and support for students with disabilities; 382 extra teachers, including the 158 teachers allocated over and above usual annual growth, will be employed by the department; \$151 million will be spent to continue to improve student literacy; \$240.3 million for the capital works program, including allocations for new schools at Upper Coomera and the Bonogin-Reedy Creek area—which I know will please the Chair; \$16.7 million to renovate schools under the Triple R program; and \$24.3 million to equip 94 schools with airconditioning under the Cooler Schools program. The 2002-03 Education budget will help to give every student in Queensland the best chance to succeed and to take an active and rewarding part in the life of the Smart State. Madam Chair, as you would be aware, education lies at the heart of the Beattie government's Smart State vision. This budget is a sign of our commitment to achieving that vision. I will briefly outline what this means in real terms for teachers, schools and students.

To support the government's commitment to a quality teaching work force, an increase of \$75.3 million has been provided for increases in state school teachers salaries, making Queensland teacher salaries among the highest in Australia. Professional development opportunities for the school work force are highlighted, with extensive opportunities available for teachers to extend and improve their areas of expertise. The focus on ICTs in schools through the reforms means that \$28 million over four years will be used to further train teachers in using ICTs in everyday teaching and learning. A key element of the budget is the focus on ICTs as an integral part of delivering education in our classrooms. Along with the replacement of 19,400 old computers, 3,000 new computers will be provided to progress the department's goal of one computer for every five students. The budget also provides for 1,600 more classrooms to be connected to the Internet and will result in improved technical support to all schools.

Support for students with disabilities is another priority, with \$60 million allocated over the next four years for state and non-state schools. This genuine attempt by the government to improve its response to students with disabilities is further highlighted by the implementation of the seven point plan for inclusive education to create equal opportunities for all students irrespective of special needs.

As we all know, teachers are central to our children's education. An extra 158 teachers over and above annual growth will start in 2003 to provide intensive learning support to students and schools most in need. This is the third instalment in the government's commitment to employ 800 extra teachers over four years. In addition, 224 teachers will be employed to meet annual growth.

Literacy is another focal point with the continued implementation of the \$151 million package to improve literacy in state schools in response to the *Literate futures* report. Key areas include the development of whole-of-school literacy strategies and continued support for learning and development centres. This budget will continue to deliver in these key areas as we support our teachers to bring out the best in our children and prepare them for the future. I look forward to building on our successes and addressing the challenges of the future as we continue to implement major reforms and make that vision a reality.

The CHAIR: The first period of questions will commence with government members. I call the member for Glass House.

Ms MALE: Page 1-4 of the MPS states that Destination 2010 will provide a set of quantifiable and measurable performance indicators to help meet the objectives of QSE—2010. Could you please inform the committee where Destination 2010 is up to?

Ms BLIGH: As members would be aware, the government has endorsed a plan called Queensland State Education—2010 which sets out a blueprint for the future of state education until the year 2010. In August last year we publicly released to state schools a document called Destination 2010 which was a proposed planning process that set targets which would help us get from here to the vision of the 2010 plan. What will now be put in place is a new simplified planning and performance process that will be part of meeting the 2010 targets. Previously, school planning required schools to produce in some cases up to seven or more different plans. This will now be combined into three documents to reduce the time that is spent on planning and renew the focus on performance in our schools. The new focused requirements will mean—we hope—much less red tape for schools with a much more targeted approach. The primary aim is to

reduce the time that principals and other members of the school community devote to planning and allow them much more time to focus on their teaching and learning.

As I have said, QSE—2010 is a 10-year vision. Therefore, as we implement it we need to monitor our progress. There is no point in getting to 2009 and finding that we are a long way from where we want to be. So Destination 2010—the new planning system—will set clear system-wide targets to be reached by the year 2005. It will also, as part of the new planning framework, require schools to develop in conjunction with their own school communities their own plans based on local circumstances. They will be required, as part of that, to set their own targets as their part in achieving the system-wide targets.

Some of the system-wide targets—just by way of example—include that by 2005 85 per cent of students will be achieving national year 5 reading benchmarks; 80 per cent of year 8 to year 12 students will be retained in year 12; and 88 per cent of parents will express satisfaction that their school is a good school. These system-wide targets are now confirmed following extensive consultation with principals. As I said, they were first released last year as part of the 2010 draft action plan, but they will recognise that each school community is different. Some will already be above the targets, some will be below, but they will all be expected to play their part in meeting that system-wide vision of excellence.

Ms MALE: How will this framework be implemented and monitored?

Ms BLIGH: It is all very well putting out planning documents, but actually making sure that the roughly 1,300 schools in the system are playing their role is important for us to monitor. All the planning in the world, in my view, is of little use unless it is monitored. As part of the school improvement and accountability framework, state schools will be reviewed every three years to make sure that they are on target. This review will be undertaken by the principal in conjunction with the school community, and its results and outcomes will be validated by the executive director in the local district. However, there will also be provision made for a review by exception. This review by exception can occur at any time in the three-year planning cycle. It will be triggered where there are significant changing circumstances or a continuing decline in performance. Conversely, significant innovation and continuing above average performance may also trigger such a review.

The review would be instigated by the Assistant Director-General of School Performance. It would be conducted by a team external to the school appointed by the Assistant Director-General of School Performance. Where there is a need for improvement, the outcome will be a plan of action and intervention measures if needed. Those schools which are identified as being above average in performance will be used as best practice examples. Their experience will be shared with other schools throughout the state. Whatever projects are working successfully in the school may also be the subject of showcase for excellence awards or entries.

Parental and community involvement will be essential in the new school planning process. I take the opportunity to encourage P&Cs to discuss with their principals the role they can play in the process. Much of what is contained in this new planning process will not be new for most of our very effective schools, but it will formalise what those schools have been doing for a number of years already.

Ms JARRATT: Page 1-5 of the MPS states that significant funding will be allocated to improve access to information communication technologies, or ICTs, and to improve the ICT skills of students and teachers. How will this money be rolled out to schools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As you would be aware, the budget papers outline a very significant investment in the information and communication technologies our schools use. There will be \$23 million this year, in addition to the \$36.4 million in existing funding in this financial year. That will grow to a further \$35 million in new funding in the 2003-04 year. That will become a recurrent investment in our schools.

The roll-out of these funds will begin from next week, when an ICTs for Learning school information kit will be sent out to all state schools. To access the enhanced resources, schools will be required to audit their performance in ICTs against a new set of foundation benchmarks. This will for the first time give us a picture of and baseline data about the state of ICTs in our state schools. While we are not sure exactly what will come back, I think we can fairly reasonably predict that the bulk of schools, we hope, will actually be meeting most of the benchmarks. There will inevitably be schools that have some way to go to catch up, and there will also be schools that are significantly ahead of those benchmarks.

For those schools identified as needing to do significant catch-up to meet the benchmarks there will be a priority schools program put in place to assist those schools to meet those foundation benchmarks as quickly as possible. But we do not want that process to hold back the innovation that is happening in other schools so there will be, as part of these new funds, a grants process whereby those schools that are above the benchmarks can apply for funds to take the next significant steps in the use of ICTs in their schools.

Because this new initiative is now on a recurrent basis in our system, it will give us significant improved bulk purchasing power, which we hope will enable us to make the funding go a lot further and to assist those schools even more than we would have otherwise.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, I refer you to schools that have adopted innovative approaches. Can you give examples of these schools? What benefit will they receive out of the package?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. When we were looking at how we might roll these funds out to schools I was particularly keen to make sure that, while we applied the appropriate resources to make sure that schools that were lagging behind were able to catch up, those schools that were taking bold new steps into the future were not held back. So schools that exceed the foundation benchmarks are eligible, as I have said, for this innovators grant.

The innovation and excellence and improvement program will offer selected schools the opportunity to innovate in many areas. Some of the examples of the sorts of programs they may be eligible for include programs that will improve the technology links between school and home for students and teachers, programs that will improve and expand community use of ICT infrastructure after school hours, or programs that will enhance teacher engagement through, for example, trialling of Internet enabled hand-held devices through to providing greater access opportunities to student groups who traditionally have not been as engaged with technology as we might have hoped—particularly, in that respect, girls in our schools.

There are a lot of examples of innovative schools. It is hard to pick some. One I will mention in answer to your question is the Lockhart River State School. If technology offers us anything, it offers us one of the best chances to overcome the tyranny of distance. Lockhart is one of our most remote schools. It has developed a reach-in, reach-out program, which is a suite of community and classroom activities using ICTs. The project uses a web site with webcam links for Lockhart River to see what is happening outside in the community, providing links with community heritage—that is the reach out part of it—and, importantly, links between students and their families. That is the reach in part of it. Those students who, because they are part of a remote community, have had to leave that community to further their education can actually link back in to their classmates and keep in regular contact with their families. Community members are able to access the technology out of school hours to work with students who might be literally thousands of kilometres away. Multimedia texts and interactive software are used constantly, and application software is used for writing, creation of digital art, digitising art and dance and working with music. It a great example of a school that is really excelling in this area. We would like to see more of it.

Mr RODGERS: Minister, as mentioned on page 1-17 of the MPS, the value of a state school lies in a skilled work force and the capacity of schools to be learning organisations. Could you please inform the committee of the number of new teachers to be employed in this financial year and how we will enhance the capability and flexibility of the work force to meet the needs of school communities?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The budget outlines a number of new teachers that will be allocated to our schools this year. As I said in my opening statement, an extra 158 new teachers will start in 2003. They will provide intensive learning support to students and to schools most in need. The allocation of these teachers is the third instalment in the government's commitment to employ 800 additional teachers over and above growth over four years. The allocation of these teachers will be as agreed with the QTU and will assist schools in the areas identified in the agreement with the Queensland Teachers Union. That is in the areas of behaviour management and reduction of class sizes. They will be allocated to districts on a needs basis.

In addition there will be 224 teachers allocated for enrolment growth. I draw to the attention of the committee an oversight in the MPS. I refer members of the committee to page 1-11 of the MPS, which is the staffing table for the department. In relation to teacher numbers, teachers employed to teach students with a disability, there was an oversight in the preparation of this table. The funds are \$60 million over four years. While the money is talked about in the budget,

the translation of that into staffing numbers was unfortunately omitted from this table. The extra funding delivered in the 2002-03 state budget for students with disabilities will provide an additional 102 staff, which includes 60 teachers and 42 teacher aides. So the overall increase in teachers in 2003 will be 224 for growth, 158 as the third instalment of the 800 teachers and 60 for students with disabilities, which is a total of 442. That was a minor oversight in the preparation of the table but generally good news because it means more teachers in our classrooms.

Mr RODGERS: I note from page 1-22 of the MPS that there have been 39 community consultation forums scheduled across the state to consult with the community on the education and training reform for the future package. Could you please advise the cost of the consultation process and what the government hopes to gain from this consultation?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for his question. As there has already been one of these public forums in his own electorate, he would know the interest that the community has and the very, very vibrant and robust debates and discussions that have been happening out there around the table with members of the community and particularly from the education sector.

As part of the community consultation process, there will be, when completed, 39 community consultations. Twenty-six of those have been held along the coastline from Burleigh Heads to Thursday Island and 13 of them have been held west of the coastline. The forums are still ongoing so final costs are not yet in, but the estimated cost of the 39 forums is \$82,689—almost \$83,000. Can I say to the committee members that I think that this is money very well spent and that the government is committed in general terms to community engagement and consultation with the people of Queensland on all major issues. We believe that these reforms are some of the biggest reforms that our government is proposing, not just in education but in the whole of our activity in this term of government. So we are very committed to talking to the public about them before we rush in and make final decisions.

More than 5,100 people have attended the 29 forums held to date. It has been enormously valuable not only for myself as minister but for senior officers and local staff of the department to sit face to face with the people whose lives these changes will affect. So whether they are mums and dads of preschoolers or whether they are teachers in high schools who have strong views on some of the learning and earning proposals, it has been, I think, very, very helpful in the process of reaching our final decisions.

I note that the member for Beaudesert does not share my view that this is important and that he does not think that the consultation is necessary. I am pleased to note that there are members of the opposition, including Lawrence Springborg—who was unable to attend the Warwick forum—who support this consultation program. The member for Warwick sent an apology which read in part—

I commend you for this initiative and believe that it is very important that the community has a chance to have input into these ideas.

However, can I say to the member for Beaudesert that I am pleased to note that one of the reasons he thinks that we do not need consultation is that he thinks that the reforms have public support and should be implemented. I am happy to confirm to him that there is general support for the tenor of the package, but I would have to be honest and say that there have been a deal of questions and many people are very interested to find out more about it before they reach a final view on what it is that the government is proposing. I think that it is also important to recognise that this consultation is a two-way street. The government is, in fact, getting lots of ideas from the community that I think will ultimately improve the overall package.

The CHAIR: In relation to that, I refer to page 1-23 of the MPS and other sections that refer to the introduction of an additional year of schooling in Queensland. In 2003, Education Queensland will begin 39 preparing for school trials. Can you please inform the committee what has brought us to this very important trial and what your hopes are for its future?

Ms BLIGH: Yes; can I thank the member for the question. The discussions about the early years of education in Queensland have been around for a long time. In many ways they came to a head in the public consultation process on 2010 where the area of new foundations was identified as a priority and the government set about doing some very rigorous work on how we could provide for better early education for children in Queensland. As I am sure you will know by now, every other state in Australia has a full-time preparatory year of schooling available for children in the state sector. Research has shown that in literacy and in numeracy testing nationwide, Queensland's year 3 and 5 students consistently come in under the national benchmark. Part of the reason for that is our children are six months younger and have up to 10

months less education than year 3 and 5 students in other states. While the testing results attempt to recognise that, it is impossible to remove the effect from the results. It is the view of our government that it is not fair on our children and that our system is denying them the benefits of early education.

In August 2001, the department contracted AC Nielsen to investigate the needs of families in the precompulsory year. The research found that there was a very high degree of dissatisfaction with the current part-time preschool arrangements and the inflexibility of the system as it existed. I stress here a high degree of satisfaction with what happens in our preschools but a desire to see it full time rather than part-time. Parents in the research supported raising the school starting age by six months with a number of reasons identified. Firstly, it would see an older cohort of children entering school and, therefore, children would be better prepared for formal schooling and better prepared to attend a full day of school. A prep year would bring Queensland in line with other states and, as the prep year would be non-compulsory, it would still give families flexibility.

Can I say that there is also now significant data that shows that there has been a drift away from the state preschool system over the last decade or so. In the year 2001, 64.6 of the eligible age cohort of four- and five-year-olds were enrolled in state preschools. This contrasts sharply with the figures for 1985 where attendance averaged 76 per cent of the eligible age cohort and peaked in 1990 at 76.5 per cent. There is almost a 12 per cent decline in the enrolment of the eligible age cohort in the state preschool system and the government felt that we could not continue to ignore that families are obviously making decisions on the basis of their changing needs and that we needed to accept that our system had to look at that. So you will see all of those have resulted in what has been put to the community at the moment.

The CHAIR: Just in relation to those education and training reforms, can you tell the committee if students attending non-state schools will benefit from these reforms?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. These reforms, as I have outlined earlier, were really motivated by much of the work that was done in developing Queensland State Education 2010 as a blueprint for state education in Queensland. However, while the 2010 process was the impetus, there is no doubt that these reforms will have major implications for all Queensland children and school students no matter where they go to school. So whether they are in a government or a non-government school, each part of this package will have some effect on students.

Can I say that since the release of the reforms on 4 March, there has been much consultation with non-government school authorities about their involvement in these reforms. An officer from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission has been seconded to Education Queensland to work with the project team to ensure that the views and interests of the non-government schooling sector are incorporated in the final deliberations of government.

In each of the areas—can I start with the preparatory year trials—there are impacts for the non-government sector. The trials of a preparatory year of school have been expanded to include nine non-state school sites, six of which will be in the Catholic system and three in the independent system. All of the trials sites will use the same curriculum, which is currently under development by the QSA, and all teachers will access the same professional development, which will be provided by Education Queensland. All trial sites will be evaluated as part of the same project and should the trials prove successful and the government decides to implement an extra year of schooling, assistance will be provided to the non-government schooling sector to assist with the one-off capital requirements that this will mean.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to the \$10 million career change program and I ask: how many workers compensation claims had teachers lodged for workplace stress and bullying at the time that this package was announced? In order for these teachers to be able to accept this \$50,000 payout, is it true that teachers must sign away any pending workers compensation claim that they may have had with the Department of Education?

Ms BLIGH: In relation to your first question, I suspect that we will have to take that on notice. Can I just clarify? The question is how many stress claims had been lodged—

Mr LINGARD: For workplace stress and bullying.

Ms BLIGH: With WorkCover? At the time and at the date that the career change program was launched? That is what you want to know? I will have to take that on notice. You will

appreciate that I would not have that off the top of my head, but we can have a look and get that.

Mr LINGARD: I would like to know just how many teachers who received the career change package dropped any workers compensation claims on the department at that time.

Ms BLIGH: Again, I would have to get that for you, but I can confirm for you, as I did when I provided it in the answer to the question on notice, that one of the eligibility criteria for acceptance of the package was that people could not have any outstanding claims against the department. So it is quite possible that people might have dropped them or settled them. I can certainly get you that information.

Mr LINGARD: My advice says that there are at least 200 of these claims within the department at this stage.

Ms BLIGH: 200 claims for stress?

Mr LINGARD: Over 200.

Ms BLIGH: Have we got a number on that? We will take it on notice.

Mr LINGARD: My concern is that, obviously, if there are over 200 of these particular claims and the Minister for Industrial Relations has just been in here saying that there is \$330,000 available to reduce these sorts of claims, why are there so many claims within the Education Department?

Ms BLIGH: Look, there are a number of reasons behind stress in workplaces, whether it is in teaching, whether it is in police, whether it is in any profession. I think it has been well recognised that the human services occupations—whether it is teaching, police, et cetera—are generally quite high stress occupations and that some people find them as such.

Can I just say that some questions in regard to this were raised last year and I would like to put on record that the department is taking action to reduce the number of stress claims. I share your concerns about the stress that any of our teachers might experience. Last year I outlined to the committee that there were a number of things being undertaken: firstly, that we would put in place a consultancy service to assist in the management of work-related stress. This service was trialled in 2001. The pilot saw the employment of an additional 13 staff with expertise in rehabilitation and occupational health, and the total number of staff working in this area is now 25.6 full-time equivalent officers. It was very successful and the positions will now be made permanent and will be located in the new corporate services unit to work closely with schools.

I also identified last year a lack of consistency in the guidelines and procedures used to manage cases of stress. As part of the pilot, the business processes associated with workers compensation claims were reviewed and improved to ensure consistent and effective management of claims. In addition, the guidelines and policies associated with returning injured employees to the work site were reviewed and improved. The policy and guidelines were released earlier this year.

I also indicated that there would be training programs put in place for principals and for managers. An audit was undertaken in the past 12 months to identify work sites of greater than 30 employees where it is necessary to have an occupational rehabilitation officer, and training was provided to ensure that these officers' skills remain current.

More intensive case management of complex cases was also indicated last year. I can confirm to the committee that Education Queensland has adopted and improved a rigorous process to manage complex cases, which has resulted in the closure of at least 15 cases that had been outstanding for more than a year. This has occurred due to the improved cooperation of central district and school personnel under the management of the additional organisational health officers. This is an area that is of concern to myself, as minister, and to the government and it is something in which we hope to make continual incremental change.

Mr LINGARD: Are you concerned that there may have been some teachers who took the career package and just dropped their claims against the Education Department for workplace stress and bullying?

Ms BLIGH: No. I was aware from the beginning that one of the conditions of taking the package was that all outstanding claims be settled. I do not think it is unreasonable that where people are being offered an incentive to voluntarily separate from the organisation outstanding claims be settled and a thing of the past. So I think that is not unreasonable. Given that the package was a voluntary situation, I think that was reasonable.

Mr LINGARD: You are aware of statements that teachers who were given the \$50,000 to resign from the Education Department immediately accepted positions in private schools or embarked on studies for hobbies in their retirement. Surely you and your department are concerned that people who are about to move into retirement have been given a \$50,000 package on top of their retirement package and that more eligible applicants have either missed out or been forced to sit back and wait for the next generous offer? Why did you not implement a mechanism to prevent teachers from using the \$50,000 on programs other than genuine career change?

Ms BLIGH: I am happy to clarify for the committee and, again, for the member for Beaudesert that the government's motivation in making this program available was to make sure that those people who are in front of our classrooms are highly motivated to be there. It was our intention to make sure that those people who were not motivated to be there were offered an opportunity to leave. In that regard, I am very satisfied with this program and the way that it has been implemented.

You seem to be indicating that there should have been some age limit. I would draw to your attention that, in my view, that would be age discrimination. There is no compulsory retirement and teachers are entitled to work for as long as they like. I have tried to have this discussion with you before and I think we are going to have to agree to disagree on it. I am very satisfied that the people who were eligible for this program—there may well be people who did not put their names forward who might have been eligible, but that is not something over which I or the department has any control.

Mr LINGARD: I noted in one of my questions on notice that teachers did not have to be in front of the class and did not have to be in the school to apply for the package. But now you have just indicated that you wanted to remove those teachers who were in front of schools and may have wanted to move out. Were any people selected who were not in the school situation?

Ms BLIGH: Yes, it is my understanding there were some people who were in non-school locations, but they still were teachers in the system and, I think, could have been put back at any time. So again I am not particularly alarmed by it. As I have said earlier, this whole program is a self-funding program. I am happy to confirm that while it is true that people were eligible if they were in non-classroom teaching situations, all of the successful applicants were classroom teachers.

Mr LINGARD: Were these career change packages offered by your department simply to remove some teachers who had been suing the department for these workplace bullying and stress charges?

Ms BLIGH: Absolutely not. I have already outlined as clearly as I think is possible that the motivation was simply one about renewing the teaching work force to ensure that enthusiastic graduates were given an opportunity to move into the system and those people who were not motivated to be there were given a reasonable opportunity to exit the system. Any suggestion that this was in any way designed to avoid other processes is, frankly, a nonsense. I would suggest to you that any teacher who made that decision would have only done so on financial advice.

Mr LINGARD: I note that the amount of a grant received by teachers who accepted the career change was dependent on their work fraction. Can you give examples of how a teacher qualifies for a pro rata such as \$25,000 or \$20,000 rather than \$50,000?

Ms BLIGH: It is my understanding that it is a straight pro rata process. A \$25,000 grant would have been someone who was working 0.5—so a permanent employee of the department but at 0.5.

Mr LINGARD: Are you therefore indirectly saying that a person who is only working half time does not need as much for a career change relearning program?

Ms BLIGH: No. That is what the process was; that was what the entitlement was. It was on a pro rata basis. Full-time employees were entitled to the total package; part-time employees were entitled to a pro rata package.

Mr LINGARD: I think you would say it is quite ridiculous to think that a person would retrain for \$20,000 when someone else would retrain for \$50,000.

Ms BLIGH: Well, that might be your view, Kevin; it is not mine. I do not think this program is a ridiculous program. This program was one that gave us the best opportunity the department has had for a number of years to renew the teaching work force. We make no apology for it. It is

a renewed and invigorated teaching work force that we believe is one of the key ingredients to teaching and education excellence.

Mr LINGARD: Can you explain how a teacher working half-time could take the career package and be replaced by a highly motivated young teacher full-time and yet the Education Department saves enough money to repay the \$10 million loan?

Ms BLIGH: It is not \$10 million. In the end it ended up being about \$9 million, I think. They would be replaced by a 0.5 person. If they were in a half-time situation, they were replaced with a half-time appointment because all that was replaced was the vacancy and you save the pro rata funds.

Mr LINGARD: I have seen the number of people who took part-time packages. Are you saying that all of those were replaced by part-time, highly motivated young teachers?

Ms BLIGH: They were all graduates. I will come back to you with details on that, but that is certainly my understanding, that all of the people who took the package were replaced by graduates and obviously there would be some of them who were interested in a part-time appointment.

Mr LINGARD: How much money has been injected into the New Basics program since its inception and how much has been injected into the Queensland School Curriculum Council in the same period?

Ms BLIGH: I will have to take that one on notice and get back to you.

Mr LINGARD: Why do you continue to have the New Basics curriculum program developed autonomously from the statutory body which is funded by the state government on an annual basis to deal with curriculum?

Ms BLIGH: The New Basics curriculum was developed by Education Queensland as an innovative trial program as part of some of the work that was done in the lead-up to the 2010 process. It was then the subject of an election commitment. We think it is one of the things that Education Queensland has which, frankly, make it the envy of many other states. We are very proud of this program, but it does have to face a very rigorous evaluation over the next couple of years.

In terms of the role of the Queensland School Curriculum Council, at the time it had responsibility for putting in place the syllabus around the KLAs, which were part of national agreements. Given that the New Basics is only a trial and only in state schools and the Queensland School Curriculum Council is an authority that oversees and prepares syllabus for use by all sectors of schooling, it was considered appropriate as I understand it at the time that it be developed from the expertise of people employed in the Department of Education.

Mr LINGARD: Does the minister still intend to keep the New Basics program going with separate funding from the QSA?

Ms BLIGH: At this stage there is no intention to change any of the current arrangements. But, as I have said on the record when we were debating the QSA legislation, as it is a new statutory authority we would expect that it will evolve over time. I am very aware that it is important to avoid duplication between the activities undertaken by the authority and the department. Those matters will be subject to consideration over time, but at this stage there are no plans to change. This is a trial and it is important that the trial continue on track, that it continue in the way that it was set up so that the evaluation will not be tainted by any sort of changes midstream. Depending on the outcome of the trial and any decisions about expanding it, that might be a point at which other options are considered.

Mr LINGARD: Can I have clarification on those teachers who can apply for the career change program and the fact that the minister referred to someone in a non-school situation. Can a person who is seconded to the minister's department, a previous teacher, apply for a grant?

Ms BLIGH: Can the member clarify the question?

Mr LINGARD: The person does not need to be in front of the classroom. It can be a non-school person, as I have seen the criteria state. Could a person seconded to the minister's department as a public servant apply for a \$50,000 grant?

Ms BLIGH: They could have applied, but none of the people who took it—

Mr LINGARD: No, but they could apply.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, if they were teachers. But the program is over. They had to be teachers who had 10 years' teaching service.

Mr LINGARD: Is the minister saying that the program is over now? Have 200 people been selected?

Ms BLIGH: There were 187 people to whom offers were made, and that is the end of the program. The program was for up to 200, because a number of people who applied were not suitable or did not meet the eligibility criteria. Sorry, there were 198 eligible candidates. In the end, 183 accepted. That is the end of the program. It is not an ongoing program.

Mr LINGARD: I have seen the figures as far as the part-time ones are concerned. I am amazed at the number of part-time teachers who received an offer, and it was not the \$50,000. We must be well short of the \$10 million.

Ms BLIGH: But that is not relevant to the program. The program was for up to \$10 million for up to 200.

Mr LINGARD: Full time at \$50,000?

Ms BLIGH: That is right, but given that that was the number that accepted or were eligible—and some of them were part-time—it is certainly within the program parameters.

Mr LINGARD: From some of the figures I have seen, some of them were teaching for only 20 per cent of the time—and yet they got a package.

Ms BLIGH: That's right.

Mr LINGARD: And they were moved out for highly motivated teachers.

Ms BLIGH: But they got a pro rata part of the package.

Mr LINGARD: Legislation in parliament to establish a QSA received bipartisan support early in the year, and there is no doubt that the minister had no opposition to setting up this authority on 1 July. Why did the minister not have a board of governance and a new director in place well before this date to give some direction to the new board and all the personnel from the three statutory authorities that were amalgamated?

Ms BLIGH: Is the member suggesting that there should have been a board in place before the legislation was passed by parliament?

Mr LINGARD: I am suggesting the same as I suggested about a high school—that it should be built before the first day and that demountables should not be there. If a new board, the QSA, is starting on 1 July, surely within the organisation of the Education Department there would be, first, a director before 1 July and, second, a board of governance?

Ms BLIGH: All of those things actually occurred. I am happy to outline the process for the member. First, the legislation was passed on 21 February and the transition then began in earnest, because much planning had already started to occur; but many things could not happen until parliament passed the legislation. It took 16 or 17 weeks from when the legislation was passed in parliament. In Public Service terms, I regard what the transition team did in 16 weeks, in comparison to other similar projects, comparable to working at light speed. I take the opportunity today to congratulate the transition team. In my experience in terms of public sector activity it is very rare to see things done at this kind of speed.

In relation to the council, as the member will be aware, the legislation actually specifies that the council be made up of a number of people nominated from other organisations. So, a process was put in place by which those other organisations could provide their nominees to me and I went through the cabinet process to ensure that those nominations were part of cabinet approval and Governor in Council. If we look at that on a 16-week time frame, that has been done as efficiently and as quickly as it possibly could have. I note from the member's public comments earlier in the week the claim that staff were ignorant of that and that something was done secretly. I advise the member and the staff in his office to read the *Government Gazette*, because they were gazetted a number of weeks ago. The chair of the new authority was announced well in advance. Professor Bob Lingard accepted the nomination a couple of months before the authority became a reality. I am very satisfied with the progress. It stands scrutiny on any measure. The people who put together this transition deserve our congratulations. The director was appointed on 27 June and was available to take up duties on 1 July for an appointment at an SES position in the public sector. For the person to be appointed and available, for all the paperwork to be done and for that person to be on the job on the first day is

a very efficient process. I have seen these sort of appointments take anywhere from five to seven months, particularly where the person is an interstate candidate.

Mr LINGARD: How can the minister be satisfied when three bodies came together at least a week ago, many senior management positions were not appointed and a range of officer positions are still to be filled or advertised? How can the minister be satisfied with that progress?

Ms BLIGH: It was always going to be a significant exercise to bring together three separate organisations and to have them running smoothly as one new organisation. It will not be accomplished in a day, but it will occur over a period of time. There was a transition plan negotiated with staff unions that was finalised in March. It was provided to all staff of all three organisations during March. I am pleased to say that in terms of the transition plan every single date and time frame has been met. Every single deadline is on track. There has not been slippage in any of those time frames. Far from being concerned, I again congratulate the transition team. This is a huge exercise. To be absolutely on time with all of the processes, including transfer at level of staff, closed merit process, open merit processes, the advertising processes, et cetera, is a remarkable achievement.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Ms MALE: I refer to pages 1-5 and 1-13 and 14 of the MPS. The proposed education and training reforms for the future talk about ensuring that young people remain engaged with education and are either earning or learning until aged 16 or 17. I am aware that presently a number of young people leave the education system as soon as they turn 15. What plans are there to provide new challenges for students at risk of not completing their 12 years of schooling? Specifically, what role might vocational education and training play in assisting these students to re-engage with learning?

Ms BLIGH: As I have outlined, this is one of the government's major reforms to the education system and one in which we are determined to make progress. Our present system of schooling is able to assist the majority of students in Queensland schools to achieve to the best of their ability. Around 73 per cent of Queenslanders under 24 now complete high school, with the majority going on to work or further education. That is 73 per cent, up from 68 per cent in 1998. I think that is a tribute to the work that many of our schools have been doing for some time to see an improvement in this area. But we want to go beyond that. We know that some students also leave school at 15 to undertake apprenticeships or traineeships. We also think that is a very valid life pathway. However, as many as 10,000 young Queenslanders aged 15 to 17 are not enrolled at school, are not at work and are not undertaking further educational training. Increasingly, the prospects for these students are very bleak. Education Queensland research shows that these young people are alienated and disaffected. They believe that the curriculum offered by schools in many cases is irrelevant. Often, this particular group of students has difficulty in accepting school environments.

Research also shows that to make a difference schools have to firstly be committed to each individual. They have to support each young person until they achieve positive outcomes. They have to provide well organised connections between education and work or further study, and provide good information and guidance to students about the many and increasingly confusing pathways available to them. It also can make a real difference to have a key person who guides each student through those pathways. We know that greater flexibility for students through opportunities for increased vocational education and programs to assist at risk students seem to have improved the likelihood in many cases of students remaining at school.

For this reason you will see in this year's budget papers that an allocation of \$40.3 million has been made over a three-year period starting in the next financial year, 2003-04. The purpose of those funds is to support students who are at risk of leaving school. One of the reasons they will begin in that year is that they will be used in flexibility ways to support the final decisions of government arising out of the green paper. Exactly how those funds will be spent will be finalised as a result of the discussions that are currently being held with the Queensland public. We understand that these initiatives cannot be cost neutral and we are very pleased as a government to be making an investment into something that we think will significantly improve not only the social justice of Queensland but also its economic prosperity.

Ms MALE: I note at page 1-34 of the MPS you make mention of the review of pathways articulation through the post compulsory years of schooling—that is, the Gardner review—and the senior certificate project undertaken by John Pitman. What was the purpose of these projects and can you also advise the committee what progress has been made and how you see they will

intersect with the government's major reform agenda, the Education and Training Reforms for the Future.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question, which is related to the last questions. The Gardner review was jointly commissioned by Education Queensland and the Department of Employment and Training to provide advice to the government on pathways through senior schooling. It actually emerged out of the public consultation on the discussion paper that led to the amalgamation of the statutory authorities. Its purpose is to provide recommendations on ways of establishing a more effective relationship between courses, credentials, experiences and settings offered to young people by schools, TAFE, private training providers, universities and industry. You heard me refer earlier to an increasingly confusing smorgasbord, if you like, of options being presented to young people. We have an obligation to ensure that as they choose pathways those pathways will articulate into future opportunities and that the work they undertake along the way will be recognised and that the choices they make are not choices that will necessarily lead them to a dead end.

A steering committee has been formed with officers of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Treasury, the Department of Employment and Training as well as Education Queensland. It has a reference group representing key stakeholders which provides a mechanism for ongoing consultation. The report will be finalised in July.

The senior certificate project was initiated in June 2001. It was sponsored by Education Queensland with assistance from the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies and is being headed by John Pitman. The project was initiated to explore whether the present two-year full-time institutional setting for years 11 and 12 is a significant reason for non-completion for some young people. It is designed to investigate initiatives to bring about improvement, to advise on structural changes to support the initiatives and advise on the implications that flow from the initiatives. The final report, titled *The senior certificate—a New Deal* was finalised at the end of June and it is currently being considered by Education Queensland.

Both the Gardner review and the Pitman report will have significance in terms of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future initiative and both will influence the retention of at risk students within the system. I intend to make both reports public after cabinet has had time to consider them.

Ms JARRATT: On page 1-20 of the MPS there is a government commitment to continue funding for behaviour management services in state schools—a commitment that I know will be welcomed across all school communities. Could you please elaborate on just what behaviour management services are in place to assist school communities, teachers, students and districts with disruptive and aggressive behaviours?

Ms BLIGH: Our major investment in this area is a deployment of 300 behaviour management support staff employed at a district level. Support is provided to districts in addition to these staff, which includes early intervention support for students who are identified at risk, classroom support in effective learning, teaching and management strategies, professional development in behaviour management for school staff and communities. Obviously, with 300 behaviour management staff you cannot have one in every classroom all of the time. It is a very significant investment, but part of their work—and probably part of the most effective long-term aspect of their work—is the work they do with other school staff in effective management techniques of disruptive behaviour. They also provide assistance with the development and review of school behaviour management plans.

In addition to that ongoing investment, Queensland was pleased to be involved in the launch on 16 June of a national web site called *Bullying—no way*. It is an anti-bullying web site that was developed by Queensland as part of a national project done through MCEETYA and is available to all schools throughout Australia.

Alternative schooling is also obviously one response to engage alienated and disruptive students. An evaluation has been done on alternative schooling in Queensland. Included in the evaluation were the five trial sites being funded through Education Queensland—at Balaclava, Capalaba State High School, Clontarf Beach State School, Silkstone State School and Woodridge State High School. But it is important to recognise that there are many other alternative schooling sites, some of which are funded in one way or another through either Education Queensland or another government agency or by the non-government sector. Some of these were included in the evaluation. These include the Centre Education Program in Kingston, Glendyne youth training centre at Hervey Bay, the Southside Education Centre at

Tarragindi, the Tennyson Special School, the Brisbane School of Distance Education, which has a particular program for students in this circumstance, the Edmund Rice Family Program at Cherbourg, the Tallebudgera Beach Outdoor Education School on the Gold Coast, the Albert Park flexi-school in Brisbane and the Flexible and Alternative Mobile Education Service, known as Flame, in Noosa. But there are other options as well in many regions not necessarily included in the evaluation. These include, for example, the Toowoomba flexi-school, the Maleny flexi-school, the South Burnett Second Chance Program, the Capricornia Coast Full Service School and the Youth Outreach Service in the Valley.

Ms JARRATT: In May 2002 you launched the Work Force Diversity and Equity Program for Education Queensland. The program targets a number of areas, one of which is the government's commitment to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed by Education Queensland. Would you tell the committee what issues the program will address and how Education Queensland plans to work towards an increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in its employ?

Ms BLIGH: The Work Force Diversity and Equity Program is designed to address the barriers that exist in recruitment, retention and career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Department of Education. The strategy seeks to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have equitable access to secure employment in all areas of the department. The strategy is actually the other half of the Partners for Success Program. It was always designed as an education and employment strategy and recognises that the presence and involvement of indigenous Queenslanders in our schools and in the Education work force is critical to the educational attainment of indigenous children. The government has committed through the strategy to recognising and utilising the diverse knowledge, skills and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and ensuring flexibility when dealing with the diverse needs and aspirations of the indigenous community. This means ensuring policy coordination in employment and career development and strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As part of the strategy, Education Queensland has committed to develop strategies to introduce work shadowing and work experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, has committed to increase the number of scholarships provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to guarantee employment in Education Queensland upon successful completion of the teaching course by scholarship holders. Education Queensland has committed to increase the number of permanently employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with the provision of traineeship incentives and teacher-aide positions. The department will also develop a system to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who are interested in acting in higher positions to be readily identified and supported in that process so that they can enhance and further develop their skills for eventual promotion. The department will also provide individual career development, leadership, succession and coaching programs to support the aspirations of indigenous Queensland employees.

Education Queensland will also conduct exit interviews with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to identify any barriers to retention that may be addressed. A good example of a successful employment program in this area is the Remote Area Teacher Education Program, better known as RATEP. It is a joint initiative between the Far North Queensland Institute of TAFE, James Cook University, Education Queensland and a number of remote communities. It delivers education and training in remote communities and therefore makes that training much more accessible than it might otherwise have been. Western Cape College out of Weipa currently has 16 students enrolled in RATEP and two of these will graduate as registered teachers at the end of this year. The college also has a number of community teachers, teacher aides and teacher assistants who are all part of RATEP and is a good example of the strength of the program in those communities.

Ms JARRATT: Just following on from the employment strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, I understand that this strategy is a part of a package of strategies aimed at diversifying the Education Queensland work force and that there were also strategies for women and for men. Could you please elaborate on these two strategies?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As the largest employer in this state, the Queensland government believes that it has a responsibility to strive to achieve a work force that is diverse and equitable and in which people are recruited, retained and promoted on the basis of their ability and their merit. In relation to women employed in the Education Department, we have put in place a strategic plan for the employment and career management of women in Education Queensland from 2002 to 2005. It aims to increase the representation of women in leadership

roles in the organisation. Currently, 72 per cent of the teaching work force is made up of women but only 28 per cent of the senior leadership of the organisation is female. The target set by the new strategy is to achieve 41.1 per cent of senior leadership positions in larger schools by 2005. That figure would go from 28 per cent to 41.1 per cent by 2005, so it is what is known as a stretched target.

The women's strategy also intends to attract women through promoting EQ as an employer of choice, to recruit women through ensuring recruitment and selection processes are inclusive of women at all levels, to retain them by establishing working conditions which recognise particularly the family needs of female employees, and to develop career development and planning programs including rotational relieving above level programs and formalising some ad hoc support mechanisms such as mentoring and work shadowing.

In relation to the employment of men in the department, the situation is actually almost the reverse. The converse is true. The struggle that we have in the department is recruiting into and retaining young men in the teaching profession. Currently, male teachers in the work force are at 28 per cent and the figure has been in decline for a number of years. The new strategy sets a target to raise that from 28 per cent to 35 per cent by the year 2006. It aims to do that by creating a supportive and participative workplace conduct and culture, establishing teaching as an attractive career for young men, and to increase the number of men applying for and being recruited into teaching roles. Everybody in Australia is struggling with this.

It is a tough area, but some of the strategies identified and put in place are partnerships with other government departments to promote teaching to a more diverse range of professionals, liaison with Queensland universities to establish targeted academic programs to address the areas of male teacher shortage, the development and implementation of a marketing and communication campaign to promote teaching as a profession generally so that more people from more diverse areas take it up, including young men—any men, but I am particularly talking about graduates—and the development of a targeted scholarship program for tertiary teaching courses aimed at school students, males currently enrolled in another area of tertiary study and males already possessing an undergraduate degree in an area other than teaching. These strategies are for three years and will be evaluated and updated to take account of future needs.

Mr RODGERS: Page 1-15 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements discusses initiatives being implemented by the government in response to the recommendations of the Cape York Justice Study. I believe one of these initiatives is the creation of Western Cape College. Would you tell the committee about the college and also inform us of the anticipated benefits to the students involved in the amalgamation of the four school communities?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The Western Cape College has indeed been formed by bringing together the schools in four separate Cape York communities—that is, the schools at Weipa, Napranum, Aurukun and Mapoon. This initiative is very much a result of the government's commitment to the establishment of stronger partnerships with both communities and business and arose out of much of the work done in the Partners for Success program. The government's commitment to increasing student retention rates statewide and particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is also part of the motivation behind this college.

Western Cape College in my view is an excellent example of the success of stronger community partnerships. As a result of the Wik coexistence agreement, which was developed between the traditional owners of the Wik country—most of whom live in those communities—the Queensland government and local industry and Western Cape College, Comalco has made a commitment to increase significantly the number of indigenous people from those local communities in its work force over the next couple of years and, in doing so, has given a guarantee to employ all Wik students who achieve a year 10 certificate or better. This initiative gives these students a real goal and a real future. The challenge for us is to work with Comalco and other employers in town to ensure that as many young people as possible from those local communities are able to access what I think is a very important initiative from Comalco.

Importantly, when the college was brought together Aurukun, one of the campuses, was trialling the New Basics program. As a result of bringing the college together, all of the campuses are now using the New Basics curriculum. Obviously, if you are going to bring it together it has to have some consistency across the different campuses. Anecdotal feedback to date indicates that the implementation of the trial has already impacted on issues of behaviour management and absenteeism. The college has also set itself ambitious retention rate targets. At the Weipa campus year 11 enrolments have already increased from an average of 24 to 36 this year, and

14 of the students are indigenous. In addition, the college has negotiated eight traineeships and three school-based apprenticeships. It is now investigating ways of increasing student accommodation in Weipa to allow access to the high school for students from Aurukun and Mapoon. It is no mean feat creating a new school out of four campuses at the best of times, but when those campuses are thousands of kilometres apart it has its own special challenges. They are doing a great job up there in a very exciting project.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, people close to the QSA do not know who is on the board of governance. Could you tell us who is on the board of governance?

Ms BLIGH: I will get you the list. It was gazetted. It was subject to a media release. The media release has been on the web site for at least two weeks. I will get you the list. Do you want to go on to the next question? I do not have the list in front of me.

Mr LINGARD: I thought you would have known who is on the board of governance of the QSA.

Ms BLIGH: There are about 26 members. I do not expect that you would—

Mr LINGARD: You have already spoken about Professor Lingard, and we know about that.

Ms BLIGH: He is the chair of the board.

Mr LINGARD: That name has been bandied around, but I would have thought someone would have known who is on the board of governance.

Ms BLIGH: As I said, it is a very big board. I think it has about 20 members. I do not know the names off the top of my head, but I will provide them to you as soon as someone can get me the list.

The CHAIR: Do you want to put that on notice as well?

Mr LINGARD: No, I do not want to put it on notice. Someone surely will come back with the board of governance.

Ms BLIGH: Okay. We will wait.

Mr LINGARD: Can I ask why you do not amalgamate both the New Basics curriculum group and the present QSA? At present it is obviously double-dipping to have two boards running a curriculum program for Queensland.

Ms BLIGH: I think that your question indicates your complete ignorance of what is happening with the New Basics trial. It is not a curriculum for Queensland. It is a trial in 59 trial sites in the state education system. The Queensland Studies Authority and the authorities that were its predecessors had legislative responsibility to develop curriculum for use across all school sectors, both the non-government sector and the state school sector. The trial is being conducted out of Education Queensland in a very small group of state schools. When that trial is evaluated decisions about its future will be made.

Mr LINGARD: I am very much aware of the New Basics program, and I think I was congratulated at the last estimates for supporting it.

Ms BLIGH: You were, and I am very pleased that you support it.

Mr LINGARD: I know exactly what it is all about, but it is a new curriculum which is being developed within the schools. It is a curriculum.

Ms BLIGH: That is right.

Mr LINGARD: You just told me it was not a curriculum.

Ms BLIGH: No, I said it was being used in a very small group of state schools. It is not a curriculum for Queensland—for all of the schools in this state—and certainly not across the other sector of schooling, which is the non-government sector.

Mr LINGARD: Obviously to an outsider it would seem as though there are two groups developing curriculum. I am just saying that surely that is double-dipping. Let us go back to the career change program. If a person gets \$50,000 to develop a new career and if we find out that he does not do that career, how are you going to get a remittal of that \$50,000?

Ms BLIGH: I have explained this several times. The career change program packages attracted certain tax concessions on the basis that the funds were used for a career change purpose. It is now a matter between the individuals and the Australian Taxation Office. The officers of the Department of Education are not taxation officers and will not be pursuing those

people. It is self-evident that if people have chosen to take a package then they have changed their career from being a state school teacher in Queensland to something else, and that was the motivation of the government.

Mr LINGARD: You and I know from paying taxes that if they cannot prove that to the Taxation Office they will be taxed extra, but there will be no return of the \$50,000. So in other words you are going to let a person run away with \$50,000.

Ms BLIGH: I am not going to divert any resources from the Education portfolio to pursue people over the next however long they live and find out what they have done with the funds. That was not the purpose of the program. The purpose of the program was to provide an incentive to those people who wanted to exit the profession of being a state school teacher. It is a cost-effective, self-funding program that allows us to renew our work force. It is not a program that will see the government set up a new unit in the Department of Education to pursue people.

Mr LINGARD: So you do not mind if a person takes the \$50,000, pays tax on the \$50,000 and runs with the rest?

The CHAIR: The minister has already answered that question.

Ms BLIGH: I think I have answered this question over and over. I am satisfied that the program has been successful in achieving the aims that the government had for it.

Mr LINGARD: If it is that we come back with at least 200 workplace stress claims in the Education Department, does the director-general lose his performance based bonus?

Ms BLIGH: I think he has already lost it. Hasn't the Premier already chopped them?

Mr VARGHESE: That is for new contracts.

Ms BLIGH: It is for new contracts; that is all right. The matter of the performance bonus of CEOs is a matter between the Premier and the CEO, as you well know, because the individual CEO contracts are with the Premier. Having said that, the number of stress claims is an ongoing concern to the agency. I expect the CEO, along with other senior officers who have responsibility in this area, to be making ongoing and serious progress in managing these claims and reducing their incidence. I am satisfied that the department is doing that.

Mr LINGARD: The Queensland Teachers Union states that despite the Building Better Schools program and the Secondary Schools Renewal Program capital funding levels in the last few state budgets have remained fairly stable. That is their statement. Previously it was accepted that state finances were used to build new public schools. The federal government capital grant was used to provide extra facilities in existing public schools. Why have you started using the federal government capital grant to fund the total construction of a new high school?

Ms BLIGH: First of all, I am very pleased to see you becoming a unionist. The National Party will be pleased to see you here advocating the views of the Queensland Teachers Union. I utterly refute any suggestion that the capital spending in schools has remained stagnant. As you already identified, the capital spending has in fact been increased significantly by programs such as Building Better Schools, Secondary Schools Renewal and others. You can see a real difference out there in schools.

In relation to the relationship between the state and Commonwealth funding of the Capital Works Program—and I am very interested to hear you asking this question—the way that it happens is that the Commonwealth puts in the money. Then a process is undertaken whereby projects are nominally allocated. Once it is all in the bucket it is all out there spent on schools, et cetera. But so that the Commonwealth gets reasonable credit for the money that it puts into capital works, projects are nominally allocated against the federal dollars. Obviously there is generally some reasonable negotiation about that. In fact, in some other states—with the predecessor to the current Education Minister—there was a complaint that all they ever got to open were toilet blocks. There has been some negotiation between the state and Commonwealth about what are reasonable facilities to allocate. In fact, the Commonwealth said that given the size of its investment it thought it was reasonable that at least one new school should be allocated against the Commonwealth. So that is why it is there. Given the usual argy-bargy between different levels of government and different political parties, I think that this process is actually very reasonable. It is managed very sensibly. The Commonwealth put the view to the state last year, I think it was, that given the size of its investment it was not reasonable that it had only very minor capital works associated with its dollars and it wanted to see larger projects, including the possibility of a new school.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to page 1-56. Certainly, as you say, there is a non-state school grant of \$753 million coming through from the federal government. There is \$44.312 million to the state for state schools. Is it the policy still that you nominate which building projects you want as part of that \$44.3 million to the Commonwealth government?

Ms BLIGH: You are on page 1-56 and you are talking about the -

Mr LINGARD: Those figures are not relevant. I have said the figures. Of the \$44.3 million, does your department still say, 'This is what we want against that \$44.3 million.'?

Ms BLIGH: Yes, the state government determines the Capital Works Program and then, in negotiation with the Commonwealth, allocates projects that are on the Capital Works Program—this is a state program and this is Commonwealth dollars—and sometimes it is fifty-fifty. The protocol has been that where the Commonwealth is notionally allocated 50 per cent or more of a particular program then the federal minister is entitled to open the facility. Where the state contributes 50 per cent or more the state minister opens the facility. I am sure that your colleague the member for Robina would indicate that is a protocol of long standing under both sides of politics. It is not an easy process to manage, but it is managed by negotiation. As I alluded to earlier, I think there have been some problems in other states, but while I have been minister it has been a relatively easy process.

Mr LINGARD: There have certainly been some accepted guidelines. One of the exceptions is that not a massive amount of money for one particular project will be spent against that \$44.3 million. Your department nominated \$14.1 million for the total Flagstone State High School.

Ms BLIGH: Are you suggesting that when the Commonwealth asked for that to happen as part of a negotiated process I should have knocked it back?

Mr LINGARD: I am saying that I do not believe that a school of \$14.1 million—the total cost—should be allocated against that \$44.3 million.

Ms BLIGH: I am very happy to put that point of view to the federal minister.

Mr LINGARD: Did you know that \$14.1 million was initially approved by the federal government for Flagstone State High School?

Ms BLIGH: It would not have—the Commonwealth does not approve funds for particular projects. I have tried to explain the process.

Mr LINGARD: The Commonwealth government does approve what money you want spent against the \$44.3 million; because you have indicated your projects for that \$44.3 million, and one of those projects was \$14.1 million for Flagstone State High School.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, and the \$14.1 million is actually determined as a result of the work of officers of the Department of Education, Q-Build and Project Services who scope the site, look at the enrolments, work up the costs and then determine the expected cost of the project. Whether it is a \$14.1 million school at Flagstone or a toilet block at Biloela, every single project has to be costed. An estimated cost is then put as part of the Capital Works Program. Unfortunately, lots of very worthwhile projects do not make it to the Capital Works Program because you have to make some pretty tough decisions. Once you have finalised the program there is then a process by which projects are notionally attributed to Commonwealth funds.

Mr LINGARD: I saw that. But it was from your suggestions. Let me tell you what happened.

The CHAIR: I ask the honourable member not to make a speech but to ask a question.

Mr LINGARD: It will be a question. The sum of \$14.1 million was allocated by the Commonwealth government against the \$44.3 million. It was approved as expenditure.

Ms BLIGH: By whom?

Mr LINGARD: The Commonwealth government.

Ms BLIGH: I do not know where you have got this information from, but it is just simply wrong. The Commonwealth does not approve expenditure on capital works in any state budgets. There is a longstanding process by which the projects are costed and then they are by negotiation allocated notionally against the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth does not employ people to go out and do this. It would be a duplication and a nonsense for them to do so.

Mr LINGARD: We are playing with words, because there is no doubt that the Commonwealth allocates \$44.3 million in this particular budget for capital grants.

The CHAIR: I remind the member that he is not asking a question but making a statement.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, it puts the money in. I take it that the member is disturbed that the Commonwealth is funding the Flagstone High School. I am happy to take it on board, and I will convey your concerns to the federal minister if you have a concern.

Mr LINGARD: Obviously it has decided not to fund the Flagstone State High School because there has been collaboration about the words 'community college'.

Ms BLIGH: God forbid!

The CHAIR: I think the minister has already answered that question. We will move on to the next question.

Ms BLIGH: My understanding is that the Commonwealth has actually signed off on the capital works program projects. I have certainly signed off on what has been sent to the Commonwealth. I can find out whether the Commonwealth has in fact agreed to that.

Mr LINGARD: What happens if the Commonwealth has not agreed to it?

Ms BLIGH: We come back for more negotiations, on that or any other project. There is usually a process of, 'No, we want more of this and less of that.' That is in fact how, as I alluded to earlier, a whole school was allocated to Commonwealth expenditure. The Commonwealth was concerned that there were too many small projects allocated against it and it wanted to see some bigger projects, given the size of its investment, which I did not think was an unreasonable point.

Mr LINGARD: Would you be concerned if you found out that the Commonwealth has not agreed to \$14.1 million?

Ms BLIGH: The money is in the budget. The money is there. It has given me the money. I have the \$44 million.

Mr LINGARD: Of course you have the \$44 million—to do projects that you want to do in Queensland.

Ms BLIGH: That is right.

Mr LINGARD: That is right. And you wanted to do Flagstone High School for \$14.1 million.

Ms BLIGH: And if the Commonwealth says it does not want Flagstone allocated against it, we will find it \$14.1 million worth of other projects that we will notionally allocate to it. It will not change the capital works program.

Mr LINGARD: Why has it not agreed to \$14.1 million?

Ms BLIGH: I am not sure that it has not.

Mr WHITTAKER: We are currently in negotiation with the Commonwealth about this budget and the allocation of those projects. As I recall it, we put a proposal to the Commonwealth and we are waiting for its response. In years gone by we have negotiated a change of our first proposal. That is not without precedent.

Ms BLIGH: I will just clarify that I do not send off and say, 'Will you fund Flagstone?' I send off a huge document that says, 'Here are all of the proposals.' I have approved the document to be sent to the Commonwealth. It will assess it. I would not be at all distressed if the Commonwealth came back and said it wanted to see a different balance for its funds. That would be accommodated. That is what happened last year. I would be very surprised if it does not happen this year. It may or may not involve Flagstone. This is Commonwealth funds. It is entitled to discuss with the state—

Mr LINGARD: Will you be concerned if the Commonwealth comes back and tells you that you should not have been using the words 'community college' as blatantly as you have been for a project to try to get \$14.1 million worth of federal government money?

Ms BLIGH: Kevin, I have no idea what you are talking about.

Mr LINGARD: I am telling you. I am asking whether you will be concerned.

Ms BLIGH: I have got the money. The money is here. We have the money. We had the money before we talked about the college.

Mr LINGARD: Let us go to the initial part, where you took \$2.18 million last year from the Commonwealth to build a school which was a school of demountables which you are now removing. Are you concerned that you have wasted \$2.18 million?

Ms BLIGH: Absolutely not. I would suggest to you that all of the students who are currently doing some great work in those classrooms would not think it is a waste of money, and nor would their parents. If you have not been to the school I suggest you do so. It has state-of-the-art

equipment and some of the best resources available to students that I have seen in any of our high schools. It has offered great opportunities to those young people and I take my hat off to the school staff, who have put in place a high school facility they can be very proud of. Those facilities will of course be used in other schools when they are replaced by permanent buildings, so there is no waste of money. Any school facility that is there with students in it, where students are learning, in my view represents money well invested.

Mr LINGARD: I have been to the school many times. I know that you have been there, too. When you went there did you see any shops or any social infrastructure around the school?

Ms BLIGH: Not to my recollection.

Mr LINGARD: Did you see a bridge suspended across the railway line which was supposed to go to the suburb where the high school was originally supposed to be built?

The CHAIR: I have to ask the member for Beaudesert how this line of questioning is relevant to the minister.

Ms BLIGH: I do not remember whether I saw a bridge. I was too focused on what was happening in the classrooms. Kevin, you have to get over this. You have to put Flagstone behind you. Move on.

Mr LINGARD: I am concerned that a high school is built when in 1991-92 the developers showed your department a massive city of infrastructure and shops. Anyone who goes to that school now knows full well that there is not a shop, not a service station—not one piece of social infrastructure around that high school. Are you concerned?

The CHAIR: The minister has already answered that question. I do not see that it is relevant to the minister's portfolio.

Ms BLIGH: I understand the member's disappointment that this school is not in his electorate. The decision was made prior to my coming into the ministry. It has been confirmed subsequently. The school is now a reality. I thought when I noticed your crowing about the funds in 'Kev's Column' that at last we might have seen you embrace what is a wonderful project in your part of the world. I would encourage you to, as I said, put it behind you. This is a great high school.

Mr LINGARD: The Queensland Teachers Union states in its recent budget documents that there are many preschools in Queensland that are unable to offer enrolment to all students who have presented themselves. As almost all parents accept the need for some form of preschool—you have read a report today stating exactly the same thing—why have you not been able to resolve this problem of students not having a preschool to go to before launching into a full full-time trial of preschools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Obviously in the deliberations around an improvement in early childhood education arising out of 2010 the option of just providing more half-time preschools was one the government had a look at. Given that the material and the research we had indicates there is a significant drift from state preschool and that much of that drift is explained by the fact that it is a half-time and not a full-time program, it was our view that if we were going to make significant investment we should get it right and we should do it in a way that meets international best practice as well as brings Queensland up to the standard that is available in every other state in Australia. Certainly that was an option. We believe that the one we currently have put before the Queensland people is a much better one.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Mr RODGERS: Minister, I refer to page 1-3 of the MPS and note that on 1 July a new statutory authority, the Queensland Studies Authority, commenced operation. The authority took the place of three former authorities—the Queensland School Curriculum Council, the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies and the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority. Can you please inform the committee how the transition process is going? Can you also inform us how the changes affect students who are currently in their senior year?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am pleased to have the chance to set the record straight. There seems to be a view in the mind of the member for Beaudesert that this has been a confused and difficult process. I have to say, that view exists only in the mind of the member for Beaudesert. If it does exist in the mind of anybody down at that authority, then it is very regrettable that they share a similar brainwave.

This has been a very carefully worked through transition. I am very pleased to have the chance to put on record the hard work that has been done by the transition team—particularly by Bob McHugh, who headed that team, but also by the other two directors, Jim Tunstall and Bernadette Roberts. This was not an easy time for them or the authorities they represented. They came together and they have done an incredible amount of work, as have other officers of Education Queensland.

The chair of the new authority, the director and members were all appointed prior to the authority coming into being on 1 July. The new board will meet for the first time on 24 July. The transition process actually commenced last year and it is continuing. There has been nothing secretive about the process. As would be expected of any transition team, they have had a very effective consultation and information process. Transition news has been provided to members of staff every fortnight since October last year. There has also been a web site, information sheets, transition media releases, transition workshops and a transition independent counsellor to assist with the whole transition process.

The QPSU and the QTU were involved in the process. They have all agreed, as I outlined earlier, to the human resource transition principles, which were all distributed to staff and unions in March 2002. Four of the senior positions of SO1 and above have been filled and five are in the panel process. Work continues to be done by the senior officers who move across from the previous three authorities until final appointments are made. For those positions which are AO8 and below, 98 staff from the previous three authorities have been reassigned or transferred at level, and the process is ongoing for other new positions.

It is inevitable that some adjustment is needed during a transition process of this size. That is why there is an agreed transition plan. As I have outlined, it is on target and on time. I reaffirm here a commitment I made to staff as part of this process from the outset; that is, there will be no job losses as a result of this amalgamation. All pre-existing functions of the former authorities are continuing and the QSA is also resourced by several policy and information papers prepared by joint working parties during the process.

The CHAIR: Page 1-21 of the MPS mentions investment strategies to encourage the creation of high-quality teaching and learning practices. Please inform the committee about what support the government is offering teachers in this regard.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am sure that she would agree, along with other members, that teachers are central to our children's education and the longitudinal study that was undertaken for Education Queensland, which was finalised last year, reaffirmed that. I am pleased to tell the committee that there was a total of \$27,569,802 allocated to teacher learning and development for professional development in this budget. I stress that that figure does not include the funds that are invested in teacher relief to ensure that teachers can be released from the classroom to undertake important professional development activities.

In addition to that base funding for professional development for teachers across a range of professional activities, this year's budget will also see an extra \$5 million allocated recurrently for professional development in the use of information and communication technology as learning tools in our classrooms. It is all very well having equipment in place, but the really important ingredient is having teachers who can use that equipment in the interests not only of their students but also for their own personal learning as well. The funds will be a component of the first and second instalments of the grants to schools in October this year and February next year. Funding will be used for upskilling teachers in ICT for use as part of teaching practice as part of the learning agreement that will be negotiated at a school level between principals and staff. ICT innovators who win a teacher award will get up to \$5,000 to spend on professional development activities and there will be an extra \$2 million for learning and development centres in learning technology for practical ICT learning.

There is also an additional \$2 million for professional development in the assessment and reporting framework. This will allow 25 per cent of teachers in years 1 to 10 to be involved in professional development workshops on assessment and reporting during terms three and four this year and the aim is for 100 per cent of teachers to attend assessment workshops within the next two years.

The CHAIR: You mention there innovative schools and programs and professional development, which would lead to teacher excellence. How does the department reward teacher excellence?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is well overdue, I think, for those teachers who put in the extra yards and who go out of their way to see educational excellence in their classrooms to be rewarded in ways that are meaningful. To that end, I am pleased to confirm to the committee that two new scholarship programs have recently been announced. Both of these scholarship programs will provide for five scholarships to reward teachers at the forefront of their field of expertise. The first is the Premier's Smart State teacher excellence scholarships, which will recognise leaders in the field of teachers who inspire both students and peers towards lifelong learning. In addition to paid leave, the Premier's Smart State Teacher Excellence Scholarships will provide sponsorship worth \$25,000 to cover costs such as tuition, travel and accommodation for the equivalent of a study sabbatical. These scholarships will reward dedicated teachers who have worked for a significant period in the state school system and enable them to learn new skills and knowledge through further study and, obviously, bring that back to our classrooms. Nominees for the Premier's Teacher Excellence Scholarships will have at least 10 years of classroom experience, be nominated by their teaching peers and return to teaching in the state system following their time away. The recipients of the five Premier's Smart State Teacher Excellence Scholarships will each be given up to three months off on full pay to undertake a professional development activity in an area related to their field of teaching expertise. The first recipients will be announced on World Teachers Day in October.

The second new scholarship will be in the field of science teaching and is called the Westfield Premier's Educational Scholarship. These are sponsored by Westfield and Ginger Max and will provide five schoolteachers of science with a \$24,000 scholarship to undertake further study overseas in the field of science. The program will initially run for five years. The first recipients of these scholarships will be announced at the Science State-Smart State conference, which is also in October this year. Information and nomination material for the two new awards will be available in schools. The scholarships will ensure that our teachers get the recognition that they deserve. This is not just an award; it is an investment in ongoing learning and professional development opportunities for teachers in a way that has not been offered before.

I am also pleased to outline to the committee a retired teachers mentoring program, which has been put in place to utilise the wisdom of the work force. As an increasingly ageing work force retires, we do not want to see those excellent teachers just take their skills and walk out of the system without any opportunity to gather some of that back for our beginning teachers. The program will use recently retired teachers to provide professional support for pre-service, beginning and establishing teachers, including those in rural and remote areas. Retired teachers will be able—obviously, it will be optional—to undertake a professional learning program prior to starting the mentoring. EQ is now working in partnership with the University of Queensland and JCU to develop materials for the program. Mentors will be identified and trained during term three, a pilot undertaken and evaluated in term four, and it will start proper in term one 2003.

The CHAIR: I am already going through in my head some of the excellent teachers in my electorate who I can—

Ms BLIGH: Yes, they can be nominated by anybody.

The CHAIR: I already think that they could be nominated for several of those programs.

Ms MALE: I know that you are committed to providing Queensland teachers with the opportunity to increase their skills through programs of professional development. However, as we all know, teachers are supported in the classroom by a number of teacher aides. What is Education Queensland doing to provide the opportunity for upskilling these important people who are an essential part of the Education Queensland work force?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question and the opportunity to recognise the excellent work that our teacher aides do. We have approximately 6,700 teacher aides working in the Department of Education. A new classification structure for teacher aides has been developed in consultation between Education Queensland and the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, which represents these employees.

The new structure increased the number of classifications of employment for teacher aides from—it used to be that you were just a teacher aide—TA 002. There are now three classifications by an addition of TA 003 and TA 004. This now, in effect, offers a career path for teacher aides for the first time. The criteria for moving from the 002 to the 003 position is based on competency and experience. To make the progression, people must have completed 12 months at the 002 level 4 level; they must possess an AQF certificate level 3 qualification or higher, or a successful assessment against the certificate 3 in educational support; they must possess a senior first aid

certificate; and in addition to the certificate 3 in education support, the qualifications of certificate 4 and diploma in education support have now been developed. The certificate 3 in education support was accredited in January this year and the remaining qualifications will be accredited in the second half of this year.

Teacher aides who meet the second and third criteria by the end of second term 2003 are eligible for back payment to either 1 April 2001 or to the date at which they meet the first criteria. Seventy workshops are being held around the state to assist teacher aides to assemble their portfolios of evidence for assessment against that criteria. The first was held in Brisbane yesterday. To June this year there have been 314 teacher aides who have been able to move from the 002 level to the 003 level. \$3 million per annum has been allocated to cover the wages component of the new reclassification structure. In my view, it is overdue that these people's work is rewarded and that they are encouraged to aspire to a career in our system.

Ms MALE: Page 1-39 of the MPS mentions targeted intervention for students with special needs and particularly students with a disability. Would you please inform the committee what steps are being taken to offer equality of service to students with special needs?

Ms BLIGH: A number of strategies are being undertaken to ensure the equality of service provision for students with disabilities in our schools. In this year's budget I announced \$60 million in support for students with disabilities over the next four years. It will see an increase of \$5.5 million this year and that will increase to \$11 million in 2003-04, \$16 million in 2004-05 and \$22 million in 2005-06. The remainder of the \$60 million will be allocated to the non-government sector as part of the basket nexus funding agreement.

The money over the next four years in the government sector will be spent on teachers, teacher aides and for the implementation of the seven point plan. The government's seven point plan was announced in February this year and is designed to improve educational services to students with disabilities to ensure that they receive the highest-quality education possible. Included in the plan was, firstly, the formation of a ministerial task force to assist the department in the development of an action plan. That is now on track. There was a forum on inclusive education that brought many, many interested stakeholders from around the state together to develop a common understanding of inclusive education and to begin to develop a vision for the future of inclusive education in our schools. A staff college for inclusive education was established in April this year, with Dr Suzanne Carrington recently announced as the principal of the college. Since beginning, the college has undertaken a number of activities. Firstly, it established the Bundaberg inclusive education project, which involves four trial schools in Bundaberg. It will also build on the outcomes of the forum that I mentioned earlier and consider specific actions, practices and opportunities for networking between schools on the development of inclusive education.

The college has also formed a partnership with the Autism Association of Queensland and will trial job shadowing for Education Queensland teachers. In partnership with the Autism Association, Education Queensland is developing a three-day workshop. The college has also invited two representatives of each tertiary institution in Queensland to meet and discuss pre-service and in-service education for teachers in the area of students with disabilities and inclusive education.

The seven-point plan also includes the development of a five-year facilities plan to ensure that Queensland has the highest quality facilities for students with disabilities no matter where they are attending school. The work will be undertaken this year to develop that five-year plan and its implementation will begin in the 2003-04 year. Two hundred additional teachers and 6,000 additional teacher aide hours per week have been employed to provide assistance to students with disabilities.

The Queensland Studies Authority is undertaking a trial of a certificate in post-compulsory school education that was begun by the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies to further ensure that students with disabilities receive recognition of their learning experiences when they complete school.

Ms JARRATT: I note that you earlier referred to research that has shown that teachers have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of students. Page 1-21 of the MPS talks about building the capability of the work force to meet the changing needs of the school communities. Can you please tell the committee how the pilot program of professional standards for teachers will strengthen this state's teaching work force and contribute to improving student outcomes?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. As a former teacher, I am sure she would agree with me that Queensland has some of the best teachers in Australia.

Ms JARRATT: Absolutely!

Ms BLIGH: Our teachers are committed and dedicated to providing the best quality education to our students. I have to say that you could not go much further for evidence of that than the number of teachers who are taking part in a six-month pilot of the professional standards for teachers. Queensland is the only state to pilot professional standards and I am delighted to say that the program was oversubscribed. It was initially proposed that the pilot program would see 150 teachers trial the new standards. Two hundred and sixty-three teachers actually submitted expressions of interest and 230 accepted an invitation to participate. That sort of enthusiasm, I think, is testament to the willingness of teachers to see their profession enhanced.

The participants include graduates, senior teachers, supply and overseas-trained teachers from primary, secondary and special schools and distance education. The pilot was open to Education Queensland staff, but interest has also been shown by some independent and interstate schools. It is supported by both Education Queensland and the Queensland Teachers Union, and it emerged as a key recommendation from a joint task force that was established following the enterprise bargaining process.

The professional standards for teachers describe what knowledge, skills and abilities teachers should possess. The standards recognise the complex and varied nature of teachers' work. They are not a performance management tool. They provide a framework for teachers to set goals to strengthen and enhance their teaching skills. The immersion pilot workshop for teachers commenced at the end of April and concluded at the end of May. Early positive comments include comments such as 'Being involved has renewed my enthusiasm for teaching' and 'The pilot immersion workshop was absolutely reinvigorating'.

The pilot will help refine standards which will be voluntary. It is all about building the capacity of the work force and making sure that we have the best teachers we can at the front of our classrooms teaching our children. The pilot finishes in late October. The University of Queensland, School of Education, secured the tender to evaluate the pilot and the evaluation report is due late this year.

The CHAIR: Order! The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I suggest that we have a short break now and resume at 6 o'clock for non-government questions.

Sitting suspended from 5.45 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.

The CHAIR: Order! Let us recommence. I call the member for Robina.

Ms BLIGH: If it is okay, I have got some answers to questions that were taken on notice before, which I might take now. We will not take it off your time, though.

There was a question on the relative budget expenditures on the New Basics versus the QSCC in the same period of time. From 1999 till 2002, expenditure on the New Basics branch was \$6.363 million. Over the same period of time, the funding to the QSCC was \$22.911 million.

In relation to the career change program, you asked how many teachers had dropped a workers compensation claim as a result of receiving a grant. From the data that is available from the districts, there was only one teacher who withdrew a workers compensation claim as a result of accepting the career change program.

Were all the participants in the scheme classroom teachers? I just want to clarify my answer. There were, as part of the group that accepted the package, 21 classified teachers who participated. By that I mean teachers who were in positions such as principals, deputy principals and heads of departments. So they were working in schools but not necessarily as classroom teachers.

In relation to the part-time question asked in terms of replacement, there were three replacement mechanisms. In some cases, teachers who left were part-time due to illness or other working arrangements. The balance of their fraction was being undertaken by a contract teacher. Their departure enabled the position to be filled by a permanent full-time teaching graduate. In other cases, districts were able to combine part-time positions in nearby schools and filled the full-time teaching position with a full-time graduate. In other cases, a part-time graduate replaced a part-time departee. I cannot provide anything more detailed in terms of how many of those there were, but I think that satisfies the member's concern in that regard. I have a list of the members of the board of the Queensland Studies Authority which I will table and provide to the member.

Mr QUINN: I refer to the minister's answer to one of my questions on notice about central office staffing levels. The table that the minister did provide breaks down the central office into business units. Under the heading 'Audit Operations Directorate' there is a quite substantial increase in staffing levels. Why has that level been increased quite dramatically?

Ms BLIGH: My understanding of the increase in that category was that staff who were previously counted against district office positions are now being counted against head office positions.

Mr VARGHESE: As part of streamlining and strengthening the audit function, they came under the direct control of the Director of the Internal Audit, which is of course a good governance measure.

Mr QUINN: On the same table under 'Office of Resource Services' there is a quite dramatic decrease in the staffing levels. Will the minister explain that?

Ms BLIGH: With the development of the corporate service units, these staff in this financial year will go into the corporate service units being placed at regional level.

Mr QUINN: One of the other questions I asked concerned the staffing levels in the district offices and the corporate support services. The minister has given the district office staffing levels but there is nothing for the corporate service units?

Ms BLIGH: My understanding is that the corporate service units were provided to the member in that question on notice. We will find the right document for the member. Because of the way in which the member asked the questions we did provide some of the information in one and in the other, but it is all there. They are the budgeted positions and the current ones as at 1 July 2002.

Mr QUINN: Thank you. What is the full-time staffing level of the communications and marketing unit now? How does it compare with last year's?

Ms BLIGH: There were 34.4 positions this year compared with 34 positions last year.

Mr QUINN: What is its overall budget this year and what was the overall budget last year?

Mr VARGHESE: The overall budget has increased obviously by that 0.4.

Ms BLIGH: We will come back to the member with that figure.

Mr QUINN: What guidelines govern the use of public servants from this unit producing press releases for the minister and government backbenchers?

Ms BLIGH: I have put in place with the director-general a set of protocols that clearly articulate the requirements of this unit in relation to preparing media for me as minister. Those protocols make it clear that the role of that unit is to provide media associated with my functions as minister and to provide draft media releases for my ministerial office. My ministerial office will then work on those draft media releases.

Mr QUINN: What about government backbenchers?

Ms BLIGH: It is the same as I said in a question on notice. Where a government backbencher represents me in my ministerial duties, in my view it is reasonable for that to be prepared on behalf of that person.

Mr QUINN: What about where a government backbencher simply makes an award at a school?

Ms BLIGH: It would depend on the nature of the function. The one that the member brought to my attention concerned volunteers. If that is the one the member is referring to, they were representing me at the time because they were ministerial awards. It would depend on the nature of the award. If they had been invited by the local school for something, I would not think it totally inappropriate.

Mr QUINN: When did this protocol come into place?

Ms BLIGH: Not long after I became minister.

Mr QUINN: Page 1-61 of the MPS shows a quite substantial decrease in the amount of money allocated for new schools this financial year. Is the minister predicting a slowdown in the enrolment growth and where the growth will occur?

Ms BLIGH: The member is right. At this stage we do not have a significant program of new schools. We are still completing the final phases of a very significant outlay in new schools, including one in the member's own electorate, such as Varsity, so the final stages of those

schools are coming on board. My understanding is that we anticipate that the growth will be accommodated in additional facilities in existing schools. If we look at where the growth is occurring in the corridors between here and the Gold Coast and here and Noosa, a number of the major new schools in the last two years were built in that corridor. While those schools and the schools around them will experience growth, as well as ones such as Upper Coomera, Bonogin and Reedy Creek, we anticipate that the growth will fall in those areas. As the member knows, it is not an entirely predictable business.

Mr QUINN: You mentioned Varsity College. The junior school has been well attended by students from the surrounding area. In many respects, I think it is fast reaching capacity. What plans does the government have to acquire additional land in that vicinity to provide future relief for Varsity College, particularly the junior school?

Ms BLIGH: At this stage, I am not aware of any plans to purchase more land, but it will be the same as for the development of new facilities and new schools in all areas of Queensland in that it is something we monitor on a regular basis. Enrolment growth is predicted in advance. If it looks like a school will need enrolment management plans put in place, enrolment management would be considered. If there was clearly going to be growth over and above the capacity of the school and enrolment management in relation to the schools in the near vicinity, obviously we would have to consider additional facilities.

Mr QUINN: What advice do you have from the Gold Coast south district office in terms of the need for a new school in that area?

Ms BLIGH: In the Varsity area?

Mr QUINN: Say from Varsity over the highway to West Burleigh—that sort of area?

Ms BLIGH: Is that around Bonogin-Reedy Creek?

Mr QUINN: No, it is more south of there.

Ms BLIGH: I have not personally received any advice at this stage about that area, but I am happy to provide a departmental officer who could assist.

Mr MOULD: I am pleased to provide advice. We have had a number of discussions with Gold Coast south together with Delfin, the developer at Varsity, about what needs to occur at Varsity. You are right; the enrolments have been quite extraordinary. We have commenced negotiations with the developer about any future locations for schools, whether they be neighbouring the existing school or in another part of the Varsity development. Those initial discussions have commenced. As the minister said, we will make determinations about the profile of that enrolment as the development continues in the area and then make a final decision.

Mr QUINN: I refer to the output statement for secondary education on page 1-35 of the MPS. Halfway down the page under the term 'Quality' there is a measurement of how many Queenslanders aged 15 to 19 go on to full-time employment or training or part-time work or education and training. Note 6, beside the estimated and the actuals, provides for a variation of plus or minus 10 per cent in terms of its accuracy. That would seem to me to be a rather wide variation and not a very reliable figure to work upon. How does the government intend to assess whether its Learn and Earn policy is in fact successful if this is the only measure you have?

Ms BLIGH: It is true to say that this is not an entirely reliable measure, but we are depending on the work of the Australian Bureau of Statistics in that regard. If you look further at note No. 6, it will indicate that even with consideration of the difference an analysis of the two years will indicate that no change is discernible. It does show you trends, but it will not show you with any high degree of accuracy what is happening in any given year. The government is still working through its proposals in relation to Learn and Earn and what we will be doing with secondary schooling. Obviously, if you look at the document, part of what we are looking at is a much better system of coordination of where young people are. We would hope that would give us a much better picture of the success or otherwise of any initiatives that the government ultimately puts in place.

At the moment, if a young person leaves school they may go into a TAFE, so you have to find whether or not they have enrolled in a TAFE and then you have to find through the TAFE data whether they have completed the TAFE course or gone somewhere else. They might get a job for a while and go back to their school or another school. I do not know that you can entirely eliminate some inaccuracies given the nature of human behaviour in that regard, but one of the proposals in the green paper is the school as a coordination point. So while a young person might be enrolled with the school, they might not be at the school. Even if they do go off to TAFE or work experience, their records would still be with the school. I think that would give us some

improvements in this, but it will be by no means a guarantee of accuracy. I have got a long explanation from the ABS about why its data is not reliable, but I am not sure that it would help you. The footnote is very helpful. The footnote states that imprecision is a characteristic of almost all data, which seems to me to cover a multitude of sins.

Mr QUINN: Plus or minus 10 per cent. Given that the government has a program, supported by everyone, of developing biotechnology, what programs does Education Queensland have to promote biotechnology, particularly in secondary schools, and increase the level of teacher knowledge and skills in this area? If the government is going to go down this track, it would seem that schools are going to play an increasingly important role. What initiatives are there to raise the level of skills and knowledge in the teaching work force itself? That would obviously flow on to the students.

Ms BLIGH: I am pleased to see that the member shares our government's concerns about promoting biotechnology but also about ensuring that our teaching work force is at the forefront of science teaching. Firstly, these concerns about the teaching of science and the ability of teachers to maintain pace with this very rapidly changing field, given that it might be 10 or 15 years since their original degree and science is changing possibly more rapidly than any other field, was identified as a problem by the deans of science in a national report in early 2001, as a result of which the Council for Education Renewal, which reports to me and previously to the director-general, identified the need to significantly enhance and support the teaching of science in schools. To this end, the government has put in place an initiative this year called Science State—Smart State.

Obviously, when we talk about science in that context we are talking not just about biotechnology but about a range of developments in the science field. We do not claim to have all of the answers about how to better support teachers in keeping abreast of that field and therefore the Science State—Smart State initiative is currently working through a series of public discussion papers. The chief scientist from the Department of Primary Industries has recently developed a discussion paper on the teaching of science for consideration. All of this will result, after a number of public consultations, in a big science summit at the end of the year on the teaching of science. Out of that will come a plan of action that I am sure will include, given the level of interest from a number of industry partners, ideas about how we can better provide industry partnerships and use them to provide opportunities for our science teachers and heads of departments to significantly improve and keep abreast of those developments.

The other initiative that I think will go some way in this area is the election commitment for six—we made a commitment for six and delivered eight—centres of maths, science and technology. They were deliberately put in place in recognition of the need for us to improve our performance in that area. The centres for excellence are located in eight schools across Queensland. They have as one of their requirements in their service agreement, firstly, that they have to have links with local industry that is based around science and technology and, secondly, they have to have clear targets to increase the number of students who are studying science at high levels, and to provide opportunities for teachers of science, maths and technology to keep abreast of those changing fields. Biotechnology is obviously one part of all of that.

Mr QUINN: I refer again to page 1-35 and the heading 'Quality'. There are measures of the proportion of students enrolled in or taking particular subjects, but biotechnology or science is not one of them. You have got information technology, VET subjects and a few others. If this is a key area of the government's initiatives I would have thought there would be some measure of this in the statements on quality here.

Ms BLIGH: I am happy to take this on board in terms of the development of appropriate measures in next year's MPS. It is something that I am aware of and, for that reason, I have sought for it to be included as a target in the documents that I alluded to earlier this afternoon in terms of Destination 2010. I am going to get the exact wording of the target. A system-wide target has been established through that process and schools will be required to set their own targets to meet their own circumstances that will comply with that. Certainly, measuring this is something that is worth doing.

Mr QUINN: Again with regard to the capital statement on page 1-61, in relation to school renewal there was a fairly large amount of money brought forward, I suspect, from this year's budget to last year's budget. Why was that done? Was it simply demand? What other reason was there?

Ms BLIGH: It was simply to accelerate some of the projects. Once you actually get on site it is in many ways more cost effective to bring all of the project into one financial year so that you can manage the funds that are available as cost effectively as possible. So it was a bring forward from this financial year for projects that were approved and funded and would have been built in this year but we brought it forward to accelerate the project. I am happy to get some more detail on that if you want. I will refer you to Tom Mould.

Mr MOULD: One of the very significant parts of the bring forward was to do with secondary school renewal.

Ms BLIGH: It is specifically on the secondary school renewal bring forward.

Mr MOULD: Yes. There was an enormous bring forward of secondary school renewal because we had undertaken a process of community consultation with every community in the 63 schools across Queensland and that had of course ramped up expectations of some outstanding outcomes in these schools. The minister made a decision that instead of slowing down the process and living within the budget limits of particular years we should seek to progress those projects as quickly as possible so that school communities could enjoy the benefits of SSR. So it was a huge bring forward of almost \$50 million.

Mr QUINN: Thank you. I again refer to the same capital statement. The provisions in this financial year are significantly increased from last financial year and it is about unplanned emergent needs. We are putting more money into the unplanned area and reducing the amount of funds towards new schools. This is a statement about the planning employed by the department. Why are you going in this direction?

Ms BLIGH: I might refer that question to Neil Whittaker.

Mr WHITTAKER: Provisions relate to not only, as you have alluded to, provisions for expanding classroom sizes but there are also provisions for things such as latent site conditions that you can run into at a construction site. We had a school last year where all the geological survey information indicated that we had a site that was free of rock. When the contractor moved in and started to uncover the foundations we found absolute bedrock and the price of that school escalated as a result of that incident. So provisions cover those sorts of things as well as the unexpected growth within corridors of fast developing communities where we do a demographic forecast based on the February enrolments for the following year. There is a 12-month period within which you can have enrolment growth that was not predicted at the time we do the budget, which is in the quadrant from March through to May. So we have allowed provisions there to cover any unexpected growth. That is based on the experience we have had over the last couple of years.

Mr QUINN: What date will the mid-year census be available?

Mr WHITTAKER: The mid-year census is conducted at the end of July. It usually takes about two months to analyse that.

Mr QUINN: It is hardly mid-year, is it?

Ms BLIGH: It is done at mid-year, not reported at mid-year.

Mr WHITTAKER: We have the information available as a result of that in October to do our planning for opening for the start of the following year.

Ms BLIGH: We cannot give a date but a rough month.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Ms BLIGH: Sorry, Madam Chair, but prior to taking the next question can I just clarify something for the member for Beaudesert. He asked a question about the number of teachers who had a workers compensation claim with the department at the point that the career change program was advertised. I am advised that that data is held at district office level and can be collated but not now. Can I undertake to take that on notice and provide the information to him?

The CHAIR: Okay.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, page 1-34 of the MPS refers to virtual schooling. Would you please inform the committee as to what role virtual schooling plays in the education of Queensland students in remote areas?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. This is a very exciting initiative that has been trialled over the past couple of years. The virtual school is being expanded across the state. It began as a pilot in the year 2000 with 120 students. There are now over 60 schools

from Thursday Island to Goondiwindi that deliver virtual schooling subjects. It is a great example of how technology can conquer distance and provide real opportunities to young people who would either never have had them or would have had to travel thousands of kilometres from their own homes to have got them.

We now have not only 60 schools participating but 460 students currently accessing the service. Virtual schooling is increasing the curriculum choices of students in rural and remote areas of Queensland and giving access to subjects that a student's school is not able to offer because of too small an enrolment number in that particular subject. For example, if a student is studying Japanese in year 11 and moves to a school that does not offer the subject, the student is able to access the virtual schooling service and continue their study of Japanese. This occurs in rural, remote and metropolitan schools. I have actually sat in on a virtual Japanese lesson at the teacher end. It is an interactive process where students are sitting at the screen in their school environment and the teacher is in their school environment but they can actually write on the screen. The teacher can ask, 'Can you please write "good morning" for me in Japanese,' and they can write it on the screen and the teacher can immediately correct them or advise them. So it is a very interactive experience and meaningful for the students.

Teachers conduct online lessons that allow students, as I said, to log in and attend real-time classes using a combination of telephones and computers. So they are not doing it outside of school hours. They have a lesson set aside during their normal timetable and they would go off to the virtual classroom and do their Japanese lesson, in that example. These students, as I have said, often live hundreds of miles from each other and may not have the opportunity to interact with either children of the same age or children who have the same interests. The classes provide students with immediate feedback. It is real-time interaction with their teacher. The virtual schooling service has generated the interests of teachers across Australia and, I am pleased to say, internationally. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement chose the service as an example of innovative teaching practice that uses information and communication technology. Students are encouraged to complete year 12 when they are able to access their subject choices, and this is one of those things that provides that opportunity.

Mr RODGERS: Minister, you have already outlined the state government's commitment to improving access and use of information and communication technologies in schools throughout the IT roll-out. Page 1-16 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement highlights a range of new initiatives called the Learning Place. Could you please tell the committee how students and teachers are using this Learning Place in the classroom?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I had the pleasure of launching the Learning Place in late April at Brisbane State High School. The Learning Place is a web site which allows schools to access a range of IT resources, online learning and communication tools. The total hits on the web site to June this year have been more than 13,000, averaging about 230 hits a day. Schools are the main users of the web site and, again, it is an excellent tool for rural and remote schools. There are 237 private and public courses offered on the web site. Private courses are only open to students and teachers with special passwords and allows classes to work online on private projects. Public courses include writing online courses, in which 400 teachers have enrolled to date and 93 have graduated. They also include a course in instructional design, which has eight enrolments and four graduates to date.

The Learning Place supports the integration of ICT into teaching practice, which is part of the government's commitment to ICT in the reform package that I outlined earlier. What it provides for students is an opportunity to talk online with students from other schools in Australia and students from overseas and international experts in their field of study without ever leaving their classroom. For example, students at one school recently completed a science unit. Scientists could not meet them face to face but could spare 45 minutes for an online chat—the kind of resource that you might never get into your classroom but allows them to be able to speak directly with someone who is an expert in biotech, for example. Students from Palmwoods State School, Mapleton State School and Mooloolah State School have formed a cyber school cluster to examine catchment management, something the member for Glass House might like to have a further look at.

For teachers it offers access to online curriculum resources and training to help them to develop their own online courses to integrate into their classroom lessons. They also participate in online chats, forums and discussion lists to share ideas and resources with other teachers and others who are interested in education. There are 33 online coordinators who have been trained to help other teachers across the state write online courses. Online coordinators are teachers and

education advisers based in locations, including schools, learning and development centres and centres of excellence in maths, science and technology.

Mr RODGERS: Minister, page 1-33 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements refers to a trial in 15 remote communities where students are now able to access government financial assistance that enables them to leave home to study. Would you tell the committee about the trial and how access to the trial will benefit Queensland students in remote locations?

Ms BLIGH: The trial to which the member is referring has become known as the bypassing trial. It is a trial which gives students who wish to study away from home the opportunity to claim the state government's living away from home assistance and the Commonwealth government's assistance for isolated children allowance. The scheme allows the student to leave and study in communities where schools might offer more extensive curriculums. By accessing the trial, the families of these students do not experience pressure to relocate away from their communities to access better schooling. Fifteen schools are now taking part in the trial.

Prior to this trial there was only one school that was bypassable in order to access the Commonwealth and state assistance. That was Aurukun State School's years 8 to 10. There are now 39 students who have been identified as beneficiaries of the trial policy. The principal of the staff college in the Longreach district has been appointed to manage and monitor the two-year trial and its impact on students who remain in those small remote schools and the impact on those communities. Six of the schools in the trial are in Aboriginal communities and subject to the Partners for Success policies, and these will have their outcomes reviewed through the evaluation of that initiative. For the other nine schools a staff college team will work with the bypassable school communities to explore a range of options to ensure that curriculum choices are maintained for those students who do not participate in the trial. I stress that it is entirely voluntary. It is a decision for those students and their families. The principal of the staff college will gather information on issues and conduct a formal survey with stakeholders in term 2 of 2003 to evaluate a report on the impact of the trial policy change.

Obviously, this initiative is about giving rural and remote families an opportunity for the best possible education for their children, but it is important that we get the balance right and that the trial does not inadvertently have an impact on those communities and the schools that are bypassed. The trial does have the support of the Isolated Children's Parents Association. The president, Mr Jack Beach, has publicly endorsed the initiative, and the ICPCA has in fact been seeking a government to consider this for some time. I am very pleased to see that it also enjoys bipartisan support. Both the member for Gregory and the member for Beaudesert have supported the trial.

The CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 1-39 of the MPS. I understand that Education Queensland has undertaken a review of hospital school services that culminated in a new hospital schools policy. Can the minister inform the committee of the basis for the new policy and what it means for hospitalised children? Can you also provide the committee with an update of the Mater Hospital's school and its proposed move to new premises within the children's hospital?

Ms BLIGH: I want to place on record the government's commitment to the continuance of educational services to hospitalised students. I also want to place on record my commitment to the continuation of the Mater Hospital's school. Delivery of education, both in a mainstream school setting and in special settings, has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. During the year 2000 a review was undertaken to examine the way in which this important service was being delivered to ensure that we are providing targeted and effective support for children in hospital. I am sure everybody here understands that health practice has changed over that time as well, including paediatric care. Gone are the days when children with tonsillectomies, for example, routinely stayed in hospital for seven days. Many of those sorts of procedures are now regarded as day surgery.

The review revealed that at the Mater school 40 per cent of enrolments were for students who were admitted to hospital for just one day. At the Royal Brisbane the figure was 12 per cent. These students were not students who had multiple admissions. During 2000-01 two extensive rounds of consultation were undertaken with principals and teachers of all hospital education units and the wider stakeholder group. Consultation involved site visits to every facility in Queensland and meeting with hospital staff and district directors. The service that can now be provided to hospitalised students is both more flexible and responsive to children's educational and health needs. The policy has placed a four-day hospital stay requirement on one-off patients. That was formulated after close examination of the admission data and advice from hospital staff.

Shorter hospital stays and intensive medical treatment mean that a child admitted in these circumstances can be supported from their home school, if necessary. Children who have an ongoing medical need can be enrolled from their first day of admission. The policy also does not exclude any sibling of a hospitalised child or the child of a hospitalised parent who may have an educational requirement. I have also ensured that there is provision for an extraordinary circumstance not covered by the policy to be referred to the relevant district director of education for enrolment.

The review highlighted the need for the service to be expanded. Cairns was a region that did not have an educational service for children in its hospital, and that service will now come on line later this year. The new policy will continue to provide an excellent service to hospitalised students in a responsive and flexible manner. The relocation of the Mater school to a site within the new children's hospital is currently being negotiated with the Mater Hospital. The delivery of educational services will be both ward based and to small groups of students. The original site was one of approximately 400 square metres. That has been revised. The new site will be approximately 300 square metres, and that will be supplemented by the joint use of ward based rooms, conference rooms and other hospital facilities. The Mater has agreed to meet the cost of the fit-out of the new area and sign a joint use agreement for the use of the other facilities in return for the handover of the current school building. All in all it is a good outcome for both the government and the Mater Hospital, particularly for those children who will need the service. It is expected that the process will be completed prior to the end of 2002, with the school relocated in early 2003.

The CHAIR: Minister, you have touched on this matter previously, but I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS. South-east Queensland continues to experience rapid growth, particularly in the Brisbane-Gold Coast corridor and particularly in some hinterland areas of the Gold Coast. How has the government responded to this growth?

Ms BLIGH: I sometimes think that if those people who are responsible for planning and allocating funds out of the federal coffers could have a real sense of what is happening here in Queensland and the exponential nature of the growth they would understand some of our concerns. Planning for growth in this particular area of south-east Queensland has meant the development of a number of new schools and a very considerable capital investment. In the last four years alone \$134.9 million has been allocated to the construction of just new schools in that area. This includes \$32.9 million allocated in this budget to the establishment of new schools at Upper Coomera and in the Bonogin-Reedy Creek area.

I have to say, as I said earlier, that it was great to read 'Kev's Column' in the *Tamborine Times*. The member for Beaudesert advises his constituents of the excellent result that the budget delivered for schools in his electorate at the upper end of the Gold Coast corridor. As part of the additional \$5.6 million spent on major capital works and new schools in the area, the member for Beaudesert advised his constituents of the \$505,000 for Beaudesert State High School, \$1.5 million for Tamborine Mountain State High School and \$10 million for Flagstone community college. I have got here that I am supposed to say that it is great to see you on board with Flagstone, Kev, but I don't know whether I can say that any more. I think we both have an unhealthy obsession with it.

The member for Robina also would be aware of the \$30.4 million that has been budgeted on Varsity College in his electorate. It is a first-class educational facility. As in all high-growth areas, the siting of new schools requires very careful consideration of the demographic and geographic information available. At Upper Coomera, as I am sure the Chair would be aware, eight sites were considered. The site that is currently under consideration will become a community hub and add to the amenity of the area.

In Upper Coomera a commercial site is to be located on an adjoining property near where the school will be. This development is to include a service station, retail outlets, a tavern and a proposed community centre. The school has been designed to ensure maximum separation between this development and the school. In the Bonogin-Reedy Creek area we are currently looking to secure land for a new site, and if successful in the short term we would look to have an early years facility on site for the start of 2003.

Ms MALE: Minister, I refer to page 1-49 of the MPS. I am aware of the strong support that the Queensland government has shown for higher education in this state. I am also aware that the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training has released a discussion paper titled *Higher education at the crossroads*. Amongst other things, the paper identifies various themes such as governments, management, workplace relations and institutional specialisation for

discussion. I understand that the report even canvasses the creation of two super universities in Australia. As the federal government proposes to use outcomes of these discussions to shape its 2003 budget, what has your department done to ensure that the particular needs and views of this state are strongly represented?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Indeed, the future of higher education is something in which I am sure we all have a very keen interest. The state government looks forward to participating fully in a very rigorous and transparent debate on these critical matters. There are a number of issues in the federal paper that are of particular concern for Queensland. These have been outlined for the benefit of the federal government in the Queensland government's recent submission to the green paper process.

For a start, Queensland is Australia's fastest growing state. Nationally, over the next 10 years Queensland will have the highest predicted growth in the youth 15 to 24 ages cohort. It is not the highest amount by a small amount; 50 per cent of all of the growth in the country will occur here in that age cohort. Over half of the predicted growth is expected to occur in our regional areas. It places special responsibilities on our regional universities, which need to be able to maintain strong research capacities and offer comprehensive course options to our students. The state education reforms that are out for public consultation at the moment will also increase demand for higher education over time.

Equity should be a fundamental cornerstone of the higher education system, but we are concerned that it is not adequately addressed in the Commonwealth's paper. Equity concerns for indigenous Australians have not been successful and require review. Equity of access is also an issue for families in regional and remote areas, whose sons and daughters face significant travel, relocation and other costs associated with university attendance. This is one of the reasons regional campuses have been so crucial to ensuring equity of access in Queensland. Queensland institutions and the state government have a range of strategies that we believe will help address the issue of indigenous participation. We would welcome further discussion with the Commonwealth on these matters.

Queensland has also indicated that it does not support the establishment of what the Commonwealth is calling world-class universities at the expense of and detriment to other higher education institutions. We are very concerned that those two places may be created at the cost of other smaller campuses, particularly regional. Nor does Queensland support proposals for universities becoming increasingly specialised, our major concern being the impact of that on regional institutions if they are the only option for young people. Because of distance, it is important that institutions have a reasonably full range of courses available.

From a Queensland perspective, there are a number of things we would like to see the Commonwealth consider. I am very pleased to see that the Commonwealth minister has said he has an open mind on a number of these issues. They include proposals for piloting multi-sectoral institutions that would provide students with access to schools, recognised VET and higher education on the same campus or co-located campuses, an Australian centre for research into international students in higher education and the possibility that the Cape York justice initiatives may provide a real chance to improve our performance in this area. Two public forums sponsored by the Brisbane Institute, in partnership with the Office of Higher Education, will be held in both Townsville and Brisbane over the coming months to encourage further debate.

Ms MALE: On pages 1-49 to 1-53 of the MPS you provide advice on the assistance provided to tertiary institutions. Can you provide the committee with further information on the relationship your portfolio has with these institutions, including the growing number of private providers?

Ms BLIGH: The responsibility for this relationship and managing it rests with the Office of Higher Education. The office provides me with advice on the development of strategies and policies to support the provision of higher education in Queensland and the management and further development of a range of programs and services for the benefit of universities and the community, including the Learning Network of Queensland, the Queensland Tertiary Education Foundation and state higher education grants. State governments are also directly responsible for other matters, including the recognition, establishment and administrative oversight of universities under state legislation. The accreditation of higher education awards offered by non-university providers is also a responsibility of this office.

Over the last two years my portfolio alone has provided over \$22 million for land acquisition and capital construction for new branch campuses, the operation of the Open Learning Network

and other services in the higher education area. In 2001 an audit of the accreditation functions of the Office of Higher Education was undertaken by the recently constituted Australian University Quality Agency. This agency is a first and this was its first audit. I am very pleased to confirm to the committee that the Office of Higher Education came through with flying colours.

Applications to accredit courses for private providers continue to increase. In 1999-2000 there were applications for seven courses and four providers. By 2001 this had increased to 32 courses and 15 providers. The audit concluded that the accreditation functions of the Office of Higher Education are fully consistent with national policy frameworks and are efficiently and effectively managed. This is further reinforcement that absolute rigour is maintained in respect of the private provider course content. That certainly gives me a lot of confidence in the work done by the Office of Higher Education and those who assist it and in the quality of the provision of higher education in Queensland.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, quite obviously you are unable to complete the Cooler Schools program in four years as your government promised. This budget provides a different promise, stating that these projects fulfil the government's election commitment to continue the Cooler Schools program. Why have you not given a definite commitment and instead used the word 'continue'?

Ms BLIGH: The commitment the government made was for a four-year program. The four years will be complete in June 2003, so the words there are accurate. The funds that are available in this year will see us continue the program. At the end of the four years of the program obviously the budget process will determine whether the program will be expanded or renewed.

Mr LINGARD: A number of schools that have had airconditioning installed under the Cooler Schools program have had to stop using it as they cannot afford the costs of running it. Will you consider raising the electricity allocations for schools that have had airconditioning installed to allow them to continue using the equipment?

Ms BLIGH: I am pleased to advise the member that schools that are having trouble with the cost of electricity as a result of airconditioning can apply to the district office for assistance in that regard.

Mr LINGARD: A number of non-government schools have expressed concern over the distribution of funds for Cooler Schools. It was originally understood that non-state schools would be eligible for funding on a per capita basis and would receive 20 per cent to 25 per cent of available funds. The non-government sector believes that it is receiving only about 10 per cent of available funds and is therefore not receiving an equitable distribution of the Cooler Schools funding. Why has this occurred?

Ms BLIGH: I am happy to clarify for the member. I think he is right; I think there has been some misunderstanding of the government's commitment in this regard. The government made a specific commitment in relation to the funds that would be allocated for the non-government sector. There was a statement to the effect that those funds would be available on the same basis as in the state sector. That comment referred to the subsidy arrangements—the 1:4 ratio. If that has been interpreted in other ways, I think that is unfortunate.

I am pleased to say that there has been a very substantial allocation of funds into the non-government sector within the eligibility zone. I can understand that there might be some frustrations. It has been a very enthusiastically subscribed to program in both the state and the non-state sector. I have had a number of discussions with the Catholic Education Commission about this. While the Catholic Education Commission certainly understands the nature of the commitment and the basis on which it was made and understands that the government will continue to work with it to assist where we can—that is not necessarily obviously out there at a school level—there is the same sort of impatience as there is in state schools. We will obviously be taking that on board when we come to deliberate next year about the future of this program.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to a media article of 30 January. I will not quote the paper, otherwise you will say I support that, too. It referred to the Cooler Schools program. Premier Beattie is commented as saying about the program—

It is simply a necessity. Eventually all schools will be done.

How long do you think that will be?

Ms BLIGH: Obviously I cannot say what the Premier might mean when he uses the word 'eventually', but I think it probably has its commonly understood meaning—in the fullness of time, according to budget parameters.

Can I go back to the question about non-government schools? I think it is important to say that a total of 71 Catholic schools have benefited from the program—those in the eligibility zone—which means that 91 per cent of all eligible Catholic schools in the zone have actually received something. That does not mean they have got everything they want, but 91 per cent of Catholic schools in the zone have received something. The Independent Schools Block Grant Authority advises that only three of the 35 eligible schools have not received some assistance. It is a question of winding out the program. Ironically, once you put some airconditioning in it actually generates more expectation that you will be able to finish the whole school. But it will happen eventually.

Mr LINGARD: I note your comment about my attitude towards the consultation groups in the first couple of questions I asked. Many people see the present round of consultation as simply delaying the implementation of programs such as full-time non-compulsory preschool until at least 2005. Why are you delaying the implementation of full-time preschool courses when Queensland is the only state which does not have this program? You have referred to reports tonight that state that everyone supports a full-time program. Why are you delaying it until at least 2005?

Ms BLIGH: So that we can afford to pay for it is the first answer. The government has been very open and honest about that from day one. This is a very significant investment of public funds—not only capital but recurrent. The government has indicated that the lion's share of the growth revenue to the state will be used to pay for this initiative. However, even if the Treasurer was having a very good day and came and said that he had \$500 million that he would like me to spend, which I think is very unlikely, we would have other things that we would have to put in place. Obviously, if we are going to effectively put in place a new year of schooling, we will need to take on board I think in the vicinity of 300 to 350 new teachers. So there are discussions happening with the universities to ensure that there is the supply to meet that demand.

There is the question of what curriculum we would be using. You are right in one sense in that other states have been doing this for some time. But they do not all do it the same. It is not like there is some easy product that you can just take off the shelf. Queensland also has its own particular issues, such as how it might be delivered to students of distance education and how it might be delivered in very small rural communities. Those are issues that we could simply sit and do nothing about until 2005, but we do not think that is a useful way to go. We think it is important to actually trial it so that we can trial the curriculum. I very much doubt that what we start with will be what we end with, and we can work with those other areas such as remote communities to ensure that we are getting a model that suits them.

There is also the question of the age of entry. The proposal is hand in hand with the proposal to lift the age of entry. That is something that we need to have some discussion with the Queensland community about. I am sure you would appreciate that parents have very strong views about when their children are ready for school. If the government is considering changing the entry age, I think it is only fair that we give very fair notice of that. It is not something that you would do with 12 months' notice. I think families already start to make plans around that occurrence.

There is also the issue of the capital works. Even if you had the money, it is a very significant capital works program. There would need to be an audit—and I think that is going to start this year—over the next two years of the trial of all of the existing facilities to see what will need new facilities, what will need upgrades. Of course, it does not affect just the state system; it also affects the non-government system and we will have to work with them.

This is a very significant initiative. While I can understand and share the member's views that it would be good to do it as quickly as possible, to do it responsibly and to do it well and to do it when we can afford it, I think, is the only way that we can go.

Mr LINGARD: I am concerned about the comment that is coming back from some of the consultative committees that limited resources are being given to those 50 schools that are trialling the preschool program and the fact that the addition of maybe half a teacher aide is hardly significant, especially if it is to continue a play-way type program within the preschool. The concern is that we will end up with a very rigid type of curriculum if you do not have enough aides and assistants to run that full-time preschool. Have you looked at it?

Ms BLIGH: Yes. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say that you should not be out there talking to people because it is wasting time and then say, 'But they have got all of these concerns and you should be listening to them.' I take the second view that you should actually be out there listening to the concerns and acting on them where possible.

What we are putting in place here, it is important to understand, is not simply a doubling of the existing preschool; it is an entirely new service for a different age cohort of children. It does mean that it will not look exactly the same as our current preschool. Given that the proposed age cohort of children who will be in this preparatory year—at least half of them are children who would qualify for our current year 1—we have proposed that there would be 15 hours of teacher aide time for the trial. But the trials are a genuine trial. They will be evaluated. I think that, given that there are at least some states where the preparatory year has no teacher aide time and never has had, that is a very fair place to start. But it is a genuine trial and we will see what the evaluation says.

I think the other important thing to recognise here is that the participants in the trial are voluntary. These are people who have applied to be in the trial. At this stage we have not selected the sites. I think that there were 232, or 200—more than 200—applications for 30 trial sites next year. That is an extraordinary level of interest. So I do not think you could say that those schools are worried about the resources. They are bursting to get into it and a number of schools are going to be disappointed.

Mr LINGARD: I am concerned—and I agree with you that it is voluntary—that there are a lot of schools out there that would have loved to trial the program, but they do not have the physical facilities. Those schools are going to have to wait at least three years before they get anywhere near that type of program. That is detrimental to those kids who might have enjoyed a full-time preschool program.

Ms BLIGH: That is absolutely right, but as I have said before, governments have a responsibility to manage within the funds that they have. We will be bringing this initiative on board as quickly as we can.

Can I just take a moment to clarify something. I think you made comment in the second reading debate on the budget that we would be implementing this higgledy-piggledy. Can I make it very clear to you and the committee that there will not be a gradual implementation of this. There will be the trial, the trial will be evaluated, and depending on the outcomes of the evaluation, a model will be determined by government and it will be fully implemented statewide. So it will not be higgledy-piggledy. I think that is very—

Mr LINGARD: I am not quite sure that I used the word 'higgledy-piggledy'.

Ms BLIGH: You did, actually. I have it on record. I have you saying 'higgledy-piggledy'. But you did not say 'my black hen'.

Mr LINGARD: I would be pleased to see how Hansard spelt it.

Ms BLIGH: I have it here, actually.

Mr LINGARD: My mate says that it is a preschool. I am concerned also that, because of the popularity of a full-time preschool course, the private school sector—and also creche and kindergarten—will promote this program very strongly and it will be accepted well within the community. I am also concerned about the number of preschools that are being deserted at present because parents are electing to go towards a private preschool full time. I am worried about all of these concerns growing over the next three years. If you are stating absolutely that we cannot go any further with our trials over the next three years, there is a concern in my mind about the popularity and what will happen to this preschool course.

Ms BLIGH: I share your concerns. We will have to manage the interests of the community in this. But can I say that, prior to the government announcing this, it was not on the agenda. It certainly was not on the agenda when your government had the opportunity. Queensland has not had a preparatory year of schooling since 1952. So we are very proud of this initiative and we are very pleased that we have put it back on the agenda in a way that we think is responsible and affordable.

We have anticipated that the first opportunity to bring this initiative on and roll it out statewide, given the nature of the investment, will be some time after 2005. If the budgetary circumstances change, obviously that will be reassessed, as these things always are. But I think it is important that we are honest with the Queensland community about when that can come on board. As I have said earlier, there would certainly be other constraints, such as the availability of

teachers, et cetera. Having the money is only one part of this. You cannot actually provide this service without trained teachers, you cannot provide it without a curriculum, you cannot provide it without buildings. All of those things have to be carefully put in place so that it will be ready to go on a statewide basis.

Mr LINGARD: Can I ask you some haphazard questions, which might be a bit higgledy-piggledy?

Ms BLIGH: I can tell you the spelling if you like.

Mr LINGARD: I have been advised that the Queensland Chamber of Commerce offered the Queensland government \$1.3 million, as long as the money was matched by the government, to provide training for teachers to be involved in industry programs to assist teachers seeking employment. Given your government's stance on jobs, jobs, jobs, and the new earning or learning promotion—which I support—why have you not supported this program in matching the Chamber of Commerce's \$1.3 million?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for his question. I am unaware of any offer of funds by the Chamber of Commerce for this initiative. They certainly did come to me with a proposal. Certainly, their part of the bargain, as I understand it, was that they would work with industry to locate appropriate placements. I have certainly indicated publicly and to them that I think it is actually a very good idea. But again, it is about doing things when you can afford them. I have indicated to them that, in the context of a relatively tight budget circumstance this year, it is not going to be possible, but that we would want to continue to have discussions with them. I understand that the director-general has begun those discussions. So it is certainly not off the agenda and I have indicated that. I think it is something that we would aspire to at a time when it would be affordable.

Mr LINGARD: I note in your budget papers quite an emphasis on the VET programs. You make the claim that school-based trainees and apprenticeships have increased by over 17 per cent in the last financial year. Given that your Premier has run extensive advertisements promoting school-based traineeships and apprenticeships, can you give a guarantee that the \$500 seed funding given to schools for each school based sign-up will continue and will not suffer any decreases?

Ms BLIGH: Certainly the budget is there for those funds this year and there is no intention by the government for that to be reduced.

Mr LINGARD: I know the director-general is probably aware of what I am talking about, but it was originally \$650 and then it was dropped to \$500 and called 'seed funding'. Now I am concerned that there is no definite statement to say that that \$500 will be continued and I am concerned about the words 'seed funding'.

Ms BLIGH: We have indicated that the \$500 will be continuing.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to the education and training reforms, in particular the earning and learning aspect. If a student of 15 obtains an apprenticeship and leaves school, only to lose his job five weeks later, what is the process for this student? Is he required to go back to school, and what legislation will enforce this?

Ms BLIGH: They are the sorts of details around the proposal that will have to be ironed out before it can be implemented. I am very aware of some of those issues. If you look at the green paper, it talks about the school as the coordinator, and I alluded to this earlier in an answer to the member for Robina. Whether or not that is feasible is something that is currently the subject of consultation with schools. It may be, for example, that the young person that you are referring to could in fact maintain their enrolment at the school for a period of time and simply come back into that enrolment at the end, if those circumstances existed.

These are the sorts of details that, as I said, we need to iron out. It is clear that if we are going to change the legal requirements of young people aged 15 to 17, it will require legislative changes. Obviously they will be brought before the parliament and those sorts of issues will have to be ironed out in the process of developing that legislative framework.

Mr LINGARD: Regarding your government's initiative of the blue card for those working with children, I note your government has given consideration to volunteers and parents working within their own child's school, but there appears to be no provision made for students employed in school-based traineeship child care. As you would be aware, these students are full-time school students only working one day a week on traineeship wages and would need their first two weeks

wages to cover the \$40 for their blue card. Will you give consideration to your department meeting these costs or coming to some arrangement with your colleague to waive these costs?

Ms BLIGH: You would be aware that the legislation to which you refer is administered by the Premier and that portfolio. I am happy to take the question on notice and come back to you in terms of its implications on Education Queensland.

Mr LINGARD: When an AO2 is absent—relief communications staff—they cannot be replaced until they have been absent for five days. In some schools the AO2 is the only administration person on the premises. The other administration work does not stop coming because these people are away. Consequently, either the work piles up or the principal has to do it on top of all other duties. This affects the smooth running of the school and, in the case of a teaching principal, the quality of the teaching program for the students. Will the minister look at a system of replacement for absent administration staff?

Ms BLIGH: Can I say that we are aware of the issues, particularly as they impact on small schools, and the establishing corporate services units will work with schools to work through some of those issues. We do not have an automatic answer to all of those problems in a big system. I certainly take on board your concerns and can indicate that I share them. That can often be an unwarranted load on very small schools.

You may be aware of a report in 2001 on small schools—basically schools that have teaching principals—where a number of those issues or similar issues have been raised. We are systematically working through, particularly with the principals association, the implementation of those recommendations.

Mr LINGARD: Can I just mention one that has come to me today? A boy wishes to do an apprenticeship but because he is still technically at school he cannot apply for one that has been advertised through a local job network provider. They have told him he must leave school and be unemployed. The mother approached CADET locally and they advised her that those children doing their schooling through a Brisbane school of distance are not eligible for school-based traineeships. I notice in your budget papers that you have been working on school of distance students and it says that some schools of distance education will allow apprenticeships. I just wonder why this is not a program which is available for all children involved in a school of distance education?

Ms BLIGH: The eligibility for the apprenticeship outside of the school—I mean, you have got two parts to the question. Your first example was someone who wanted to actually take up an apprenticeship.

Mr LINGARD: Which I am not concerned about. I am not going to worry about that.

Ms BLIGH: I guess it is important to understand—

Mr LINGARD: I am worried about students who are involved in a school of distance education who cannot get one of the school-based apprenticeships.

Ms BLIGH: I am happy to get some more information on this, but certainly my immediate response to it would be that, given the nature of distance education, it is just impossible in some places to offer the sort of education and the sort of hands-on practical work that is part and parcel of apprenticeship programs. Obviously that is not an entirely satisfactory situation to continue, but there are certainly some things that are happening that can overcome that. I referred earlier to the virtual school. Again, when I was in Weipa I saw a couple of young people doing maths C by the virtual school. In the same room were another couple of young boys who were doing a computer program that was part of a module for a motor mechanics apprenticeship that they were part of. Now, that is obviously only one example, but it is that sort of thing that will really have to be actively worked through with schools of distance education and the Access ED part of the department.

Unless somebody has something that they want to add in relation to why some schools of distance education would find it difficult, I think it just is commonsense about why, given the location of the students who are enrolled in distance education, it would be very difficult for them to realistically or meaningfully offer those opportunities.

The CHAIR: No further questions? There being no further questions, that can conclude the examination—

Ms BLIGH: Sorry, I did not realise that. I just wanted to clarify matters raised in a question from the member for Robina in relation to measures on enrolment and work in science. One of the Destination 2010 targets is to see an increase from now until 2005 of four per cent in the

percentage of year 12 students who will complete at least one science, maths or technology board subject. So, it is certainly not left out of the consideration.

The member for Robina asked a question about the communications and marketing budget. The recurrent budget in 2001-02 was \$3.231 million, with a capital expenditure of \$0.024 million. The 2002-03 recurrent budget is \$3.580 million and a projected capital budget of \$0.022 million. So, it is not really like chalk and cheese at all.

The CHAIR: There being no further questions or answers, that concludes the examination of the estimates on expenditure for the Department of Education. I understand there is one question on notice still outstanding. Is that right?

Mr QUINN: Yes.

Ms BLIGH: In relation to the workers compensation claims.

The CHAIR: Before dismissing the officers, could I remind you that the response to the question taken on notice is required to be returned to the committee by 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 17 July. If you are unable to meet the time frame, I would appreciate it if you would notify me and the deputy chair.

I thank the minister and the officers for their attendance. I thank the members, Hansard, the research staff, the catering staff and the parliamentary attendants for their valuable contributions to the estimates process. I particularly want to thank the members of the non-government side, especially for their good humour and—what was that? 'Civility'? I think 'politeness' was the word I was searching for. I thank my members on the government side for their assistance and putting up with me. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 18 April 2002. I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 7.08 p.m.