

THURSDAY, 15 JULY 2004

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Estimates Committee C Members

Mr G.J. Wilson (Chair)
Mrs P. Croft
Mr J.H. Langbroek
Mr R.D. Messenger
Mr M.H. Rowell
Ms B.G. Stone
Hon. D.M. Wells

In Attendance

Hon. T.A. Barton, Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations
Mr M. Spencer, Senior Policy Advisor
Department of Employment and Training
Mr S. Flavell, Director-General
Mr C. Robinson, Deputy Director-General
Department of Industrial Relations
Mr P. Henneken, Director-General
Mr G. Poole, Deputy Director-General
Mr B. Walker, General Manager, Executive and Strategic Services (Acting)

The committee commenced at 8.33 a.m.

The CHAIR: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. 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 2004 for the areas set out in the sessional orders of 20 May 2004. The organisational units will be examined in the following order: Employment and Training; Industrial Relations; and Education and the Arts. The committee has also agreed that it will suspend the hearings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10.30 to 10.45; lunch from 12.30 to 1.30; and afternoon tea from 3.30 to 3.45.

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 that departmental officers 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 order of the committee. 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 silent film footage be permitted during the opening statement by the chair and the opening statement by the minister. My final request is that if you have a mobile phone or pager would you please make sure that it is turned off. If you have phone calls to make, please do so outside the chamber.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations open for examination. We will commence with the Department of Employment and Training, for which the time allocated is two hours. This will be followed after a short break by questions directed to the Department of Industrial Relations for one and three-quarter hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Mr BARTON: Yes, I would, Mr Chairman. I thank you and the committee members for that. The Beattie government will continue its efforts to increase employment opportunities for all Queenslanders—young and old—and be vigilant that this state's workplaces remain safe, productive and equitable. Currently, Queensland has the lowest unemployment level in 23 years with a rate of 5.8 per cent. My departments of Employment and Training and Industrial Relations will have important roles in the ongoing development of the Smart State.

With the national outcry over current and pending skills shortages, our statewide network of 15 TAFE institutes with 108 campuses will continue to provide training and advancement for about 240,000 students, apprentices and workers. The Department of Employment and Training has a record \$921.2 million budget for training and delivery and has earmarked \$118 million to build a new statewide skilling strategy which will create an estimated additional 17,800 training places in priority industries with skills shortages over the next three years.

The \$1 billion three-year Smart VET strategy announced in the budget will see the implementation of a series of joint industry skill formation strategies. I expect these to include accelerated skills development programs within the apprenticeship pathway and the introduction of existing worker traineeships. These initiatives will fast-track workers in short supply. The leading Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program will receive up to \$278 million over the next three years which will create an additional 34,000 jobs, taking the total since the Beattie government introduced the initiative in 1998 to more than 100,000.

Reforms to Queensland's education and training system to guide young people from school to further education, training and employment will gear up with an investment of more than \$78 million to support the transition of 15- to 17-year-olds from school to further education, training and employment. I am absolutely determined to ensure that this record increase in the training budget is used in the most effective delivery for training of young Queenslanders, including those in rural communities. That is why I am announcing this morning a review into how the state's four agricultural colleges can be improved to get better training delivery and job opportunities for young Queenslanders in rural communities and address skills shortages in rural industries. There are issues relating to poor performance with regard to corporate governance, financial management and training outcomes, and the review will address these issues.

The Department of Industrial Relations will continue its efforts to ensure Queensland workers have safe, fair and productive workplaces. Key Department of Industrial Relations initiatives include \$4 million for 22 new workplace health and safety inspectors to specifically target the building and construction industry. Compliance and enforcement activities will also be beefed up across the state, with \$930,000 for an expanded industrial inspectorate.

During the 2003-04 year, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland carried out 140 prosecutions and employers breaching the workplace health and safety laws were fined more than \$2 million. Also during 2003-04, almost \$8.5 million in wages was recovered for Queensland workers and 8,042 wages complaints finalised by Department of Industrial Relations inspectors. Thank you for that time, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first period of questions will commence with non-government members. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: Thank you, Mr Chair. Minister, I noted your emphasis on skilling strategies in your opening statement. Minister, I refer to page 1-18 of the MPS and the second paragraph in which it is noted that—

... the Government implements programs and initiatives directed at skilling the labour force, increasing industry productivity and addressing skill shortages in key industry areas.

Minister, will you please detail the current Queensland skill shortages by occupation? What is the estimated number of apprentices and trainees who have left these industries experiencing skill shortages over the last three years?

Mr BARTON: Member for Hinchinbrook, certainly the skill shortages are areas that we have taken a great deal of interest in. You will note that in the budget we have put in place over the three-year period a \$118 million program to address the very crucial issues that exist in particularly the traditional trades areas—the metal trades areas, some mining areas, building and construction and certainly other manufacturing. We have great difficulty at this point in time with skill shortages. We have specific strategies that are being put in place to address that.

I also mentioned, you will recall, Mr Rowell, in my opening statement that we are aware that there are some skill shortage areas in rural industries as well. We intend to ensure that the four agricultural colleges are going to be better placed in the future. We have in fact put some additional funding into those agricultural colleges' budgets for this financial year as well. The principal skill shortage areas that we are concerned about have potentially been caused by the fact that the state has been—victim is probably too strong a word—suffering from the fact that we have been so successful. You only have to look at the amount of building activity that is taking place, particularly around the south-east corner. If you look outside this building you will see the number of cranes that are over at South Bank and in the city. If you look at the same thing on the Gold Coast and up through the north coast, you will see the enormous amount of building and construction work. So there are shortages in key skill areas. We are committing further funding to address the shortages in the building and construction area, and we are doing a similar thing with a number of major projects that are under way in this state. I know that that is something that I was very conscious of during the last term of government when upskilling people for manufacturing and upskilling people for the major projects was also a major issue for us.

So we are putting into place specific new programs. We will model them to some degree on the very successful outcomes that we have achieved with Aviation Australia, but we will be putting major efforts into manufacturing, the mining industry and building and construction and making sure that we have skills available for the food processing area. Again, I stress that we are also determined to get better outputs from the four agricultural colleges for skills shortages emerging in rural industries.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I asked you this: what is the estimated number of apprentices and trainees who have left these industries experiencing skills shortages over the last three years? Could you produce those figures, otherwise you can take them on notice?

Mr BARTON: I will not be taking any questions on notice. What I can say to you is that we have in this state record enrolments of apprentices.

Mr ROWELL: I was talking about the ones who have left the industries and the problems associated with that.

Mr BARTON: We are no different, Mr Rowell, to every other state. In fact, at this point in time if we went around this room we would see that I am a tradesperson who is no longer working in his trade. There are always a very significant number of people who get promotions or who move on to other areas. There are complex reasons which potentially trawl against both of my departments. The harsh reality is that I run into people, particularly boilermakers, who have worked on construction sites who are driving taxis or who are selling tyres who say to me—

Mr ROWELL: I did refer to apprentices and trainees, though; I was not referring to those that were involved in industries previously.

Mr BARTON: We are keeping pace with growth. We are increasing the numbers of apprentices to address those skill shortages. There is certainly a skill shortage brought about because of the tremendous growth that the state is experiencing and I acknowledge that; I readily acknowledge that. What we are doing to address that is putting in record funding, far more funding than any other state has achieved.

I am not here particularly to play politics with the federal government today, but we have seen the federal government give us a haircut of some \$20.7 million, thereby reducing our training expenditure. Funds available to us from the federal government have been reduced by \$20.7 million despite the fact that we have had the ACCI, the AIG and the Business Council of Australia all call for the federal government to increase their funding level for training to address skill shortages. We have done that in this budget.

I repeat what I said in my opening statement: we have a record budget. We are putting in an additional \$118 million to build a new statewide skilling strategy that we anticipate will put in an additional 17,800 training places in those priority industries that I have mentioned to address the skill shortages over the next three years. We are absolutely determined to address that. I cannot quote exact figures of people who have left the industry. We are aware that there are more and more people required and we are absolutely determined to meet that need by having record numbers of apprentices. We anticipate something in the order of 46,000 apprentices and trainees to commence training this year. Our apprentice numbers in Queensland are at all-time highs.

Mr ROWELL: I refer to the response given to the non-government question on notice No. 5 which relates to the number of enrolments at each public provider—TAFE or agricultural college, that is. In the 2003-04 financial year there were an estimated 29,471 course enrolments in skill shortage areas out of the estimated total of 328,268 enrolments across all public providers in Queensland. The number of course enrolments in skill shortage areas represents only 9 per cent of the total enrolment of 2003-04 across all public providers. Why are these figures so low, and is it because you have not allocated enough places for training in these skill shortage areas?

Mr BARTON: I do not want to seem to be at cross-purposes with you, Mr Rowell, but TAFE provides for training in a whole range of areas. What I have said to you, very clearly, is that our strategy

for this period is to dramatically increase the numbers of training places that are across those skill shortage areas. I will have somebody check those figures for me while I am speaking to make sure that the assertion that you make is mathematically correct. I do not want to be sitting here with a calculator or sitting here doing long mathematics trying to answer your question.

If, in fact, as I think you have said, only 9 per cent of the places are for skill shortage areas, and I am assured by the deputy director-general that that is correct, I have to stress to you that we are dramatically increasing the number of places. I have quoted the figure of an additional 17,800 places over the next three years as part of that specific program that we have initiated in this year's budget which will continue for the next two years. But I need to stress TAFE does a lot more than train for skill shortage areas.

I made the point before that I am a tradesperson who is no longer working at my trade. I am also a product of TAFE. I did my training at TAFE when typically TAFEs did train apprentices, and traineeships had never been heard of and a lot of the fee-for-service type courses that TAFEs provide now to the community and to business did not exist.

There has been a revolution in training since the 1960s when I did my apprenticeship and when I was going to TAFEs. TAFE now has an enormous number of courses in the widest possible training issues across the community in the interests of the community and for trainees in all types of things. I will repeat the specific areas where we are concerned about skill shortages because it not a secret and we are not hiding from it: we are very concerned about making sure that we can meet the need in the metals area, in the mining area, in the manufacturing area; we are particularly concerned about shortages in building and construction and we are putting an enormous effort in through the next three years to meet that skill shortage area.

Mr ROWELL: As a comparison, what were the number of places for training in skill shortages areas delivered by private providers in 2003-04 and what percentage did this represent of all training across private providers in Queensland?

Mr BARTON: I do not have the figures for private providers, and again I would stress to you that it is not a matter of taking it on notice and getting it later because they are not required to provide those figures to us, I am told. Let us put this in a context. A bit more than 40 per cent approximately of the training is conducted by private providers.

Mr ROWELL: Could you repeat that figure?

Mr BARTON: A bit more than 40 per cent of all training in Queensland is conducted by private providers. I will quote a few industries that I am immediately aware of: I know that one of the groups that does a very good job in training tradespeople is in the automotive industry, particularly if we are talking about the areas on the other side of the dividing range, and their program which we fund through user-choice funding is exceptionally good. But the harsh facts are that most of the training that is provided in the key traditional trade areas, if I could put it that way, of metals, building and construction, are provided by TAFEs. It is, in fact, still the public system that is providing 76 per cent of all apprentices. The private providers trained 23.2 per cent—this is in apprentices. Thirty-one per cent of trainees are trained by the public system and 69 per cent are trained by private providers.

I quote those figures because they are the 2004 figures. In fact, that demonstrates clearly what I was just saying: that the TAFE system, the public system, does most of the training in the traditional trade areas, and we are boosting dramatically the amount of funding that is going into the public system, and in fact the private system, for apprenticeship training in the traditional trades.

The traineeships came into being initially in the mid 1980s. I was involved in some of the discussions with the late Bob Marshman in putting traineeships into Queensland. The private providers provided the lion's share of training for traineeships; the TAFE system provides the lion's share of training for apprentices in the traditional trade areas. We are picking that ball up and running a lot harder despite the fact that the federal government has cut our funding.

Mr ROWELL: I refer to your response to the non-government question on notice No. 9 in which 103 registered training organisations were indicated as due for renewal in 2004-05, which is 223 less than the number that were up for renewal in 2002-03, which was 326. Is this a reduction in the number of RTOs and what is the reason for the reduction in the choice that employees have of a private provider, which is the purpose of the user-choice program; and out of the current registered training organisations on the department's list of preferred suppliers how many of these provide training in regional Queensland and specific geographic areas designated as special needs areas?

Mr BARTON: I do not know how many questions that was but let us start from the top.

Mr ROWELL: It was about the private providers.

Mr BARTON: I know it was about private providers but you had about five questions in one there. The first issue I need to make very clear because the answer is very specific in terms of the answer to the question on notice to a very specific request. That does not constitute a reduction in the number of private providers. What the question asks was how many will be renewed in the following years. I think

we need to be very clear about that because they are not necessarily annual contracts. What we have got in 2004-05 is a projection that 103 of them will come up for renewal. That does not mean that there has been a reduction of 34 that you might construe from that answer, or that, in fact, between 2002-03 to 2003-04 there has been a reduction of about 200. That is not the case. It is a matter of that is when they come up for renewal. You have asked for when do they come up for renewal; we have provided you with the very specific figures in that regard.

We certainly do have a few occasions where private providers do fall over, sadly, but we have a diverse training marketplace consisting of 1,118 registered training organisations. This includes 634 private providers, 392 schools, 15 TAFE institutes, four agricultural colleges, five universities, 26 other government institutions such as government departments that are registered training providers, and 42 community providers. Additionally, 611 interstate registered training organisations are currently registered to operate in Queensland.

Queensland is second only to Victoria in terms of the overall number of registered training organisations with 27 per cent of the national total. When you ask for breakdowns, we certainly are all over the state. We are not reducing the number of private providers and, in fact, there is almost an 8 per cent increase in the budget for user-choice funding in this year's budget from us, this particular budget, which would go to private providers.

\$44.5 million has been issued to private providers for training in 2004-05 which represents over 40 per cent of the total user choice budget. In fact, I was congratulated last week when I was with Dr Brendan Nelson, the federal minister, for our very substantial increase in funding for private providers to train in this state. We are fairly unique in doing that.

Mr ROWELL: Can you confirm whether there have been any instances in the last financial year where the department has decided to cease funding a particular industry or qualification that a registered training organisation had a user-choice contract for and, if so, what were they, and were sufficient funds provided to meet the commitments for the continuing of students?

Mr BARTON: I am not sure whether I have got you. Did you say did we cease training ourselves?

Mr ROWELL: No, I was speaking of the funding. Did the department decide to cease funding for a particular industry or qualification that a registered training organisation had a user-choice contract for?

Mr BARTON: I want to make sure I give you a clear answer and I want to make sure I am clear on the question. Yes, there are occasions when a registered training organisation fails. That is a fact of life, sadly. There is a mixture of private companies, some for-profit companies, some not-for-profit companies and some community organisations that are registered to provide specific training. From time to time, sadly one of those registered training organisations fails. In the short time that I have had this portfolio, I know that there have been some that we have worked very closely with to stop them from failing. We have been able to give some assistance to make sure that they do not fall over. That is certainly what we would seek to do in the first instance for every case. We always try to ensure that we look after the best interests of the students.

Mr ROWELL: That is important.

Mr BARTON: Continuing students are the first priority. So the funding is maintained for the continuing students. We do our level best to place those continuing students elsewhere. I think Chris has a list of some organisations that have in fact failed. There have been some that have stopped training. I could read through the whole list for you, Marc, but I do not think that would really prove anything.

Mr ROWELL: It is those students who are of concern.

Mr BARTON: I think that answers your question. We continue the funding for continuing students. Our priority is to make sure that they are not disadvantaged. If a training organisation falls over, we do not let them get put on the street. The funding for them gets continued and transferred to other organisations that can pick them up. I would not be so bold as to say that there is never an occasion where a place cannot be found for somebody. There would always be a few who sadly might not be picked up. But our strategy and our funding is there to make sure they continue.

The CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has, at this juncture, expired.

Ms STONE: Page 1-10 of the MPS makes reference to the positive impact of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative on the Queensland labour market. Minister, could you advise the committee of the state of the labour market in Queensland today?

Mr BARTON: My department is committed to assisting the least competitive job seekers through providing the job experience and preparation they need to secure a job as evidenced by the three-year extension of the highly successful Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative from 2004-05. The initiative will create an additional 34,000 jobs, including apprenticeships and traineeships, bringing the total jobs since the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle commenced in October 1998 to over 100,000. A

total of 1,877,600 people were employed in Queensland in June 2004. That is an increase in the working population of 4.1 per cent compared with a year ago. The national figures have only risen 2.4 per cent. Again, that reflects that we are growing jobs at almost twice the national rate.

Full-time employees constituted 71.5 per cent of the total employment, which is slightly lower than the national level of 71.6 per cent. Over the past decade to June 2004, employment in Queensland increased by an accumulated 31.2 per cent compared with 20.1 per cent in the rest of Australia. In the 72 months since the Beattie government has been in office, employment has grown by 274,700 jobs compared to 83,500 jobs over the 28 months under the Borbidge government. In annual terms, this represents jobs growth of 45,780 per annum under Labor compared with 35,790 under the coalition.

A total of 116,600 people remained unemployed in Queensland in June 2004. Despite strong employment growth, Queensland's unemployment rate of 5.8 per cent remains above the national rate of 5.5 per cent. Similar rates of unemployment were last seen in Queensland in July 1981. This substantial improvement has been made despite high labour force participation, driven largely by interstate migrants attracted to Queensland because of its superior economic and employment performance. In other words, the more successful we are, the more people will seek to get employment here.

Higher rates of labour force participation places a greater burden on the Queensland economy to produce jobs. The labour force participation rate in Queensland of 64.9 per cent continued to be higher than the national average of 63.6 per cent. The participation rate of males in Queensland rose 1.1 per cent over the year to 72.9 per cent, while for women the labour force participation rate declined 0.5 per cent to 57.3 per cent. The growth in labour supply has tended to offset Queensland's superior—

Ms STONE: Minister, this morning I have heard you speak about skill shortages. I would like to continue on with that and find out what part the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative has played in trying to meet those skill shortages.

Mr BARTON: I am glad you asked that question because it follows on from some early questions. To achieve the Smart State objectives my department prioritises public investment in training and employment initiatives to the needs of industries central to Queensland's economic growth. Departmental activities have focused, and will continue to focus, on: areas of the labour market that are essential to the economic future of the state; new and emerging industries that have the potential to provide significant economic benefit in the future, especially for growing export revenue; traditional industries experiencing or which would benefit from technical change; and opportunities to maximise the productive capacity of the Queensland work force, including through the skilling of labour market entrants and the reskilling and upskilling of existing workers.

Nearly six years after the launch of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, the outcomes for key Queensland industry speak volumes about what can be achieved with commitment and energy, particularly in relation to addressing skill shortages. Since the government took office in June 1998, the number of apprentices and trainees in Queensland has increased from 44,270 to an estimated 70,500. This increase is partly attributed to the government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative.

For example, between July 1998 and 30 April 2004, the state government's building and construction contracts structured training policy, known as the 10 per cent training policy, created a total of 6,454 training opportunities, including 1,588 for existing workers and 4,866 for apprentices, trainees and cadets—well in excess of the original goal. The indigenous employment policy for Queensland government building and civil construction projects, known as the 20 per cent policy, has, since 2001, created 347 employment and training opportunities in building and construction for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in remote indigenous communities.

Through the private sector employment program there have been an additional 4,633 apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities. That was funded through \$8.5 million in incentives paid to 3,106 private sector employers and group training organisations in 2003-04 alone. So we are putting our money where our mouth is to make sure that we get support from the private sector to up their training initiatives. From 1 July 2004 employer incentives continue to be provided to private sector employers through two new programs which will respond to acute skill shortages and prepare school students for employment.

Ms STONE: Page 1-4 of the MPS refers to the allocation of an additional \$278 million to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative. Can you outline the plans for the next three years?

Mr BARTON: The 2004-05 financial year will see the start of the revitalised Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative with a government investment of up to \$278 million, including up to \$15 million for the Worker Assistance program over the next three years. The initiative has been sharpened and refocused to continue to meet Queensland's continuing employment creation needs. It will create an additional 34,000 jobs, including apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements. This will bring the total jobs since the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative commenced in October 1998 to over 100,000.

The findings of a 2002 review of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative identified that, while outcomes achieved compared favourably with similar programs elsewhere in Australia and overseas, there was still scope for improved participation by some groups of job seekers. These included mature age job seekers, people with disabilities and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Over the next three years, through the initiative, the government will increase efforts to assist key Queensland population groups and industries.

In the revitalised initiative there is even greater emphasis on: community tailored assistance packages to meet the needs of underrepresented job seekers; specific support for indigenous communities, apprentices, trainees and job seekers to boost their participation and retention rates; skilling young people with an emphasis on 15- to 17-year-olds in support of the government's education and training reforms for the future agenda; and more targeted responses to skill shortages.

Under the third phase of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, the budget for community jobs plans programs is \$86.29 million, with an assistance target of 22,779 people. The Community Jobs Plan—Work Placements, formerly the Community Jobs Plan, and the Community Jobs Plan—Employment Assistance, formerly the Community Employment Assistance program—this is so that we know what we are talking about—programs are introduced. I wish we would not change the titles. Assistance previously provided through the Experience Pays and the Back to Work programs for mature age job seekers will be incorporated into the revised Community Jobs Plan to provide for increased flexibility and responsiveness.

There is a new strategic employment development program. It is estimated \$7.2 million will secure the additional employment of 3,500 apprentices this financial year. The Education and Training Reforms Pathways program—Get Set for Work will assist 15- and 17-year-olds. Over three years \$18.94 million will assist 4,100 15- to 17-year-olds in this program.

Mr WELLS: Today, the minister has referred to increased numbers of apprentices and trainees in Queensland. For the record, could the minister advise the committee of the number of apprentices and trainees in training in Queensland at present?

Mr BARTON: I would be absolutely delighted to. Apprenticeship and traineeship training is an integral component of building Queensland's economy. The number of apprentices and trainees in training reached record levels in the 2002-03 financial year. The National Centre for Vocational Education and Research data indicates this trend has continued in 2003-04 with a high of 71,000 apprentices and trainees in training as at 30 September 2003.

This was followed by a record number of completions—8,300 in the December 2003 quarter. As at 31 March 2004 there were 70,500 apprentices and trainees in training compared with 68,100 at the same time last year, an increase of 3.5 per cent. Additionally, the number of apprenticeship commencements for this financial year—these figures are up to 30 April 2004—show a 14 per cent increase compared to the same time last year.

The 2003-04 target of 40,000 to 44,000 for apprenticeship and traineeship commencements is likely to be exceeded with the final number of commencements expected to be around 46,000. The 2004-05 target range for apprenticeship and traineeship commencements has been increased to the 42,000 to 46,000 range to reflect trends in commencements and the impact of additional funding made available by this government in the 2004-05 budget.

The record number of apprentices and trainees in training is attributable to a number of factors including: industry's increasing investment in the value of human capital; growth in the level of funding and the effective prioritisation of the user choice program; growth in school based apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements; commencements resulting from the Public Sector Employment and Private Sector Employment programs administered through the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative; and commencements through the Youth for the Environment and Local Communities program, a two-year program which ceased on 30 June 2003. It is also attributable to the range, flexibility and relevance of the 660 apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications from traineeship packages available in Queensland.

My department invests considerable effort in ensuring the longevity and quality of apprenticeships and traineeships, and continues to lead national initiatives designed to improve outcomes for the participants and the quality of the training system. Initiatives include a mandatory induction process, strengthened requirements for the training plan which are negotiated with all the parties and the nominated supervising registered training organisation within the probationary period, and an up-front assessment of an employer's capacity to train and supervise in keeping with an approved training plan.

Mr WELLS: The minister has addressed a number of questions from the opposition relating to skill shortages. Part of the government's response to this issue is the accelerated apprenticeship training program. Could the minister give the committee details of the accelerated apprenticeship training places referred to in the MPS on page 1-3?

Mr BARTON: Thank you for the question. SmartVET is the Queensland government's three-year \$1 billion strategy to target the power of the strong and vibrant vocational education and training sector

squarely at the skills needs of industries which are critical to Queensland's economy. The SmartVET strategy will provide Queensland with the most advanced approach to vocational education and training adopted by any government in Australia. Within the SmartVET strategy, \$29 million will be directed towards trialling new initiatives over three years. This includes \$9 million to design and create an estimated 550 accelerated apprenticeship training places over three years.

The department will work with key unions and industries to develop new accelerated apprenticeship training models to support the quicker progression of apprentices through the formal training component of their trade qualification. This will result in the acceleration of the supply of highly skilled workers to the labour market in critical skill shortage areas. The program will fund the creation of 182 new accelerated apprenticeship training places each year in regions attracting large-scale investment from key industries, including the building and construction, mining, manufacturing and engineering industries. The accelerated apprenticeships will be modelled on the highly successful Certificate IV institutional pathways already offered by Aviation Australia. Those graduates enjoy a 94 per cent employment outcome in the state's new aviation industry.

The new SmartVET strategy reflects our economic priorities. It provides funding targeted at training, which will increase the pool of highly skilled workers available for recruitment into priority industries in Queensland. SmartVET will ensure that Queensland develops a work force that more than keeps pace with our Smart State reputation.

Mr WELLS: Page 1-22 of the MPS refers to direct grant funding to TAFE Queensland institutes, which play a critical role in delivering training right across Queensland. Could the minister please advise what allocation has been provided for TAFE in this budget?

Mr BARTON: For 2004-05, TAFE Queensland has a record budget of \$604.7 million, an increase of \$27 million, or 4.7 per cent on last year's budget of \$577.7 million. The 2004-05 budget includes \$407.3 million for direct grant, \$127.7 million in planned fee-for-service activity, and \$63.5 million in user choice funds for apprenticeship and traineeship training. TAFE institutes are also considered to be a preferred recipient of additional \$25 million strategic purchasing program funding which will be accessible during 2004-05, and a further \$11.5 million for new training initiatives under SmartVET. TAFE institutes will also be able to bid for allocations under a further \$11.5 million in funding, which is being made available to TAFE for training under the SmartVET initiative. SmartVET involves the coordinated planning, purchasing and delivery of vocational education and training which targets the provision of a skilled work force for new and emerging industries and industries which are experiencing skill shortages.

The budget will outlay \$53.6 million in capital acquisitions during 2004-05, an increase of \$1.3 million from the 2003-04 budget. Funding for significant construction activities include \$13.75 million for the construction of a new health and social services building in Toowoomba, \$8 million for site acquisition and facilities planning for the new Coomera campus at the Gold Coast institute as part of the Smart State Building Fund, and \$1 million for the establishment of a new facility in Yeppoon adjacent to the YEPPON State High School. Institutes will also share in \$4 million for infrastructure equipment, \$3.5 million for minor capital works projects, \$11.25 million for information and communications technology and \$5.38 million for an annual maintenance program to improve classrooms and other institute facilities for students and staff.

In the 2004-05 financial year, TAFE institutes will all play a key role in the continued implementation of the government's groundbreaking Education and Training Reforms for the Future. They will implement a major training effort, targeting skills for the construction of the light metals industry development in the Rockhampton and Gladstone corridor. They will expand programs available at the Wide Bay institute to support the marine industry, including online distance delivery and the establishment of a marine academy, plus a range of other plans.

The CHAIR: Minister, I would like to ask a question relating to an area which, as you might well understand, is very dear to my heart—the electorate of Ferny Grove. Page 1-10 of the MPS refers to Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives and developing local level partnerships. Could the minister advise the committee of the assistance provided under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative to people in the electorate of Ferny Grove in north-west Brisbane?

Mr BARTON: I would be absolutely delighted to answer that question. The electorate of Ferny Grove, like all state electorates, receives a great deal of support from the Queensland government as part of our strategy to ensure that the unemployment rate—which has fallen to a 22-year low under the Beattie government—continues to fall. There are still many people who are unemployed and who lack the skills, work experience and confidence to compete in today's job market. However, we will continue to help the jobless—including those in your electorate—to get jobs and to share in the state's prosperity.

The Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative endeavours to provide access to unemployed job seekers in local communities even in electorates where unemployment is low. Between October 1998 and April 2004, a total of \$3.06 million in assistance has been provided to people from the Ferny Grove electorate. A total of 663 people from the Ferny Grove electorate have been assisted, with 560 people having achieved employment outcomes. This includes a total of 192 apprentices and 223

trainees. Under the Community Employment programs, a total of 248 people have been assisted with 145 jobs. Six apprentices and 158 trainees from the Ferny Grove electorate have been employed under the Public Sector Employment and Youth for the Environment and Local Communities programs at a total cost of \$2.5 million. Under the Private Sector Employment program, initiatives totalling \$0.5 million have been implemented for the employment of 251 people, including 186 apprentices and 65 trainees.

I am pleased to announce, in relation to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative funding, that in the 2003-04 financial year up to 30 April 2004 a total of 83 job seekers in the state electorate of Ferny Grove found jobs through the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. This includes, through the Community Employment programs, a total of 37 job seekers who have been provided with employment assistance, with 21 finding employment. That is a pretty good ratio of people who have gone on to be employed. This also includes wage incentives paid to public and private sector employees, which have provided 54 additional apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, including school based ones, for Ferny Grove constituents.

Apprenticeships and traineeships help to alleviate skill shortages and create more opportunities for young people to transition from school to work. Incentives have also helped eight mature-age job seekers to find work. The Pine Rivers Shire Council has employed a mature-age trainee under the Public Sector Employment program. The trainee is employed in a library and information services traineeship and is located in the council office at Arana Hills in the member's electorate. The trainee is still employed by the council in this traineeship. I am sure that your community organisations will have some other good projects for the future for us to consider.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allotted at this juncture for government members' questions having expired, I now call upon the member for Surfers Paradise.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Minister, for the time that you are spending here this morning, as well as the time that you and your departmental staff have taken to prepare for these hearings. I also thank the Liberal Party staff who have assisted me in preparation for this committee meeting.

My first question relates to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle scheme. On page 1-13 of the MPS it states that as part of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle scheme there will be \$2.6 million for a Get Set for Work program. Apparently, the program is targeted at unemployed early school leavers and those 'otherwise at risk of disengagement from employment, education or training and for whom there is no other appropriate education or training program available.' Could the minister please outline a situation in which a person would not have available to them an appropriate education or training program, and exactly how people at risk of disengagement are identified by the department?

Mr BARTON: I guess that in this community we all have a perception that young people who leave school go on to apprenticeships or they have jobs or they continue through their school years to such point where they may in fact go to university. That is what our Breaking the Unemployment Cycle programs seek to do. There are numerous examples of how we have been able to assist literally hundreds of thousands of young people during this six-year period. Typically, community groups are the best people to identify any opportunities. We do have young people, particularly those in the 15- to 17-year-old age group, who have dropped out of school. Our government is seeking to address this through a range of ways. Anna Bligh will no doubt speak in some detail this afternoon about the Employment and Training Reforms for the Future, which I share responsibility for as the Minister for the Department of Employment and Training.

One of the really sad facts is that many young people drop out of school. In fact, I think the statistics show that most of them drop out of school towards the end of the first semester of year 11. They do not have jobs to go to and are not either earning or learning. We try to give those people who have dropped out some real skills. We certainly try to break the unemployment cycle by giving them a work ethic and by trying to give them some job experience. My experience with this goes right back to when I was a backbencher in my first term of government. Matt Foley was the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. I travelled around the state with him and for him, at times, looking at a whole range of programs which we were putting in place which pre-empted the current Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. Sadly, a lot of young people were not only unemployed but greatly at risk of becoming chronically unemployed for the remainder of their lives. I see this in my own electorate, where we are at the point where we have third generation unemployed. It gives those people some work experience, a work ethic and, most importantly, some work skills. Our figures show that quite a significant percentage of those people go on to full-time employment or to some form of training.

Mr LANGBROEK: The MPS states that you will be providing 600 school based apprenticeship and traineeship places. I assume that there are more than 600 Queenslanders eligible for this program. Could you please outline the criteria for entry into this program and how many eligible Queenslanders will not benefit from the \$2.6 billion allocated to the Get Set for Work program?

Mr BARTON: This particular program that you have mentioned—the education and training reforms pathways program, Get Set for Work—is a component of the government's education and training reforms for the future being implemented in 2003-04. I spoke in general terms before about the philosophy of getting young people back into the labour force as we have been seeking to do. But this

one is targeted very specifically to fund locally based organisations to deliver employment and training assistance to 15- to 17-year-olds who are either early school leavers or at risk of disengaging from education. This assistance is aimed at developing the skills and confidence that are required to gain employment or to re-enter further education and training. The Get Set for Work program is an intervention that recognises that the duration of an individual's participation is based on the time needed to achieve an outcome rather than the length of the program. Based on previous experience and research, the expected average participation would be around six months.

The program may include—these are the types of opportunities—opportunities to re-engage with others and build the social skills that are required for work through personal development and team-building activities. These activities are aimed at improving self-esteem and behaviour. Also, there are referrals and links to support services for personal and social issues such as housing, family and health; access to training options that address gaps in learning such as life skills and accredited vocational training including literacy and numeracy support; workplace learning through work experience; practical training programs and community work; preparation for employment and development of resumes, interview skills, job search and job placement and vocational counselling; and post-placement support and mentoring to help sustain employment or attendance at training and education. The program provides a safety net for young school leavers and those who are at risk and who are required to be in educational work as part of the education and training reforms. The program targets young people who are unable or unwilling to engage with existing institutional programs and services.

Sponsoring organisations eligible to receive funding include incorporated not-for-profit organisations, local government authorities, and education and training providers. The program will target early school leavers aged 15 to 17 years who are unemployed or who have minimal hours of employment who will be required by law from now on to be in some form of education and training until they are aged 17 and young people aged between 15 and 17 years who are at risk of not transitioning from compulsory schooling or maintaining their participation in the senior phase of learning and unlikely to gain full-time employment.

Mr ROWELL: In the earlier question I asked—question No. 1—I was asking you about the estimated number of apprentices and trainees who have left industries and why these industries are experiencing skill shortages. As appears on page 1-24 of the MPS, would the minister please explain why the percentage of traineeships completed during 2003-04 was only 55 per cent to 60 per cent and the percentage of apprenticeships completed was only 60 per cent to 65 per cent—

Mr BARTON: Whereabouts are you?

Mr ROWELL: It is page 1-24. It deals with the 55 per cent to 60 per cent of traineeships completed during 2003-04, and the percentage of apprenticeships completed was 60 per cent to 65 per cent. These percentages are down in the areas where there are skill shortages. Could you please explain why this is occurring and if these people have been leaving in areas where there are skill shortages?

Mr BARTON: Yes. I guess completion rates are one factor in assessing the value of apprenticeships and traineeships. I will come back to this in a moment, but we certainly have targeted 55 per cent to 60 per cent of traineeships and we target 60 per cent to 65 per cent of apprenticeships. If we look at TAFE, some 73 per cent of TAFE students are in employment three to six months after completing their course. Now, 67 per cent is the figure for university. If we are talking about people who complete apprenticeships or traineeships, then it is 90 per cent of those who are either in jobs or went on to further study.

You asked me why are some people not completing. I guess that we would have to have a pretty thorough survey to find out, but I stress to you that the figures of completion rates for apprenticeships and traineeships in this state are in fact quite high compared to some of the national standards and compared to other forms of training. I would go so far as to say that I am a zealot about trying to ensure that we get a lot more young people into apprenticeships in particular. I started a lot of work on this almost three years ago as part of developing the state's manufacturing industry strategy when I was the Minister for State Development. I had a round table of some of the state's biggest business leaders in the manufacturing industries. In that process we identified—and this has been identified very broadly since then—that the whole value of apprenticeships has been very devalued by our community, not just apprenticeships in manufacturing industries. In fact, most of the big-hitter business leaders who sat around the table with me at the manufacturing leaders forum were in fact tradespeople themselves. They had started apprenticeships as young people. They had been promoted or had gone on to further study and, ultimately, been promoted.

So through that strategy we then started a conscious effort to ensure that we put proper value back into training for apprenticeships. Sadly, I think that society has gone to a point where it believes that unless your child can get a high TE score and go on to university then they are a failure. We have put an enormous, and are putting in an enormous, amount of effort into getting more young people into apprenticeships. But, sadly, not everybody makes it through to the other end of the system. We could probably go into more detail later about why some of them do not, if you wish.

Mr ROWELL: I refer to page 1-18 of the MPS at the fourth paragraph where it states that the department will continue to partner with community, industry, business and all levels of government to design and deliver training programs and initiatives which are high quality. What was the total level of funding provided by the government in 2003-04 to the industry training advisory body and what have you budgeted for in the 2004-05 year?

Mr BARTON: I am told that \$2.16 million is the budget for that particular line item—the same as last year.

Mr ROWELL: As I understand it, in late 2002 the department wrote to each ITAB and stated that it would be looking to enter into—

Mr BARTON: Which ITAB, sorry?

Mr ROWELL: ITAB—I-T-A-B.

Mr BARTON: Yes, but which one?

Mr ROWELL: Industry training advisory body. It said that it would be looking to enter into performance and funding agreements with a rationalised ITAB network in 2003-04 with the department conveying the message that if the ITAB decided to stay alone it would receive no funding. Why did your department consistently provide this advice when at the same time consultants had been engaged to develop a funding model for ITABs for 2004-05 which concluded the opposite—that the ITABs, which did not stand alone, would receive an injection of funds whilst ITABs that were amalgamated would receive less funding? How many ITABs did amalgamate as a result?

Mr BARTON: Let me just talk about this, because this is one where very clearly change is being forced upon us. We have no choice but to consider whether there needs to be change at the ITAB level. In the 2002-03 federal budget the Commonwealth government took a decision to cut funding for state and territory industry training advisory arrangements. I must say that it did that without any prior warning or any prior consultation with us, as the state government which delivers the funding through to those ITABs or works more closely with the ITABs. The Queensland government decided to continue to support the industry training advisory body network, and my department has been working with ITABs to ensure their financial and operational sustainability. But I stress that we do not have the capacity to make up the shortfall in Commonwealth funding.

The department will, however, provide the network with the \$2.16 million in funding in the 2004-05 financial year—and that is the figure that I quoted to you in the previous question, too. This remains the highest per capita contribution of any state or territory to industry advisory arrangements. So while we have not lifted it, we have maintained it at the same level that it was at last year in last year's budget. It is the highest per capita support of any state to ITABs and it comes on top of the fact that the federal government has totally removed all of its contributions to ITABs. Sadly, this is one of the areas where the federal government is not putting its money where its mouth is. It is saying that it is concerned about skill shortages. It is saying that it is concerned about making sure that people get appropriate training, but it has totally cut all of its funding for ITABs. We are continuing.

Due to the removal of the Commonwealth funding to the ITABs, amalgamations were an absolute necessity. Further funding for the industry training advisory bodies will be based on the size and scope of their roles, but we cannot fill up the bucket of money that the federal government took away. We are continuing our contribution and at the same level, but that means that the ITABs themselves are going to have to find a way to be more efficient, because the reality is that they have less money to operate with.

We are continuing to work as a department with the ITAB network and we are facilitating an amalgamation process and the development of a new funding model that will adequately resource ITABs to achieve similar outcomes in divergent industries. We have not made final decisions about that yet. In fact, we are putting in our money. We are working with them. We believe that, if they are going to achieve efficiencies, they are going to have to amalgamate, but we have not made any final decisions about that as yet.

Mr ROWELL: I hear what you are saying about the federal government, but the state has been a major beneficiary of the GST. I think that we got second best of all the states in Australia with the levels of funding.

Mr BARTON: That—

Mr ROWELL: Can I just continue?

Mr BARTON: I will make some comment about the GST later seeing that you have led with your chin.

Mr ROWELL: You raised the issue of what the federal government is not doing. I just pointed out a few issues that it is involved in, too. There is the level of funding to be provided this year, and the ITABs have been earmarked for an increase in funding. I heard you talk about the \$2.16 million in funding. Was this determined on the basis of the skills shortages? Which ITAB will experience funding

cuts? Will you indicate which of these represent amalgamated ITABs? That is the question that I asked previously that you really did not address.

Mr BARTON: We have not made final decisions yet about who should amalgamate with whom. I accept—and the Premier and I think that the Treasurer would have accepted—that we are getting significant funds through the GST, but we are being slashed and burned on a whole range of other specific performance payments or having our hands tied as to how we can spend the money. It is a bit like your wife giving you the housekeeping money and saying that you can buy only bread and cheese with it and then saying, 'But don't you dare buy beer, Marc, or I'm going to reduce your allowance next week,' like my wife does to me.

Mr ROWELL: Haven't you got a running away from home allowance?

Mr BARTON: Yes. But alternatively, the federal government is putting in place more and more requirements and tying its funding more and more tightly. In many cases, even though GST funding is coming through—it is needed for a whole range of other additional services—it is cutting the specific payments. The ITABs are very specific industry bodies. We support them. In fact, they really are tripartite bodies. They are supported by industry and they are supported by us. Up until 2002-03 they were supported by the federal government in specific terms as well. I cannot give you a final outcome, because it is something we are still working through in consultation with—

The CHAIR: You still have further time, Minister.

Mr ROWELL: I think it is good if you do expand on it, because it is a critical area for the future.

Mr BARTON: I think it is a critical area for the future. I must say, though, that I am not real happy with a couple of people in ITABs who are out there waging lobbying campaigns, and one in particular who is doing a real nice nasty job on me—if he keeps it up he will get a writ—about what I am supposedly doing to his ITAB when in fact we are consulting with them and trying to work with them to ensure we get the best outputs we can for ITABs and the best outcomes we can generally.

I am a passionately strong believer because of the early role I played with apprenticeships way back in the days of the old Industry and Commerce Training Commission, when there were coalition governments in the early 1980s, when I was on a number of the ICTC bodies at that time. I am a firm believer in ensuring that industry—when I say 'industry' I mean the employers in the industry sector and the unions in the industry sector—has a major say in making sure we work out what training is needed, because I am also a passionate believer in ensuring that training is done to meet a need, not for the sake of training people so that they have a piece of paper and can say, 'Gee, that's good.' We can only do that if we have that high level of interactivity between industry itself and my department and also now the reality of a large number of private providers.

Mr ROWELL: And identifying good outcomes and not reducing the level of those that are not successful in getting through the traineeship.

Mr BARTON: I absolutely agree with you that we are all about achieving the correct outcomes, which I put in the terms of having training to meet a real need of industry, not training for the sake of saying, 'Isn't this good? We did a lot of training.' I stress: I am very passionate about that. In fact, my department is well aware of my views about that. Sometimes I think we all—even me—get a bit distracted and think, 'It would be nice to train people for this,' when there is no real demonstrated need, although sometimes we have to be looking to the future.

I want to work constructively with the ITABs, but I have to work within the bucket of money that we have, even though this is a very significantly increased training budget this year from this government. I am proud of that. We are going to get real bang for the buck for this government out of this department this year. Because the federal government funding component has been removed altogether, we are going to require some change in ITABs, because we just cannot have a whole raft of people spending the bulk of the funding we give them on administration instead of the real job that we need them to be doing in identifying what those training needs are and achieving the desirable outcomes that we should all be working towards. That is a harsh reality.

We had the luxury of having a whole range of individual ITABs when the federal government was supporting it as we were. Now that the federal government is not supporting it I want to ensure that we are not spending money on unnecessary administration. In my view that means some amalgamations, but amalgamations that can reasonably work.

The CHAIR: The time allocated to non-government members' questions having expired, I now call upon the member for Broadwater.

Mrs CROFT: Good morning, Minister. Page 1-22 of the MPS refers to direct grant funding to TAFE Queensland institutes, which, as you have mentioned today, play a critical role in delivering training right across Queensland. Can you please advise how much of that record TAFE Queensland budget of \$604.7 million will be allocated to the Gold Coast TAFE?

Mr BARTON: I thank you for the question. Like you, I have a very real interest in what happens with Gold Coast TAFEs, although I also have an interest in Logan, which is actually in my electorate.

Hopefully the member for Surfers Paradise will be equally interested in this output. In this budget, the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE is receiving \$45.29 million for training delivery as part of the record \$604.7 million budget for all of our TAFE institutes. This represents an increase of 10.8 per cent on the previous year's budget for the institute. I repeat that: 10.8 per cent to the Gold Coast TAFE. The budget also provides the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE with \$8.3 million for major capital works projects, including for the development of the Coomera education precinct. I appreciate that that is not in your electorate, but it is close enough. A lot of your constituents will certainly get real benefit out of that when we have it opened later in this term.

In addition to the record funding for training delivery, the institute will be considered as a preferred provider of initiatives funded through the \$25 million strategic purchasing program for 2004-05. Under the government's three-year \$1 billion SmartVET initiative, the institute will share in \$3.9 million of new funding to increase its focus on providing a skilled work force for new and emerging industries and industries experiencing skills shortages.

The Gold Coast Institute of TAFE will also share in funding to improve classrooms and other facilities for students and staff, including \$3.25 million for infrastructure equipment; \$3.5 million for minor capital works projects; \$11.25 million for information and communication technology upgrades; and \$5.38 million for the annual maintenance program. With an increased budget for 2004-05, the Gold Coast TAFE will continue to help build a skilled work force and address skills shortages to support local, regional and state growth and development. The funding will also assist the institute in providing practical and relevant vocational education and training pathways to Queenslanders with a particular emphasis on supporting the implementation of the government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future.

I could go into more detail on that. That the Gold Coast TAFE is running a 34-week program for students attending the Miami State High school and identified as at risk is just one example. The Gold Coast is a real success story. Certainly the TAFE is already assisting, not just in the tourism and hospitality industry but also in the boat building industry. The Gold Coast in many ways has become a centre of excellence for major new innovative industries. TAFE is right at the forefront of it on the Gold Coast.

Ms STONE: I want to bring your attention from the Gold Coast success story to the Logan success story, Minister, and in particular the Springwood electorate. I know that page 1-10 of the MPS refers to the local level partnerships under Breaking the Unemployment Cycle. I would like to know how that has assisted the people of Springwood.

Mr BARTON: I am very happy to assist the people of Springwood, because they live right next to the electorate of Waterford, which is also another very good place. While Queensland's unemployment rate has fallen to a 22-year low under the Beattie government, there are many people out of jobs and who lack skill and work who need that bit of support. We are helping them through Breaking the Unemployment Cycle. We aim to provide assistance to unemployed job seekers and local communities, even where unemployment is low.

Between October 1998 and April 2004, a total of \$3.9 million in assistance has been provided to people in the Springwood electorate. A total of 939 people from the Springwood electorate have been assisted, with 773 people having achieved employment outcomes. Again, as it was in Ferny Grove, the percentage of people who have gone on to get employment through our Breaking the Unemployment Cycle programs is very high. This does include a total of 340 apprentices and 220 trainees. So there are a lot of apprentices and a lot of trainees that have been assisted.

Under the community employment programs a total of 379 people have been assisted into 213 jobs. Four apprentices and 139 trainees from the Springwood electorate have been employed under the Public Sector Employment, Youth for the Environment and Local Communities programs at a total cost of \$2.2 million. Under the Private Sector Employment Program, incentives totalling half a million dollars have been paid for the employment of 417 people, including 336 apprentices and 81 trainees.

I am also pleased to announce that, in relation to the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative funding, in the previous financial year to 30 April 2004—we do not have final figures for the whole year yet, so they should be even higher—a total of 111 job seekers in the state electorate of Springwood found jobs through Breaking the Unemployment Cycle, including through CEP programs. A total of 28 job seekers have been provided with employment assistance, with 21 finding employment. The electorate of Springwood has received \$226,900 for two community employment program projects. Wage incentives paid to public and private sector employers have provided 83 additional apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, including school based apprenticeships for Springwood constituents. Apprenticeships and traineeships help to alleviate skill shortages and create opportunities for young people in transition from school to work. Incentives have also helped seven mature-age job seekers in Springwood to find work. That is a very good news story.

Mr WELLS: If you have good news for Ferny Grove, the Gold Coast and Springwood, I wonder about the people of Murrumba, who are people of extremely good judgment but where there is a high level of unemployment.

Mr BARTON: I think there are a lot of people of extremely good judgment. I am very happy to advise you of the sort of support this program has been able to provide your electorate, because I think that is also important and shows that we are looking after those people who have extremely good judgment as well.

Between October 1998 and April 2004, a total of \$4.6 million in assistance has been provided to people in the Murrumba electorate. A total of 1,068 people have been assisted, with 861 people having achieved employment outcomes, including a total of 217 apprentices and 275 trainees.

Under the community employment programs a total of 576 people have been assisted, with 369 people into jobs. Seven apprentices and 193 trainees from Murrumba have been employed under the Public Sector Employment, Youth for the Environment and Local Communities programs at a total cost of \$3.1 million. Under the Private Sector Employment Program incentives totalling half a million dollars have been paid for the employment of 292 people, including 210 apprentices and 82 trainees.

I am also pleased to advise here that under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives funding in the previous year, up to 30 April, a total of 132 job seekers in Murrumba found jobs, including through CEP programs. A total of 64 job seekers have been provided with employment assistance, with 34 of those finding employment. Wage incentives paid to public and private sector employers have provided 95 additional apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, including school based apprenticeships for Murrumba constituents. Apprenticeships and traineeships are creating a very good opportunity for young people to transition from school to work. In Murrumba incentives have assisted three mature-age job seekers to find appropriate employment as well.

Mr WELLS: Thank you. I will tell them about that. Page 1-3 of the MPS refers to the establishment of Skilling Solutions Queensland. Can you provide the committee with further details of this initiative?

Mr BARTON: I am absolutely delighted to. The establishment of Skilling Solutions Queensland is a key initiative of the government's new billion-dollar SmartVET strategy. \$10.8 million has been provided to establish Skilling Solutions Queensland, which is a new integrated training and employment service that will fast-track the employment prospects of Queenslanders and help industries facing skill shortages to acquire suitable workers on demand. We are in a rapidly changing labour market. It is essential for Queenslanders to have guaranteed access to accurate and up-to-date information on career pathways and employment prospects throughout the state.

SmartVET will harness the working capacity of all Queenslanders by providing access to personalised advice and support in gaining the skills needed by key industries and in ensuring that the existing skills and experience of workers are formally recognised. It is very important that we recognise prior skills and prior experience.

The initiative will offer Queenslanders a customised face-to-face career advisory and assessment service that provides information on a range of employment related issues including training, career pathways and local sustainable employment opportunities, particularly in areas experiencing skills shortages. Specialist advisers will help individuals to identify and assess the skills that they already possess so that their journey to formal qualifications is shortened, develop training plans that map the skills they will need to acquire and alert them to skills shortages in local industries that could represent employment opportunities. We need to ensure that we dovetail—again, my point earlier about training to meet a need, not training for training's sake.

The Skilling Solutions Queensland pilot will also provide advice on registered training organisations available to provide the required training, links to national state and regional employment and skills shortage databases and specialist advice to mature-age workers about training strategies applicable to them. The new SmartVET strategy reflects our economic priorities. It provides targeted funding to training that will increase the pool of highly skilled workers available for recruitment in the priority industries in Queensland, and SmartVET will ensure that Queensland develops a work force that more than keeps pace with our Smart State reputation.

Mr WELLS: On page 1-2 of the MPS there is a report of an eight per cent increase in funding under the user choice Apprenticeship and Traineeship Training Program. What will be the impact of this additional funding?

Mr BARTON: The Beattie government is very committed to the continued development of a robust and high-quality training market in Queensland. It is meeting this commitment by maintaining appropriate levels of competition in the delivery of publicly funded training and ensuring that public funding complements the training that is being delivered through Queensland's burgeoning fee for service training market. The government has provided successive record levels of funding for apprentice and trainee training through the user choice program, which has grown by 38.1 per cent over four years.

My department is committed to using this funding to ensure that employers, apprentices and trainees have the maximum possible choice of registered training organisations for publicly funded training. In 2004-05 program funding has increased by nearly eight per cent to \$110.5 million, funding

an estimated 2,500 additional training places. This funding will be directed towards addressing skills shortages and priority apprenticeship and traineeship training. The program will also continue to support the learning needs of young people and other Queenslanders who are the most disadvantaged in entering or remaining in the labour market.

In 2004-05 additional funding includes \$2 million to increase the viability of training in thin markets where there are small numbers of apprentices and trainees distributed across Queensland, making training expensive and unattractive to registered training organisations—\$1 million to create an additional 400 new training places in traditional apprenticeships for the building and construction and engineering industries and \$1 million to increase incentives for training providers that offer recognition of prior learning as part of training to fast-track apprentices and trainees to the achievement of their qualification.

So it is a very good news story. I should add that I was very happy when the federal minister congratulated me on our additional funding in that area. I did remind him that he should be tipping some more money in to help us do an even better job of training Queenslanders and that he would get a very big bang for his buck if he gave us even more money to use.

Mrs CROFT: Minister, page 1-19 of the MPS refers to the growth of school based apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland, and I am delighted to hear that you have accepted an invitation to address the Coombabah State High School at its prestigious Coombabah industry night on 24 August. We will be looking forward to hearing you speak on that night, but can you please provide details on the growth of this exciting pathway to jobs for young people?

Mr BARTON: I am looking forward to that night as well, because school based apprenticeships and traineeships are an effective transition pathway from school to further training or employment for young people and will assist in the addressing of critical skills shortages across Queensland. Following the 2001 election, the Beattie government set a target of 10,500 additional school based apprentices and trainees over a three-year period ending 30 June 2004.

As at 30 April 2004—and the final numbers are not in yet—this target has been achieved, with over 13,000 students taking advantage of this initiative. So we sought to do 10,000; we have achieved at least 13,000. Queensland is now leading the nation in the uptake of school based apprenticeships and traineeships. Queensland currently has approximately 37 per cent of all school based apprentices and trainees in training in Australia. We have about 19 per cent of the population; we have 37 per cent of school based apprenticeships. For the quarter ending 31 March 2004, Queensland recorded 49.6 per cent of all school based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in Australia. So not only are we the highest; we had in that period nearly half of all the new ones coming in in Australia. I think we can genuinely say we are leading the way.

Since the inception of school based apprenticeships and traineeships in 1997, 23,724 students have taken advantage of this important training initiative. During 2003, 5,524 young Queenslanders commenced school based apprenticeships or traineeships. This compares to the 2002 commencements of 4,766. As at 30 April 2004, there were 6,194 school based apprentices and trainees in training. They are very significant numbers.

The government will expand funding arrangements for school based apprentices and trainees under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative by providing 1,000 wage subsidies in 2004-05. They will be available to public sector agencies and private sector employers in rural and remote areas under the Youth Training Initiatives Program. School based apprenticeships and traineeships are supported across the school sectors, including Education Queensland, Catholic education and the Association of Independent Schools. In total, 381 Queensland schools have participated in school based apprenticeships and traineeships. The majority of school based apprentices and trainees have been employed through group training organisations.

Mrs CROFT: I refer now to funding for pilots of recognition of prior learning on page 1-21 of the MPS. Could you please advise the committee what these pilots are designed to achieve?

Mr BARTON: I would love to. As I have said before, the SmartVET strategy is the most advanced approach to vocational education and training adopted by any government in Australia. The key to the strategy is the integration of a range of initiatives that tackle skills shortages from different directions. The \$1 million provided to pilot recognition of prior learning projects will develop the test methods of assessing the current skill levels for existing workers and specified industry sectors. One thousand Queenslanders working in key industries will have the opportunity to fast-track the new qualifications under the Recognition of Prior Learning Program.

Through recognition of prior learning activities, workers will have their existing skills assessed and credited towards a formal qualification. Consequently, workers will only be required to undertake the necessary additional training to fill the gap between their current skills and those required for the issuing of a qualification. The initiative will allow industries in urgent need of more highly qualified staff to upgrade their existing work forces as quickly as possible. Further, it will enable workers to gain up-to-date industry and nationally accepted qualifications.

The pilots will also develop RPL strategies that will be rolled out across the state to support training providers in providing high-quality RPL services as part of any training program. It is ultimately our aim that any worker with existing skills will fast-track through their qualification so that time and money is not being spent in training someone in the skills that they already have. Importantly, RPL processes have major benefits, including helping to transition workers back into the work force after a period of absence by affirming the value of their existing skills—that is very important, particularly for women who spend time out of the work force—and helping employers to understand the existing skills of their workers as part of an upskilling program. All too often we see examples of where people have employees in the work force and they just do not appreciate that they have the skills they need.

The CHAIR: The time allotted to government members' questions has expired.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, page 1-15 of the MPS details the types of assistance provided for employment and training. Will you please detail how many applications your department received in 2003-04 to claim the travel accommodation subsidy available to registered Queensland apprentices and trainees who live more than 50 kilometres one way from where the registered training organisation provides training? Of these, how many were successful and what was the total expenditure paid out of the subsidy?

Mr BARTON: I am not sure that I have those figures immediately with me.

Mr ROWELL: Could you take it on notice?

Mr BARTON: Whereabouts are we on page 1-15? Is it in the table?

Mr ROWELL: Yes, 1-15. It talks about trainees and so on. What I want to know is how much was paid, how many were successful and so on.

Mr BARTON: But you are talking about the ones who are in rural and remote—

Mr ROWELL: Yes, 50 kilometres away one way from the areas where traineeships can be provided.

Mr BARTON: I do not know that you would expect me to have every single—

Mr ROWELL: You can take it on notice.

Mr BARTON: Let us have a chat about this. I think I know the reason you have asked this question and I appreciate the reason you have asked me the question.

Mr ROWELL: It is important.

Mr BARTON: Because it is an important issue in your electorate right now.

Mr ROWELL: In a lot of rural electorates.

Mr BARTON: There are a lot of important issues in your electorate right now.

Mr ROWELL: Not specifically my electorate. There are a lot of regional areas around Queensland.

Mr BARTON: It is a controversial issue in your electorate right now, particularly in the town of Ingham, and it is a controversial issue right now in the Burdekin electorate, particularly in the town of Ayr. I am being flooded by letters from people—well, not exactly flooded, but I am getting quite a few letters from people and organisations in Ingham and quite a few letters from organisations and people in Ayr, which of course is another seat that is currently held by the National Party. I guess I understand, as you would understand, because you have seen me in Ingham a number of times in recent years and I have been in Ayr—which I have a soft spot for because it is my home town—a number of times in recent years as well with regard to the current difficulties of the sugar industry.

What seems to have emerged is a view from people in both of those communities that because they are suffering some disadvantage with the sugar industry going through some periods of genuine and real difficulty they should have access to this particular program for apprentices and trainees. The guidelines are fairly clear as to who can apply. It is intended for apprentices and trainees in what are genuinely very remote and rural communities.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, this is not referring specifically to those areas whatsoever.

Mr BARTON: I might be psychic but I thought it was asked because of that difficulty. I must say that we cannot assist the people of Ingham and Ayr because they are not rural and remote. I have been advised—and that is why I thought we would have a chat about it for a while—that under that program everyone who was eligible who applied was assisted, and the budget was \$2.4 million.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I think we have the wrong horse, to be quite frank.

Mr BARTON: I do not think so.

Mr ROWELL: What I was dealing with was a pure subsidy situation, but I will ask you the question that you are referring to.

Mr BARTON: Well, you already have the answer.

Mr ROWELL: I think you were referring to page 1-13. I was talking about page 1-15 and the generalisation regarding those people in apprenticeships or traineeships anywhere where it is more than 50 kilometres away from the registered training provider. The question I want to ask concerns page 1-13 of the MPS, which indicates that \$1.8 million and \$2.6 million will be invested in school based and other apprenticeships and traineeships through the Education and Training Reforms Pathways Program youth training incentives scheme, and that is probably what I think you are referring to.

Mr BARTON: No.

Mr ROWELL: Okay, that is good. This is the question: why, Minister, have the Hinchinbrook and Burdekin regions been omitted from this scheme—that is, the youth training incentive scheme?

Mr BARTON: Because they simply do not meet the criteria. The youth training incentive for the private sector is targeted at assisting students in rural and remote areas. I grew up in Ayr. It might be a bit rural, but it is hardly remote. I have also spent a lot of time in Ingham. It is rural, but it is hardly remote. To define rural and remote areas, the department has used Education Queensland's Priority Country Area Program, or PCAP, boundaries. The Burdekin shire is precluded because of its proximity to Townsville and similarly with the Ingham area, because it is about the same distance from Townsville as the Burdekin is from Townsville. This does not mean that young people or employers in the Burdekin area or the Ingham area will miss out. There are still two other avenues through which the Burdekin and Ingham and other employers not in a rural or remote area can access incentives. They are the Strategic Employment Development program and the public sector stream of youth training incentives. These incentives are all part of a comprehensive and targeted initiative by the Queensland government in support of the education and training reforms—and I think that is what we are referring to here—and to address skill shortages which will provide students with additional employment pathways whilst in the senior schooling years.

We have an estimated budget for the youth training incentive for this coming financial year of \$1.16 million for the private sector and a budget for the youth training incentive for the public sector of \$1.84 million. In terms of the output measures that we are looking for, it includes 2,250 school based apprentices and trainees in the private sector and 2,550 in the public sector over three years. I do want to stress that people are seeking to get me to change the rules on a specific programs, and that is certainly the reason for this question. I might have been pre-empting you; the person who slipped me your questions must have had them out of order. We in fact have appropriate measures where we can assist young people, but it is not aided by people seeking to have guidelines changed to access programs that are not available to them and, for very good reasons, cannot be available to them. But all is not lost. They can apply for funding under other programs.

Mr LANGBROEK: At page 1-13 of the MPS it is noted that \$300,000 will be allocated to give disadvantaged young unemployed people the clothing or equipment they need to get a start in the workplace. It is allocated over three years, so that is \$100,000 to be allocated per year. Could you outline how many young Queenslanders may benefit from this amount of money? Could you also outline the criteria for being classed as a disadvantaged young person?

Mr BARTON: I will seek to get the formal criteria. I do not know whether we have that with us, but we will certainly provide that to you. I have had parents come into my electorate office because a youngster has had the opportunity of a job but they needed a pair of work boots, because they cannot go on to a site that requires the wearing of safety boots. That is something that the chairman would be very well aware of from his experience around the building and construction industry. The boss says, 'You've got a job. You start Monday, but here's what you need.' That will include a pair of safety boots. In fact, I have gone out of my way to find that. This is a program that does ensure that the necessary tools or protective equipment must be purchased within three months of the commencement of the date of the apprenticeship or the traineeship. The application must be lodged within six months of the commencement date of the apprenticeship or traineeship. The tools or protective equipment purchased must be deemed appropriate under the subsidy and the cost assessed as fair and reasonable by the Department of Employment and Training.

There is probably more criteria here that I could assist with. They must be employed in an identified skill shortage and/or growth industry that is crucial to the development of the state's economy. They must be employed in an industry where there is either no applicable tool allowance or where necessary tools and protective equipment are not traditionally provided by the employer, and in many cases they are. Subsidies only apply to those apprentices and trainees where the qualification outcome is at AQF level 3 in skill shortage or growth industries. The only AQF level 2 and level 4 apprenticeships and traineeships eligible for an incentive payment are in the growth industries of telecommunications and aviation.

The program has been established to provide for the purchase of essential tools or equipment where the prospective employment opportunity did not attract a tool allowance under an award arrangement. So it is a matter of helping people to get started, I guess. I must admit that it is a relatively small amount—and it is a relatively small amount—because most of the awards now that look after the traditional skill trades would have provisions for the provision of tools and the provision of safety boots

and the provision of, in most cases, even work clothing. But there are circumstances where young people are not able to access them from the employer. We do not want to have young people who are disadvantaged who would otherwise get a job missing out. It is a small amount of money, but it is a pretty important small amount of money to assist those people who would otherwise be disadvantaged.

The CHAIR: Order! The time allocated for non-government members' questions has expired. I call upon the member for Springwood.

Ms STONE: Minister, page 1-22 of the MPS refers to increasing investment in vocational education and training for the manufacturing industry. Could the minister please provide additional details?

Mr BARTON: Yes, I would love to because Queensland's manufacturing industry is the fastest growing in Australia, and I am very proud of that. The Beattie government is building on this growth and generating jobs by committing \$8 million over three years for the advanced manufacturing plan, which was launched by the government in 2003—I must say by myself at that time—in support of initiatives outlined in Making Queensland's Future—A Manufacturing Development Plan.

As at March 2004, the manufacturing industry was the largest employer of full-time staff in Queensland. The industry employs about 10.4 per cent of Queensland's total work force, significantly impacting upon the state's economy. The advanced manufacturing plan aims to enhance Queensland's position as the leading state for value-added manufacturing growth in the nation. It is unashamedly focused on skills, training and work force development, and the Department of Employment and Training is implementing a range of initiatives in support of the plan. In 2003-04 my department invested over \$69 million in manufacturing industry related training to build a highly skilled work force and to improve the image of the industry to attract quality new entrants.

A further investment of more than \$70 million in manufacturing industry related training was announced in the 2004-05 state budget. This is a significant investment, reflecting the importance of this sector to Queensland's economy. The increased investment in 2004-05 will be used to further progress existing activity and to design more flexible training responses to skill shortages in key sectors, including marine, aerospace and process manufacturing.

Innovative training and skills development programs for existing workers and new industry entrants will continue to be delivered. Strategies will be further commenced to strengthen industry and school linkages and to continue to build on the effectiveness of government industry partnerships, including to lift the profile of careers in manufacturing through attractive and relevant marketing materials that showcase careers in manufacturing—and I think I am launching some of that next week—career expos where employers and apprentices meet directly with students, and industry forums that explore ways to further develop Queensland's manufacturing skills base. In 2004-05 the government will also be funding training in response to the skilling needs of specific industrial projects such as the \$400 million expansion to the Yabulu nickel project in Townsville and the \$3.2 billion Aldoga aluminium smelter in Gladstone. Queensland's manufacturing industry is also a key targeted sector under the government's \$1 billion SmartVET strategy.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Minister, page 1-22 of the MPS refers to the Queensland Takes Off strategy. Could you advise the committee of progress with Aviation Australia?

Mr BARTON: I would absolutely love to, because Queensland's Take Off policy was launched by the government in 2000-01 to establish Queensland as the aviation hub of the Asia-Pacific region. A key initiative of the policy was the establishment of Aviation Australia Pty Ltd, a training centre for aviation excellence which is chaired by my director-general these days. The centre is pivotal to the development of a local work force with the training and skills necessary to support and attract aviation businesses to Queensland. A registered training organisation, Aviation Australia's \$5 million world-class training centre was opened at Brisbane airport by the Premier in December 2002. The centre provides hands-on training and experience for potential aviation industry apprentices and maintains strong industry relationships with Qantas, Boeing and many other major industry national and international organisations.

Aviation Australia has graduated 155 aeroskills students in its first two years of operation, with a further 132 currently enrolled. Training responds directly to the needs of industry sectors experiencing critical skill shortages, including avionics, structures and mechanical maintenance engineering. To date, 94 per cent of graduates have gained employment after completing training. This is testimony to the quality and relevance of the training provided by Aviation Australia in meeting industry need, including specialist aircraft type maintenance training. Cabin crew emergency training is to be introduced from later this year after installation of emergency simulation infrastructure in a further expansion of facilities. Aviation Australia has also been chosen as the training provider for the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre, which services the growing training needs of northern Queensland which was opened by the federal Minister for Training and myself early last week.

I am proud to announce that Aviation Australia has secured commercial training contracts with Cathay Pacific, Dragonair, Gulf Air, Air Pacific, Air New Zealand and Air Niugini. The centre also

undertakes business development activities with aviation organisations in the Middle East and Asia. Approximately \$15 million in grants from the department, the Department of State Development and Innovation and the Australian National Training Authority have been invested in the set-up and establishment of Aviation Australia to date. Further set-up grant funding of \$1.7 million from the Department of State Development and Innovation will be provided over the next two years. Between 2001-02 to 2003-04 my Department of Employment and Training has approved the investment of approximately \$6.3 million for aeroskills training through Aviation Australia. There is some more good news on that and a lot more to come, but I think I have run out of time.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The member for Springwood.

Ms STONE: Could you please advise the committee whether the 10 per cent training policy referred to on page 1-14 of the MPS is achieving its goal of creating additional apprenticeships and traineeships in the building and construction industry?

Mr BARTON: I am happy to answer the question, because the answer is absolutely yes. The structured training policy is known as the 10 per cent training policy. It has and will continue to achieve its goal of creating additional apprenticeships and traineeships in the building and construction industry. The Beattie government has pursued a coherent policy agenda aimed at alleviating skill shortages and building a highly skilled labour force for the building and construction industry in Queensland. Between July 1998 and 30 April 2004, a total of 6,454 training opportunities—including for 1,588 existing workers and 4,866 apprentices, trainees and cadets—have been created in the building and construction industry as a result of the policy. This achievement is well in excess of the original goal.

For the period 1 July 2003 to 30 April 2004, 1,064 training opportunities were created in the building and construction industry under the policy. This figure includes 199 existing workers and 865 apprentices, trainees and cadets. It is anticipated that by the end of the financial year the target of 1,200 will have been achieved. It is anticipated that in 2004-05 up to 1,050 additional training opportunities will be created through the policy. The 10 per cent training policy applies to all government departments, statutory bodies and statutory government owned corporations and is part of the Queensland government's state purchasing policy. It has been in existence since 1993 and is now a major part of the government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative.

The policy requires that a minimum of 10 per cent of the total labour hours on any Queensland government building or civil construction projects—valued at over \$250,000 for buildings and \$500,000 for civil construction—must be undertaken by apprentices, trainees or cadets or used for the upskilling of existing workers. Contractors are required to provide evidence of compliance with this policy. This information is assessed by my department in conjunction with the Department of Public Works and Main Roads in any review of their eligibility to tender for future government work. Under this policy a training opportunity means the employment training on site of apprentices, trainees and cadets, including the upskilling of existing workers in recognised training projects. It is playing a very major role in the provision of skilled building employees to meet that skill shortage that is there.

The CHAIR: The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Employment and Training has now expired. On behalf of the committee I express appreciation to the minister and senior personnel and all officers and staff of the department who are here this morning and those who no doubt have worked hard back in the department to assist this committee. We express our appreciation for that hard work. The hearing is now suspended for morning tea and we will resume at 10.45 with the estimates of the Department of Industrial Relations.

Sitting suspended from 10.31 a.m. to 10.48 a.m.

TAKE IN APPEARANCES

The CHAIR: The committee will now move on to examine the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Industrial Relations. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, page 2-20 of the MPS points out that only 90 workplace agreements were lodged this year, a decrease of 3.5 per cent over the previous year. In fact, if you look back, the number of Queensland workplace agreements waiting approval have continued to fall since the Beattie government's drastic changes to the Industrial Relations Act in July 1999. Minister, will you admit that the changes your government has made to the Queensland workplace agreements have failed, rendering them unworkable?

Mr BARTON: I could never agree to such an outrageous assertion.

Mr ROWELL: Just dealing with the facts.

Mr BARTON: I was hoping to deal with the facts. You asked me for an opinion; you asked me to agree with your assertion that our changes to the Industrial Relations Act had failed. I could never agree to such an outrageous assertion. All the applications that have been handled in this period of time are to do with competition for secret and unfair Australian workplace agreements.

We made no bones about it as a government. While I was not the responsible minister at the time I think most people in this room know my long background in industrial relations. Quite frankly, the

changes that were made when the Queensland workplace agreements were removed from our legislation—and we very strongly believe that the federal government should also do away with the Australian workplace agreements—have resulted in what the government believes to be the absolute best and fairest system of industrial relations in the country. Queensland has a very strong independent umpire in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. It has the capacity under Queensland IR legislation for all matters to be heard and determined by the commission; it has a capacity for there to be certified agreements, negotiated freely between the parties, registered with the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

Some of the matters that do come before commission, of course, are concerns that some Australian workplace agreements do not meet the no-disadvantage test. That is a factor that was there when the Queensland workplace agreements existed. Workplace agreements should not be about creating an unlevel playing field for employers, either—for some to be able to negotiate or, in fact, unfairly gain agreement with their employees on conditions that give them an unfair advantage over other employers.

We say that we have absolutely the best industrial relations system in the country at this point in time. We have some of the absolute lowest levels of disputation ever in Queensland's history. How well our system works has been proven and we do not resile from the changes that were made several years ago.

Mr ROWELL: It takes two to make any agreement and I think that is the essence of making a workplace agreement. Given the government's failure with the laws, I am saying that interest in Queensland workplace agreements is dropping. When will you develop a better outcome by amending legislation? If we are not getting the interest in these agreements it seems likely that there is a blockage in the system. All I am saying is that it would be relevant if the government looked at it again to increase the outcomes and make them much better. What is not mentioned under the figure of development is future development in 2004-05.

Mr BARTON: As to future development, in relation to the types of applications that are being received, I stress that rather than dropping—you are focusing on the Queensland workplace agreements?

Mr ROWELL: Yes.

Mr BARTON: What we have said is the alternative that we have in place is for certified agreements. Certified agreements are not dropping. The certified agreements are, in fact, rising very considerably. In 2002-03 there were 517 applications filed in relation to certified agreements. In 2003-04 that rose to 980. There is a huge amount of interest in certified agreements and that is precisely in the region that you had spoken of that it takes two to tango or it takes two to reach agreement.

We are very, very strongly agreeing that, in fact, we believe that it is appropriate for there to be agreement reached and for that agreement to be reached and certified by our Industrial Relations Commission, because that is where it should be. My DG is giving me some advice here that a number of the applications that were, in fact, made in the commission with regard to Queensland workplace agreements—older ones that are still in existence—were claims made on behalf of some Vietnamese workers in particular who were being severely disadvantaged by the workplace agreements. The employer immediately withdrew out of the state jurisdiction, went to the federal jurisdiction and then immediately put them on to Australian workplace agreements where he could continue with the type of agreement that those workers believed was disadvantaging them. There was some jurisdiction hopping, we think, by some of the employers who are not quite doing the correct thing. Once they were picked up by our state industrial jurisdiction and found to be imposing unfair disadvantages and unfair practices on their employees they immediately went to the federal jurisdiction.

Of great concern to me is the situation in relation to migrant workers. You would have seen announcements made by me about a week and a half ago about our new practices and guidelines to look after outworkers in the clothing industry, most of whom are migrants—a lot are migrant women. In many circumstances those people do not have knowledge of their rights. There is no fair bargaining in terms of their ability to negotiate a fair agreement with employers who hold all the aces in their hands. These matters frequently then end up back in the industrial jurisdiction for determination.

Mr ROWELL: I again refer to the same dot point on page 2-9 of the MPS. It is noted that on 31 March 2004, 95 prosecutions were finalised. If you go to the Output Statement on page 2-11, the number of prosecutions finalised was 125. What figure is correct for the 2003-04 year and are these prosecutions outstanding from the previous financial year?

Mr BARTON: How many questions is this?

Mr ROWELL: If you go down to the bottom of the page to dot point 4 on 2-9 and then have a look at 2-11 the number of prosecutions is 125, and it says 95 on page 2-9.

Mr BARTON: I have just been assured that one was the actual figure at nine months, which would be the lower figure, and the higher figure is actually spelt out as being the target or estimate. So

that is estimated actual as at the end of the financial year. Neither of them is incorrect. In fact, if you read the dot point—

Mr ROWELL: It is 30 different.

Mr BARTON: Let us go through this. This is all about simple mathematics, so we will have a simple mathematics lesson. Dot point 4 on 2-11 says, 'As at 31 March 2004, 95'—

The CHAIR: I am having difficulty following the minister's response. I wonder if the member could decline from interrupting so that we can hear uninterrupted the minister's response.

Mr BARTON: We need to be clear because there is no inconsistency. Dot point 4 on page 2-9 says, 'As at 31 March 2004, 95 prosecutions were finalised for 2003-04, resulting in fines of \$1.5 million.' Let us be clear, it is very simple: 95 were finalised as at 31 March; we knew that. We are well past 31 March. What we all know is that the 30th day of June was only 15 days ago. So when this document was prepared and signed and presented in the budget a month ago we had to have an estimate of what our actuals would be based on the trends that were there that we knew about—what was likely to come. But we could give you the exact figure as at 31 March and that is what that point says. Then in the column on page 2-11 it is actually headed up '2003-04 estimated actuals'. So it is not a matter of there being any inconsistency at all. I am told that we do have a final figure for the year. We did estimate that it would be 125; I am told that it is actually 140. We actually did prosecute and nail a few more bad people than we thought we would based on the trend line as at 31 March.

I give my department every encouragement to go out there and get those crooks that are ripping off workers and pull them before the courts and deal with them, because the good employers are being disadvantaged by those crooks every bit as much as their employees.

Mr ROWELL: On page 2-3 of the MPS it states that ongoing additional funding of \$0.93 million is being committed per year to expand the industrial inspectorate across regional Queensland to undertake a more proactive general inspection audit role. How many additional inspectors will be employed by the industry in 2004-05?

Mr BARTON: We intend to employ an additional nine inspectors across the regions to enhance our ability to ensure that our awards and conditions are complied with. The budget initiative funding is \$0.93 million. It has been granted to enhance compliance with industrial relations legislation. The initiative will allow the Department of Industrial Relations to undertake a more proactive general audit role. Nine additional staff will be engaged in regional locations to focus on strategic general audit campaigns. This will include a dedicated team to target recognised problem areas or industry on a statewide basis.

We know the trends. We are also very committed to rural and regional Queensland. These nine people are going to be in regional locations. They are going to be very strategic. There will be one additional officer in north Queensland, one in central Queensland, one in the Wide Bay-Sunshine Coast region, one in the north Brisbane region, two additional officers in the Brisbane South-Gold Coast region and three additional officers as a dedicated audit team based in the Brisbane South-Gold Coast regional office. We will undertake general audit campaigns and strategic targeting of poor performing employers—in other words, those employers that we keep getting complaint after complaint about—industries with high non-compliance, classes of workers experiencing non-compliance, areas of new industrial relations legislation coverage, and effective strategies and seminars and media campaigns. We would rather people be aware of what is required of them instead of us having to come and find out later that they have been breaking the law and sometimes not been aware of it.

In terms of unpaid wages adjustments, as a result of our efforts in 2003-04 \$8.47 million was collected on behalf of workers who had made complaints to us that we followed up or who our industrial inspector had found when they were doing audits of industries and employers they believed were not doing the correct thing.

Mr ROWELL: Page 2-11 of the MPS provides a figure of 15.4 per cent for the reduction in the compensated lost time injury rate. How does this figure compare with other states? Why has the measure been discontinued in 2004-05 when this data was supposed to be collected for five years?

The CHAIR: To assist the committee could the member take us to the particular part of page 2-11.

Mr ROWELL: It is under the heading 'Quality' where it states—

Reduction in the compensated lost time injury rate over five years...

Mr BARTON: I think it is probably inherent in what is contained in the column. It has changed because we used to keep our own data. We have now moved to the national benchmark. That figure has been discontinued this year because it is inconsistent with the national benchmarks that we have moved to. The item immediately below that on page 2-11 states—

Reduction in the incidence of compensatable workplace injury by at least 40% by 30 June 2012 (20% reduction by 30 June 2007) in accordance with the National Strategy.

By the time you turn that into an annual figure, it becomes three per cent. I have been working very closely on this with my interstate colleagues and the national Minister for Workplace Relations. My predecessors did that. I have followed that up in the short period that I have been in this portfolio. We are consciously moving on these issues and many of the occupational health and safety and many of the workers compensation policies to adopt national standards. Our figures are comparable to other states, but we certainly have a larger rural sector in Queensland. The very nature of Queensland means that we are very rural based. We have a lot more employees in the rural sector and we also have a bigger construction sector that can sometimes skew our figures a little as well. They both have higher injury rates. Some of your people keep rolling their tractors on top of them.

Mr ROWELL: We have roll bars on them to stop that.

Mr BARTON: We are putting them in. I brought a newspaper clipping with me about a young gentleman in Maryborough who is fighting for his life after an accident about a week and a half ago. I know that I continue to be lobbied by some people in the rural sector to try to give them exemptions from putting roll bars on tractors and farm equipment. This has been coming for a long time. It is sadly one of the areas that we have problems with. We are unrepentant in insisting that roll bars are placed on tractors and farm equipment. We intend to save lives.

Mr ROWELL: On page 2-16 of the MPS under 'Future Development' it says—

A major focus will be on targeted workplace education and compliance campaigns across Queensland to increase compliance with industrial relations laws. In this regard, nine additional industrial inspectors will be engaged to carry out audits...

Given that the staff complement could only complete 800 general inspections in 2003-04, how did you come up with a target of 2,500 to be conducted in 2004-05 when there will be only a further 10 inspectors employed to help achieve this?

Mr BARTON: It has been pointed out to me—and it is correct—that in addition to those audits we follow-up 8,500 complaints in a year. So the additional inspectors are going to allow us to be much more proactive than reactive. They will primarily be proactive on audits. In addition to the 800 general inspections conducted, our industrial inspectors followed up on 8,500 complaints this year. It states that of IR complaints investigated and finalised 8,000 was the estimated actual. I guess 8,500 may have been the actual figure. We can clarify that. It is the figure immediately below that in any case. IR complaints investigated and finalised totalled 8,000. That is most of the work that the industrial inspectors do. The figure is very reasonable and realistic in those circumstances.

The CHAIR: The time allotted at this juncture for non-government members' questions has expired.

Ms STONE: I want to talk about workplace health and safety with reference to page 2-8 of the MPS. Can you outline how funding to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is being used to improve workplace health and safety in the community?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question. In March this year I officially launched the Queensland workplace health and safety strategy, a blueprint to drive workplace health and safety prevention activities over the next eight years. It sets clear targets to achieve a significant continual reduction in work related fatalities. By 2012 we aim to reduce the incidence of fatalities by at least 20 per cent and the incidence of workplace injury by 40 per cent. This is challenging but achievable.

To meet these goals, five industries—construction, manufacturing, transport and storage, health and community services, and the rural sector—have been identified as priorities and will be targeted in a bid to cut incidents. We will also be targeting three injury groups identified as national priorities for intervention: musculoskeletal disorders; falling, slipping and tripping; hitting and being hit by objects. Our prevention activities are targeted, driven and evaluated by sound strategic and evidence based approaches.

Additional funding has been provided to implement three new key initiatives to address priority workplace health and safety issues in Queensland. We will improve the safety of building and construction workers by adding up to 27 workplace health and safety inspectors dedicated to the construction industry. I know the chairman will join with me, as I am certain every member of the committee will, in thinking that 27 new industrial inspectors dedicated to the construction industry is a good measure. We believe it absolutely needs that. Nine new inspectors will be employed to deliver advisory services to small businesses with priority given to target sectors to improve compliance with workplace health and safety legislation through new information, awareness and prevention strategies.

My department will also sharpen its focus on preventing bullying, harassment and stress in workplaces by employing five new specialist inspectors with qualifications in organisational psychology to develop awareness materials, information products and provide ongoing training to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland staff. That has been an area we have been very concerned about. While we believe we are now on top of the stress claims that have been coming in—they have plateaued out; they are continuing to rise—we are taking specific action to address that issue. In total, 41 new inspectors will be employed to meet the injury and fatality reduction lists outlined in the Queensland workplace health and safety strategy 2004 to 2012 and implement the three key initiatives.

Ms STONE: I want to continue on with the building and construction industry. On page 2-10 of the MPS it makes reference to initiatives to address the capacity to ensure compliance on building and construction sites. Can you outline what the government is doing to improve workplace health and safety in the building and construction industry?

Mr BARTON: The building and construction industry in Queensland has grown by 42.8 per cent over the past five years. This government insists that this boom in building and construction be matched by high standards of worker safety. The construction industry is one of the priority industries identified in the Queensland workplace health and safety strategy. The building and construction industry strategic plan will provide a specific focus for incidents and injury prevention efforts in this industry. One of the department's new initiatives is designed to address the rapid and continuing growth in building activity in Queensland and the need for improved compliance within the industry sector. We will establish a Queensland construction industry strategy group to lead relationship management with industry partners, to drive implementation of the construction industry strategy and to assist regional teams with complex construction issues.

In 2004-05 we will improve the safety of building and construction workers by adding up to 27 workplace health and safety specialists who will be dedicated to the construction industry. These specialists will be funded through a new workplace health and safety package. It will include 22 new frontline inspectors who will specialise in preventing injuries and incidents in the building and construction industry. This will boost the strength of the on-the-ground workplace health and safety inspection team for the construction industry by almost 70 per cent. In addition, up to five new senior inspectors will be based in south-east Queensland and will focus on major construction projects in the regions—Australia's growth hot spot when it comes to building and construction. We are absolutely adamant that we will have the growth, but we will not hurt and kill people on the way through.

The CHAIR: I call the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: I have a couple of questions about compliance. You have already answered the first question about the compliance campaign and the additional nine industrial inspectors. I raise the matter in case you want to add anything else, otherwise I will move on to my next question.

Mr BARTON: Queensland does have a small business sector. What is our specific strategy in relation to small business? I would like to add to that. Approximately 216,800 private sector non-agricultural businesses employ less than 20 people. That is a very significant number of employers. Small business represents 96.5 per cent of all private sector businesses and is responsible for around 50 per cent of all private sector employment in Queensland. Our data suggests that the small business sector has grown substantially over the last 10 years. Queensland workplace health and safety audit activity suggests that small businesses need assistance to improve their workplace health and safety compliance performance. We intend to assist the small business sector because we know that it is a big grower of jobs. I know that from working in my previous ministry.

Major industry associations acknowledge that the complexity of workplace health and safety regulations and the challenges posed by translating regulatory obligations into practice are a major impediment to small businesses achieving good performance in this area. We will work to improve the compliance of small businesses with workplace health and safety legislation through new information awareness and prevention strategies. The new funding will also be used to deliver advisory services to small businesses within the target industries, raising awareness and assisting business operators to apply effective risk management. We will employ occupational health and safety specialists in the areas of occupational hygiene and ergonomics. We will develop and disseminate information to the small business sector through an interactive web site tailored to the needs of small businesses and conduct participative workshops and seminars.

We are absolutely committed to supporting Queensland small businesses through specific workplace health and safety programs. They are a very important employer in this state. They provide 50 per cent of all jobs and 96 per cent of all business. We know that when you are a small company you cannot always have access to the same specialist support as large companies, so that specific program has been put in place.

Mr WELLS: Page 2-16 of the MPS refers to targeted workplace compliance campaigns being a major focus in the future. An additional nine industrial inspectors will be employed to achieve this, as you have mentioned. Can you provide more detail regarding this initiative?

Mr BARTON: A budget initiative of \$930,000 for the 2004-05 year has been granted to enhance compliance with the industrial relations legislation. Specifically, the initiative is intended to facilitate a broader proactive general audit role by the industrial inspectorate. I run the risk of repeating myself, and I will, because I think that this is important. This is not just a matter of industrial inspectors responding to complaints. Complaints do come in, and I must admit that many of them come directly to me. I pass them on to the department for the inspectorate to handle. We want to enhance and facilitate the general audit role of the industrial inspectorate—in other words, make them much more proactive.

In the past two years, general audit programs have highlighted extensive non-compliance with industrial laws. Sadly, they have revealed a consistent pattern of widespread non-compliance over a considerable period with time and wages records, pay slips and entitlements. In addition, casual employees and women are consistently identified as the most likely to be exploited in this environment. Hence, our need to be more proactive and to find these people, not to just wait for them to walk through the door with a complaint.

The additional funding will allow for an expansion of resources for the inspectorate to ensure that enforcement activities continue to have an impact on the Queensland labour market. As I have said, nine additional inspectors will be engaged to facilitate a greater focus on strategic general audit campaigns. I have already mentioned where they will be located. We aim to increase those from 800 to 2,500, and Mr Rowell made that point earlier. That is in addition to the 8,500 responses that industrial inspectors have given. I am a firm believer, as are members of my department, in being proactive about finding the people who are flouting the awards and industrial legislation of this state to the detriment of not only their employees but also their competitors. They put genuine businesses out of business by underpaying their employees. We should not be seen as picking on business, but I do think that good businesses would want us to tidy up the unfair competition from people who are rorting the system.

Mr WELLS: With reference to pages 2-15 and 2-16 of the MPS and the inspectorate and the compliance services, could the minister explain some of the new efficiency initiatives and strategies undertaken to enhance compliance?

Mr BARTON: I would absolutely love to. The industrial inspectorate has a clear legislative role under the IR Act 1999 to ensure compliance with industrial instruments. The inspectorate constantly examines better ways to deliver its service. Initiatives and strategies to be introduced will centre around the following programs: dispute resolution of wage complaints, enforcement of wage complaints, and general audits.

Dispute resolution involves resolving wage complaints before the need for face-to-face investigations. We do not want to be the sheriff roaming in and hitting people over the head. It is carried out by contacting the affected parties by letter, explaining the obligations of the employer in relation to industrial law and stressing the need to resolve the matter in the best interests of both the employer and the employee. In the majority of cases, the resolution is attempted by way of correspondence. However, some cases may need direct contact from time to time. Currently, approximately 50 per cent of wage complaints are successfully finalised by negotiation. Employers and employees appear to be pleased with this approach because matters are attended to more quickly than through the resolution process of inspections and taking matters to court.

Wage complaint enforcement really is the traditional role of the inspectorate. That is the main reason that it came into being. Initiatives introduced to ensure compliance include the introduction of on-the-spot fines and self-recovery kits. On-the-spot fines have been in operation since October 2002. In 2003-04, 129 fines were issued, mainly for employers not keeping proper time and wages records. At page 2-15 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements it states that more than 130 fines were imposed. At the time of printing, that was an estimate. The actual end-of-year figure is 129. We actually estimated 130, so I will have to kick someone's butt because it fell short by one. Self-help kits are available to employees who wish to take their own enforcement action. Centralising of the prosecution actions in the department's six regions has also been introduced. In 2003-04, 579 prosecution actions were undertaken. General audits will be a major focus of the industrial inspectorate activities for this financial year and, of course, nine inspectors will be following that through.

Mr WELLS: With reference to page 2-17 of the MPS, can the minister outline the current levels of industrial disputation in Queensland and Australia and how they have changed over time?

Mr BARTON: I thought that no-one would ever ask me this question, so I am glad that you did. The latest ABS data on industrial disputes shows that Queensland continues to experience an historically low level of industrial disputes. Queensland lost 6,000 working days in the March quarter of 2004 due to industrial disputes, which was down from 13,600 in the December quarter of 2003. We lost 31,300 in the 12 months to March 2004, which was down from 49,700 to December 2003. Queensland's quarterly strike rate—that is, the number of working days lost per 1,000 employees—was 3.8 for the March quarter of 2004, which was down from 8.7 in December 2003. The level of disputation is very low indeed. The decline in industrial disputation in Queensland has been stronger than for Australia as a whole and for most other states. Australia, as a whole, lost 76,800 working days in the March quarter of 2004, which was down from 151,500 in the December quarter of 2003. There were 449,000 days lost in the 12 months to 2004, which was up from 439,400 to December 2003. The quarterly strike rate for the March quarter of 2004 for Australia was 9.3, which was down from 18.4 in December 2003. Queensland was 3.8 compared to a national figure of 9.3. We have about a third of the national strike level, which is a very good result.

What is the strike rate in other states? Victoria's rate was 18.3. When I was the Minister for State Development, I used to regularly say that the best reason to sell business in Queensland was that my mates in Victoria were continuing to drive people out of Victoria and into Queensland. Sadly, they are

still doing so. We have a strike rate of 3.7 and it has a strike rate of 18.3. Western Australia's rate was 17.4, South Australia's rate was 8.1—or double our strike rate—and New South Wales' rate was 4.6, which is just a bit higher than ours. Since the election of the Labor government in June 1998, the average number of working days that have been lost is 14,400 in comparison with 33,400 under the coalition government. I use that figure to demonstrate to people who think that its methods work better than ours that our methods have resulted in approximately a third of the strike rate that it had while it was in office.

The CHAIR: Page 2-15 of the MPS indicates that the Queensland government has been actively involved in matters dealing with the building and construction industry. What is currently under way to improve industrial relations practices in the industry?

Mr BARTON: The Queensland government, unlike the national government, is committed to a consultative and cooperative approach to industrial relations in the building and construction industry. The Queensland government rejects the approach of the Australian federal government as being unnecessarily provocative and confrontational. Instead, the Queensland government is working cooperatively with other state and territory governments to develop a truly national approach to issues in the building and construction industry. The Queensland government does not condone any unlawful action by unions, employers or employer associations involved in the building and construction industry. In keeping with this approach, the Queensland government convened the Queensland Building and Construction Advisory Committee in October 2003.

It is a high level, tripartite committee that has been formed to be the venue for an ongoing dialogue about the main issues affecting the building and construction industry, including its contribution to the state's economic performance, employment outcomes and industrial relations generally. The committee has met on a number of occasions. It is currently looking at strategies to assist in improving workplace health and safety performance in the industry and at the code of practice for the building and construction industry in Queensland.

In addition, the Queensland government has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at improving industrial relations and workplace health and safety performance in the industry sector. These include a new definition of 'worker' in the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act, strict prequalification requirements for builders seeking to work in Queensland government construction projects, a strong commitment to training through its training levy and licensing arrangements and the adoption of a new strategy for improving workplace health and safety, including the engagement of the 22 additional specialist health and safety inspectors. In terms of industrial relations performance in the industry, the latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that in the March 2004 quarter, 4,500 working days were lost in the construction industry in Queensland. In the same period in 2002-03, 21,900 working days were lost. So we have a very good performance.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The time presently allotted to questions from government members having expired, I now call upon the member for Surfers Paradise.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you. I welcome the officers from the Department of Industrial Relations. I refer to non-government question on notice No. 10 in which it is stated that of 218 compliance audits carried out on amusement devices, only 39 per cent—or 85—were found to be in compliance with workplace health and safety standards. As such, I ask: what exactly is being done to lift this terrible rate of compliance in the amusement industry?

Mr BARTON: We have had a very substantial project—I think that it is over the past three years and my director-general will correct me if I am wrong. We are strengthening registration requirements. Higher-risk amusement devices are to be registered in a special class—and I think that you and I, as fans of high-risk amusement devices, the wild rides—would know what we mean by those compared with the more placid devices. We are developing a national register of ride incidents and we are doing that in conjunction with the other states. Queensland is to be the custodian of that national register for the first 12 months, because one of the other facts of life is that the showies do tend to trip around a bit. That is the nature of their life. I have a very good working relationship with them, because the national headquarters for the Showmen's Guild is not quite in my electorate, but you could stand on the border of my electorate and throw a stone onto the roof of their building if you wanted to and very many of them actually live in my electorate. Queensland has been conducting a proactive compliance campaign over the past three years and is participating in that national compliance campaign. So we have been one of the leaders in developing that national compliance campaign. We are developing strategies to control the risk of injuries that result from the inadequate design of rider restraint systems along with other occupational health and safety jurisdictions.

They are the formal things that we are doing, but let me a little bit more lucid. I have a bit of detail, because I think that we are all highly focused on the fact that the exhibition is coming up in a couple of weeks' time. In fact, I am really pleased that we are having the public holiday for the exhibition because that means that, as the minister responsible for public holidays, this year I get to have a public holiday on my birthday. Last year, we had a team of eight inspectors audit the amusement devices while they were being erected to make sure that they were compliant and in good and appropriate order. A further

team of eight inspectors were rostered over the life of the exhibition to provide a presence to ensure ongoing compliance, because sometimes problems can emerge. That proactive focus from last year will continue this year. We will be having eight inspectors who will again ensure that, while the rides are being erected, they are complying and that they are all in appropriate good order. There will be a team of 10 inspectors rostered on during the entire show on a daily basis to ensure compliance. There have been too many incidents and we are working closely with the Showmen's Guild and the owners because they do not want to be hurting people, either.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, minister. My next question refers to page 2-9 of the MPS where it refers to one of the recent achievements in the portfolio being a strong emphasis on serious incidents, complaint investigation and prosecution. Could you detail why the timeliness for commencement and completion of investigations is at the bottom level of the 70 per cent to 80 per cent targeted range? That is on page 2-11 in the output statement under 'Timeliness'?

Mr BARTON: What paragraph is it on page 2-9?

Mr LANGBROEK: It is paragraph four. The sentence commences—

The output continued its strong emphasis on serious incidents, complaint investigation and prosecution.

Mr BARTON: Yes.

Mr LANGBROEK: And then on 2-11, with reference to timeliness of prosecution, the aim is to be 70 per cent to 80 per cent.

Mr BARTON: Yes. There is a requirement under the act for us to initiate prosecutions within 12 months. If, in fact, we are unable to resolve the matter by other than a prosecution, then you really want to do your homework. If you are going to prosecute somebody, you have to make sure particularly that it is a valid prosecution and that there are very good reasons for that prosecution. Of the investigations completed within specified time frames, 70 per cent. I think that it is as simple as that. We need to make sure that we do our homework and that we do not go prosecuting people wrongly. The other figure that is relevant is the success rate, because it shows that in 2003-04, the number of prosecutions was 140. The success rate was 91.4 per cent. The previous year it had been 89 per cent. The year before that, it had been 95 per cent. So I guess that means that, in taking the time to make sure that we get it right before we start putting people in front of courts, that is shown up in the success rate. In the great bulk of cases—better than nine out of 10—they are actually convicted. We do not want to be convicting anybody, which is why our focus is much more on a proactive way of working with employers as well as working with employees—because sometimes prosecutions are of employees, too—to make sure that they are aware of what the requirements are. You will see that that is very much the focus that we are going to continue to do and enhance for the future.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you.

Mr ROWELL: Dot point 7 on page 2-16 of the MPS refers to the Work and Family project and the completion of the pilot program with reference to the Work and Family Unit, which was established in July 2001. Will you please detail its expenditure for the last two years and what funding has been budgeted for this year?

Mr BARTON: Where does it say in that dot point that it started in 2001?

Mr ROWELL: I believe that is when it started.

Mr BARTON: I think that someone must have given you my questions. It did start then. You are correct; it was a 2001 election.

Mr ROWELL: I would not feed you misinformation.

Mr BARTON: I know you never would deliberately and I would never, ever deliberately feed you any misinformation. The project was developed as a result of the 2001 election commitment. The project was designed to develop a self-assessment measure for organisations to evaluate their work and family policies. The department is also an industry partner in a new three-year research project on parental leave. In terms of the budget figures, which you asked for and I am happy to provide—

Mr ROWELL: Yes.

Mr BARTON: I am not sure whether they are somewhere else in the MPS, but I am able to give them to you. The 2003-04 budget was \$30,000. The 2004-05 estimated budget is \$10,000 and the forward estimates for 2005-06 are another \$10,000. I can give you a lot more information on the specific project, if you like. The Work and Family project pilot program was designed, correctly, to implement the 2001 election commitment—a better deal for work and families—to run pilot programs with up to 10 workplaces to evaluate the most effective family-friendly initiatives. The project is being conducted collaboratively between the department, the University of Queensland, and through an Australian Research Council funding grant.

The development of the self-assessment questionnaire, known as the family-friendly workplace measure, will allow organisations to evaluate and improve their policies and practices. The measure will examine employees' awareness of policies, the importance of these policies to them and the culture of

their workplace. In addition to self-assessment measures, a case study report of 10 organisations will be produced identifying organisational factors that facilitate or impede the use of policies. To date, nine organisations have participated in the project, including a community health organisation, a major bank, a city hospital, a regional hospital, an international law firm, a small law firm, a biotechnology centre, a tertiary institute and a regional indigenous organisation. The final pilot program will be conducted shortly, but we are pretty committed to ensure ensuring that workers with family responsibilities are able to have those effectively addressed.

Mr ROWELL: On page 2-1 of the MPS reference is made to the department's vision for a safe, fairer and more productive environment. Do you think that it is acceptable that the staff of the John Tonge Centre have accrued leave of in excess of 80 days because of short shortages and management pressure? How does this sit with your department's policy?

Mr BARTON: I think that that is a question that you should direct to the Minister for Health. I certainly do not, and nor could you expect me to have, information about the leave arrangements, or the leave accruals of staff at the John Tonge Centre, because it is not a unit that is under the control of one of my departments. I am not trying to be difficult. You have made an assertion that those people have huge amounts of accrued leave. I do not know whether that is correct or not. I know that you would never wrongly give me information, but because this is not a unit that is under the control of either of my departments, I have no reason to have that information here with me. I know that, from my involvement when I was the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, I had a lot to do with the John Tonge Centre as well as did the Minister for Health. My understanding is that the unit is controlled by Queensland Health. A lot of the funding that went to the John Tonge Centre did come from the Queensland Police Service at that time. I can recall that Wendy Edmond and I jointly got a lot of additional funding at one point to assist the John Tonge Centre to be able to carry out the very heavy requirements. I make no comment about whether people have a lot of accrued leave or not—you say that they have and I have no reason to doubt you—but there is an enormous amount of pressure on the John Tonge Centre to meet not just the police's requirements for prosecution matters and in some cases to purely identify people and people who, sadly, have died.

There is also the growth in DNA testing and it has to meet a number of requirements of coroners from time to time. I know that means that in areas where there were skill shortages there were big recruiting campaigns of the key people John Tonge needed. Matters of that nature could possibly result in a lot of people having accrued untaken leave. I do not know whether that is a fact. If the Minister for Health wanted to discuss that matter with me I would be happy to chat with him about it but, really, I should not be making any comment about what is or is not happening in a unit of public administration that is not within my portfolio responsibilities.

Mr ROWELL: In the output statement which appears on page 2-17 of the MPS, the level of client satisfaction associated with policy is estimated for 2004-05 at 80 per cent, subsequent to the transfer of policy development to the department. Do you consider that this is a reasonable and satisfactory outcome?

Mr BARTON: What page are you quoting from?

Mr ROWELL: Page 2-17.

The CHAIR: It is a big page. Could we have the details of whereabouts in particular?

Mr BARTON: This is a table. You just quoted about 50 words, and there ain't anywhere that there are 50 words on this page.

Mr ROWELL: With the transfer of policy development to the department, it talks about satisfaction with policy.

The CHAIR: Order! I really ask the member to give some assistance not only to the committee but also to the ministerial representatives. Can you indicate with precision which part of the table your question is directed to?

Mr ROWELL: Look under 'Timeliness' and 'Wage recovery investigations completed within three months'.

Mr BARTON: Yes.

The CHAIR: Before there are any further questions related to output statements in the form of tables, I request all members to with precision refer to the relevant part of the table so that we do not have to go through this again.

Mr ROWELL: Could I add that also to the policy section, which shows 80 per cent as well?

Mr BARTON: Policy section?

Mr ROWELL: That is under 'Quality'.

Mr BARTON: 'Policy' under 'Quality'. Let us start from the bottom, I guess, with timeliness. The national benchmark, which we all try to adhere to, is 80 per cent of wage complaint activity completed

within three months. That is a national benchmark that we seek to meet. No state nor the federal jurisdiction is meeting this measure. Queensland's measure has been around 70 per cent for about a year, but two years ago it was down at 63 per cent. So there has been a big improvement from 63 per cent to 70 per cent. We aim to achieve 80 per cent. That is our estimated target. Our estimated actual was 70 per cent. That is still very much my understanding of where it is. Like everything, there will not be absolute final checked figures until we get annual reports out in September or October. There has been a significant improvement. We aim to do better. The fact that they are not always achieved within the three months is due to the complexities of the issues dealt with, which makes this measure very hard to achieve.

The dispute resolution processes have improved Queensland's performance, because you are able to do it by agreement a lot quicker than if you are simply toughing it out—having an argument and forcing people to hand over documents. Sadly, we still get the odd one that does not want to cooperate, but we are benefiting from having input by doing a lot of it now by cooperation.

If we go back to the one at the top, the level of client satisfaction in relation to policy is a new measure. The policy process is interactive with the minister. Original proposals from the department always benefit from ministerial input. He is a very good DG; I reckon that is absolutely correct. When it comes to policy, the more the minister gets directly involved in interacting with the department the greater the chance of having really good policies and people being happy with them.

Seriously, you are never going to keep all of the people happy all of the time. I get about 70 per cent of the vote in my electorate, and I am happy with 70 per cent. I think your vote is not quite that high. I reckon if you have 70 per cent of the people happy all of the time, you are doing well.

The CHAIR: The time for questions by non-government members having virtually expired—we will make it up on the other side—I now return to questions from government members. Minister, I refer to page 2-8 of the MPS. Can you provide details on WorkCover's financial position, including how Queensland's premium level compares with other states?

Mr BARTON: WorkCover is one of the very important organisations in Queensland and one that we are very proud of that does an exceptionally good job. It is well led by its chairman, Ian Brusasco, and his board. The WorkCover Queensland fund continues its strong performance with an equity position forecast to continue at the 20 per cent solvency required for maintenance of a fully funded scheme. In addition, investment returns for 2003-04 are projected to exceed the budgeted figure of seven per cent which, together with the investment fluctuation reserve, will assure a maintenance of this healthy position into the future while providing stable and predictable premiums for employers.

Average WorkCover premiums continue to be the lowest of any state in Australia at 1.55 per cent, and this rate will be maintained for the 2004-05 financial year. This performance has been achieved under the Beattie Labor government which inherited an average premium rate of 2.145 per cent from the previous coalition government. The savings in premiums by employers have exceeded more than \$1.1 billion since the Beattie government came to office. So it has been a very big success story for employers as well—the fact that we have been able to reduce the rates and keep them down.

By way of comparison, for 2002-03 the average premium rates for other state workers compensation schemes are New South Wales \$2.57, Western Australia \$2.34, South Australia \$3 and Victoria \$2.22. Recently Victoria announced a reduction in its proposed rate for 2004-05 to 1.99 per cent. While this is pleasing for employers in that state, it still represents premium rates 22 per cent in excess of those applying in Queensland.

I must admit that I saw the media coming out of Victoria when the Victorian Premier made the announcement about the big slashing of workers compensation rates in Victoria. I thought, 'We had better watch this. It looks like they might be going to give us a run for our money at last.' You would swear they had won lotto when they made the announcement. Theirs is 1.99 per cent. Ours is 1.55 per cent and likely to stay there for a considerable period of time. We have the actuarial capacity to make sure it does stay there for a very long period of time while giving people very good service, both employees who are injured and employers for workers compensation.

The CHAIR: Minister, can I take you to page 2-8 of the MPS? Can you provide details of the trends for workers compensation claims?

Mr BARTON: I would love to because, again, it is part of the success story. Workers compensation scheme-wide data indicates that statutory claims are continuing to trend downward relative to the size of the work force. The claim rate per 100 employees is projected to fall 1.9 per cent in 2003-04 compared with 2002-03. This decrease follows a decrease of 4.7 per cent in 2002-03 over 2001-02 and a decrease of 2.9 per cent in 2001-02 over 2000-01. Common law payments are expected to stabilise in the coming years. Common law lodgments in the year to 31 March 2004 were 3.4 per cent below lodgments in the year to 31 March 2003. I am sure that reflects the fact that we are injuring far fewer people per head of population.

While there has been an increase in total workers compensation payments for 2003-04 from 2002-03 of 5.9 per cent, it is still below what was expected, given growth in covered employees and

average weekly ordinary time earnings of 6.5 per cent. That is another indication of the fact that we have an excellent record of fewer claims and fewer people being injured, relative to that strong growth in our work force and strong growth in wages.

Mrs CROFT: Would you please provide details about the incidence of compensated work related fatalities in Queensland since 2000-01?

Mr BARTON: I would, because fatalities are of great concern to us. Compensated work related fatalities have decreased each year since 2000-01. Work related fatalities, including work related traffic fatalities—even though they are traffic they are related to work—fell from 75 in 2000-01 to 68 in 2001-02 and again in 2002-03 to 67. Between 2000-01 and 2002-03 the incidence of compensated work related fatalities fell overall 17 per cent from 4.7 fatalities for every 100,000 Queensland workers in 2000-01 to 4.2 in 2001-02 and to 3.9 in 2002-03.

It is not possible to provide figures for 2003-04 because the data has not been finalised. Fatalities data is based on the year in which a fatality claim is made, which can be different from the year in which the person dies. No reliable data is available for 2003-04 yet as it may be some time after a fatality has occurred before a claim is lodged and assessed. The trend line there is very, very strong. We expect that to be continued.

Again, when I spoke earlier about our long-term strategy for occupational health and safety one of the key measures we were aiming to reduce is fatalities in the workplace, as well as overall accidents in the workplace. I am very heartened by the fact that the numbers of claims of workers compensation are reducing, because that means we are injuring fewer people at work. That is also reflected by the number of fatalities also dropping.

Mrs CROFT: Still on page 2-8 of the MPS, can you please advise of the Queensland government's position in relation to the Productivity Commission inquiry into national workers compensation and occupational health and safety frameworks? Can you also please explain what are the risks for the workers compensation scheme in Queensland?

Mr BARTON: Thank you, because we were very concerned about that national Productivity Commission report. In terms of risks, the workers compensation proposals contained in the report by the inquiry could see small- and medium-sized businesses face sharp increases in premiums as they are left to carry the cost of state schemes. It had been proposed to let the big companies out of the system. In reality that means that smaller companies carry more of the burden.

Queensland has an average premium rate of 1.55 per cent. This is the lowest of any state in Australia. I gave those comparisons earlier. In addition, the Queensland scheme is fully funded and maintains statutory solvency. I must say, it is my understanding that we are still the only workers compensation scheme that is fully funded and fully solvent. The others are paying their projected costs out of projected future income.

The Queensland government wants to maintain the competitive advantage currently afforded to Queensland businesses that compete interstate. That is also incredibly important. This advantage results from having the best performing workers compensation scheme in Australia with the lowest premiums of any state.

The Queensland government supports moves to a more nationally consistent workplace health and safety system. We are working closely with the other states and the Commonwealth for consistency—I think that is important—but not a single scheme. The Queensland government agrees with the decision of the federal government not to support a national broad based premium paying scheme. I was very pleased when Mr Andrews made that announcement about two weeks ago. He advised us that that was his position. However, the Queensland government is strongly opposed to the Commonwealth proposal of allowing eligible corporations to self-insure under the Commonwealth's Comcare scheme and to be covered by Commonwealth occupational health and safety legislation. We are opposed to that.

This proposal is likely to lead to confusion over whether the state or Commonwealth occupational health and safety legislation applies to certain workplaces when employers engage contractors. There will be one law for some corporations and one law for remaining corporations and medium and small businesses in the state. Additionally, penalty regimes differ across the jurisdictions, meaning different penalties could apply to similar incidents in the same state.

The Queensland government supports the need for revitalised national consultative arrangements for workplace health and safety and workers compensation. However, the Queensland government is yet to be convinced that the Commonwealth's proposal is the best model. There is concern that this proposal will weaken the cooperative approach to national policy development that currently exists, and I and every other state minister reflected that view at a recent meeting at workplace relations ministers.

Mrs CROFT: Page 2-10 of the MPS refers to strategies to address psychosocial injury. Can you please provide detail on the number of workers compensation claims related to psychosocial injuries and what your department is doing to address this issue?

Mr BARTON: I would love to provide that detail because this is an area that has been receiving some attention and also some concerns have been reflected. I think some of the people up front there on my right need to be assessed. Accepted psychosocial—

Mr ROWELL: Now, Minister.

Mr BARTON: Well you are interjecting while I am trying to talk.

Mr ROWELL: Withdraw that if you do not mind.

Mr BARTON: I will withdraw it but you are talking while I am trying to provide an answer. I think that is pretty unreasonable.

Mr ROWELL: I was just raising a point. We have to mention a dot point but they do not seem to. We are trying to follow the whole procedure, too.

Mr BARTON: If you want to ask me questions about it, please feel free. Accepted psychosocial injury claims have reduced significantly in recent years, with a decline of nearly 20 per cent between 2000-01 and 2003-04. With the work force continuing to grow, the decrease has been greater than 28 per cent when looked at per 100,000 workers. My department is driving a reduction in the workers compensation costs through a three-year preventative program for the public sector across all departments. The program requires agencies to systematically identify and assess the specific risks in their organisation and to develop strategies to address these risks.

My department has also run a pilot program this year called Project Commit, which is a hands-on intervention that assists private sector employers to better understand the risks leading to psychosocial injuries. Project Commit provides employers with an independent assessment that includes recommendations to assist employers implement prevention strategies. This project is a first for employers in Australia. My department released the prevention of workplace harassment advisory standard 2004 earlier this year. The standard provides practical information to assist employers to identify workplace harassment in their work places and outlines measures that can be used to prevent or control workplace harassment. Furthermore, new funding in 2004-05 will be used to employ five new specialist inspectors with qualifications in organisational psychology. The major role of these specialist inspectors will be to develop and increase the competencies of all inspectors across Queensland in dealing with psychosocial issues.

An immediate focus for these positions will be the development of information products for employers and presentations to industry forums. My department will continue to work closely with employers in both the public and private sectors to reduce the incidence of psychiatric and psychological injury.

Ms STONE: Page 2-4 of the MPS refers to the provision of policy frameworks to improve and review employee relations policies. I note that the government's commitment to maximising permanent employment is incorporated into current Public Service enterprise agreements. Can you please outline what progress has been made in maximising permanent employment in the Queensland Public Service?

Mr BARTON: Absolutely. The Queensland government believes in and supports a strong public sector. The commitment to employment security is demonstrated through the government's policy framework and has been reinforced through recent Queensland public sector certified agreements. In May 2003 agencies reported to the Department of Industrial Relations on the progress made in achieving set targets to maximise permanent employment. The reports indicated that across the Queensland Public Service during the previous 12 months there had been a significant commitment to permanency of employment. This success was achieved while implementing other whole-of-government initiatives such as the current review of corporate services across government.

The government's continuing support for employment security is illustrated by the fact that the level of permanent employment within the Public Service is higher compared to the overall Queensland work force. Casual employment within the Queensland work force is 30.3 per cent. However, casual employment within the Queensland Public Service is only 7.94 per cent. Indeed, when both temporary and casual employment within the Queensland Public Service are combined, the percentage is still only 21.1 per cent. Permanent employment within the Queensland Public Service is 77.9 per cent compared with 69.7 per cent for the total Queensland work force

All public sector certified agreements now include a provision that tenured public sector employees are not to be forced into unemployment as a result of organisational change other than in exceptional circumstances. Public servants are the preferred providers of public services in Queensland. Consequently, this commitment has a positive impact on the stability of service delivery in rural and regional communities in particular. The Queensland government undertakes to maintain employment security as a matter of priority. Agencies are encouraged to focus on addressing any

inappropriate use of temporary and casual employment on a continuing basis. The Department of Industrial Relations monitors levels of temporary and casual employment across the Public Service and reports to government as a whole on a regular basis. Maintaining permanent employment is very, very important to us.

Ms STONE: With reference to pages 15 and 16 of the MPS, can you please provide information on what actions are being taken in relation to the exploitation of outworkers in the clothing industry?

Mr ROWELL: Mr Chair, I request that if you are going to talk about these issues, because we are interested, a dot point be mentioned. There was no dot point given, and yet I was requested to indicate where the issue was when I was asking a question.

The CHAIR: Well, I will clarify it if you need it. The point I made earlier was that when a member refers to an output page which was 2-11 at the time which has a table it would assist this committee and also the members on the ministerial table if some particularity could be given as to the reference on that output page. That is the order I made. Now the question will proceed.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Mr Chair, and I thank the member for the question. The government is serious in its efforts to protect the employment entitlements of outworkers in the clothing trades and prevent their exploitation. Outworkers are one of the most marginalised labour market groups. Their employment is characterised by non-standard working arrangements, with people working long hours in their own homes and for a number of clothing manufacturers. Outworkers in Queensland are typically Vietnamese women with poor English language skills who have limited opportunity for alternative employment.

My department has implemented a comprehensive outworkers strategy comprising a number of elements that target the exploitation of this group of workers. The appointment of a Vietnamese liaison officer has proved successful in encouraging Vietnamese people to access the department's advisory and compliance services. The liaison officer helped to recover more than \$100,000 for Vietnamese workers in 2003 and handled more than 300 inquiries from Vietnamese employers and employees in that calendar year.

My department has conducted a review of the outworker code of practice that regulates the relationship between the industry and government agencies in their procurement activities. The thrust of the recommendations from this review focus on simplifying and improving compliance with the code and employment law to prevent the exploitation of outworkers. Cabinet also approved a legislative package to increase the protection of clothing outworkers from exploitation. The amendments will allow outworkers to recover unpaid wages from the person they believe to be their employer.

These amendments will mirror legislation in New South Wales and Victoria. My department maintains a close relationship with New South Wales and Victoria, where 85 per cent of garment manufacture occurs. The creation of a consistent regulatory regime ensures that states efforts to protect the exploitation of outworkers complement each other and that unscrupulous employers do not border hop to find the most accommodating jurisdiction in which to carry on their exploitation of workers.

I would also like to acknowledge the strong support of the Vietnamese community in Queensland for the government's efforts to improve the working lives of Vietnamese people employed in their homes in the clothing trades.

Ms STONE: With reference to page 2-14 of the MPS, is the government doing anything about the provision of a portable long service leave scheme for the contract cleaning industry in Queensland?

Mr BARTON: I am glad you asked that question because we are in line with the government's commitment to ensuring safe, fair and productive workplaces across the state. Cabinet has endorsed the proposal to introduce legislation to provide contract cleaning workers with long service leave benefits. The cleaning industry suffers from regularly high turnovers in cleaning contracts and workers. This has traditionally been an impediment to ensuring that cleaning workers receive long service leave entitlements as many workers do not stay long enough with one employer to qualify for it.

The proposed portable long service leave scheme will see cleaners paid long service leave entitlements from a central fund on the basis of their service in the industry. This scheme, I am pleased to say, is supported by the cleaning industry, with employer and worker representatives reaching agreement on the key issues and impact across the industry.

All states and the ACT have portable long service leave schemes for the building construction industry administered under legislation. The ACT has a portable long service leave scheme for its contract cleaning industry administered under industry specific legislation. It is administered by the Building and Construction Industry Long Service Leave Board, which also administers the building and construction industry scheme. It is proposed that Queensland's contract cleaning industry portable long service leave scheme will be administered by QLeave in a similar manner to that currently operating effectively in the ACT. The proposed scheme will be funded by an industry wide levy of two per cent of cleaning workers' wages. This will allow for the scheme to be self-supporting and will allow for recognition of five years service prior to the scheme's commencement date in 2005.

Other specific details of the scheme are yet to be determined pending discussions between industry representatives, QLeave and relevant government agencies, but I do stress it is a very important matter in terms of looking after some of the lowest paid workers that we have in this state. Again, it is another area that has a high proportion of women workers and a high proportion of women migrant workers who have been missing out on long service leave. This means that with the agreement of the employers—and they have agreed; I am very pleased with that—we will use the same scheme that looks after the building industry portable long service leave, and I am sure it will be to the benefit of a lot of employees who would otherwise have missed out.

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

Mr LANGBROEK: Minister, I refer you to 2-13 of the MPS, the output statement of financial performance. Under the very first heading 'Revenues from Ordinary Activities', the third point is 'grants and other contributions'. I note that is going up from \$11 million to \$23 million in 2004-05 and I note that at point 8 it mentions that the changes in revenues relate mainly to the new budget initiatives. When I was president of the Surfers Paradise Chamber of Commerce, a lot of businesses mentioned the fact that, if there was a workers compensation payout, workers comp would reclaim the payout over the next three years in terms of an increased premium to the business. Can you confirm that that is the arrangement for workers comp, and in that case is that insurance or is that just a levy that is used to recover the workers comp payout? Because it is certainly a hardship to some of those businesses when they have to repay the payout over the next three years.

Mr BARTON: I will try to answer that question for you. I am not really sure that it relates to the grants and other contributions line of that statement.

Mr LANGBROEK: Yes, I am not sure myself.

Mr BARTON: Workers compensation premiums are set by WorkCover and is dependent on a range of factors, which includes the industry sector that the employer is in and is also impacted on by the experience. When I say 'the experience', the track record—

Mr LANGBROEK: Claims experience.

Mr BARTON:—for want of a better term, of that particular place of employment. I mentioned this morning that we do have some industries where, frankly, the injury incidence is much higher. I guess we are not surprised by that. Sadly, the farm sector is one that is high compared to many workplaces. The building and construction industry historically has had a higher rate, but it is one that is declining. Metals manufacturing and some of the sectors that I have worked on before I went on to do other things were sectors that had higher premiums, as does the mining industry and the meat industry.

Probably what I am saying is that workers compensation management really does need to be seen the same as any other insurance. People who have good track records, who do not have injuries, get the equivalent of the impact of no claims bonuses, so they get premiums that are set at a very low level—even for their industry sector—because they have a perfect or a very good track record or a very low incidence of injuries in their industry. Those who have a bad track record, not only do they not get the benefit of the equivalent of no claims bonuses but they would possibly get charged the higher rate. It is important that I say that it is no different from the experience for any other form of industry.

I am still a proud member of the Beenleigh Chamber of Commerce—I have been for about 13 years—and I have sometimes run into it there, and I think that is what you would have run into. What your experience may have shown is that if you had small businesses that had no injuries at all, and that is fairly typical of managed small businesses, then they would have gravitated down to the absolute lowest premium level. Then if they did get an injury, that would have meant the loss of that very competitive rate. They would have gone back to taws. When you say three times, I guess you would need to look at the individual experience of each one to be able to determine that that could be the case, but it is no different from others.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, on page 2-17, going down to industrial disputes strike rate, working days loss per 1,000 employees, we can see that we are going from 33 in this estimated actual 2003-04 year to next year of 42. Why is this anticipated? You go down to quality, then you go down to industrial disputes, strike rates, working days lost per 1,000 employees, 33 to 42.

Mr BARTON: We have looked at the long-term trend. I think, Marc—

Mr ROWELL: Yes, I know, I read the note on—

Mr BARTON: It is a less than. The little ditto in front of it means that we are projecting it to be less than 42 per cent.

Mr ROWELL: Yes, okay.

Mr BARTON: I have already made the point about how good our track record is at this point in time. Our track record shows that the number has been continuing to decline. I am not projecting that we are going to go up, but we are being realistic. The only thing we can do is make a projection based on the long-term trend rate—the long-term rate—and the long-term rate suggested that if we are going to

average it out across a period of time, then it would be around there. We are projecting to keep it less than that.

I am going to be careful how I say this because I phrased it in one of these hearings years ago and got into trouble for it. I do not have a crystal ball, and I cannot project exactly what is going to happen in industrial disputes. All I can do is say we have got a very, very, very good track record at this point in time. As a government we have continued to see drops in the industrial dispute level. I expect that to continue to occur, but in trying to develop what is our best guess, then in fact we have said it is our aim to keep it below the long-term average. The long-term average would mean 42 per cent. We intend to do better than that.

I would say to you that my projection personally is that we will do better than where we are now. I said where we are now is 3.8 working days lost per 1,000 employees compared to a national average of 9.3. We believe that our industrial legislation is the best in the country. We will make some adjustments to that during this term of office. I will certainly consult with you at that point in time.

Mr ROWELL: It just did not reflect, you know, what your intentions—

Mr BARTON: Yeah, that is probably a fair comment—why is that a bit different—but again that is the explanation. It is the long-term average, but we have every reason to expect that we will do better than the long-term average.

Mr ROWELL: Okay. Minister, I refer to page 2-26 dot point seven, which is seven from the top, which notes that—

Over 600 audits of domestic safety switches were conducted, resulting in almost 70 per cent compliance.

Can you please explain why this figure is different to the one reported in 2003-04 in the output statement on page 2-28—that 1,050 audits were conducted—and why have you set such a conservative estimate for the audits in 2004-05?

Mr BARTON: I do suspect that it is the same response, although we are not as clear this time. I will see if someone behind me can shed some light onto the actual figure. The 600 figure that is included on page 2-26 was a figure that was available for the first nine months. I apologise, we could have been a little clearer in saying that that is the figure as at 31 March 2004. Our estimated actual is based on a trend of having done 600 as at 31 March. By the end of June we should have been around the 1,050 mark. We think it is very important, but we are not projecting to do more than what we think we have done this year.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, under Future Developments on page 2-27, there is a commitment to provide electrical safety education to the community and ensure compliance with electrical safety laws. This is confirmed on the output statement, MPS 2-6. On the next page there is a significantly higher number of contractors audit investigations estimated for 2004-05. What service will your department have to cut or scale back to meet these targets, given that there is no increase in staffing in the Electrical Safety Office?

The CHAIR: Minister, you have three minutes.

Mr BARTON: Thank you.

Mr ROWELL: It is 2-27.

Mr BARTON: I have the 2-27 one, I think. That is the one about 400 audits, is it?

Mr ROWELL: Yes.

Mr BARTON: That is the second bottom point.

Mr ROWELL: Yes, that is, the second bottom point—

A campaign is also planned to promote electrical safety, educate the community and ensure compliance with electrical safety laws.

Mr BARTON: I am just looking for where it is in the output statement on the table, that is all.

Mr ROWELL: In the output statement, it goes down to electrical contractor audits.

Mr BARTON: Again I guess the first example in 2003-04, more than 400 audits were conducted, that again would have been a 31 March figure. You will also note that it says 'since September 2003', so that is a figure of about 400 for only six months. I am advised that this is a unit that has not been there very long. I think right at the beginning you did make a comment to me about how come I have the electrical stuff. There were changes made. This stuff traditionally used to reside with previous ministers for energy. As a result of a number of issues several years ago now—I think it only came over in about September 2003—it came across to the Department of Industrial Relations.

Mr ROWELL: Sure.

Mr BARTON: The division came across to the Department of Industrial Relations. Again, the Department of Industrial Relations has the overall occupational health and safety issues for government and anything related to that. It was transferred across during the last term of government. Again we are

just not sure because I was not there when it was transferred across so I cannot be sure of the absolute date, but it was transferred across from energy to DIR. The DG advises me that it was transferred over during 2001. There was then a major review of its work which resulted in changes in 2003. The actual structure of that division is fairly new, as a result of that review and that change. If you look at the trend, it would have been about 800 in six months, 1,050 being the estimated actuals for a nine-month period until the end of June. That asterisk means more than 720, which does really relay the trend line of about the same.

The CHAIR: Order! The time allotted for questions by non-governments members has expired. I now call upon the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: With reference to page 2-14 of the MPS, can the minister outline the government's approach to national and state wages cases?

Mr BARTON: The national and state wage cases are an incredibly important vehicle for low-paid workers to receive reasonable wage increases. In the national wage case the government has participated in joint state submissions to ensure that workers receive decent wage increases but are, nonetheless, economically sustainable. This year all of the states together—and I guess that is all of the Labor states because we are all Labor states—supported a \$20 a week increase. The commission obviously took note of that position and the collective wisdom of the state Labor governments in awarding a \$19 per week increase. The joint states were also close to the mark in 2003 when they supported an \$18 increase. The commission came down with an increase of \$17 for the lowest paid workers. Those decisions have been, in our government's view, a great result for ordinary workers, particularly our lowest paid workers that we are talking about here again.

In contrast, if the commission was following the federal government's viewpoint, the lowest paid workers in our community would only be receiving a paltry increase of \$10 a week. In the state wage case that will happen in the immediate future, the Queensland government supports a flow-on of the national wage increase in order to maintain parity between state and federal award rates of pay and to ensure that the 56 per cent of workers who are under state awards also get a decent, sustainable living wage.

Since June 1998, the lowest paid workers in Queensland have received minimum wage increases of up to \$89 per week. These increases provide vital assistance for those workers who rely on awards and are not able to receive wage increases through enterprise bargaining. During that same period there has been no evidence of adverse effects on employment and there has been continued strong economic growth and, I must say, very strong employment growth. The government is supporting the flow-on of the \$19 increase in the state wage case this year. The matter is being heard before a full bench of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission on 21 July.

The government's approach in wage case matters has found the right balance between the economic and social dimensions of wages policy. In economic terms there is a need to ensure that wages outcomes are sustainable in the current economic environment. In social terms, there is a need to ensure that workers are covered by fair and reasonable wages and that those with little or no bargaining power are not left behind.

Mr WELLS: On page 2-14 and 2-15 of the MPS I note that the Queensland government has been involved in test cases in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Can the minister outline the approach adopted by the government in these cases?

Mr BARTON: I would love to. The Queensland government generally intervenes in major test cases in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission when it considers there is a sufficient public interest in doing so—that is, when the matter involves wages or conditions of employment that have economic and social implications across the work force for both employers and employees. For instance, the government appears in the national wage case each year, and I have made some comments about that. Recently the government also made submissions in the termination, change and redundancy test case and the work and family test case which is currently in progress.

It is important for the Queensland government to be involved in such cases, because the results of federal test cases will often later flow on into state jurisdictions, and it is important that the AIRC receives a Queensland government perspective on the relevant issues. In some cases the Queensland government will be part of a combined submission with other state and territory governments. However, the Queensland government will, of course, make its own submissions where it considers this is more appropriate, as it did in the termination, change and redundancy case.

The government determines its position in each case based on its assessment of relevant economic and social considerations, legislative provisions and the likely costs or benefits to Queensland. The general approach is to support fair and reasonable improvements to wages and conditions where appropriate, taking into account the needs of employers and employees.

In the TCR case the Queensland government supported improved severance payments but did not support the removal of the small business exemption as sought by the ACTU and as granted by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. In the work and family test case the Queensland

government supported some elements of the ACTU claim to make awards more family friendly while also taking into account the ability of employers to accommodate these arrangements. We will continue to take a balanced approach, but at all times we will be seeking primarily to look after the interests of our lowest paid employees.

Mr WELLS: The chair tells me that this is the last question so I will make it a brief one: I refer to your capacity as the 'Minister for Public Holidays' and to your recent announcement that this year there would be a public holiday on your birthday, and I ask: will there from now on always be a public holiday on your birthday?

Mr BARTON: I would have to go and consult the almanac to have a look at how often the cycle comes around because I can't remember when the Exhibition show holiday last fell on my birthday. But as my birthday always falls typically at some stage during the Exhibition, once every six or seven years it always seems to fall on the Exhibition show holiday. I did not have to take any specific action to have it there but I am very, very relieved that I will be able to go down and consult with my friends from the bush at the Cattleman's Bar and the Woodchop Bar and not have to worry about coming to work, hopefully, unless there is some drama elsewhere in the state.

Mr ROWELL: I presume it is more than your 21st birthday.

Mr BARTON: Sadly, I turn 55 this year. I am almost becoming an old person.

The CHAIR: The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Industrial Relations has now expired. On behalf of the committee I extend our appreciation to the minister, his staff and all of the staff within the department, many of whom are here this afternoon while others are back in the office, for the assistance that they have afforded the committee in the way in which they have prepared very extensive briefings for this committee. Thank you very much.

Mr ROWELL: Could I also acknowledge the work and the input of the staff that have come along to respond to questions that we have put before them. I would like to thank them for their involvement and I certainly thank you for your involvement, Minister, too.

Mr BARTON: Can I say a few words before the committee retires? I know we are eating into your very short lunch break and you are all back for another extensive session this afternoon.

The CHAIR: We can adjust for that.

Mr BARTON: Can I thank you and your committee members and thank the Deputy Chairman for his comments as well as your own on behalf of the committee to my staff and my departmental staff. Budget estimates are indeed a very onerous time for everybody. The work that is involved in budget estimates has to be prepared on top of everybody doing their normal jobs. Many people put a disproportionate amount of time in. I want to thank my own departmental staff and my personal staff for their very hard work. I think they have done an exemplary job. I thank the parliamentary staff for the way they have conducted themselves.

There has been a little bit of criticism by some people before other committees about the effort that is put in by departments. I want to say I think it is exceptionally good value for money for government and for opposition. It also allows departments to have a very good look at themselves. There have been a number of times even this year—and I have found it in previous years—where the very fact that I am asking for more detail sometimes means the department has a good look at an issue that they have also taken for granted. I am absolutely sure that as a result of all of that preparation work we get better government and opposition gets better answers to their questions. This process is a very good one. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for those comments. The committee will retire and reconvene at 1.35 p.m.

Sitting suspended from 12.36 p.m. to 1.36 p.m.

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

In Attendance

Hon. A.M. Bligh, Minister for Education and the Arts

Department of Education and the Arts

Mr K. Smith, Director-General

Ms R. Logan, Director, Strategic Resource Management

Mr S. Kessell, Director, Office of the Director-General

Mr P. Willet, Executive Manager, Business Resource

Mr M. Watt, Senior Policy Adviser

Ms L. Johnson, Senior Policy Adviser

The CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. The next item for consideration is the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Education and the Arts. The time allocated is a total of four hours, comprising three quarters of an hour for the Arts and three and one quarter hours for Education.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the 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. The 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 silent television footage will be permitted during the opening statement by the chair and the opening statement by the minister. My final request is that if you have a mobile phone or pager, would you please make sure that it is turned off. If you have phone calls to make, please do so outside the chamber.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Education and the Arts 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, Chair, and members of the committee, I would like to make a statement. This is the first year to see the two areas of significant importance to the Smart State agenda combine under the new Department of Education and the Arts.

Arts has been aligned with many portfolios over the years, including notably once the Mines Department. However, I think there are many synergies between arts and education making it a complementary arrangement and I look forward to answering questions in both areas.

Can I start by drawing members' attention to the education aspect of the portfolio. In this year's budget our government is continuing to invest significant new funds in education to give our state's young people the best chance at achieving success throughout their lives. A record \$336.7 million has been provided for the capital works program, which represents an increase of 22.7 per cent on last financial year, and \$4.817 billion has been allocated for recurrent expenses, which is an increase of 7.3 per cent.

The 2004-2005 Education budget begins delivering on our government's election commitment to invest significant new funds in building, upgrading and maintaining school facilities. It will also progress our landmark reforms across all levels of schooling—from the early years right through to the senior years and beyond.

Total budget allocations for key initiatives for education in 2004-05 include: \$145.8 million for schools' growth, including a new state primary school and nine major new stages at developing state schools; \$118.3 million to renew and upgrade state school buildings; \$17.5 million to aircondition state school classrooms in the Cooler Schools zone; \$26.4 million to maintain school facilities, including \$18.2 million for Triple R and \$8.2 million for the High Priority Building Asset Maintenance Program; approximately 589 extra school teachers, which will include 150 to further reduce middle year class size targets to the lowest in the country. This comes on top of 677 new teachers who started in 2004, including 350 for growth and 327 to reduce class sizes and to help large primary schools with curriculum coordination.

\$135.2 million will be allocated to progress the government's education and training reforms, including \$36.8 million to provide preparatory year classrooms for state and non-state schools and \$2 million for education and training services for students disengaged from learning. It includes \$0.9 million to appoint nine extra senior guidance officers to support state school students; \$2.4 million

as part of a \$6.9 million package over four years to improve the fitness and health of students; and state funding of \$343 million for non-state schools and grants.

This significant investment in our school infrastructure and teaching staff is to ensure that we can deliver a quality education for all students. The state government is directing funds to where we believe they are needed most and that is into the classroom. It is vital that the government gives young people every chance to succeed. Higher qualifications, skills and training are essential in a highly competitive and globalised society. With the initiatives outlined in this budget and many others already in place or being planned, I am confident our young learners will be equipped for the challenges they will confront in this rapidly changing world.

I would like now to draw the attention of members to the arts. The Queensland government is continuing to invest new funds in the state's arts and cultural industries. In 2004-05 a total of \$186.2 million has been allocated for recurrent expenditures to develop dynamic arts and cultural activities. In addition, \$101 million has been provided for capital expenditure to ensure that our cultural facilities are among the best in the world. Highlights include building major cultural facilities, creating jobs, developing collections, arts and cultural programs and new audiences to build a creative Queensland.

This budget meets the government's election commitment by providing an additional \$4.5 million over the next three years to the Pacific Film and Television Commission to stimulate the state's domestic film and television industry, develop digital media and support indigenous and emerging film-makers.

The 2004-05 budget directs substantial funding to Queensland's leading cultural organisations and our cultural statutory authorities to ensure the delivery of arts and cultural services statewide. A total of \$89.3 million is provided to the Queensland Art Gallery, the State Library of Queensland, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre and the Queensland Theatre Company.

Funding of \$100 million has been provided in the 2004-05 budget for the construction of the government's Millennium Arts Project, the largest cultural capital works project in Queensland for more than 20 years. Total funding for this project is \$308.5 million, including an increase of 48.5 in 2005-06 to meet construction industry escalation costs.

Key arts initiatives for 2004-05 include the funds for the Millennium Arts Project, \$4.9 million extra for jobs, programs, collections and equipment in preparation for the opening of the new facilities; as I have said, the new funds for the Pacific Film and Television Commission; and other grants into the arts sector. The Queensland government is leading social, cultural and economic development through these investments in arts and culture.

The CHAIR: The first period of questions will commence with non-government members. The member for Burnett?

Mr MESSENGER: We might as well start with the easy questions first. I refer to the Portfolio Overview on page 1-1 of the MPS. How many briefing notes were prepared for you for the estimates committee hearings and what are the topics of each briefing note?

Ms BLIGH: Hundreds, I think is probably the answer, and there are many topics. The topics relate to the MPS.

Mr MESSENGER: Would you care to detail those briefing topics?

Ms BLIGH: I think you will find if you go through the MPS that most of the major issues are covered in the briefing notes.

Mr MESSENGER: Is it a question that we should put on notice?

Ms BLIGH: If you like.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to the Portfolio Overview on page 1-1 of the MPS. How many officers were involved in the preparation of estimates committee briefing notes? What is the estimated cost of the preparation of all of the briefing notes?

Ms BLIGH: The answer is as many officers as were needed to prepare the briefing notes required. It is at no cost because it is part of the job of these officers.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to paragraph three on page 1-76 of the MPS and the additional funding for the Millennium Arts Project. Will you provide the committee with a guarantee today that the Millennium Arts Project cost blow-out will be limited to \$50 million or can we expect further overruns in the future?

Ms BLIGH: The government has made an additional \$48.5 million in capital available to the portfolio to ensure that the project, as outlined, can be completed without any significant reduction in the scope of the project. It was our view that, while there has been inevitable rescoping of the project over the last 12 months, any further rescoping of the project would compromise the integrity of the project and we were not prepared to do that. The \$48.5 million in funds have been allocated. It is my

responsibility and intention as minister to deliver this project within the allocated budget. That is the intention of the government.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer again to paragraph three on page 1—76 of the MPS. When was the audit carried out which revealed the \$48.5 million blow-out in the cost of the Millennium Arts Project? On what date did you receive those findings?

Ms BLIGH: I am not sure what the member means by an audit. As Minister for the Arts I was briefed as part of the brief for the incoming Arts Minister. So within a week of being sworn in as Arts Minister—probably within the first couple of days—that was one of the first briefs I read.

Mr MESSENGER: On what date?

Ms BLIGH: I can say that there was work done in consultation with Bovis Lend Lease in December 2003 that was part of finalising what extra funds might be necessary to finalise the project. I was not Arts Minister at the time. I was formally advised as Minister for the Arts sometime in February.

Mr MESSENGER: Are you saying that the \$48.5 million blow-out was recognised in December of last year?

Ms BLIGH: I can advise the member that the total cost of this project is something that has been under consideration for sometime. As I have said earlier, some rescoping of the project occurred in the last six months of last year to ensure that the public was getting value for money. But the escalation in the building price index became obvious by the end of last year. The need for further funds was identified in December. In terms of the precise figure of \$48.5 million, it is my recollection that within days of becoming the Arts Minister that was something that was drawn to my attention. The government has acted on it within the context of budget deliberations this year.

Mr MESSENGER: I understand that there was an election in between but it was not until 27 May that the ministerial media release came out notifying the public and members of parliament of that blow-out.

Ms BLIGH: I should just say in response to that comment from the member that having an issue brought to your attention as minister is one thing but it does require the deliberation of the portfolio, the Cabinet Budget Review Committee and Treasury prior to government making a decision and then being in a position to announce a decision about how a situation might be dealt with.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer again to paragraph three on page 1—76 of the MPS. When the cost blow-out was revealed you noted at the time that efforts had been made to rescope the project to keep it within the budget. Can you detail some of those efforts?

Ms BLIGH: I do not have the details in front of me. You will appreciate that, for a project of this size which involves a large Gallery of Modern Art, a very significant redevelopment of the Queensland Library as well as site infrastructure works, for every part of the project you would sit down with the architects, the company and the two statutory authorities involved and work through where alterations might be able to be made to generate savings that would enable the projects to be bought in on budget. There is nothing secret about any of this. It is a process that you would expect to go through with every major building project. That is what has happened. The advice came to me that the various players had rescoped to the point where any further rescoping would have compromised the integrity of the project.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to paragraph three on page 1-76 of the MPS. Prior to beginning construction of the Millennium Arts Project what traffic and parking projections were undertaken of the area? What were the results and how have they been addressed?

Ms BLIGH: Can I clarify from the member whether he is talking about the traffic issues during construction that have led to street closures?

Mr MESSENGER: Let us talk about the traffic problem before the project began and also the parking projections for the future. This building is going to generate a lot of visitors who want to park there.

Ms BLIGH: I will take the question in relation to parking projections on notice. You will appreciate that it is a detailed question. In relation to the traffic issues during construction, you would probably appreciate that this is in my electorate so I take a very keen interest in what is happening in terms of street closures and local traffic in the area. As the local member, I was consulted at length last year about the various changes and alterations to streets that would have to occur during construction. It may be, in some cases, for close to two years. It does mean inconvenience to local residents and people travelling through the area, but there has been a very extensive public information strategy which I think has gone a long way to minimising disruption. My electorate office has had no complaints so far. I think that the information strategy has been fairly effective in that regard.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to the table of contents at the start of the MPS and the list of statutory bodies reported in the MPS. Unlike last year's MPS, the Queensland Theatre Company is not separately reported in the MPS for this year. Could you outline why this is so and provide us with the budget and staffing figures for this financial year?

Ms BLIGH: It was a conscious decision taken that the Queensland Theatre Company not be reported as a separate item in the MPS this year simply because of its size. By comparison to all the other statutory authorities, it was not seen as material enough to warrant a separate part in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Its workings are for a calendar year because of the nature of its programming. They are document in its annual report. If the member is interested in anything specific to the operation of the QTC I would refer him to that document.

Mr MESSENGER: Would you give an undertaking to table those budgetary figures for the QTC?

Ms BLIGH: Over and above those in the annual report? Do you want something separate?

Mr MESSENGER: No, could you provide us with the budget and staffing figures. I was trying see how many staff work at the QTC.

Ms BLIGH: Sure. I can take that on notice. I should clarify for the committee that there is no ulterior motive here. It is simply that it is a very small aspect of the portfolio and decisions are taken from time to time about how various parts of a portfolio might report. The QTC is so small by comparison that it seemed an unnecessary, onerous burden to have a report from it because it does do a very extensive annual report. If you are interested in the staffing, there are 32 FTEs.

Mr MESSENGER: I make the observation that it is doing a fantastic job. I know it recently helped a group of school students from the Wide Bay-Burnett with their outreach program. Would the minister give a guarantee that that regional outreach program and partnership program will continue?

Ms BLIGH: I agree with the member's view about the work of the QTC. I think it is an extraordinary organisation doing great work. Its regional and outreach programs are some of its best features. I will be saying a bit more about them later today. I can absolutely say that we will not just keep them going but that they will go from strength to strength.

I clarify for the member that a total of 404 briefs have been prepared. I should clarify that these briefs are prepared formally for the Director-General to assist the minister to assist the parliament. I do not regard them as my briefs; I regard them as briefs prepared by the department to assist the work of this parliament and to assist the work of this committee, which I think is a very important feature of an open, transparent democracy.

Mr MESSENGER: Will we be able to get copies of those briefs?

Ms BLIGH: The briefs are prepared for the department and they are not for you. They will assist me to answer your questions.

Mr MESSENGER: Forgive my naivety.

Mr LANGBROEK: I thank the minister and departmental staff for time and effort in preparing documentation and being here today. Page 1-59 of the MPS is headed Output Statement of Financial Performance and relates to grants and subsidies. When a grant is given to a recipient, apart from financial accountability—I am sure that there are many processes to make sure that they spend the money properly and in the most effective way—what reporting system does the public have access to in order to achieve open, accountable government, which I know this government hangs its hat on? What mechanism is there to report to the public about the outcomes of these grants?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. These grants are a very important part of supporting the arts community. But you are right, every single dollar is a taxpayers' dollar. It is important that they are acquitted effectively. There is a new acquittal policy. That was developed and applied in Arts Queensland during 2004. A handbook of arts grants is provided every year. Hopefully, you should have some in your electorate office. If not we can provide them.

The acquittal requirements are clarified in that handbook so that even before applying for a grant an organisation should be aware of the requirements. We have also introduced funding by instalment with a final payment of five per cent withheld until an acquittal has been completed. Those grantees who are unfamiliar with the acquittal processes are supported by Arts Queensland. You will appreciate that some of the organisations who receive arts grants are receiving government funding for the first time. Arts Queensland officers are available to assist in providing them with support to that.

The policy also says that no new funding can be provided until satisfactory acquittals are received. Certified financial reports are required. Over and above the money, the reports must also address the agreed project outcomes within four weeks of the completion of project. Copies of any materials that were funded, such as CD, photographs or DVDs, must be provided. If a CD was funded it has to be provided. For the electorate of Surfers Paradise the total funds provided are more than \$3 million.

Mr LANGBROEK: I am sure they are greatly appreciated.

Ms BLIGH: It is pleasing to note that the number of late acquittals were reduced by 15 per cent in the last financial year. Some of the new processes are starting to see that work a lot of better.

Mr LANGBROEK: On page 1-59 it is noted that grants and subsidies for 2003-04 were up by \$7 million over and above the \$27 million budgeted for in that year. I notice that \$27 million is the figure budgeted for the coming year. Is it possible that the budget for grants may blow out by a large sum above \$27 million as it did last year?

Ms BLIGH: If you look at the footnote to that increase you will see that it is not a blow out. The increase includes payment for the Queensland Heritage Trails Network. Those are funds provided by the Commonwealth for its share of the Heritage Trails Network projects. They were carried forward from 2002-03 into the 2003-04 financial year, but they will be spent in the 2004-05 year. We expect that post that expenditure \$27 million will be adequate to cover the normal grants. It is one-off carry forward of Commonwealth funds specifically for the Queensland Heritage Trails Network. It is about \$5 million of that.

Mr LANGBROEK: On page 1-55 of the MPS at dot point five you refer to the Art Built-In program, the government's two per cent in funding for public art. As a new member I understand that in 2002-03 there was an amount of two per cent left over. It was not all spent in 2002-03.

Ms BLIGH: I am unaware of any remaining funds in 2002-03, but I was not the minister at the time. I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr LANGBROEK: And I wasn't a member at the time.

Ms BLIGH: And you weren't a member. In general, that is not how the Art Built-In project works, in the sense that the 2 per cent is very much built in. From the beginning of construction until the end, various parts of the project may involve work from artists so that over an 18-month construction period, different parts of the total 2 per cent would be realised, if you like. In that sense, it is not really that there is money left at the end. Do you have a specific question about a specific project?

Mr LANGBROEK: No. It was more that with a very large capital works budget this year of up to \$6 billion, obviously there will be a sizeable amount—some millions of dollars—for the Art Built-In project and I was wondering whether you anticipate not necessarily spending it all. I am looking for clarification as to whether there was some left over and, therefore, there may be some left over in this year as well.

Ms BLIGH: I should mention that it is not a separate allocation. The government does not determine the cost of a capital project and then add 2 per cent on top, unfortunately. As I said, it is built in. Projects will be identified that are part and parcel of the construction. Some will be obvious things which you will see associated with buildings and others will be less obvious, in the sense that they may involve the work of artists with glass that would have been part of the building anyway. As I alluded to in my answer to the first question from your colleague, I do not anticipate having any money left over from my capital works budget this year.

Mr LANGBROEK: No, I am sure you don't. You will spend it all and spend it wisely. Thank you, Minister. I have no more questions.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to page 1-58 of the MPS where the Output Statement states—
Art Built-In delivered in accordance with policy guidelines.

Since the introduction of the Art Built-In policy, what number of public works projects have exceeded the \$250,000 minimum project cost and thus been deemed eligible under the policy's guidelines?

Ms BLIGH: Are you asking me what number of government public works have exceeded—

Mr MESSENGER: The \$250,000.

Ms BLIGH: I do not have that figure here, but I can take that question on notice. Since July 1999, when the program was put in place, there have been \$17.5 million in commissions and \$6.1 million of that has been committed in regional Queensland. It has provided 826 jobs for arts workers and 80 per cent of the Art Built-In allocation has been spent on artists' fees and artists' works. \$353,000 or 43 per cent of the allocation has gone to regional artists and artworkers. It is a very big program. In the Education portfolio, for example, toilet blocks are exempt, so I would have to get a list of every toilet block that has been built since 1999.

Basically, there have been 140 projects, 66 of which are completed and 74 of which are active projects registered with the Public Art Agency. That does not quite answer your question. However, I would suggest that your question is probably moving towards the onerous end of the spectrum.

Mr MESSENGER: Just continuing with that question—

The CHAIR: Order! The time for non-government members' questions, at this juncture, has expired. The member might like to return to that question shortly. For questions from the government side, I call the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: Minister, I refer you to page 1-76 of the MPS. What my colleague the member for Burnett persists in referring to as a 'blow-out' I see, rather, as a significant and welcome additional

investment in the quality of arts infrastructure in Queensland. I am particularly interested in the future possibilities of a Gallery of Modern Art, a redeveloped State Library and a suite of new and redeveloped arts and cultural facilities in regional Queensland. Could you tell the committee: what are the benefits of the Millennium Arts Project to Queensland in respect of those possibilities?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I share his views about the investment in this very, very important project. Frankly, what we will see delivered statewide as a result of the Millennium Arts Project are world-class facilities for arts and cultural development. There have already been 17 projects completed from Logan to Mount Isa and it is the largest capital funding boost into cultural infrastructure in almost 30 years. When most people think about this project, they are increasingly focusing on the Gallery of Modern Art, but it is a project that commemorates the millennium and provides infrastructure right across the state. Statewide construction has created the equivalent of almost 1,000 full-time jobs for three years.

Turning to the Gallery of Modern Art, this will be the largest gallery of modern and contemporary art in Australia and in the Southern Hemisphere. It will be not only dynamic but also a very accessible centre for the visual arts in Australia. It will bring Queensland to the forefront in attracting major international exhibitions. It will more than double the exhibition space for Queensland's own collection. We have particularly significant collections in contemporary art, indigenous art and art of the Asia-Pacific region. It is also a great opportunity to showcase some of Queensland's artists, both contemporary and some of the older artists. It will provide a new children's arts centre and increase access to the state's substantial collection. It will also expand services and educational programs in regional Queensland.

Another important aspect of this project is the Millennium Library Project. The library will be developed into a world-class learning centre with expanded reference facilities and online access. It will increase support for 324 public libraries throughout Queensland and, importantly, showcase Queensland's unique heritage collections and touring exhibitions. People will see some truly amazing things when the library has the space to properly display and exhibit them. It will also expand programs and facilities for children, youth and indigenous people.

Another more obvious part of the project which is coming to fruition is the redesign and rejuvenation of the Queensland Museum's main campus. It is seeing a very swanky new front door, which you have all probably seen emerging, as well as the redevelopment of the Sciencentre. We expect it to open later this year with a 40 per cent increase in exhibition space on what was available in the old Sciencentre. Interestingly, in relation to this project, when you think about all of the cultural infrastructure on that side of the river that we all take for granted, when that was being constructed by a previous government some time ago, the difference between the final cost and the originally announced cost was 500 per cent—and none one of us would regret spending one cent of it.

Mr WELLS: Hear, hear! This is the first time in the history of Queensland that the portfolios of Education and the Arts have been amalgamated into the one department. As a matter of historical interest, it was a recommendation of the caucus transition to government committee in 1989. It was not able to be acted on at that stage, but now it has been. What synergies have been delivered by this amalgamation that benefit Queenslanders?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for his question and, as usual, for his interesting insights into our history. Sometimes it takes good ideas a while to emerge. I think that amalgamating these two portfolios presents some very exciting opportunities. From the point of view of what arts does for the education sector, there is an increasing body of international research that provides very compelling evidence that learning in the arts has a very important and positive effect on learning in other areas of the curriculum. Recently, the department has collaborated with the Queensland University of Technology and the Australia Council to examine the educational benefits of arts education. That has particularly involved children in the middle school years from disadvantaged areas. I am looking forward to the results of that report. It certainly identifies benefits of very strong collaboration between the education and arts sectors at community and school levels. Equally, there is no doubt that the education sector has much to offer the arts sector. There are opportunities to enhance the new years 1 to 10 arts syllabus. The honourable member will recall putting the wheels in motion for that.

Queensland has one of the strongest instrumental music programs in the country and it seems to me that we have much to see strengthened by collaboration between the Arts and Education portfolios, particularly the schools part of the Education portfolio, especially in strengthening the excellence programs such as MOST, the program for musically outstanding students, the Fanfare festival for bands and orchestras, the minister's Awards for Excellence in the Arts, the Kelvin Grove Dance School of Excellence and secondary school centres of artistic development such as the Balmoral State High School's arts academy program. It gives us an opportunity to focus on children and schools by all arts and cultural statutory authorities.

There are many statewide arts companies that are already working with schools. In talking to people in both sectors, we are already starting to do some thinking and some work towards developing a much more formal collaboration and partnership that will see us have a much stronger opportunity not

only to nurture excellence in the schools of those people who will be the future art workers and performers of tomorrow but also to nurture and foster very well-developed and well-educated audiences for the arts of the future, as well as providing opportunities, particularly for our major companies and statutory authorities, to be involved with developmental programs in schools. So there is a lot of synergy and I am looking forward to exploiting it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I call on the member for Broadwater.

Mrs CROFT: Minister, as you would be aware, the Gold Coast is home to many budding and professional film industry workers. I wonder if you are able to advise the committee on the Queensland government's response to the national downturn in film production levels?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for her question. I am not surprised that she would be interested. While the film industry is a very important industry increasingly to Queensland statewide, there is no doubt that in the south-east corner, and particularly in areas such as the Broadwater electorate, there is a very keen and well-understood interest in it. Through the Pacific Film and Television Commission, the government is committed to, firstly, developing the domestic film and television industry, to continuing to work to attract international productions and to doing what we can to enhance screen and film culture. In the past three years we have seen \$139 million worth of production generated, which translates into a total economic impact of \$424 million.

Some of the productions that we have seen in the last couple of years have included *Peter Pan*, *Ghost Soldiers*—also known as *The Great Raid*—the UK television series *Jeopardy*, the Queensland miniseries *Through My Eyes*, and four reality television series, as well as the recently filmed *House of Wax*, which you may have heard of, featuring the very prominent Paris Hilton—as Robin James, the head of the PFTC, knows very well! I am pleased to advise there are two new films that we expect to announce before the end of the year that will begin filming at Warner Roadshow Studios. After a time of some downturn, it is very encouraging to see that. There are also several major location based films that we expect to be in a position to announce later this year.

There are a number of incentives and schemes in place to attract domestic and international production. There are a broad range of these, including from development initiatives to the cast and crew salary and payroll tax rebates. This year will see the beginning of the implementation of our election commitments in the film industry. These are primarily aimed at boosting and supporting domestic production. The Domestic Production Fund will receive a total addition of \$750,000 this year. There are a couple of new schemes to encourage: firstly, in digital development \$450,000 to develop projects with the potential for computer game spin offs, a new Media Film Makers Fund of \$200,000 to develop projects on multi-platforms such as Internet sites and mobile telephone networks, and an indigenous film-makers fund of \$100,000, encouraging indigenous film-makers to tell their own stories.

Again from a Gold Coast perspective, the member for Broadwater may be interested to know that we have secured, with an election commitment, the Screen Producers Association of Australia's annual conference at the Gold Coast for the next three years. \$125,000 in additional funds this year will see that conference come here. For the first time Queensland will host the national conference for film and television production, held from 7 to 10 August. Approximately 600 Australian and 30 international delegates will attend. I am very confident that it will start to contribute to further development of this area as a location.

Mrs CROFT: Thank you, Minister. It sounds as if there are more exciting times ahead for the film industry.

The Queensland Orchestra has achieved significant progress since the Australian government, through the Nugent inquiry, recommended the merger of the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra and the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. Why has the Queensland government provided additional funds in 2004-05 to the Queensland Orchestra?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased that there is an additional allocation of \$750,000 in the 2004-05 budget, bringing the support for the orchestra to \$2.86 million. It will achieve two things. It will address an ongoing deficit and it will ensure that the orchestra is able to take its product around the regions of Queensland. As you alluded to in your question, the Queensland Orchestra is the result of an amalgamation between the Queensland philharmonic and Queensland symphony orchestras as a result of an arrangement with the Federal government. Unfortunately, when that amalgamation occurred, the original Australian government funding model was flawed and a structural deficit has resulted. The original funding model failed to take account of the total costs for the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra and resulted in a shortfall of almost \$1.5 million.

In my view, this orchestra is the victim of continued inequitable funding from the Australian government across its orchestras. Queensland's orchestra receives the second lowest per capita of federal orchestral investment in the country and receives the lowest percentage of Australian government contribution to any state orchestra despite Queensland's population growth. The Australian government has consistently refused to acknowledge the ongoing inadequacy of the funding model. I am heartened, though, that the Commonwealth has recently announced a review of orchestras to be

chaired by James Strong. The results of that review are expected by 31 December. I would certainly hope that Queensland's longstanding difficulties in funding will be recognised through this review. Despite this, the orchestra has gone from strength to strength since its amalgamation. In particular, I would like to recognise that it now has the lowest administration costs in the country and is already surpassing its sales targets set for 2004. Forecasts of \$1.3 million for this year will see a 16 per cent increase in revenue.

In 2004 it is expected that the orchestra will undertake a total of 122 performances, including 17 regional tours. Last month the orchestra toured in Townsville and Cairns and this month begins a tour of ensembles in up to 14 rural communities. I am sure that all members of the committee would agree that servicing the regions of Queensland is important. It does have a cost impact that both the state and the Commonwealth have to take responsibility for. Our government is very pleased to put in extra money this year. Without that extra money, the regional tours would have been put in severe jeopardy. I would hope that we are back here next year with a much more certain funding foundation for the Queensland Orchestra and I would hope that the federal government takes that on board.

Ms STONE: Something else that is very important to the region is public library collections. Minister, I refer you to page 3-2 of the MPS and I would like to know what the annual investment in public library collections is.

Ms BLIGH: Thank you for the question. The State Library provides over \$14 million in grants to independent public libraries annually for the purchase of books and spends more than \$2.5 million annually on books for the Country Lending Service. Borrowings from the Queensland public libraries are expected to rise from \$41 million in this financial year to \$42.5 million in 2004-05. So that is an awful lot of activity and an awful lot of material being borrowed from the library.

I would like to take the opportunity, though, to put on the record this afternoon some changes to the accounting treatment in relation to the public library and general reference collections. The Queensland Audit Office requested a comprehensive, high-level reconciliation between the State Library's book management system and the general ledger for 2003-04. Library collections are grouped into three categories: heritage and cultural, general reference and public library services. While the heritage and cultural assets appreciate over time, the general reference and public library service collections are depreciated. Public library service collections comprise a large number of high-volume, relatively low-value items with an average cost of about \$17 each with a very short useful life that are currently being depreciated over seven years. As at 30 June 2003, the State Library reported a total library asset value of \$74.4 million comprising \$28.1 million for heritage and cultural assets, \$28.3 million for general reference and \$18.3 million for the public library service collections.

The last valuation of the collections was performed in 1996 when the collections were valued at \$64.8 million. Historical costs, rather than valuation, has been used since 1997 to record the collection's values. Detailed analysis of the arrangements in place since 1997 has revealed that depreciation and deleted-items expense relating to the general reference and public library service collections have been understated since then with a consequent overstatement of the total collection value.

A lack of reliable financial data on the value of individual assets has been a significant issue. The State Library proposes a change in the accounting treatment of these collections. The general reference collection will continue to be capitalised and depreciated as per the existing arrangements, but the public library service collection assets will be removed from the ledger and expensed from 2003-04 in compliance with Queensland Treasury accounting policies. The new accounting treatment is simpler and more cost effective. The impact, however, is up to \$20 million in 2003, comprising a write-off of the public library service collections of \$18.3 million as well as a more than \$1 million depreciation and deleted-item adjustment for the general reference collection. The write-off is supported by the Queensland Audit Office and Treasury and will be included in the audited financial statements within the 2003-04 annual report. Importantly, there is absolutely no effect of this accounting treatment on these services and book stocks available for public loan. You will be tested on that later.

Ms STONE: I am aware that the government's Art Built-In policy has been very successful in generating jobs for artists and arts workers. I am just wondering how many jobs have been generated for regional artists since the policy commenced in July 1999?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As you will have seen in some of my earlier comments, there has actually been a substantial investment in regional jobs as a result of the program. I was very pleased to note that, while there have been 826 jobs created statewide, 353 of them—that is, 43 per cent—have gone to regional artists and arts workers. It has seen over \$6 million of commissions for arts workers throughout regional Queensland since 1999.

I think that you get a flavour of it when I give some examples such as the Queensland Health aged care program, which saw a major upgrade of Queensland Health's aged care facilities across Queensland. It saw \$1.34 million in commissions that generated 38 jobs for artists in places such as Maryborough, Dalby, Redcliffe, Redlands, Roma, Sandgate, Townsville, Warwick, Wondai and Yeppoon. Some examples of the artworks commissioned—and it goes again back to that point that I

was making earlier about the nature of the projects being built in to some extent—include screen and shade structures, outdoor and indoor furniture as well as textiles.

At the Mackay Court House redevelopment we saw the redevelopment of both an existing heritage building and a new extension. An amount of \$170,000 worth of commissions generated 14 jobs for local artists and arts workers. One that some of you will be more familiar with than others is the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, which saw \$500,000 worth of public art with two major commissions by Gold Coast artists. An amount of \$100,000 was spent on artworks from local and regional indigenous artists on the Gold Coast Convention Centre.

The Great Walks of Queensland, which is a major Queensland government initiative creating world-class walking tracks throughout the state's natural areas, has to date generated two jobs. However, many more will be created as the project progresses across the state. Regional artists have also received jobs on major Brisbane projects. Of the 366 jobs generated in Brisbane buildings and projects, 39—or 10 per cent—have been awarded to regional artists and arts workers. Toowoomba based artist Jill Kinnear, for example, received a large commission of more than \$200,000 for the piece known as 'Veil' at the Suncorp Stadium. Sunshine Coast artists Hew Chee Fong and Loretta Noonan received a large commission of \$99,000 for work in the Roma Street Parklands. So I think that those examples give you some idea of the diversity of what is happening in the Art Built-In project.

The CHAIR: The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Arts Department has now expired. The committee will now move on to examine the matters relating to Education.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to page 1-8 of the MPS and the department's role in supporting the education and training reforms, particularly the preparatory year. An audit was recently undertaken by Treasury and Education Queensland of the capital commitment required for the prep year. How have the initial funding estimates been revised following the outcome of this audit?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The member would be aware of the capital requirements for both state and non-state schools, as the Treasurer advised the House in the budget speech. An amount of \$56 million has been allocated for non-state schools, and that is something that has been negotiated with the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. In relation to the state sector, there is a very extensive audit that is still ongoing. There have been more than 600 schools visited. On the basis of the first 380-odd, there has been some work done that would predict what the cost might be, but there is no final costing available at this stage, although we would expect that the total costs will be in excess of about \$320 million.

The member may be aware that there was reference in the election commitments that funds of up to \$395 million would be made available for the capital. That was for state and non-state schools combined. There has been a commitment made to schools that, by the end of this year, every school will be advised of the nature of the facilities or the upgrade that they will be getting and what part of the site it will be on. Until we have really finalised that, I am not able to give you any accurate picture at this stage.

So it would appear on the basis of a little less than two-thirds of all schools being audited that we may well be able to come in under the original estimates. But until that has been finalised, it would be premature for me to predict the final. I should say that, in this financial year, \$29.4 million has been allocated. I am sure that you would be aware that another 20 schools will be phased into the prep year next year. Unlike the first two rounds of the trials, which were restricted to schools that had excess capacity on where children could be accommodated in spare classrooms, the next two phases will be open to schools that do not have excess capacity so that we can use it as an opportunity to trial the proposed prep classrooms and the prototype. So funds have been made available this year to ensure that we are in a position to begin the capital roll out.

Mr MESSENGER: I make the observation that a lot of people think that the prep year is a great initiative, but many schoolteachers and parents whom I have spoken to are a little bit nervous about the implementation and the management of that prep year. How can you hand down a budget for the prep year when you have not finalised the cost?

Ms BLIGH: I am not sure what you mean by 'hand in a budget'.

Mr MESSENGER: Because you do not have accurate figures on the total cost of the prep year, how can you accurately devise a budget?

Ms BLIGH: What I have indicated is that, on the basis of the very in-depth audit that has been done as a result of a partnership between Queensland Treasury, the Public Works Department and Education Queensland, from the first 380 or so schools a financial extrapolation has been done that has given a degree of comfort that we are well within the original calculation of \$395 million. But I cannot give you an exact or precise figure until we have been to every single school.

You will be aware that the roll-out will happen in 2007. We have some time to get that particular data finalised. There are both capital and recurrent costs. We are very comfortable with the predictions

on the recurrent costs, give or take a little because of unpredictable things. We are, as I said, just finalising the exact allocation that we believe will be necessary in the state school sector for capital. Until they have been to every site, anybody who says they can give you something exact is just not telling the truth, because what a school looks like on paper and what the building challenges might be, when you actually get there and inspect the site, may be two different things. You really have to be careful about making too many claims of precision.

Mr MESSENGER: I just make the observation that the nervousness on the part of those principals and parents is because there is a fear that the preparatory year implementation will be mismanaged and underfunded.

Ms BLIGH: Well, I am not sure what those fears would be based on, whether it be the capital works program or the roll-out of that program across the department. The department has delivered some large programs in the last couple of years, such as secondary school renewal. Those people who have experienced it will tell you that that has been done to a very high standard and delivered to all expectations. I am very confident. You can reassure people who are telling you that they are nervous that I am not. I have no doubt that a very big project such as this is bound to have some teething problems along the way, but the government's commitment is absolutely clear.

I think it is understandable that those schools that are not part of the trial maybe are a little nervous, because they are not across the details in the way that those schools that are trialling are. But now that the government has made an announcement about the start date, has begun in the last couple of months to put in place a process of working with every single principal in every single primary school to determine the most appropriate facilities and has given a commitment that every single primary school principal will have a final plan by the end of this year, which is two years out from start date, I think those fears, to the extent that they exist at all, will be gradually allayed.

It is inevitable, I think, that there are a lot of questions out there about an initiative of this size and this significance. I refer to some of the, I guess, question marks about what sorts of facilities might be put in place. Whenever there is an unknown, people have lots of questions. You may have seen in recent media reports that a prototype for the new buildings has been developed. The association of primary school principals and other major stakeholders have all actually been physically walked through a mock-up of that prototype and have given me in writing their views that this prototype adequately meets the requirements for children of this age group. That information is slowly filtering out there. I am confident, as I said, that this program will be a very, very sound investment.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to page 1-8 of the MPS. What is the estimated total number of new teachers, teacher aides and support staff required for the 2007, 2008 and 2009 prep years? What is the total cost of those staff? How many are expected to have early childhood teaching qualifications?

Ms BLIGH: I think I have got all of the questions. You asked for the total number of new teachers in 2007—

Mr MESSENGER: Teachers and teacher aides.

Ms BLIGH: In terms of teachers, we have already announced as part of the election commitment that we anticipated there would be a need for 105 additional teachers. In that year there will be a half cohort of children starting. That half cohort will then go right through the primary school system. With the exception of enrolment growth, we would expect 105 would be the one-off allocation to cope with the prep. I have to come back to you on teacher aide hours. There is a number on that, but it is quite large so I will come back to you on it.

In relation to your last question about early childhood qualifications, we have indicated that priority will be given to staff who have dedicated early childhood qualifications, as is currently the case in preschool. From time to time, particularly in remote areas, there are situations in which it is not possible to find somebody who is willing to go to those areas. In that case it may not always be possible. But it would only be in those exceptional circumstances that we would expect to see these dedicated prep classes taught by people with other than early childhood qualifications. It is a bit hard to give you exact numbers, but I think that answers your question.

I should say that the figures I have given you are for the state school system. The non-state school system is not something I can accurately predict on their behalf, but you would reasonably expect to see them with somewhere between 25 per cent and 30 per cent of those. It is the sort of thing that makes your brain hurt, because the impact on staffing is one that actually takes place over 13 years. It will take 13 years for the half cohort that starts in 2007 to work its way through the system. We are working our way through it. I will come back to you on teacher aide hours.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer to page 1-15 of the MPS and the department's contribution to the whole-of-government priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. Can you provide the committee with a term-by-term breakdown of the number of students suspended or excluded for substance abuse and related incidents since data collection first began?

Ms BLIGH: I will just get you the data on that. As you would be aware, centralised data collection on the area of suspensions and exclusions for disciplinary purposes has commenced in only very recent times. There has been a commitment that it will be published in the annual report, and there has been one publication of that data.

In relation specifically to substance abuse, I can give you from term 3 of 2003 to term 1 of 2004 and I can give you a breakdown. As you would be aware, the category of substance abuse includes abuse of illicit substances, other legal substances and tobacco. An illicit substance is one that is illegal, such as marijuana. Other legal substances are those which it is legal to sell, such as alcohol, paint or glue, but which it is not legal for people under 18 to be using. Tobacco, again, is legal to sell but not legal for young people to buy or use.

With regard to illicit substances, for those three terms 240 students were placed on short suspension, 146 were placed on long suspension and 92 were excluded. With regard to other legal substances, 308 were placed on short suspension, 49 were placed on long suspension and eight were excluded. With regard to tobacco, 1,244 were placed on short suspension, 28 were placed on long suspension and three were excluded. I should say that a long suspension is six days and over and a short suspension is between one and five days. In terms of a rate per 1,000 students per term, the total for suspensions for illicit substances is 0.2. For exclusions it is 0.1. So there is a very, very low percentage of students experiencing suspensions or exclusions for that reason.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer again to page 1-15 of the MPS and the priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. Minister, how can you claim to be mounting a meaningful response against drugs in Queensland schools when it has already been revealed that a detailed survey on this very issue has been gathering dust in your department for many months?

Ms BLIGH: My department does not conduct surveys on this matter. My department relies on data that is collected by Queensland Health. Queensland Health is part of a national survey. In fact, it is party to two national surveys that are conducted in households across Australia. Those surveys are conducted every two years and data is available to Education Queensland and anybody else who has an interest in this material on a rolling, two-year basis. As I said, we rely on the data that is collected nationally. It is material that is regarded as rigorous, as something that stacks up. It is not sort of wild speculation. It is data that you can rely on. I am quite comfortable with the material that is being provided by Queensland Health.

I can say, however, that Queensland Health this year is contributing an extra \$75,000. Obviously I am not the Health Minister so I cannot give you too much detail, but it is providing an extra \$75,000. There are two surveys. One is the national household survey that does do questions on drugs. There is another on drug use in schools. The drug use in schools survey started with, as I recall, 15- to 24-year-olds. The extra \$75,000 will mean that it will now be able to ask questions and give data on those aged 12 to 24 and will be able to get the data in finer slices, if you like, so that we will actually be able to identify how much of the cohort is a school-age cohort, because 15 to 24 does not really tell you whether that is school age or not. So the material that will be available out of the survey that is conducted this year—the biannual survey is due this year—will be a lot more finely graded.

Mr MESSENGER: Would that, for example, have information on what is the most prevalent or common illicit drug?

Ms BLIGH: My understanding is yes. Certainly the material I have seen from previous surveys breaks it down into drugs such as marijuana as distinguishable from other, more hard core drugs.

Mr MESSENGER: Which is the most common drug in our schools?

Ms BLIGH: As you would expect, at the lower end of the spectrum—marijuana. A much, much, much smaller group of people—I do not have the data in front of me, but I could certainly provide it to you; it is publicly available information—is school-age children using serious hard drugs at school or who are of school age.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer to prehearing question on notice No. 8 and the list of higher education courses accredited by the minister. Can we assume from your response to the question on notice that your department has not carried out one single audit into the operations of any accredited higher education course with the exception of Shafston university? Do you concede that your department's lack of vigilance is leaving students open to a similar fate as suffered by those attending Shafston university?

Ms BLIGH: The member should be aware that this matter is governed by national protocols. Those protocols from time to time change. This is still a relatively new field and, not surprisingly, the protocols have got more rigorous. The Queensland parliament passed legislation at the end of last year that makes Queensland legislation compliant with the national protocols. That became effective, as I outlined in answer to the question on notice, in May. So, not surprisingly, there have not been any audits between May and now. Prior to that the department had the power to respond to complaints, and that is what it did. I would expect to see a more rigorous process of checking accredited courses.

I should say that courses are not accredited without a great deal of rigour. My responsibility as minister is to put in place accreditation assessment panels in the lead-up to decisions about accreditation. I take a personal interest in making sure that the people who are recommended to be on those assessment panels are people whose academic reputations are beyond any doubt. I am satisfied that there is a very, very rigorous process put in place before any of these organisations gain accreditation to run a course at that level. I agree that that requires rigour not only at the front end but also in rolling checking, and that is precisely why we introduced the legislation. I was pleased to see the parliament support it. It is now in place, and I look forward to seeing, as I said, a more rigorous process in the future.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer again to the prehearing question on notice No. 8 and the list of higher education courses accredited by you. What processes are currently in place to respond to complaints received from students receiving their course? What is the number of complaints received each year relating to the course providers?

Ms BLIGH: The processes that are in place, as I said, firstly include a very rigorous assessment process—and I should say that it takes a lot more than a mere application to get a course accredited. It is often the case that prospective applicants are advised by both the department and me that more work will have to be done before they can consider accreditation or their accreditation may be subject to conditions and therefore the courses cannot be offered until the conditions have been met.

The department has a range of powers by which they can investigate complaints that are made, and the legislation that I referred to earlier further clarifies the powers of the department to do things such as enter premises and inspect both financial and other records. I will have to take on notice the question about how many complaints. Do you want to say for what period? Do you want the last 12 months?

Mr MESSENGER: As much as you will give me. Yes, please, the last 12 months will be great.

Ms BLIGH: Okay. I will come back to you on notice on that.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer to page 1-8 of the MPS and the department's role in supporting the education and training reforms, particularly in the preparatory year—

The CHAIR: You will have time to return to that question if you would like. The time for non-government members' questions has expired.

Mrs CROFT: Minister, the Labrador Primary School community was very excited when the school was selected as one of the first prep year trial schools. I refer you to page 1-32 of the MPS and to the evaluation of the prep year trial. Can you please elaborate on the evaluation and its outcomes?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased to advise the committee that this week I received the final report of the evaluation of the prep trial conducted by the Queensland University of Technology consortium overseen by the School of Early Childhood in that university. I am very pleased to report that it provides very strong and consistent evidence of the benefits of the prep year. I do not think anyone would be surprised to know that the prep year has had some benefits already and those are demonstrable, but I am pleased to say that those benefits have exceeded my expectations at this early stage.

What the report shows is that on entering year 1 those students who were part of the prep year trial last year have been rated by year 1 teachers as more socially skilled and better adapted to the school setting than those who had attended a half-time preschool. They showed that in a number of areas of development the program was highly successful in promoting children's social and emotional development, communications skills and literacy, numeracy and motor skills. It was clear from the report that one of the key success factors is the full-time provision of the program, which provides much more continuity, particularly compared with the previous part-time program.

One of the interesting features of the report and the evaluation is that it shows children in the trial in the prep year are making more significant progress—that is, their progress exceeds the progress made by children in preschool and it exceeds or equals the progress in year 1, which I think is very significant.

As you would also expect in an evaluation of this type, it has shown us some areas we could be looking at for improvement. A proportion of teachers felt they required more support for professional development than has been provided to date because it is a new curriculum. There has been a commitment to provided additional funds to both the Queensland Studies Authority and Education Queensland to develop and deliver professional development to teachers in the lead-up to the roll out of the prep year in 2007.

A number of teachers reported some adjustment difficulties but also reported that they saw the work as challenging and important. I would like to note that one of the key findings of the report is that proactive teachers with high expectations of children were one of the key success factors, and this backs up the finding of the longitudinal study released a number of years ago that it is dedicated teachers at the front of the classroom that really drive the most significant changes.

The report also highlighted that, in relation to services prior to prep, particularly those that are offered by the Creche and Kindergarten Association, children who undertook those programs experienced greater advantages into the prep year. So that is something for us to work on as well.

Mr WELLS: Education is an important export for Queensland. I noticed that on page 1-22 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements there has been a more than 20 per cent increase in international student numbers attending Queensland state schools. This is a very positive outcome. Minister, can you please advise how your department is expanding international education opportunities in the school system in Queensland?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know of his own interest in this area, and I am sure he will be pleased to see some of the results that are now being realised.

Mr WELLS: Well, 20 per cent is pretty impressive.

Ms BLIGH: It is 29 per cent—a 29 per cent increase in the last financial year in full fee paying students, which is a great outcome. So the last financial year has seen a bigger growth than in the years prior to it. There has been a majority of those students from China, Japan, Germany, interestingly Brazil, and South Korea. As you would expect, a majority of those are enrolled in years 11 and 12.

One of the interesting features, as I said, of Queensland's international student intake is that Queensland has 38 per cent of the total Brazilian school students in the country and 22 per cent of the total German school students, so we are obviously an attractive destination for those young people and their families. There are more overseas families discovering Queensland's schooling system.

The department also runs a number of onshore programs through its international arm, Education Queensland International. The department markets a range of onshore school programs. Secondary schooling in years 8 to 12 sees students eligible for either three to 12 months in a high school as part of a study abroad program or an intensive English language program to prepare international students for entry into a Queensland high school.

The total revenue generated from all fee paying international students in government schools is up this year by \$2.96 million—a total of \$6.26 million in June 2003 up to a total of \$9.22 million. \$5.5 million of that has been injected back into the host schools over the course of the financial year. The economic value of international school students has been estimated at around \$25 million, including their purchase of goods and services and associated tourism and travel while they are here. Thirty-two Queensland state high schools are accredited to deliver programs to international fee paying students in years 8 to 12.

I am pleased to advise the committee that I have recently approved a trial of a year 7 international program. From next year the government will trial the expansion of international schooling into year 7 in five state primary schools with about 60 international students. The trial schools will be identified later this year and students will be required to be accompanied by a parent as they are in the lower grades of high school. It is an interesting area and I will be interested to see how it has been taken up but there are other states in Australia that are offering this. It is a way for students to become familiar with Queensland's schooling system and develop their language prior to entering high school.

We also have a number of offshore programs with three sites in China delivering a modified version of the Queensland year 10 curriculum to 115 students. Three new sites in China are expected to come online in September and a further six in 2005, and a year 10 offshore program providing pathways into years 11 and 12 in Queensland. So there is a lot of international interest and I will look forward to watching the growth over the next 12 months.

Mr WELLS: I refer to 1-15 of the MPS which outlines the department's contribution to the whole-of-government priorities, including improving health care and strengthening services to the community. We have had a number of questions from the opposition about drugs in schools. I would like to hear about what the department is doing proactively in this respect and, in particular, what part drug education has in the context of health education.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. No doubt he is experiencing *deja vu* with some of this material. This is understandably an issue of great concern in the community and one which parents particularly have very strong views on and high expectations of from our schools. I would like to put on record that illegal drug use has absolutely no place in Queensland schools and that is reflected not only in the policies of Education Queensland but also in the National School Drug Education Strategy, which Queensland is a party to.

Schools, we recognise, play an essential role in partnership with the community, parents, health professionals and police, and it is important that they take a proactive approach that educates children explicitly on the dangers of using drugs and the consequences of drug use. That is done in the Queensland context as part of a much broader health and wellbeing context and is not done in isolation from students' generalised learning.

Every school must provide as part of the year 1 to 10 health and physical education syllabus work that is age appropriate on the issues surrounding drugs—not only explicitly about drugs but also on the

broader skills that children require if they are going to effectively leave drugs out of their life, such as how to say no to peers and how to work through those sorts of social issues as well.

Drug education in year 11 and 12 is typically part of the pastoral care and life skill programs that students in those years are part of. As I said, Queensland is party to the National School Drug Education Strategy. That is a strategy that represents a consensus in this very difficult area. It is surprising that it was achieved, but I think it is important we understand that it represents a consensus between both the federal and state governments across a range of different political parties at the time it was achieved. So it is a bipartisan document across a number of levels of government, and the general principles outline the need for continuity in integrated curriculum, the involvement of parents and community and long-term outcomes.

It covers risks associated with drugs and how to avoid becoming involved in drug use. It is not a document or a strategy that supports a zero tolerance approach. It is one that is very much based on a harm minimisation approach. It is one that is adopted here in Queensland but, as I said, the Commonwealth has recently evaluated it in 2002 and has signed up and provided funding for another three years. So I am very pleased to be at one with the Prime Minister on that particular issue.

In terms of Education Queensland's actions, there is a drug education coordinating committee. As part of the national strategy, I think there have been more than 1,200 drug summits—I will have to check that figure—held in local communities where schools have sponsored that partnership between police, local community organisations and parents to share strategies that will work in their local community and that has been very useful. But ultimately schools have a responsibility and school based health nurses, guidance officers and school based police are all playing an active and proactive role with teachers in working on this difficult issue.

Mrs CROFT: Minister, page 1-49 of the MPS mentions that during 2004-05 the government will commence a major capital works project to provide better special education facilities at a cost of \$28.4 million. One of the projects mentioned is the Coolangatta Special School. Can you please provide further information to the committee on how this school community will benefit from this support?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Representing the Gold Coast, she would be very well aware that this has been an issue that the school community of Coolangatta Special School has been debating for some time. I announced in last year's budget some funds to allow the school to embark upon a planning process to replace what is basically a completely unsatisfactory, inadequate and outdated facility.

The current school is located in a beautiful setting on the top of Kirra hill but it operates from a very small site. It is half a hectare, it has no school oval, it has no specialist facilities and it was formerly Coolangatta State School so it has very traditional highset buildings. Many students of the special school are unable to access second-storey classrooms. So they are not conducive to the learning needs of children with special needs.

We looked at two options. One was to rebuild the school on the site and the other was to relocate the school. It has not been an easy decision for the school community, but I take my hat off to the parents who worked so hard over the last 12 months because in the end they decided that, while it is a great view, they like every other parent want their children to graduate with more than a view. They want their children to graduate with the best possible education and it cannot be provided on a half-hectare site.

So the recommendation to me was that we look at relocating the school. I am happy to advise the committee today that I have approved the relocation of Coolangatta Special School. There are negotiations occurring with a landowner in the Currumbin Valley area. Until those negotiations are complete, I am not in a position to specify the exact location but we will do so as quickly as possible.

I can say, however, that this year will see \$5.5 million to commence the construction. We will see a new single storey school on a new site that will have a range of facilities which are appropriate and provide particularly for those specialist areas such as life skills, which are missing from the current school.

I should say that Coolangatta Special School also owns a farm in the Currumbin Valley. One of the decisions to relocate into that area means that the school can be closer to the farm, which is a very important part of their curriculum, and it means a lot less time on buses for these children, which is important.

There is obviously going to be a great deal of speculation about the future of the site. Quite understandably, many members of the local community will be interested in what the outcome of that will be. I should say that my role as Minister for Education is to determine whether the site is required for an education purpose. It is no longer required for that purpose, and I have declared it surplus to the portfolio's needs. The future of the site is one that will be dealt with through the government's asset management process and discussions across government will have to occur. It is premature to speculate about the future of it, but I can say that it will no longer be used as a special school.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms STONE: Minister, pages 1-41 and 1-42 refer to ways in which the department is supporting pregnant and parenting young people to complete school. Could you please update the committee on the outcomes of these strategies?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for her question. I know of her interest in this area. I am pleased to be able to advise the committee that there has been quite a lot of achievement in this area since I reported to the estimates committee last year.

In terms of supporting pregnant and parenting students, the professional learning web site has seen 3,737 hits—approximately 300 a month—which is a very significant increase in requests. Requests range from coming directly from students who have an interest or people who are no longer at school, such as a young mother who left school four years ago who is seeking information about schools that might welcome pregnant students and cater for her as a young parent, to a regional school seeking advice about support for a year 9 student. The principal has since organised a teleconference with the young parent at Mabel Park State High School, organising peer support for that year 9 student to enable her to stay at school. Community agencies also call. There was a recent call from one agency working with a group of young mothers in a remote area of the state requesting information about support available for their return to school.

The program has also seen the establishment of a reference group and the appointment of a pregnant and parenting students youth worker in the Ipswich/Corinda area as part of the education and training reforms trial. I am very pleased to see that in some trial areas this issue has been picked up as one that is directly related to retention, and programs are put in place as part of the ETRF trial funds. There has been the establishment of a young parents group at the Brisbane School of Distance Education which, for many years, has been the only source of education for young pregnant mums who have left school. To see that young parents support group put in place is, I think, very important.

We have seen the opening of the Wellbeing Centre, which provides on-site child care at Woodridge High School. That is a sensational program that is operating out there. We have seen the opening of a parent friendly place at Mabel Park State High School to extend the support that is offered through the POWER program, which stands for Parents Overcoming Work and Employment Restrictions, and Spinifex State College has established the Spinifex Teaching and Education Pregnant and Parenting Students program, or STEPS.

All districts of Education Queensland will be required to include the needs of pregnant and parenting students in their district youth achievement plans by the end of this year. We have got some way to go. There have been some very significant steps forward. It is no longer a case of out of sight, out of mind. The educational needs of those students who are either pregnant or parenting are now very much on the agenda, and I am looking forward to seeing good results.

Ms STONE: One of the items mentioned as part of the safe and healthy school selection policy, which is referred to on page 1-11 of the MPS, is a grants program called safe and healthy schools grants. Could you please advise on the progress of the distribution of these grants?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am sure she would be aware that the question of children's health is very much on the public agenda and on the national agenda. There is a growing expectation that schools will play a very proactive role in making sure that children are kept active and are provided with appropriate levels of education in healthy eating and active lifestyles.

There has been an increasing concern about the potential health effects of the growing sedentary nature of children's lifestyles. There are a number of components to the strategy. Basically there will be CPR skills for all years 11 and 12 students to ensure that they leave school with a very clear level of skill in that area. We have committed to equipping a number of healthy school vans that will go and visit schools, and they will be equipped with information about nutrition and diet as well as a range of activities that they can take into the school, skill up the teachers on new active programs and hopefully schools will then take that on. We hope that is a program that will be visiting schools over the next 12 to 18 months.

Interschool sport for all schools with an enrolment of over 300 will be expected by the end of this year, and an expansion of the activate program, which is a program we do jointly with Queensland Health in tuckshops from 10 schools to 50 schools. We are also looking at additional school police, nurses and crossing supervisors.

One of the parts of the program I wanted to talk about today was the \$500,000 grants program that will operate each year for the next three years to enhance sport and physical activity in schools. This week I have approved 40 grants that will go out to schools and benefit 105 schools who are either working individually or in clusters. There are many quite interesting ideas that they have put forward for this new grants program. It includes everything from playground upgrades, swimming programs, a small schools camp where small schools can come together and put in place major active programs, a motor skill refinement program and a cycling group. They are all supported by the safe and healthy schools

web site and the development of an online learning community so that teachers can keep up with the latest ideas in this growing area of interest.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time for government members questions having expired, I now call upon the member for Surfers Paradise.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Chairman. Can I welcome the Department of Education staff, who replaced the arts department staff. Minister, can I refer you to 1-79 of the MPS. It begins the section on new projects in schools around the state. Recently, as I am sure you know, at Peak Crossing a fire destroyed a building at that school. It was decided by your department that the building would not be rebuilt as it was not an active classroom; however, a demountable building from Woolloowin State School would be moved there in its place. Is it common practice for the Education Department to replace permanent structures with demountable structures in the event the permanent structure is destroyed? I would hope that in this case it was not planned to be there permanently.

Ms BLIGH: I am very happy to provide some clarification about what has happened at Peak Crossing and what will be provided. I want to first acknowledge what a traumatic event it is when there are fires in schools. I have visited a number of schools post-fires. It is not just the buildings. The buildings being destroyed is terrible, but it is usually the tragedy of what is inside the buildings that can never be replaced—the school work and the teachers' work—and it takes a long time for school communities to get over it. Between Q-Build and Education Queensland I think there is a lot of expertise in rectifying schools as quickly as possible. We do everything in our power to bring schools back to the circumstances that they were in before the fire.

In relation to Peak Crossing, the school that they lost was actually the original school building, so you can appreciate that we will not be in a position to rebuild an original school building. In that building was a computer lab, a small tuckshop—because it is a very small school—and it was the place in the school where the school gathered for assemblies and small school performances. The school has a spare classroom. That spare classroom has been fitted out with all of the computer technology that will replace the technology lab that was in the old building, so that has been provided. The school will be provided with a covered outdoor space. I guess that is like the standard covered outdoor space that you would see in a new school. That will allow them to have assemblies and small performances. The school will also be provided with the temporary building that you referred to for the purposes of running a tuckshop. So the temporary building is only for the tuckshop, which is not normally standard provision in schools of that nature. The temporary building was actually taken to Woolloowin school to replace their tuckshop when they had a fire. It will be provided to the school to run the tuckshop out of it. It will not be provided for classroom purposes.

It is not uncommon in schools from time to time to have classrooms or buildings which are surplus to educational requirements as enrolments go up and down. What has happened at this school is that on the basis of their existing classroom numbers they do not have a need for another classroom to be built. But I think you will see from what I have said that real efforts have been made to replace the functions of the building that they lost. The technology lab is now in the spare classroom the school had. The assembly space will be replaced with a standard outdoor covered assembly area and stage area, and it is the tuckshop that is being replaced with the demountable. As I understand it, the department's officers have been working closely with the P&C and the principal, who are supportive of this outcome.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Minister. Can you tell me about these demountable buildings, and not necessarily just in the Peak Crossing case. Do they all have wheelchair access? I understand, from some parents who have expressed some concerns to me, that all government buildings should have wheelchair access according to your Disability Services legislation. I understand that here are some demountables that may not have disability access, and that parents who have children with disabilities are sometimes recommended to go to other schools that have wheelchair access because not all the demountables do.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I have a very strong commitment to ensuring that we are able to accommodate the needs of students with special needs. In fact, we have dedicated capital works programs for the first time to ensure that we are able to upgrade schools and to ensure the adequacy of our special education facilities.

In relation to relocatable buildings or indeed any other building in a school—because, as you will be aware, there are many, many schools in Queensland that were built 50 or 60 years ago—many of them, if not most of them, are two-storey buildings, and obviously it is very difficult to provide access into those second storey classrooms.

What Education Queensland does is provide access into classrooms when there are students enrolled with disabilities. It may not be that the child can access every single classroom in the school, but if the child is enrolled in, say, year 3 and requires disability access and year 3 is located in a relocatable building, then a ramp would be provided to that building.

When Education Queensland sits down with the parents of a child with a disability to work through with them what is the best location for their child to be educated in, a number of factors are taken into

account and a number of schools have a specific coding. Some schools develop expertise in working with children who have an intellectual disability or children who have a physical disability, and the school would have the infrastructure to cope with that. Often those recommendations are made to parents, 'We think this school is best for your child for these reasons', but parents are entitled to enrol their child in any school that they believe is appropriate. So recommendations are made but parents are not required to go to those recommended schools. That is a decision for parents. If a parent decides that they want to enrol their child in another school that is not the recommended school, then physical wheelchair access would be provided to the child's classroom. It is not always easy because, as you appreciate, you cannot always get into second-floor classrooms, but generally schools are large enough to find a way around this. Sometimes it means relocating the class that the child is going into. I have know schools to do that as well. Every effort has been made to find the right approach.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you. Minister, I draw your attention to 1-37 of the MPS. In particular, I draw your attention to diagnostic testing and national benchmarks. It is clear that in year 3 students are achieving the national benchmark. I do not want to go through all the percentages. It is on the bottom of the 'Output Statement' on 1-37. We see that year 3 students are achieving the national benchmark. Then there is a 14.2 per cent drop in year 5 for reading and a 6.7 per cent drop in the number of students in year 5 reaching the national benchmark for numeracy. My question is: is it anticipated that when the figures for year 7 become available there will be similar drops in the number of students reaching national benchmarks in that grade?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I appreciate that there is some confusion not only in Queensland but also around the country because of the lack of current availability of the year 7 data. I am very hopeful that it will be able to be released publicly very soon. This is data in relation to the 2001 national benchmark testing and that was the first time that year 7 students were tested universally. The problem is basically determining where the cut-off is for the benchmark. Once it is determined, this problem will not arise in the future. It has to be agreed between all the states and Commonwealth, and that agreement is very close. I do not expect to see that trend, but until we have got the final answer it is very difficult for me to predict. These results fluctuate from year to year, but I can say that Queensland is not complacent about the achievement of our children in these areas—not just in years 3, 5 and 7 but the year 2 diagnostic test which, quite frankly, I think gives us a much more accurate and rigorous picture of a child's ability in this area.

There is no doubt that Queensland—and I have been very open and public about this—on all of these tests is consistently nearer to the bottom end of the ladder than the top compared to other states. There are a number of explanations for this, but predominantly it is clear that our children are up to 12 months younger when they sit these tests and have had up to one year less of schooling. That is precisely what has motivated the government's decision to introduce the prep year. There will not be immediate results from that, but I just want it to be clear that that was the single biggest motivating factor in the government's decision to introduce the prep year.

There is a lot of debate about the usefulness of these tests, because they are one-off tests. Particularly in relation to young children, there is a debate within the education sector about how much a one-off test really tells you about a child's performance. I think that it does tell you something about your system. I think that we cannot continue to look at where Queensland rates in terms of other states and not bite the bullet on the age of our children and the amount of schooling that they are getting.

We are investing significant amounts in literacy and numeracy. There is more than \$156 million going into additional programs, but we will continue to strive to do better. The department undertook a very major investigation of literacy under the leadership of the previous minister. The resulting report, *Literate futures*, identified a range of strategies that are all being implemented and, as I said, I would expect to see these results continue to improve over time.

Mr LANGBROEK: I refer to page 1-43 of the MPS in which it is stated that 72 per cent of males and 82 per cent of females are retained from years 8 to 12. Next year the target is set to maintain this 10 percentage point gap. Is the government content to retain this gap, or what programs are in place to assist male retention rates? Is there any new money for these programs in this budget?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. This data is at the heart of the government's agenda for learning and earning. This is again the data that in many respects has motivated our determination to improve what happens at the senior end of schooling, particularly for those who are aged 15 to 17. I should say that the retention rate data is not as helpful as it might be, because what it tells us is those students who are retained, if you like, in a school setting; it does not tell us whether a group of students—and these are more likely to be male students—have, for example, left school but gone and taken up an apprenticeship and therefore are still retained in the training system if not the school system and may well come out with very good qualifications. This data does not provide that at this stage. That is one of the things that we will certainly be looking at with the new registration program with the Queensland Studies Authority as part of the education and training reforms for the future.

You asked if we were content. We are not content with those levels of retention. We want to see all young people 15 to 17 engaged in education, training or work and preferably a combination of those.

Certainly we have a very clear policy direction to have more young people stay on at school and more young people taking up pathways that match their talents in the training sector as well as the schooling sector.

I should say, however, that I do think it is important to recognise improvement, and there has been a steady increase in the retention rates in Queensland. Queensland has the second highest retention rate in the country. We are only exceeded by the ACT, which is much smaller and has far less challenging service delivery issues. We are now above the national average. In government schools Queensland's rate for 2003 was 76.1 and the national average was 69.6. The gender difference is something that you see in all states and is a national difference, but until we have actually got more rigorous data it is hard to know whether this is a bad thing for boys or potentially a good thing. Until we can find where those boys are and how many of them are actively engaged in structured workplace training on the job or something formal like an apprenticeship, it is not entirely clear how we might tackle that. But we do want to make sure that we are having as many young people as possible—boys and girls—doing more between 15 and 17.

Mr LANGBROEK: On page 1-23 of the MPS it is noted that there have been some achievements in the management of behaviour in the supportive school environment policy. After the budget there was some debate about the budget's lack of support for teachers in the area of behaviour management and QTU President Julie-Ann McCullough expressed her concern that the government was deserting teachers in this regard. As such, I ask why additional money for behavioural management was absent from the budget, so much so that a comment would be made by a teachers' representative?

Ms BLIGH: I am sure that the president of the QTU will be pleased to see you quoting her press release. I am.

Mr LANGBROEK: I quoted her in my budget reply, too.

Ms BLIGH: I think that this is a very serious issue in our schools. I do not think that anyone has a magic answer or any silver bullet. I think that the question of managing the behaviour of young people is one of the core skills of teaching and one which many teachers certainly talk to me about and indicate that in some schools—not all schools but in some schools—the behaviour they are dealing with now is certainly more difficult than they might have earlier in their career. I think they require support. I think it is important to recognise that there are very substantial levels of support for teachers and schools, but that does not mean that we have all of the pieces of the puzzle perfect at this stage.

I was disappointed that the Queensland Teachers Union's comments did not recognise the work that is being done to fund new initiatives in the education training reform trials. Every school in Queensland, state and non-state, has joined from July this year and every single district has been allocated new funds to use for new initiatives which they believe will work in their local area to help retain more young people at school. So it relates to your last question. In some school areas those programs will have an impact and a relationship with behaviour management—not all of them, but there are certainly some areas where it has been recognised in the early trials that programs such as flexible learning options and alternative schooling sites will make the biggest difference to those people who would otherwise be very disruptive in their schools.

Already in the first round of trials we have seen two new alternative sites funded through the ETRF, one at Bray Park and one at Kingston. But I also think it is important to recognise that the Queensland Teachers Union has for a long time very vigorously put forward the policy that the single biggest issue in relation to behaviour management is class sizes. This budget, like the one before it, sees the first injection of teachers to reduce class sizes in Queensland since the early 1980s. That is starting to have an effect on schools, and I would expect to see that some of that will have outcomes as well.

The CHAIR: The time for non-government questions at this juncture has expired. I now call upon the member for Broadwater.

Mrs CROFT: I refer to page 1-10 of the MPS where it refers to the number of new teachers which the government plans to employ from semester 1 of 2005. I know from the experience of schools in my electorate that new teachers can make a real difference to the education that students receive and can also relieve teachers' workloads. Can you please tell the committee how these new teachers will help our schools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As I was just outlining, there are a range of expected benefits that we will hope to see over coming years from new teachers in our classrooms, not least of which is an improvement in the ability of teachers to work with young people who have challenging behaviours. Before going on to teacher numbers, just in final response to the member for Surfers Paradise's last question, the other area in this department that will receive very significant funds is the final allocation of our commitment to employ 100 new youth support workers to work with schools. The final 79 of those 100 will start in this financial year. They will start work at the beginning of next year and they will make a very big difference in those schools that have children with challenging behaviour.

In relation to teacher numbers, we are projecting the employment of an additional 589 teachers from semester 1 of 2005. That estimate consists of 322 due to projected growth in student enrolments and 117 for students with disabilities, as well as 150 additional teachers as part of the government's commitment to reduce class sizes in years 4 to 10 from 30 to 28 by 2007. This initiative will deliver, as I have said earlier, the lowest middle years class size targets in Australia. We will see those class sizes reduce from 30 to 29 in 2005, with further allocations to reduce class sizes to 28 by 2007.

This commitment follows this year's completion of the government's 2001 election commitment to employ 800 teachers above growth over four years. These 800 teachers will also be used to reduce class sizes, improve behaviour management, provide literacy and numeracy intervention, and provide support to students with disabilities. This final tranche of teachers that came into classrooms this year delivered increased curriculum coordination time to special schools and primary schools with enrolments of over 500 students as part of the government's program of improving education in the middle years of schooling.

There are some examples that I would like to give of the difference that those 800 teachers are making. Mitchelton State School, which the member for Ferny Grove will be aware of, was provided with an extra full-time equivalent in 2003. The school has used that new teacher to create a new year 5 class. It has reduced the class sizes in year 5 and reduced the number of composite classes in the school which has enabled the school to address the behavioural issues that it was experiencing in the year 5 cohort. Woongarra State School in the Burnett area was provided with an extra FTE in 2004, and that has enabled the school to reduce class sizes and reduce the number of composite classes, as well as enabling teachers to work more with individual students and special groups. I would like to talk about Coombabah, but Mrs Croft probably knows the good things that are happening there.

Ms STONE: On page 1-8 of the MPS—and you also mentioned it in your opening statement—reference is made to a more than 22 per cent increase in the capital works program for 2004-05. Can you please advise the committee on how this massive—and most pleasing, I must say—increase in support of Queensland's schools will be distributed?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. She, like many other local members, tells me that one of the most pressing issues that is brought to her attention on a regular basis is the need to make sure we are keeping up with facilities and the environment that parents expect their children to be learning in. This year, the 2004-05 capital works budget allocates \$336.7 million. I am very proud of this allocation. It is a record allocation, and it does begin to deliver on our election promises that were made for this term in relation to facilities. It compares to \$257.2 million in the last financial year which, as you outlined, is a 22 per cent increase. That is a big increase in any one year and will really be felt out there in our schools. The increase has largely been made possible because of the \$1 billion Smart State Building Fund that the government announced at the end of last year. Education Queensland's share of that is \$350 million. The capital works program will inject more than \$1 billion into education facilities this term. The 2004-05 capital works program provides more than \$145 million for growth and includes \$23.4 million for new schools and stages of new schools, \$24.5 million for land acquisitions for new schools, \$49.3 million for additional stages at existing schools, \$38.9 million for extra classrooms, and \$9.6 million for emergent minimum requirements which provide relief for unplanned increases in student numbers. You can get a sense from that of the challenge of growth in this state.

Other funded programs include the delivery of the second year of the Building Inclusive Schools program of \$20.15 million this year. This goes to some of the matters raised earlier by the member for Surfers Paradise about the inclusion of students with disabilities. Round five of the extension of the Cooler Schools program will see \$17.5 million in expenditure. The delivery of the second year of the Smart Schools Renewal program will see \$14.35 million put into that program. The commencement of the provision of facilities for prep and the continuation of the phase-in of prep trials accounts for \$36.8 million. We will see core facilities upgrades to libraries and administration facilities of \$12.8 million, a \$11 million program of electrical upgrades, \$16.35 million to increase and upgrade amenities, \$6.6 million into teacher housing upgrades and \$4.3 million into a new Smart State subsidy scheme.

It is a substantial injection of capital. I think it will make a very big difference to students. Maintaining the number of schools and buildings we have is a never ending task. With a 22 per cent increase in the budget I am confident that every school will begin to feel the impact, even though they may not get everything they want as quickly as they would like. In short, it delivers more new schools, more classrooms and better facilities.

Mr WELLS: On page 1-12 of the MPS it says that the department is going to complete stage one of a new school at Narangba, which is a place very dear to my heart, even though the place where the school is going to be built does not fall into that part of Narangba that falls into the electorate of Murrumba. It also says that a number of other stages are going to be completed or commenced. I wonder whether you could provide the committee with further details?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. No doubt some of his constituents may benefit even if the school is not within his boundaries. This is very good news for Narangba. It is the first of nine

new schools. We have committed a total cost of \$145 million from the Smart State building fund in this term. We have secured a 6.5 hectare site for the new Narangba school and the tender has now been let.

We expect that building will commence soon. The first stage will see \$9.4 million worth of expenditure for the school which will see it open as a P-3 and grow from there. It will include eight classrooms, an outdoor covered learning area, an art store, canteen, sports oval, a car park, external infrastructure and an administrative area. Notably, the Narangba primary school will be the first primary school in Queensland to be built with new prep classrooms. While they may not use them as prep classrooms for the first couple of years, the new prep prototype will be included as standard in primary school construction from now on. The Narangba school will be the first one to incorporate it.

The school will be ready for the start of the 2005 school year and further stages are planned in 2005-06 and 2006-07. The ultimate capacity of the school is expected to be around 800 students. It is being constructed to relieve the considerable growth pressure that Jiniburra State School has been experiencing. No doubt you would be very aware of the increase in enrolments there.

The capital works program will also deliver 200 new classroom and major stages at other schools which are in various phases of their development including: stage 2B, which is a major hall and gymnasium, at Calamvale Community College; and stage four of the Flagstone Community College which will see years 11 and 12 start from next year. No doubt the member will recall some interesting discussions about the location of Flagstone. It is great to see it getting to the final stages of years 11 and 12. The program will also include: stage four of construction at North Lakes State College; stage two of Upper Coomera State College will see years 10 and 11 starting; Tannum Sands State High School will see additional classrooms as part of its stage five; Clover Hill State School on the Gold Coast will see stage two incorporating additional classrooms; and Chancellor State College will see years 10 and 11 developed as part of its stage two. I should clarify in relation to the member's question that the new school at Narangba will be located on Young Road in Narangba.

The CHAIR: I make reference to the fact that in the government's last term seven schools in my electorate, for example, benefited to the extent of more than \$400,000 from a program called the RRR maintenance program. At pages 1-12 and 1-29 of the MPS it mentions maintenance programs for this term of government. Can the minister inform the committee how these programs will assist Queensland schools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know about some of the great work that has occurred in schools as a result of the RRR program which commenced in 2001 with a \$50 million allocation. The RRRs are Repainting, Re-roofing and Reticulation. The program was prioritised by QBuild using assessment data and relying on its technical advice.

It did mean that those very large projects such as re-roofing and repainting which schools were unlikely to ever be able to complete out of their maintenance budgets can be undertaken through a central program and thereby relieve the maintenance budgets of those schools. The funds from the RRR program are in addition and over and above the annual school maintenance funding.

It assisted 818 schools across the state. It was, in my view, enormously successful. I am very pleased to see that the program has been extended as part of our commitment to improving facilities. We will see \$72.7 million spent over the next four years. \$18.2 million will be spent this year. We expect to assist 355 schools this year as a result of the program. Again, we hope that another 800 will see some benefit from the program during this term of government.

Our commitment to improving and maintaining buildings will not rest with the RRR program. We have a new program called the High Priority Maintenance program which will see \$20.2 million spent over three years from 2003-04—293 projects at schools this year—targeting other maintenance areas such as the replacement of flooring and carpet, the replacement of playground structures, many classroom upgrades, the refurbishment of tuckshops and the replacement of asbestos roofing where that is necessary.

We anticipate that the program will assist more than 450 schools during this term. When you combine those two, it will be the biggest single investment in maintenance that this portfolio has ever seen with a total of almost \$93 million in addition to the base allocation to schools for maintenance in this four years. I hope that many schools will start to feel the impact of that program.

Sitting suspended from 3.38 p.m. to 3.55 p.m.

The CHAIR: The committee will resume the hearing with questions from non-government members. I call on the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: I compliment the minister on her staff's preparation. It has been excellent. Minister, I refer you to page 1-8 of the MPS and the department's role in supporting the education and training reforms, particularly the preparatory year. Which preschools not located in school grounds will be refurbished for prep purposes and which will be sold off?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Again, it is too early to be absolutely definitive about that. However, it is anticipated that the overwhelming majority of offsite preschools will be sold as

part of this process. During this audit it has been the clear preference of schools to have the preparatory children located onsite. That means new buildings at the school which will be offset by the sale of buildings that are offsite. In a number of cases, the preschools that are offsite are considerably offsite—sometimes four or five blocks away. Schools have a real issue, for example, about including the preschool children in the normal activities of the school. Also, it often means sending a teacher aid down to a school to relieve a teacher for a lunch break and other breaks. There are safety issues in terms of transporting children of that age to the main school site. Overwhelmingly, the preference of schools is to have their preparatory year located onsite, given that prep school is really focused on preparing children for school.

Many schools look at this as an opportunity to reinvigorate their early childhood effort and to configure their school in such a way that it will have an early childhood precinct, with prep to year 2 or year 3 as close together as possible. As I said, the clear preference of schools is that a prep school be located, wherever possible, on the school site. I would expect that the overwhelming majority of offsite preschools will be sold to offset the cost of new buildings at those schools. There may well be some good reasons why that may not happen in absolutely every case, and until we have signed off with every school and principal on exactly what will happen at their schools it is not possible to be any more definitive about that. That will become public as soon as it is known.

I want to take this opportunity to respond quickly to a previous couple of questions asked by the member in relation to complaints received by the Office of Higher Education in relation to accredited private providers. In 2003 and to date in 2004, four complaints have been received by the department relating to two accredited private providers. One complaint was from multiple signatories. In the case of three complaints about the one provider, the issues were addressed and resolved during an accreditation process that ran through 2003-04. The one formal complaint lodged in 2004 is being investigated as part of a broader investigation of the provider concerned. I think that answers your question.

In relation to the traffic impact around the Millennium Arts Project, a local traffic impact study was undertaken as part of the Millennium Arts Project at the Queensland Cultural Centre. The study recommended some traffic signal and road layout changes within the precinct. Those changes specifically affect the following roads and intersections: Peel and Merivale streets, Merivale Street and Montague Road, and Grey and Peel streets. A broader traffic study will now be undertaken by both Queensland Transport and the Brisbane City Council as part of their analysis of traffic flow in the West End area.

Traffic arrival patterns at the Cultural Centre as at November 2002 show that motor vehicles were used by 47 per cent of clients, the bus was used by 13 per cent, the train was used by 14 per cent and 26 per cent walked. Motor vehicle usage is not expected to grow significantly in the future, particularly with the redevelopment of the Cultural Centre bus station and the improved set-down facilities as part of the site infrastructure. Approximately 70 extra car parking spaces are planned in addition to the existing 974 and extensive commercial parking is available nearby at South Bank and the Brisbane Exhibition and Convention Centre, which it is expected would be utilised by potential patrons.

In relation to teacher numbers for the prep schools, I was one teacher out, sorry. The number of teachers projected for 2007 was 106. I think I said 105 in my earlier answer. In 2008, there will be 118 additional teachers for enrolment growth. It is expected that, when the half cohort has gone right through—that is, 2020—an additional 1,462 teachers will be required across primary and secondary schools.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you. I refer you again to page 1-8 of the MPS and the prep year. It has been stated previously that 590 general classrooms will be remodelled to house the prep year. What are those general classrooms currently used for and what plans are there to replace them in the future?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. You would have heard me refer earlier to a prototype that has been developed for the construction of new art classrooms. We anticipate approximately 400 new classrooms being built to accommodate the prep year and the refurbishment or redesign of an estimated 590 general classrooms.

Currently, those classrooms are not being utilised for classroom activities. It is not uncommon in schools, due to enrolment fluctuations, for classrooms to not necessarily be used for classes. If you visit a school, you might find one class in a double classroom or you might find a spare classroom being used for withdrawal space or as a parent meeting room. Schools find ways to fill up their spare space. However, they understand that, as enrolments increase, whether through prep or through another source, that classroom will be returned to use for classroom purposes. A number of those classrooms would not be suitable in their present form to accommodate up to 25 children in that age group. In some cases, those classrooms will need significant changes. We might need to move walls or to convert three small classrooms into two large areas, with wet areas and other facilities that you would need for children in that age group.

Currently, a number of designs are being worked through with the Department of Public Works. All of the major stakeholders, who are members of the early childhood reference committee, have been

party to early consultations on the proposed refurbishment and redesign. The classrooms that you refer to are ones that are not currently being utilised. I correct that. As I alluded to earlier, some schools are taking the opportunity to move classes closer together such that some of the classrooms might have students in them, but those students will be relocated. They might move grade 7 classes to another part of the school and refurbish those buildings for the prep so that they can be part of an early childhood precinct. That would only happen where there are spare classrooms elsewhere in the school for the year 7 children to relocate to. Does that make sense?

Mr MESSENGER: How much floor space are you budgeting for the prep year students?

Ms BLIGH: Approximately 3.4 square metres per child.

Mr MESSENGER: Did you say 3.4?

Ms BLIGH: Of classroom space.

Mr MESSENGER: I think the school principals association wants something over four square metres per child.

Ms BLIGH: The school principals association has had a number of positions on this. It has now written to me that its view is that the prototype based on 3.4 square metres represents a suitable space for children of this age. The original position of something over four square metres was considerably more than the existing preschool allocation. I am not entirely sure what the basis of that was, but 3.4 is very consistent with our existing early childhood facilities. While there was some debate about that, I think it is now resolved. The 3.4 is generally accepted by most early childhood commentators as an acceptable and good quality standard for children of that age. Certainly the prototype construction has allayed concerns about that.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to page 1-15 of the MPS and to the department's contribution to the whole-of-government priorities of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. Is it Education Queensland's policy to compulsorily report all students to police if found using illegal substances or suspected illegal substances, and how many students have been referred to the police within the past year?

Ms BLIGH: I need to clarify your question. Did you ask that in relation to illicit drugs or illegal substances, referring to my earlier distinction about alcohol?

Mr MESSENGER: Illegal substances and suspected illegal substances.

Ms BLIGH: Then you are talking about everything, including alcohol and tobacco?

Mr MESSENGER: No.

Ms BLIGH: Just in terms of my earlier distinction, you are talking about drugs that are illegal?

Mr MESSENGER: Illegal within society now.

Ms BLIGH: Yes. It is the policy of Education Queensland that if students bring to school drugs that are illegal that is a matter that should be brought to the attention of the police. That has recently been clarified.

Mr MESSENGER: If a teacher found a student using, for example, marijuana—

Ms BLIGH: At school?

Mr MESSENGER:—at school, would they report that student without question to the police?

Ms BLIGH: That is the expected response, but not by itself. It is also made absolutely clear to schools that they should be working with the child's family and working to provide access to support services, where necessary, and students are referred to counselling or to school health nurses, et cetera. The national protocols are very clear that it has to be an integrated response, a combination of both support and discipline. The question of the number of referrals to police is not one that is collected centrally. I suggest that that is a question that should be directed to the Police portfolio.

Mr MESSENGER: The point that I was probably trying to make is that the teacher does not really have any discretionary powers. It is really only the police who have discretionary powers. Would that be a fair assumption?

Ms BLIGH: On the question of matters to be referred to the police, in the policy it is the principal who exercises a discretion. However, it has been made clear to principals that the matter of students bringing illegal and/or illicit drugs to school should be referred to the police. It is a criminal offence and it should be referred to the police.

Mr MESSENGER: From that reply, can I put forward this scenario: where a teacher in a schoolyard finds a student using suspected illicit or illegal drugs, they report the matter to the principal and it is then up to the principal's discretion as to whether that student is reported on to the police?

Ms BLIGH: Yes. I am sorry if there has been any confusion. The expectation is that if a criminal offence is committed on the grounds of the school that is a matter that ought to be referred to the police.

Mr MESSENGER: And that is referred by the teacher who discovers that suspected activity?

Ms BLIGH: In a school setting, it is likely that that is something a teacher would refer to the principal and, generally speaking, the contact between the school and the police is done by the principal.

Mr MESSENGER: I am just trying to work out the teacher's responsibility.

Ms BLIGH: To report it to the principal.

Mr MESSENGER: And then from the principal on to the police?

Ms BLIGH: Yes. You would appreciate that some schools have 2,500 students and literally hundreds of teachers and there might be a different protocol in one school to another in that a deputy principal may be the person designated to deal with the local police. If that is the case, then that is the person whom the teacher would report it to. Generally speaking, matters of this nature are within the powers of the principal.

Mr MESSENGER: So the ultimate responsibility is not on the teacher discovering the offence?

Ms BLIGH: Yes, the teacher is required to report that to their principal.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer again to page 1-15 of the MPS and the priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. What is the number of times that ambulances, or medical personnel have been called to drug related episodes or overdoses in school grounds?

Ms BLIGH: That is a matter that you would have to refer to the Emergency Services portfolio. There are 1,300 state schools in Queensland and I cannot answer for the non-state school sector. I think that if you want to get a broad picture of that, then certainly the Emergency Services portfolio could provide that. Education Queensland tries to find a reasonable balance between collecting data from schools that gives good indications of what is happening at schools and not requiring the sort of detail that would basically see schools reporting everything that happens. Principals are very senior staff. They are expected, they are paid and they are required to exercise authority at that level. They are supervised by executive directors. You may or may not be aware that the federal minister has just made school funding dependent on putting even more autonomy into schools. That is the sort of balance that we constantly try to find in the school system. But if you want accurate data about ambulance call-outs, you would really need to go to the Emergency Services portfolio.

Mr MESSENGER: And you would expect the Emergency Services portfolio to keep these records?

Ms BLIGH: I cannot speak for how the Emergency Services portfolio maintains its records—whether it has a referral source as part of the data or not.

Mr MESSENGER: It is just that I thought that a call-out by an ambulance to a school would be a major event in that school.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, and the school would keep a record of it.

Mr MESSENGER: And you are unable to supply those records.

Ms BLIGH: I have not gone and asked every school for all the records of all of their critical incidents. That is not something that we do. For example, we have 500,000 students in our schools and it is inevitable that there will be injuries that occur in sporting fields and there will be serious illnesses that occur from time to time. Children have terrible falls that require an ambulance intervention. Staff also injure and hurt themselves from time to time. So you would expect that you would see issues to do with medical response and emergency response as a fairly regular feature of schooling.

Mr MESSENGER: I would politely suggest that I would expect also the minister and the minister's staff to be aware of just the amount of critical incidents that happen on their school premises and also the nature of those critical incidents.

Ms BLIGH: Critical incidents are required to be reported by schools because, as you can imagine, after a critical incident there are often many things that follow that up. It may be, for example, that after a critical incident there might be a workers compensation claim. There might be a negligence claim against the department on behalf of the parents of a child. There may be follow-up medical treatment that is required and the circumstances surrounding the incident may have to be provided to hospitals or medical providers. There may be action through the justice system if the medical incident arises from a matter that involves criminal substances. There are many, many reasons why you would want to make sure that that critical incident data is kept and kept rigorously. Schools are required to do that and I know that schools take that responsibility very, very seriously. I am certainly not aware of any concern that schools are failing in that duty and I am very aware that there is full data available from schools when they are required to provide it about any particular incident.

As you can imagine, I regularly call for briefs on matters that are brought to my attention and I am happy to provide advice to you. I am not provided with pages and pages. Schools are very good at keeping these sorts of records. These are about the lives and health of children. I think that any

suggestion that schools are failing in that duty is one that should not be made lightly. If you are aware of any evidence of any school failing to do so, then I think that you have an obligation to bring it forward.

Mr MESSENGER: And just to clarify, you do not have that data that you can present to this committee?

Ms BLIGH: What data do you want?

Mr MESSENGER: The critical incident data.

Ms BLIGH: You want to know how many critical incidents were dealt with by schools in a financial year?

Mr MESSENGER: Yes.

Ms BLIGH: That could be gathered by ringing every school and requiring them to provide every bit of it and then someone sitting down and collating all 1,300 schools. I am not at all convinced that that is a good use of taxpayers' money. I am satisfied that people who are paid at principal levels and executive directors who supervise them are more than capable of ensuring that. That is part and parcel of running a school. If I need information about an incident, I expect that schools will be able to provide it to me quickly and accurately—and they do. If the Workers Compensation Board requires it, I expect that schools will be able to provide it—and they do. If the police need it, I expect that they will be able to provide it—and they do.

I think that the management of critical incidents in our schools is very good. As I say, these are matters that involve the health and safety of our staff and of children. It is one of the things that schools do exceptionally well. If there is a major incident, such as the lock down at Caboolture State School when there was a gunman on the loose and the police were involved, that is something that immediately triggers off a range of central responses where the school is immediately supported by both police and other emergency service personnel as well as people from head office. But thankfully, those incidents are extremely rare in our schools. The overwhelming majority are sporting injuries, falls, cuts, bruises.

The CHAIR: The time at this juncture for non-government questions has expired. We will resume with government questions. Minister, can I take you to page 1-12 of the MPS, which refers to the Smart School Renewal Program. How does this program differ from the very successful Secondary Schools Renewal Program and how is it assisting to provide better schools for Queensland students?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The Secondary Schools Renewal Program, as you can tell from its name, was limited to secondary schools only and it was not available to all secondary schools; it was available only to the oldest of our schools, that is those that were constructed prior to 1975. Sixty-four of Queensland's oldest state high schools benefited from renewal and refurbishment programs during the 2001-02 and 2003-04 financial years.

The replacement renewal program, the Smart School Renewal Program, is one that will benefit both primary and secondary schools constructed up to 1984. So it has expanded the program to both levels of schools and certainly lifted the age of the schools that are eligible to apply and it is not available to those schools that did receive secondary school renewal. So it is about taking this idea of renewal into a whole range of schools that were previously not eligible.

It commenced last year as a three-year, \$45 million program. I am very pleased to advise the committee that, as a result of our increased capital expenditure, that \$45 million has been expanded to \$80 million over four years to 2006-07. The projects will reflect contemporary education directions, and many of the projects focus on delivering the government reforms across all levels of schooling, particularly in those early and middle years. It also focuses on the integration of ICTs into the curriculum.

It is a very flexible program that has identified both major and minor projects. It will see more than 195 projects over four years. One hundred and eight minor upgrades are in progress and 67 major upgrade projects will commence in 2004-05. The projects are projects that the schools themselves have identified as priorities and initiated. They have had maximum input from the school community. The projects reflect emphasis from the school and builds on what I think was one of the most successful components of the Secondary Schools Renewal Program, and that was the requirement that education policy and vision should lead capital rather than the other way around. It is a visionary program.

Some examples that, I think, illustrate the program well is that in Surfers Paradise we will see three projects with an approved total of \$1.47 million. In this financial year, Bellevue Park State School will see a \$414,000 major upgrade to support its arts initiatives. In the Burnett area, there will be a four projects with an approved total of over \$700,000. In this financial year, the Isis District State High School will see a major upgrade to support middle schooling and ICT initiatives of \$367,400. There are many other similar projects right across the state.

The CHAIR: I understand that other components of the Smart State Building Program were the core facilities upgrade and a program called Wired for the Future. I also note that at page 1-29 it is proposed to provide funding to upgrade telephone systems in schools. What part do these initiatives play in supporting students and teachers in schools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Sometimes these things seem very small and not worthy of comment, but it has been my experience in schools that sometimes it is these apparently very small programs that can really make a difference in the smooth running of the school and allow the school to get on with the business of teaching and learning.

The core facilities upgrade is a \$34 million, three-year program. In the last few years, the Capital Works Program has been very focused on delivering classroom growth. With the kind of enrolment growth that we are seeing—in south-east Queensland, particularly, but across the whole state—that is taking up a lot of the funds that would be available for capital works just to keep pace with the need for classrooms and new schools. The core facilities upgrade ensures that we can have a major focus on administration and library facilities. In many of these schools, the original administrative and library or resource centres were built for a school population that has subsequently been overtaken. While we have kept up with the classroom growth with either new buildings or relocatable buildings, it has not been reflected in the growth of their resource centres and it has not been reflected in the growth of their administration centres. That contributes greatly to the ability of the school to make sure that they have appropriate facilities such as staffrooms, sick rooms, principal offices and meeting spaces as well as those important library and resource centres. This year we will see \$12.8 million funding 21 school projects across the state with a further 31 projects during the term. These will go to projects that would not have otherwise got up through the normal capital works projects and I think that it is important that we have managed to find a way to do them.

One of the other projects is Wired for the Future. This is \$42 million worth of equipment that you will never see because, by its nature, it means that it is usually out of sight. But for schools that are trying desperately to keep up with the drain on their power from increased technology, it will make a very big difference. This will significantly expand computer capacity, particularly for more modern and more powerful computers that are now considered standard in our schools. In 2002-03, there were approximately 82,000 computers available for curriculum use. In one year—between then and 2003-04—that grew to approximately 110,000 computers. This year, we have seen another 1,700 classrooms cabled. The need to power that connection is what has driven this new program with \$11 million to upgrade more than 150 schools to make sure that they have a connection to the information superhighway. Over 350 schools will benefit from this program during this term of government and any emergent needs will be dealt with as they arise.

Similarly, where schools have developed over time with different classrooms and different facilities across often quite a large school footprint, many of them have different telephone systems where they cannot even ring different staffrooms. That can really contribute to frustrating and inefficient school running. So this \$5 million program will see 200 schools fix those problems in this year.

Ms STONE: Minister, there are a couple of references in the MPS to a program that will provide new or refurbished toilets for schools over this term of government. Can you please inform the committee about the program?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I was just talking about the importance of the little things—

Ms STONE: Absolutely.

Ms BLIGH: I have been known to jokingly refer to myself as the 'Minister for Toilets' because I am surprised as to how often this matter gets drawn to my attention and how much angst it can cause in school communities. As you will appreciate, schools are often very large workplaces and places where there are literally, as I said earlier, sometimes thousands of children as well as parents and school visitors. So toilets become the focus of a school community. This program is the first dedicated toilet program that we have had for some time.

There are two aspects and drivers of the program. The first is, as I have said earlier, the very rapid growth experienced in some areas of the state, which has meant that it has been quite difficult in some places to ensure that we have the requisite number of toilets to cope with the number of children. While we have managed to get classrooms in there, the toilets have not always followed. The second area, which is one of the ones that I am sure many members here have dealt with from time to time, is the need to improve and upgrade existing toilets. So there might be enough of them, but they are not very nice. This program is the first time that we have had a dedicated program to upgrade toilet facilities.

Three hundred and ten schools will receive assistance from the program. There is \$34 million in this term of the government, and \$16.35 million of that will be spent in the 2004-05 year. \$10.83 million will be for additional toilets and \$5.5 million will be for the upgrades. It will assist more than 50 schools this year. We have prioritised those schools most desperately in need of new toilets, improved toilets or in some cases both.

Ms STONE: It is really important. I must say, a couple of my schools are very grateful for their new toilet blocks this year. Page 1-24 of the MPS refers to some subsidy programs—the School Improvement Assistance Scheme and the School and Community Capital Innovators Scheme—which

provided assistance to school communities in 2003-04. I would like to know what the proposed support to school communities is for 2004-05.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am sure that she, like other members, will be familiar with the subsidy programs that many P&Cs have applied to over the years to improve the school environment. These programs are subsidy schemes to match P&C fundraising to really help P&C money go further. Education Queensland and the government are clearly responsible for the provision of core facilities but, inevitably, parents are always keen to provide extras and additional facilities where they can.

The SIAS program started as a dollar-for-dollar matching arrangement, where the government provided a dollar for every dollar that was raised by the P&C. The program last year completed projects worth \$2.4 million. The funding has not been reviewed since 1995 and the old guidelines I think are quite inflexible. The funding limits are also out of date. For a primary school hall the maximum subsidy that is allowable is \$125,000 and for a secondary school hall the maximum is \$200,000. These halls are now in the vicinity of \$1 million to fund, and I think it is not reasonable to expect that school communities will be able to find money over and above that.

The new arrangements for these subsidy schemes I think are good news for school communities. After some consultation I have approved a new subsidy scheme. It is called the Smart School Subsidy Scheme. It is a single scheme, so the two that were there before will no longer exist. The total funding for the scheme in this term of government will be \$13.56 million, which is \$4.3 million this year—so it is a significant increase on what was in the bucket before—and \$4.52 million next year. I should say that the projects that have been done this year are ones that were awarded under the previous subsidy scheme, because they are always done a year in advance of the applications. Applications open next week. They remain open until 23 August. They will be advised by schools bulletin. Applications go through a two-stage process involving both district and central office. Applications can be made on-line, and the QCPCA will be involved in project selection processes.

The scheme accounts for equity issues relating to school size, remoteness and socioeconomic factors. The maximum subsidy will be the same for all projects in schools and has been increased to \$500,000. It will be evenly divided between large and small projects. School communities may not be required to match dollar for dollar. In some cases schools could be subsidised up to \$5 for every dollar they raise. So we will take into account some of the socioeconomic factors that affect schools. Some schools are in a much better position and have greater capacity to raise funds. I look forward to seeing the successful schools notified some time in November. I am confident that the new subsidy arrangements represent a much better proposal for schools.

Ms STONE: School security is often raised with members. In the MPS on page 1-29 you make mention of upgrading security at schools. Could you please provide further details of this initiative?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member. Education Queensland is responsible for almost 1,300 state schools, with more than 20,000 buildings. There is an ongoing need, obviously, to upgrade systems and provide better security. There is nothing more distressing in school environments than damage, theft and vandalism or arson. It is particularly distressing to schools when that damage is deliberate and potentially avoidable. We constantly monitor the security arrangements in schools, and facilities account managers provide advice to schools to improve security.

We have a number of new strategies that we hope will continue to help minimise vandalism and theft. We have a new school handbook on security this year, and we are developing partnerships with police and local councils. I am pleased to advise that there has been a 22 per cent increase in Schoolwatch calls. I think the police would certainly tell us that one of the best weapons schools can employ against this sort of damage is watchful neighbours. Those schools that are lucky enough to be located close to neighbourhoods will certainly attest to the fact that neighbours who keep an eye on the school on weekends and over holidays are the best protection those schools can get.

But we do not want to be complacent about it. We are allocating a new \$6 million security upgrade program over the next three years. In the 2004-05 year we will see upgrades at 55 schools, with \$2 million being spent in this year. The program will include the installation of new closed-circuit TV systems, the installation of additional alarm systems and in some cases the expansion of alarm systems. A further 68 schools will receive walking patrols, which is an 80 per cent increase on last year. We are identifying those schools most at risk and providing assistance to ensure they get walking patrols where required. We have seen a 30 per cent decrease in computer theft, which I think is admirable. But we want to keep driving those improvements. The security upgrade program I hope will provide much better protection for school assets which, after all, are community assets.

Mr WELLS: On page 1-8 of the MPS there is a reference to the amount of funding being provided in the budget for the implementation of Education and Training Reforms for the Future, which is referred to in your acronym-addicted department as ETRF. I know that schools in my electorate are already benefiting from ETRF. Can you elaborate on the amount and the use of government funding for ETRF?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question and endorse his comments on the use of acronyms. If I had understood at the time of creating this reform how it might be treated I might have thought of a different way of putting it. We were going to call the other program we were discussing the 'Quality Toilet Upgrade' program until we realised how it would be described.

Mr WELLS: I suggest that you refer to that one as the 'Program for the Improvement of Toilets'.

Ms BLIGH: Thank you for your assistance in that regard. My staff have got some other ones I will share with you later. The government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future, as I know you will appreciate, will see a total overhaul of our system in the early, middle and senior phases of learning. The significance of the reforms is highlighted by the fact that they will be underpinned by one of the largest allocations of funds in this year's Education budget. The funding for the reform package will be in the order of \$135 million this year, rising to over \$231 million in 2005-06 and \$307 million in 2006-07.

I am pleased to advise the committee how these funds will be used over the next 12 months. We have already had some discussion this afternoon about the allocation of funds to the prep year. We expect to spend about \$46.2 million on prep year implementation in the 2004-05 budget. In addition to the prep year funding, this budget will also see further expenditure into reforms in the middle years, which will see the government commencing to deliver on the key planks of that strategy to reduce middle years class size targets from 30 to 28 and indeed by 2005 to reduce them further with the employment of an additional 150 extra teachers. In addition, we will employ around 180 extra teacher aides by 2007 to further support middle schooling. The cost of these reforms in the 2004-05 budget will be around \$9.4 million.

Last year Queensland led the country when parliament passed laws to ensure that all young people aged 15 to 17 are engaged actively in learning or earning. We began trialling those reforms in seven areas of the state in the last year but, as I said earlier, this month the trial will be extended statewide to improve participation, retention and achievement of students in that senior phase. The continued implementation of these reforms will see us spending \$16.2 million in the 2004-05 year.

The education and training reforms always have had a focus on the use of ICTs in classrooms. The biggest share of ETRF funds in 2004-05 will be spent on ICTs. \$63.4 million will be spent in this financial year to continue to equip our classrooms and our students with up-to-date technology.

Mr WELLS: In your last answer you started to refer to the senior phases of learning, or SPLs. I note that on page 1-9 of the MPS the government's reforms to SPL will be extended statewide. I know that in my electorate students and other young people who disengaged from learning have already been involved in the trial. Could you advise the committee what benefits the trial is providing to disengaged young people? Might I say, this is a program in which I am particularly interested because I have a number of active such cases in my electorate office at the moment.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the MFM for that question. I am very pleased to provide some further detail. As I have said, the laws were passed last year but they do not become effective until 2006. We were keen to make sure that we do not get to 2006 without every school being actively engaged in these sorts of programs so that we are confident that we will be ready. We have allocated \$40.3 million over three years to support the new additional initiatives that are required. \$11.7 million has been allocated to support the trials of innovative local initiatives in those trial areas. Over the last 12 months there has been a range of initiatives trialled in the seven areas from Gold Coast to Mount Isa. Now that the trial has been extended to everybody else across the state, they will also be able to benefit from similar initiatives. The statewide trials will involve more than 163,000 young people aged 15 to 17 years in over 500 state and non-state schools, 15 TAFE institutes and about four agricultural colleges.

I will list some of the initiatives that have been trialled to date using these dedicated grants funds. I think these examples give you an idea of the diversity of ways that schools and school communities are tackling this issue. In the Townsville education district, young people in the Charters Towers community have undertaken prevocational courses to assist them find work in areas such as agriculture, horticulture, retail, small engines, personal development, job applications and letter writing. In the Rockhampton district, a life skills centre has been established that is providing disengaged young people with life skills as the first step to re-engaging them in learning or in earning. In the Fraser-Cooloola-Isis-Burnett district, we have seen innovative transport options being provided in the Childers area to enable young people from that district to access education, training and work opportunities.

In the Mooloolaba and Murrumba districts, a suite of programs has been prepared that provide better support for young people at risk of disengaging from learning. Some of those programs focus on improving the identification of young people at risk, developing support programs for them, such as short courses and alternative learning pathways, implementing a case management approach to maximise the effectiveness of support programs and implementing pastoral care programs at the schools that focus on youth and social issues. In the Logan-Beaudesert district, a scholarship program has been offered for at-risk young people to participate in TAFE programs.

Prior to the grants through the education and training reforms, none of those programs existed. Each one of them is reaching out to disengaged young people and offering them a chance for a better

education and ultimately a better life. For those reasons, the reforms to senior schools are among, I think, our government's proudest achievements. I look forward to being able to tell the committee more of those sorts of stories next year when this program will be statewide and every member's electorate will be experiencing some of these initiatives.

The CHAIR: The time for government questions has expired. I now call the member for Surfers Paradise.

Mr LANGBROEK: Minister, I would like to go back to the behaviour management issue referred to on page 1-23 of the MPS. It may be something you have to take on notice. How many students have been expelled from more than one school before they reach 15 years of age as a result of behavioural issues? What happens to these children? I understand that if they have been expelled from one school they may be able to find another school that will accept them, but what happens if they are then expelled from more than one?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Can I say, firstly, when children are excluded from a state school there are requirements that either the school itself or the district office, and usually in partnership, work with the child and their family to identify another suitable education alternative. For some children, that is enrolment at another school. For some children, it is enrolment in an alternative school or some sort of flexible program, and for other children it is enrolment through the school of distance education.

In terms of your question about how many children are expelled from more than one school, I am not entirely sure that I could get you that data in an accurate sense simply because some children move between the state and non-state sectors. At this stage we have no unique identifier for children in the education system in Queensland. You may be aware that I put out a discussion paper earlier this year on reporting to parents, and one of the proposals in there is that we put in place a unique student identifier so that we can much more accurately track retention data.

The retention data that you referred to earlier only really tells us how many children started in grade 8 and five years later how many are in year 12. Some of the children might have gone to New South Wales and finished school but they do not show up in our retention data. It is not a bad thermometer, and that is how it is done around the country. No-one would pretend it is as accurate or as precise as it needs to be. So the unique identifier will give us the ability to answer questions like that more accurately, but in the absence of that it is very hard to tell. We do work with students and their families, as I said, to relocate them to another school but it is possible that the student 12 months later might move from one end of the state to the next and it is not even possible to know what school they then subsequently re-enrol in because, while students have a student number at their school, it is not a system-wide number. So we are looking at moving towards that. You will appreciate there are some people, as I understand, in some of the responses that are coming forward, particularly from the non-government sector, who have some concerns about privacy, and we will have to work that through with people. Until we have the ability to track at any one time half a million students or probably three-quarters of a million, taking into account those in the non-government sector, it is impossible to give you accurate data on that.

Mr LANGBROEK: On page 1-2 of the MPS it states that Education Queensland endeavours to engage students in culturally and socially relevant curricula. Being the member for Surfers Paradise, I am very active in my support for a schoolies festival that is safe and enjoyable for school leavers visiting the Gold Coast and for residents of the Gold Coast alike. Is Education Queensland doing anything specific to prepare year 12 students for the schoolies festival whether they are coming to the Gold Coast or whether they are going somewhere else?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is an interesting name, schoolies week, because when they are there they are no longer schoolies; they have actually graduated. But Education Queensland takes quite a proactive role in working with many of the agencies involved. Education Queensland is a member of the government agencies coordination group and a member of the Gold Coast regional managers forum, both of which are involved in coordinating the government planning for schoolies week.

Education Queensland also ensures that teaching of safe behaviours is embedded in the curriculum through the health and physical education syllabus and pastoral care lessons in year 12. There is access provided to year 12 students for distribution of materials with appropriate information on safe behaviours and rights and responsibilities of young people. That is distributed by the Office of Fair Trading. I do not know if you have seen that material, but the Office of Fair Trading puts together a good booklet about how to avoid being ripped off and what your responsibilities are as a tenant. For many young people schoolies week will be the first time that they have rented somewhere. For many it will be the first time that they have gone out to restaurants on their own, and so it details what their obligations are as consumers and what their rights and responsibilities are. That material is provided to schools and distributed to year 12 students in the weeks leading up to the end of school, and many schools take the opportunity to then talk through some of those issues in those classes.

Education Queensland also assists the organisers of the event by requesting that students who are leaving year 12 take a form of school identification to schoolies. You will appreciate that one of the greatest difficulties that the organisers have is making sure that schoolies is for schoolies, and Education Queensland works with event coordinators to ensure that year 12 students have some form of identification. I do not know if you saw the wrist tags that they had last year. They had to have some evidence that they were enrolled in year 12 at a school to get that, and that is important

The director-general also wrote last year to all secondary school principals requesting that they assist in the distribution of appropriate material and advised of a web site established to provide schools and parents with information about schoolies week. The Office of Fair Trading also printed 100,000 booklets on postschool survival tips, which is the ones I was referring to earlier, and about 50,000 of those were distributed directly to year 12 leavers, which covers the whole cohort in the state system, and as I understand it those booklets are also provided into the non-state sector for them to distribute.

So there is a lot of work done specifically about schoolies week, but some other work is done on the issues that I talked about before—how to resist peer pressure, how to deal with difficult decisions, how to avoid situations where you feel out of your depth. They are issues that are dealt with in the broader syllabus on an outgoing basis, particularly in those last years of school.

Mr LANGBROEK: The next question carries on from that. You mentioned earlier the fact that our year 12s are a year younger than those in southern states. Plus we have had a lot of discussion this afternoon about drug education in schools and whether Education Queensland is providing particular programs for students in lieu of losing programs like the Life Education program, which I understand was funded under the Borbidge government. Can you comment on whether Education Queensland has any alternative programs planned in the future?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The member may be unaware but this has been a question that has been tested many times in this parliament. In fact, I think there have been something like 13 questions in the parliament on it. I am happy to advise you that Education Queensland provided some funds to Life Education in what was regarded as seeding funds. Those funds were not recurrent and at the end of the three-year seeding grants they ceased. Education Queensland, as I have said earlier, is a signatory to the National School Drug Education Strategy. The National School Drug Education Strategy is unequivocal in its view and the principles upon which it is based. That is, research tells us that the most effective drug education of young people is that which is provided on a continuing basis linked directly to their curriculum and the work that they are expected to do in schools and provided by people that they trust and know such as teachers, guidance officers and other people who are school based staff.

This is, as I have said, the core of the national strategy. Education Queensland provides the bulk of its resources for this into schools. However, schools are encouraged and many take up the opportunity to complement and supplement their ongoing drug education responsibilities with outside providers. Schools are provided with operational funds and from those funds they can make decisions about what is offered in their communities. In some schools and in some districts I know Life Education enjoys a very good working relationship with schools in the local area and with the district office. They visit schools on a regular basis—they might visit once a semester or something like that—to work with different age groups in the school. In some cases students might pay \$2 or something of that nature to be part of those programs. In other cases the schools might supplement or completely pay for it.

In some areas schools do not for whatever reason find that a very useful program. In other areas they do find it useful. You would expect to find a different quality of work and service provision or complementarity with what schools are doing. So in some areas schools might use Life Education and in others they do not. They might use a range of providers. They often get people from drug rehabilitation agencies or the local police to come and talk to them. They might get a local doctor. In the same way as schools would bring people from outside the school community in to supplement their teaching in every subject that they teach, so you would bring someone from the local sugar mill in to a science or chemistry class as part of the normal progress of lessons. In the health and physical education syllabus and the pastoral care classes in the senior years, Life Education does form some of the provision in some areas and in others it does not. I continually suggest to Life Education people where they do not enjoy a good relationship at schools in their area that they would do well to spend time developing that relationship because where it works it works very well.

Mr LANGBROEK: I would like to now go back to a point I made earlier about class retention for males with regard to male teachers. The 2001 Commonwealth parliamentary inquiry into the education of boys is probably the most definitive inquiry to date from any level of government on this issue. One of the inquiry's recommendations is that male teachers assist in providing outcomes for boys at school. Bearing this in mind, can you tell me how many schools around the state have no male members on their teaching staff, excluding administration staff? And how many schools have a male representation of under 20 per cent? Again, I would be happy to take that question on notice.

Ms BLIGH: As the member would appreciate, that level of detail would be something that I would have to take on notice. I can tell you that there has been a decline in the percentage of male teachers in

Education Queensland schools. 27.3 per cent of the teaching work force is currently male, and my recollection is that that is a decline over the previous five years of about five or six per cent. So Education Queensland did quite a bit of work on this issue a number of years ago. The Queensland government released the Queensland Male Teachers Strategy in 2002, I think, and is trying to lift the percentage of male teachers in the teaching work force to 35 per cent by 2006—not that we think 35 per cent is enough, but to take it from 27.3 to 35 in five years is a bit of an ask. But I thought it was important that we put in place a stretch target, because I agree it is important. We are recruiting the best and the brightest teachers and we should not be seeing that level of gender difference. What we are clearly seeing is a perception among graduates that this is a job that young men are not entering for one reason or another.

So we have put in place a Male Teachers Strategy that has a number of components. One of those components is an active recruitment program. We have done a television advertising program and we have used those ads in cinemas. We have used young male teachers in those ads deliberately to make it clear to young men that this is a job for them. There is a very good program that has been developed that is working. It is in Bundaberg and it is through the Central Queensland University. It is called the MATES program. It is a male teacher support program and it has three principal areas of focus—firstly, retaining male teachers in the education faculty. We have identified that there is quite a drop-out rate of male students not going on to become graduates. So the MATES program has identified male teachers in that area who are long-term teachers to work as mentors for young men in their education degree while they are doing university study. Those mentors actively encourage year 12 students to embrace teaching as a career, and we are currently working with them to look at how we can use those mentors to then encourage those young teachers when they go into their first years of teaching.

We had a pilot during 2003 in Bundaberg. It was very encouraging. The plan is to extend the program across the state. I have recently written to the Commonwealth government outlining the program and also to all of the other universities in Queensland because Education Queensland and CQU are doing the program in partnership. We cannot recruit male teachers if we do not have male graduates with education degrees. So we are starting from that point and trying to move it from there.

This year for the first time in a number of years there has been a small percentage increase in the number of males entering education degrees. It is only 0.5 per cent, but it is the first time there has been an increase for about five years. So that is very encouraging. It is very small, but it is in the right direction.

Mr LANGBROEK: But you are aiming for an Emily's List for male teachers.

Ms BLIGH: Absolutely. Good enough for us; good enough for them.

Mr LANGBROEK: You have just explained what the plans are with the state government, but the federal government has programs such as the Lighthouse program for boys. Will the state government's program be working in conjunction with that and other federal government initiatives in attracting males to the teaching profession?

Ms BLIGH: The Lighthouse program is a program that is very much looking at the literacy and numeracy outcomes for boys who are school students. The Male Teachers Strategy is about identifying, recruiting and retaining adult men into the teaching work force—not that they are completely unrelated but they are a very different target group. Education Queensland's schools have been very pleased to participate in the Lighthouse program. We have a boys' gender and schooling web site that has practical ideas for teachers. The web site is developing online learning networks of teachers about sharing ideas of best practice and what works with boys. The web site outlines the current research from around the world and identifies resources for the classroom.

If you are interested I would encourage you to have a look at that web site. It provides, I think, an ongoing support and a set of resources to teachers in the classroom and principals who are devising plans for their schools. We will be looking at the Lighthouse schools to see how they go. I think there has been quite a lot of work that shows there is no doubt that the aggregate data on boys' achievements, particularly in literacy, is concerning. But if we are really going to work with those boys who need it most we need to have a better idea of which boys they are, because there are some boys who are doing outstandingly. We do not want to assume that all boys are not doing well, because boys are very well represented in the group of young people who are in the top 10 per cent. It is just that there are particular groups of boys, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds and particularly indigenous boys, who we need to have a much better understanding of so we can improve their outcomes.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you. What is the web site?

Ms BLIGH: I will give you the web site address; I will get it for you. It is called Boys Gender and Schooling, but I will get you the actual web site address.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Minister.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I might take this opportunity to talk about Life Education. I refer you to page 1-15 and the departmental contribution to the whole-of-government priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. I listened intently to your reply to the member for Surfers Paradise about Life Education. I had a similar question. I attended the winter drugs and alcohol school that was run by the Queensland Alcohol and Drug Foundation president, Bob Aldred. I did not meet one international or national expert that did not sing the praises of Life Education. Similarly, I have been into many schools and spoken to many school principals, teachers and students. They all loved Life Education. What would it take for you to change your attitude to Life Education and fund it?

Ms BLIGH: I think that the government has made its position very clear on this. I understand that you have a different position. I am not sure that this estimates committee is the place for debating policy issues, but the Education budget has a very limited amount of funds for provision to anything other than classrooms and what happens in classrooms. Funding for organisations beyond that is very, very limited. I will probably speak to it later, but it goes very much to those community organisations that support students with disabilities.

As I have said, I have counselled Life Education to develop strong relationships with their schools. If the principals that you are talking to are telling you that, you need to be asking those principals why they are not using the operational funds that they are provided with to make sure that those programs are available. They are provided with funds to ensure that they meet their curriculum needs.

I understand you have a different view—and you are entitled to it—but I think the government has made its position on this very clear. As I said, if you read the National School Drug Strategy you will find that what I have outlined to your colleague, the member for Surfers Paradise, is contained in that strategy. There are differing views about what works. At this point in time Queensland has signed up with every other state in Australia, and that sign-up happened when there was more diversity among the state governments of political parties. It was governments of all political persuasions, including the Howard government, that put this in place.

There are funds available through that strategy for things like drug summits that I mentioned earlier on. But overwhelmingly the evidence is that one-off visits to schools, while they are of use, are of limited use in the long-term resilience of children. While they are good as complements, they are no substitute for a comprehensive, curriculum based, consistent approach to this issue. I can understand that people who are involved in drug education would like it to be otherwise, but there are many, many organisations that go into our schools and provide those sorts of things to complement what happens in the classroom, and they are not funded either.

The CHAIR: Order! The time for non-government members' questions has expired. I call the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: Mr Chairman, my next question to the HM is about the SCP, which is mentioned on several pages of the MPS. Can the minister provide the committee with a brief history of the origins of the Senior Certificate Project and an update on the processes and achievements so far?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. You are right; there is a very significant consultation paper that has been issued by the government on proposals to alter the Senior Certificate. It is part of the ongoing implementation of the government's white paper on education and training reforms in which we requested the QSA to examine ways to reshape the Senior Certificate.

The nature of schooling has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. In 1982, 40 per cent of students continued to year 12 and the majority of those students then went on to university or were seeking to go on to university. So the last two years of schooling was largely seen as a selection process for a university education. Twenty years later, in 2002, 74.7 per cent of students stay on for 12 years of schooling. Senior schooling is therefore catering for a much more diverse group. Many of the students in this group are looking for direct entry into the work force or into vocational or education training options such as an apprenticeship or into some other part of the training sector.

We believe this trend will continue. In fact, we are hoping it will, because that is what we are trying to achieve through the ETRF process. The more successful we are in keeping young people involved in 12 years of school or training, the more important it is that the certificate or qualification that they achieve at the end of that time is valued by the community and potential employers, it caters for the needs and aspirations of young people and it allows them to move smoothly into further education, training and employment.

As I said earlier, the new legislation is effective from 2006 and it requires young people, firstly, to complete year 10 and then participate in further education and training. The consultation paper was distributed by the QSA on 10 May 2004 and consultation closes on 20 August. There will be 14 forums and 23 think tanks that will occur across Queensland. There are eight significant issues that will influence the new Senior Certificate, and they are discussed in detail in that consultation paper. Firstly, what is the purpose of the Senior Certificate—which seems a very simple question, but often they are the hardest to answer—as well as defining what the Senior Certificate is. That goes to the question of is

the Senior Certificate simply a record of achievement or attendance or is it a qualification that requires demonstration of a minimum level of achievement prior to receiving the qualification?

There is also the question of pathways increasing the value of the Senior Certificate, new areas of learning, determining equivalence and whether literacy and numeracy minimum standards should be met, as well as flexibility. After consultation we would expect to see the development of an options paper that contains clear proposals for a new Senior Certificate. That would be released for further consultation early next year, with the final proposals considered by government later on that year, with a view to a new Senior Certificate being operational in 2008.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The member for Broadwater.

Mrs CROFT: Minister, my question is in regard to the QSA and the ETRF projects. Minister, the Queensland Studies Authority—the QSA—is referred to at page 2-1 of the MPS. I understand that at last year's estimates hearings you outlined a number of projects that QSA would undertake to progress the government's reforms to the senior phase of learning. I am aware that students at some schools have already begun trialling the results of some of these projects. Could you please advise the committee on the QSA's work to assist the implementation of the senior phase of learning reforms?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know there is a lot of interest in this area. As I said earlier, the government has allocated funds to make sure that we are ready for implementation in 2006. To that end, we have allocated \$4.5 million over three years to the Queensland Studies Authority to support its work on a range of projects which are crucial to the implementation of the government's agenda. I am pleased to provide the committee with a brief overview of the senior phase of learning projects which the QSA is working on, aside from the Senior Certificate review which I have just discussed, which, as you can imagine, is a very large piece of work.

Each year 10 student under the government's reforms will be required to participate in the development of what is called a Senior Education and Training Plan, not surprisingly known as a SET plan. Prior to the end of year 10, as I said, we would expect that, in conjunction with their school and their parents, every year 10 student will have a plan about either achieving a Senior Certificate, a Certificate III in vocational education and/or employment or some mixture of those. That SET planning process gives young people the opportunity to identify their individual strengths and interests, and to look at the education and training employment options available to them.

The Queensland Studies Authority has prepared guidelines on how to develop those plans. They have been trialled in 2003 and revised guidelines will be distributed to schools for use in trials over the 2004-05 year, because these planning processes are now required in non-government schools as well. As I said, we expect they will be implemented in 2006 when the new laws come into effect.

From 2006 all young people in year 10 will be required to register with the Queensland Studies Authority. Registration will enable young people to open a learning account into which they can bank their learning achievements towards a Senior Certificate or a Certificate III qualification. Registration requires lodgment of a young person's personal details and intended learning options.

The QSA has designed an interim registration system which was trialled with schools in the seven trial areas last year. By December 2003, 83 per cent of participating trial area schools had registered their students with the Queensland Studies Authority. The trials continued in 2004 with a significantly upgraded online registration of young people system. We would expect 225 trial area schools to be involved in 2004. The QSA is also developing a careers information service which will comprise a web site and a free call telephone service. These services will assist young people who are entering, or already in, that senior phase of learning. We are certainly looking at considerably enhancing the career advice that students and parents have access to.

In the last 12 months the Queensland Studies Authority has also reviewed vocational education and training in schools to analyse ways to encourage more young people to undertake those sorts of subjects in schools and to consider any changes to the vocational program to make sure that these qualifications are meeting industry requirements and enjoy the respect of industry. I am currently considering the QSA's recommendations in relation to that.

Mrs CROFT: Thank you, Minister. Minister, the use of information and communication technologies is also a vital part of teaching and learning in the 21st century. I note on page 1-25 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements that the department has provided more than 6,000 teachers with training in how to integrate ICTs into the curriculum. Are you aware of any new initiatives to support teachers' access to computer technology?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. New technologies are rapidly changing the way that education is delivered. We think it is very important that teachers have access to new technology to assist them with lesson planning, lesson delivery and assessment. The department is putting in place a number of strategies to support teachers' access to new technologies and the professional development they need to make sure that they are exploiting those technologies in the best possible ways in their professional interests and those of their students. For example, we are currently trialling the ICT Explorers Project in which we are providing teachers with access to the latest ICT devices, their pocket

PCs and digital cameras. We want to encourage the uptake of this sort of personal equipment by teachers.

To that end, I am happy to advise the committee of a new program that only started this week called the Laptops for Teachers Program. The department has negotiated with PKF Remuneration Services—which is a provider for the whole of government in the area of advice on salary packaging—a laptop program to run in parallel with existing salary packaging arrangements for Education Queensland staff.

Salary packaging is a tax-effective way of receiving salary as a combination of income and other benefits. It allows employees to use their pre-tax income to pay for benefits, for example, computers, HECS, home office expenses and self-education expenses. The Laptops for Teachers Program enables teachers to buy their own Apple, Toshiba or IBM laptops at significantly reduced costs through salary packaging arrangements. To be eligible the computers must meet Education Queensland hardware specifications.

We are very keen to see teachers take this program up because I believe they will benefit in a number of ways. Firstly, they benefit from great prices because they will access these laptops through the bulk purchasing arrangements that Education Queensland has organised for purchasing into their own schools. There is a simplified process and reduced administration costs to make owning a laptop much more attractive. There are a number of deals being put forward to attract teachers to the program, and teachers who salary package both their superannuation and initiatives such as the laptops will be considerably advantaged.

Under an existing enterprise agreement with Microsoft, teachers who enter this program can access free Microsoft Office software which has a value of about \$800. Having a personal laptop we believe gives teachers much more flexibility. This is equipment that they can take home. They can use it at home to assess and record school results and to devise lesson plans. Because it is equipment that will be compatible with Education Queensland's equipment and standard operating environment, lesson plans and lesson material that is done outside of school operational hours can simply be downloaded back in school time. We think having it at home will also enable more teachers to become much more familiar with the technology. In just over one week we have 20 staff already join the program and an additional 30 applications are being processed. I hope that that is a sign of things to come and look forward to hearing that many more teachers have taken up the offer.

Mrs CROFT: Absolutely. Still on page 1-25 and still on the topic of ICTs, a number of targets have been set in order for the government to deliver on its promise to improve ICT service and support for students and teachers in Queensland state schools. Can you please tell the committee if the department is meeting these targets?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The ICTs initiative, as I said, is a very major component of the education and training reforms for the future. We think that this technology into classrooms is a significant part of preparing our schools and their students for the future. In 2002 we launched the ICTs for Learning strategy. It delivers additional ICT funding for state schools, additional hardware for student access, innovative ICT procurement options for schools that see a considerable drop in prices because of bulk procurement arrangements, and a minimum standard of ICT infrastructure in schools. The department sets specific targets to be met. In most instances I am pleased to advise the committee that the target has been exceeded. In the area of the computer to student ratio, we have exceeded the target. We set a target of one computer to five students for years 3 to 12 averaged across the state. We have already achieved one computer for every 4.5 students in years 3 to 12 and the overall statewide ratio—that is, years P-12—is one to 4.9. Obviously we want to keep building on that, but to have achieved that target is great and we have achieved it early.

The current intent is that every school will reach that target in preschool to year 12 by the end of the 2005 school year. We committed to 3,000 new computers to assist schools to achieve the target ratio—that is, those schools that were lagging considerably behind—and we have exceeded that target. In 2002-03, 5,000 computers were delivered to over 500 schools under the priority schools computer sub program. We committed to replace outdated computers and to have 19,400 computers. We are on target to do that, with over 12,000 computers already replaced. We have increased desktop computers from 97,000 to approximately 111,000 and we are on track to replace the 19,400 computers promised under the ICTs for Learning agenda.

We made a commitment to have 1,600 additional classrooms cabled. I am pleased to advise that we have exceeded that target and we have 1,700 that will have been cabled by the end of July this year. I should clarify this: I understand that in answer to an earlier question I said that we would cable 1,700 classrooms this year. As I have just said, 1,700 classrooms will have been cabled by July this year as opposed to the 1,600 target. There are an extra 36,000 students and 1,500 teachers who will benefit and 141 state schools benefiting. We have also negotiated an ICT for Learning guarantee for teachers, and that has been completed. All schools have completed ICTs for Learning agreements for 2003-04 to include that every teacher will get the professional development that they need in this important area.

The CHAIR: Page 1-9 of the MPS refers to the middle years of school and the implementation of the middle phase of learning state school action plan. Could you advise the committee as to what are the aims of the action plan and its progress to date?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The middle years are a very important time of growth and change for children and young people and are often very critical years in their education and their view of education. I am pleased to have a chance to answer this question because, given the size and nature of the other areas of reform, particularly prep and the senior phase, this area is often overlooked and I think it ironically may well be one of the most important to get right.

The white paper on the government's education reforms outlined that we would be looking at a new approach to teaching and learning in the middle years. We recognised that students can often begin disengaging in these years and that an extra effort was needed. In August 2003 we launched the middle phase of learning state school action plan that responds to this area. It will deliver improved learning and achievement outcomes for state school students in years 4 to 10 in a number of areas.

The reforms include 13 areas of action, and several are well progressed already. It is through this program that we identified the reduction in class size targets, which I have already referred to, and that will see the delivery of new teachers in 2005 and 2007. We will see increased curriculum coordination time into primary schools. Unlike secondary schools, special schools and primary schools do not have heads of department to coordinate curriculum and to keep up to date with curriculum developments. Curriculum planning is often therefore left to classroom teachers. From 2004—that is this year—we have employed additional teachers. There have been 80 additional FTEs to increase curriculum coordination time to special schools and every primary school with over 500 enrolments. It has made a very big difference to the workload of classroom teachers. I have no doubt that it is making a difference to what is happening in the curriculum of their classes.

One of the other commitments we made in the middle school action plan was a commitment to unclutter the curriculum. I have had a lot of feedback from teachers that particularly with outcomes based education there is a sense that there is too much breadth and not enough depth in what they are teaching. We have recognised that that has caused some difficulties and there is a project now looking at what we call uncluttering the middle phase curriculum to provide more space and time for students to achieve a deeper understanding.

In 2004 Education Queensland and the Queensland Studies Authority have undertaken the core curriculum project to define the range of learning necessary in those years. We are looking at implementation of this project in 2005. Key stakeholders will be consulted during semester 2 this year. They also looked at greater management flexibility in schools. Guidelines will be issued from 2005 for creating middle phase schooling precincts. Small and rural and remote schools in particular will benefit by removing the duplication of processes such as curriculum planning. We are looking at improving the continuity of curriculum teaching and the transition to high school. The year 2005 will see improved processes for sharing student information across primary and high schools in the state system. Improved professional development in the middle years is also another feature of this program.

The CHAIR: I want to direct a question to the Spotlight on Science initiative. Queensland is establishing itself as a major force in scientific innovation in the Asia-Pacific region. In August last year you launched a six-point action plan to increase the numbers of school students studying science and to attract and retain skilled science teachers. The budget has confirmed \$3.3 million has been committed to this Spotlight on Science initiative in 2004-05. Can you provide the committee members with an update on the progress of this initiative?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Science is a very important plank in the Smart State agenda, and science in schools has to be at the heart of some of the developments in that area. It is interesting to answer this question this week, because this week Brisbane is host to more than 160 of the world's top biology students for the International Biology Olympiad. It is the first time that this olympiad has been held in Australia or indeed in the Southern Hemisphere. Our government is very proud to support the event in partnership with a number of Queensland universities. I think it is a coup for Queensland and a coup for Brisbane, and I think it shows how serious we are about the Smart State and the science agenda.

There has been some very encouraging progress to date on the Spotlight on Science initiatives. We committed to establish a high-level Science Education Task Force, and that was put in place in 2003. It is chaired by the internationally renowned scientist Professor Ian Lowe from Griffith University. The task force is made up of 20 science specialists from universities, TAFEs, schools and industry, including Emeritus Professor Peter Fensham as the inaugural science education ambassador; Queensland's Chief Scientist, Dr Joe Baker; Dr Diane Lehmann of the Department of Primary Industries; and Scott Hocknull, a palaeontologist from the Queensland Museum and former Young Australian of the Year. The task force has met three times since November 2003, including a meeting at the Wilsonton campus of the Toowoomba State High School which I know aroused a lot of interest in Toowoomba.

We committed to an awards program. I am pleased to advise the committee that the Peter Doherty Awards for Excellence in Science Education are now open. There are up to 47 awards valued at \$245,500 across seven categories. The applications close tomorrow, so if you know anybody you want to nominate get in there quick. It is open to state and non-state school students, teachers, schools as well as to Queensland industries, businesses, tertiary education and research institutions. The total value of the awards is \$735,000 over three years, and they will be presented during National Science Week.

We committed to making science a priority area in the innovation grants for ICTs in schools this year, and that has happened. The applications are currently opening. We undertook to ignite student interest in science. In addition to mandating science until the end of year 10, we have undertaken to develop a new senior science subject based on real world applications of science in business, industry and the local community. We have also committed \$1.08 million over three years for dedicated science professional development initiatives to make sure that our teacher skills and knowledge are keeping pace with a rapidly changing area of knowledge.

The CHAIR: Are there questions from non-government members?

Mr MESSENGER: Yes. I refer to page 1-8 of the MPS and the prep year. What contingency funds have been made available if, following the completion of the prep year trial, Education Queensland realises that the stakeholders are in fact correct and the current allocation of teacher aide time is not sufficient?

Ms BLIGH: Can I just outline that this is something that is obviously going to be monitored by the government every year in every budget. As we get closer to finalising these decisions, we will take this matter through the normal budget processes. The member may or may not be aware that in last year's trials schools were not permitted to supplement the teacher aide hours in the prep trial with any of their school based hours. This year that restriction has been removed and schools are allowed in this year's trial to supplement out of existing school hours.

We have only had one semester of this year's trials and it is clear that some schools have chosen to do that and some schools have not. In fact, over 50 per cent of schools have chosen not to supplement. There are different views about what effect, if any, the supplementation is having. That is something we will be monitoring, and until we have got a better picture of what is happening in those schools it is not possible for me to make any well-informed statements about what the government's decision might ultimately be.

I drew the attention of the committee earlier today to the report of the evaluation team at QUT. That evaluation did not draw any conclusions about the amount of teacher aide hours, but at a qualitative level what it does highlight is that what is important is how schools are using teacher aides and the quality of work that they are requiring of teacher aides, making sure that teacher aide time is directed in a focused way at educational outcomes rather than perhaps supplementing cleaning and other things that might have happened in other areas.

There is some interesting work that we obviously have to do with that program, but in terms of a contingency it is premature to discuss it because these funds will not be finalised until the 2006-07 budget year when the final allocations will be made. We would expect that there will be other factors that will influence the final budget, like enrolment growth. At the moment we are predicting enrolment growth, but we are predicting it three years out. We are also predicting where that enrolment growth might be. Predicting that three years out is bound to have a level of imprecision around it. Fifteen hours is considerably more—it is 15 hours more—than is currently provided to year 1 teachers who are teaching a class of children where half of the children are the same age as prep children.

There is quite a bit of work to be thought through. There are different views among stakeholders. I know that some people feel strongly that there should be more. There are equally strongly held views that these resources are adequate. We will continue to monitor it and, as I said, we will get a better picture at the end of this year when we see the effect of 12 months of schools supplementing or not supplementing from within their existing resources.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer again to page 1-15 of the MPS and the priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. I understand that in a number of schools staff are responsible for administering prescribed drugs to students for behavioural control and other health reasons—common drugs I think are dexamphetamine and Ritalin. What is the number of school students currently receiving medication from teachers on a regular basis and what departmental requirements accompany the dispensation of that medicine?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. You will appreciate that there are a number of reasons students may receive medication. There are the ones you outlined. There are many other children who require medication. Many students who have special needs require some medication. There are very firm policies—and I can provide the policy to the member—on the administration of prescription and non-prescription medications to schoolchildren. All school staff are required to adhere to those policies. In cases where the child's needs are complex a teacher aide, say in a special school,

may require special training to administer some medications. In the normal run of things there are very firm policies around the administration of medication to students that require both parental and medical practitioner permission.

As you would appreciate, that is something that changes on a daily basis with the number of schools that we have and the number of students we have. I would not be in a position to provide you with data about all students in our schools who are on medication of any kind. Not all students who are on medication would have the medication administered at school. I could get you one answer today and it would be a very different answer tomorrow. Students come on and off medication on a regular basis. But I can assure you that the administration of medication to children is taken very seriously. There are very strict protocols and all schools are required to adhere to them.

Mr MESSENGER: Are schools required to keep a record of those students on medication?

Ms BLIGH: I will get the policy for you. That is certainly my understanding. I will get the policy and provide it to you in full.

Mr MESSENGER: Can we place that question on notice?

Ms BLIGH: Sure. Can I take this opportunity to briefly respond to an earlier question that the member asked in relation to the Queensland Theatre Company. In relation to the total budget for the calendar years—remembering one of the reasons we have taken it out of this year is that it reports on a calendar year basis—I point out that for 2002 total expenditure was \$5.769 million, for 2003 it was \$6.066 million and the projected expenditure for 2004 is \$6.295 million. There are 32 permanent full-time equivalent staffing positions and in addition 25 casual FTEs, which gives a total of 57 FTE equivalents. I think that answers that question.

Mr MESSENGER: I wanted to have a commitment that the outreach program would continue.

Ms BLIGH: Yes.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to page 1-47 of the MPS and the Output Performance which refers to students with special needs. What is the current wait time for assessment by speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists for those students?

Ms BLIGH: As the member would appreciate, those wait times would vary significantly across the state. We have some schools that are in quite remote areas where a speech/language therapist may only visit on a number of occasions throughout the year. It depends when the student is identified as being in need of assessment and when the next visit from someone with those skills is made to that school. That would differ very much from a child in an inner Brisbane school to a child in a regional centre.

I presume that the question arises because there are sometimes in schools quite long waits. One of the things that I announced in parliament recently was some changes to the way the ascertainment process will be undertaken. Those changes are partly in response to concerns by parents and schools that the balance of funds between services and assessment is perhaps not as good as it could be and we need to simplify the assessment processes and try to speed it up where possible.

This year we will employ an extra 220 teachers for students with disabilities. Next year we would anticipate a further 117 additional teachers, with an additional 4,000 extra hours per week of teacher aide time. Obviously, you need to have some provisions in place to make sure that your funds are going to the most needy children—and the assessment process is part of that—but I do think you need to get the balance right between administration and assessment of those needs and the service that you are able to provide to those students. We are currently in the process of changing that process.

Mr MESSENGER: You just mentioned that you were going to employ another 200 teachers. Have you got plans to employ more speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists?

Ms BLIGH: One of the areas that we are looking at in terms of the changes that I am proposing, and which I outlined to parliament in the last sitting, is that a certain amount of the funds will be available to be used more flexibly at a school and district level. We would anticipate that as those funds are freed up schools and districts will utilise some of those funds more for therapy than for some of the more restricted classifications, such as teachers, than they are at the moment. Until we go through this process it is hard to know how that will play out. That is what we would expect.

We currently have 142.5 full-time equivalents across the therapies. I would expect to see that grow as we change the system. Making the funds more flexible will not necessarily happen by the beginning of next year, but more over the next 12 months to two years. In addition to the figures that I have just given you for therapists at the moment, which was as at day eight 2004, at the beginning of next year there will be six new therapy full-time equivalent positions, two in each of the therapies. That means an additional two speech/language, another two physio and another two OT therapists. Some of those assessments are also done by guidance officers, depending on the nature of the need that the child might have to be identified.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I understand your resource difficulties. Could you give me a time that you would consider acceptable for students to wait to be assessed by those professionals that we have just mentioned?

Ms BLIGH: The only thing I can say to that is as soon as possible. That is the case in any system. This is not about money. This is about the service delivery realities for a place like Queensland. We service Queensland in one of the most remote parts of the planet. All the money in the world will still mean that in those remote areas sometimes those needs will take longer to be addressed. That is a matter of regret but something that we need to be sensible about. I think there is a recognition of that.

I think it would be foolhardy to venture down a track where you could quantify those times. Obviously, you want the children whose needs are identified as being at the higher end of the spectrum identified as quickly as possible and to take priority over those who, on the face of it, might have a lower level of need. They are the sorts of decisions that you really need to make at a local level. Teachers and schools work with parents, they work with medical practitioners. It is not only the schools that do the assessments; often medical practitioner advice and confirmation of diagnosis is required. Specialist teachers are also working with families to do that.

In some of the areas of disability that we are talking about, the nature of the child's problem is not always clear. To say that we should have it all wrapped up in a certain amount of time may not be in a child's or a family's interest. Something that on the face of it might appear to be a speech/language problem may in fact be a hearing impairment problem. Actually spending the time to get it right is very important to getting the service delivery response right. I think it is important that we aim to continually improve it. Some of the changes that I have announced I think will do that with more flexibility over time, but we will need to monitor that.

Mr MESSENGER: I make the observation that many of the parents of Queensland students who fall into the category of special needs would like those times quantified because it is a heck of a long wait. In my electorate I had an instance where a young child did have a hearing difficulty. That child was getting speech therapy assistance through Queensland Health but on enrolment into the special needs school that child then had to wait about six months before they saw a speech therapist. It is just the time of actually meeting up with those professionals that is at issue.

I refer again to page 1-47 of the MPS and assistance for students with special needs. Currently students with the highest level of special needs are only allocated five hours of teacher aide time per week. What plans are there to increase this allocation?

Ms BLIGH: Again I say to the member that, if he had been listening when I announced this to the parliament in the last sitting, he would know that we are about to significantly change the allocation of resources to students with special needs. We will see some of the funds being able to be applied in a more flexible way so that schools may purchase the assistance of a speech therapist. They may use it to employ more teacher aide hours. Those are the sorts of things which I think it is difficult to predict until we see what comes out of it.

The new set of proposals come from a ministerial task force on the needs of students with disabilities that I established in 2002. That special task force had representatives of a number of parent groups and individual parents as well as experts and stakeholder groups. That task force has come to me with a report outlining about 12 recommendations. The government has picked up all but one, which was to issue a green paper. I decided we did not need to delay the implementation any further by having a green paper. It is important to recognise that we are currently on the cusp of significantly reforming and changing the system as a result of work that has been done by some people who are parents of students with disabilities as well as people who work with those children.

I take this opportunity to put on the record my appreciation for the work they have done. It is a very complex and very tough area. It is not just about an amount of money. It is how you allocate the funds that you have and how you do that fairly and transparently but as flexibly as possible.

It is important to understand that a child with an ascertainment of level six is allocated funding of approximately \$16,000 per annum. The teacher aide is only part of that funding. Those students also receive a range of other supports through visiting teachers and other programs in the school. While teacher aide hours might be quantifiable, there are many other services that that child is receiving. It is a question of how you effectively pay for that across a system.

I am looking forward to implementing the new range of proposals that have been put forward by the task force. I do not imagine the challenge is going to be an easy one. I think we have to grapple with it and get a better result for children than we are under the current system.

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

Ms BLIGH: Ask me about teacher numbers, Dean.; no-one else is going to.

Mr WELLS: I refer the honourable minister to 1-54 of the MPS and its reference to Commonwealth grants to state and non-state schools. I am aware that the Commonwealth government has claimed that it will be substantially increasing funds for state and non-state schools over the next

four years. Can the minister advise the committee of the Queensland government's position on the Commonwealth's claim and the Commonwealth's offer?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know that this is an area with which he grappled as much as I have. In March this year the Prime Minister and the federal Education Minister, you may have seen, made much of an alleged new funding package for schools for the next four years. I am sorry to inform the committee, as I have informed the House in the past, that despite all of the fanfare, effectively there is not one new cent being offered to state schools in Queensland or indeed any other part of the country other than indexation. That is, they will receive what they would have got in the current four-year agreement simply rolled over with indexation tacked on so that at the end of this four years those schools will be able to buy exactly the same with the Commonwealth money as they are now.

Even worse, though, I think is the opportunity the new quadrennium presented to the Commonwealth to take some action to minimise the worst features of its funding model. It did not take the opportunity to do that. This quadrennium we will see nothing to address the fundamental inequities in the Commonwealth government's funding model between state and non-state schools. I think it is important to put on the record that, in the next four years, for the first time in the history of this country, the federal government will spend more in real dollar terms on the 445,000 children in non-state schools than it will spend on the more than two million children in the state schools of Australia. It is a piece of history not to be missed or left unremarked upon.

Currently, state school students in Queensland and across Australia do not receive even the lowest rate of Commonwealth funding provided to some of the nation's most elite non-state schools. According to Commonwealth government budget estimates, the funding share for Queensland state schools has declined from 37.7 per cent in 2001 to 34.4 per cent in 2004-05. This comes at a time when we are experiencing considerable enrolment growth. Funding is expected to further decline to about 31.9 per cent by 2007-08, which is nearly a six per cent cut in eight years.

I do understand that the federal government, as does the Queensland state government and every other government, inevitably has budget constraints that it must recognise and battle with when putting together its budget. However, as we sit and watch a government preside over, effectively, an eight per cent cut in the public education system, it is timely to remember an old saying: if you think that education is expensive, you should try ignorance. That is what we are seeing presided over by the Commonwealth government.

It is important to understand that, while the federal government claims to be motivated by a desire to make non-state schooling more affordable, the evidence does not support that. Non-state school fees are remaining static or increasing across the country, despite the level of funding put in by the Commonwealth government. In many parts of Queensland, as the shadow minister should know, there is no choice of school. The public provider is the only provider and those schools are educating those children most in need of a government that is prepared to fund a state system. In fact, I think there are only two non-state schools in the electorate of Burnett. There are many children for whom public education is the only opportunity for a quality education. I would ask that people join me in my concerns about the way that this is being played out at a federal level, because we will all suffer in the end.

The CHAIR: Thankyou, Minister. I call on the member for Broadwater.

Mrs CROFT: Minister, I refer you to pages 1-60 to 1-64 of the MPS which outline your department's relationship with the non-state schooling sector. Could you please elaborate on those statements?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am pleased to say that Education Queensland and our government enjoy a very strong working relationship with the non-state sector. A number of very significant projects have been undertaken by our government in the last couple of years with education and training reforms, including in particular the prep year and the senior reforms. They have required a lot of work between all sectors of schooling not only at the senior levels involving senior officers of the department and senior representatives of organisations such as the AISQ and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission but also down at the school level where it is being played out in the prep year trials. The prep year teachers in the trials are all attending professional development and working together across the sectors. The district youth achievement plans for the senior phase of schooling are being developed between state and non-state schools at a local level and plans are being devised on a cross-sectoral basis. I thank them for their work on that and all the work that they are doing at the moment on the government discussion papers.

In 2003 there were 184,746 students in non-state schools in Queensland, representing 29.3 per cent of the eligible school age cohort. In the 2004-05 year, the Queensland government will spend \$303.4 million supporting these schools compared to \$274.9 million in 2003-04, an increase of approximately 10.4 per cent. We made an election commitment to immediately provide an additional \$11 million in capital grants to non-government schools. I am pleased to say that that has already been delivered before the end of the 2003-04 financial year. An election commitment was also made for an immediate injection of an additional \$2.4 million for ICTs into the non-state sector, and that has been

delivered. Some \$56 million has been provided for capital to support the prep year, and that has already been delivered.

The relationship is a strong one and it is managed through a number of important ongoing committees, in addition to programs such as the ones I have outlined that are put together from time to time for particular issues. The Non-State Schools Accreditation Board approves the accreditation of new non-state schools and monitors the continuing compliance of non-state schools with the statutory accreditation criteria. This was one of the initiatives of our government and the wheels were put in place by the previous minister. It is a program that is working very effectively and it relies on the hard work and goodwill of many people in that sector. The non-state schools funding committee considers applications for eligibility for government funding for proposed new non-state schools. It also puts significant work into ensuring that that is a very rigorous process.

The CHAIR: Minister, there is time left for one further question.

Ms BLIGH: Perhaps I can beg the committee's indulgence and let the shadow minister know that I am able to provide him with the Department of Education's policy manual document on the administration of routine and emergency medication for children. That is all the questions on notice that I am able to provide a response to.

The CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned that the Queensland Studies Authority, the QSA, is developing a new senior science elective to encourage more students to pursue science studies beyond year 10. Can you tell the committee more about this subject and any other work that the QSA is doing to broaden senior students' subject choices?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to have an opportunity to briefly put on the record what is happening in this area. Some very exciting work is being done in terms of curriculum development, particularly by the Queensland Studies Authority. We are looking at a new senior science elective and we hope that it will have a very wide appeal for all students. Not all students are prepared to sign up for the specialist subject areas in senior years such as biology, chemistry or physics. Unfortunately, that means that many of them do not then study science at all. We want to ensure that even students who are not contemplating a science based career will graduate with a high degree of scientific literacy.

The new elective that is being developed aims to give students a sense of the real world application of science and to develop scientific literacy. The subject will integrate a number of scientific disciplines and it will give students an insight into the science behind the real world. For example, it will include the application of hair dyes right through to the science of cloning. It will be just as useful, therefore, to a student planning a career in hairdressing as a student considering a tertiary level science career.

Mr WELLS: If you clone them you don't need to dye their hair.

Ms BLIGH: Thank you for that. We will save time and put that in the program. It will have the rigour required for those students who want to go on to study science at university and it will be a Queensland Studies Authority subject. Actually, it depends on what you clone. You still might want to change the colour. The subject can count towards the calculation of an OP. It will be based on the five areas of information and communication, technology, health and wellbeing, catalysts for discussion, and the environment.

Very briefly, I will put on the record another subject area that the QSA is working on—the development of a senior subject in the area of aerospace to underpin the government's push into the aerospace industry. As part of a project with Boeing Australia and Aviation Australia, Education Queensland is working with the Queensland Studies Authority to develop aerospace studies for year 11 and 12 students. That subject will also count towards an OP.

The reference committee that has been established to do this will bring together industry representatives. The committee chair is an Education Queensland head of department in aerospace industries based at Aviation Australia. The committee will comprise a senior instructor, a technical trainer from Qantas, the chief pilot and the flight operations manager of Sunstate Airlines, the HR manager of Boeing, the cabin safety officer from Virgin Blue, the training manager of Aviation Australia, representatives from the Department of Employment and Training, and a number of teachers. The industry reps will provide important advice and are involved in committees where relevant, such as the development of hospitality, business and legal studies across that subject area.

We expect the syllabus to respond to the needs of a very rapidly developing aerospace industry. Nine schools will trial the new syllabus in year 11 in 2006. It is an exciting subject area and the QSA is rising to the challenge of rethinking our syllabus development process and ensuring that it is as flexible and responsive as it possibly can be.

The CHAIR: Thankyou, Minister. The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Department of Education and the Arts has expired. Before dismissing officers, I remind them that responses to questions taken on notice at this hearing that have not been responded

to during the hearing are required to be returned to the committee by 12 noon on Tuesday, 20 July. If the agency is unable to meet this time frame, I would appreciate it if I or the deputy chair were notified.

I thank the minister and her officers for their attendance. I also thank the members, the Hansard, research and catering staff and the parliamentary attendants for their valuable contribution to the estimates process. Subject to anything further that the minister may wish to add in relation to matters raised by any member of the committee, I will proceed to conclude the proceedings.

Ms BLIGH: Thankyou, Mr Chairman. Firstly, can I take a moment to complete one question on notice that was asked earlier by the member for Burnett in relation to the predicted number of teacher aides required for the prep year in 2007-08 and 2008-09. The government's decision in relation to teacher aide hours is still subject to finalisation. You will appreciate that any movement in the number of hours allocated to a prep trial will inevitably dramatically change the number of teacher aides that are required. Really, that question has been answered by subsequent answers to your questions in that regard. The government will monitor it and obviously it will be the subject of further budget deliberation.

I conclude by taking the opportunity to thank the committee and the chair for a very smoothly run committee. I thank all of the parliamentary staff who have been associated with the smooth running of this committee. I thank my senior officers, the officers of both the Education and the Arts portfolios and the staff of my ministerial office who have—in their usual diligent way—ensured that I and the director-general have been equipped to answer the questions of this committee in a timely and accurate way.

The CHAIR: Thankyou, Minister. That concludes the committee's consideration of matters referred to it by the parliament on 20 May 2004. I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.50 p.m.