

THURSDAY, 7 JULY 2005

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Estimates Committee C Members

Mrs DA Reilly (Chair)
Mr JM English
Mr SD Finn
Mr J-PH Langbroek
Mr RD Messenger
Mr MH Rowell
Hon. DM Wells

In Attendance

Hon. TA Barton, Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations

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 B Leahy, Deputy Director-General
Mr B Walker, General Manager, Executive and Strategic Services

Committee met at 8.32 am

CHAIR: I declare the hearing of Estimates Committee C open. I welcome the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, the Hon. Tom Barton MP, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2005 for the portfolios of the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and the Minister for Education and the Arts.

The committee will examine estimates for organisational units in the following order—Department of Employment and Training, Department of Industrial Relations, the arts and education. The committee will suspend proceedings for a 15-minute break from 10.30 am to 10.45 am, lunch from 12.30 pm to 1.30 pm and a 15-minute break from 3.30 pm to 3.45 pm. 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 warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner, with any further extension of time for an answer to be agreed to by the chair. Standing orders require that at least half the time for questions at today's hearing be allocated to non-government members. I also ask that officers identify themselves before answering a question, for the benefit of Hansard. The proceedings today are governed by the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. As such, members of the public cannot participate in the proceedings and may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee.

In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television film coverage and photography will be allowed during the chair's opening statements and the introductory statements of each minister as well as silent film coverage only for a short period during each changeover of ministerial advisers. My final request is that, if you have a mobile phone, would you please make sure that it is turned off, and if you have phone calls to make please do so outside the chamber.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations open for examination. The committee will begin by examining estimates for the Department of Employment and Training. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you have five minutes to make an opening statement if you like.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Madam Chair, and committee members. The year ahead poses both great challenges and opportunities for the Beattie government in maintaining Queensland's momentum as the economic engine room of the nation. The state is currently enjoying its lowest unemployment level in three decades and, while the state's economy is booming and we have record numbers of apprentices and trainees training, we face the growing risk of skill shortages and the prospect of industrial unrest as the Howard government presses ahead with widespread industrial relations change. I will have more to say on the Department of Industrial Relations and the IR climate later.

This year's Department of Employment and Training budget has been framed to recognise the challenges we face and to deal with them head on. It coincides with the release of the Queensland government green paper *Queensland's proposed responses to the challenges of skills for jobs and growth*. Proposals to address the state's future skills need to include a modernised apprenticeship system, a new specialist trade and technician skills institute, a new adult trades apprenticeship system and reforms to encourage older workers to remain in the work force. In fact, I want to announce today that the government, through the Department of Employment and Training, has reached agreement to purchase a near-20-hectare site at Acacia Ridge which will become the first of our specialist trade and technical skills institutes. It is anticipated within 12 months of purchase that the first students will receive training at the former BHP Brisbane steel mill site after some reconfiguration and refurbishment of existing structures. Training areas targeted will include engineering, building and construction, automotive, plastics, airconditioning and refrigeration, and paraprofessional and post-trade training.

The facility will mark the first major step in the government's upgraded training agenda on delivering skills that was proposed in the recently released discussion paper. The Employment and Training budget provides funding to continue innovative solutions to skill shortages in areas crucial to the state's economy and ways to maximise the work force potential of Queenslanders of all ages including the long-term unemployed. We will do this through a major investment of \$911.7 million in jobs and training in 2005-06.

Overall, the budget directs \$812.9 million to vocational education and training services to respond to enterprise skills needs and to meet the need for skilled workers in crucial industry sectors. TAFE Queensland's 15 institutes in 108 locations across the state play an increasingly important role in the provision of skills for Queenslanders and train 78 per cent of all apprentices in the traditional trades. In 2005-06 TAFE Queensland will receive \$580.4 million for training delivery, with an additional \$72.6 million in property, plant and equipment. The pioneering \$1 billion three-year SmartVET strategy, now in its second year, will receive a further \$354.6 million, bringing total investment since 1 July 2004 to \$689.9 million. The strategy is on track to have created 180,000 training places by 2007 in priority industry areas central to our economic growth.

I would now like to turn to industrial relations and the significant progress being made by the Department of Industrial Relations in making Queensland workplaces fairer, safer and more productive. This state's fair and balanced industrial relations system gives workers and employers a fair go, in stark contrast to what is being proposed under Canberra's national unitary system. I am pleased to report that in 2004-05 our Department of Industrial Relations had solid outcomes in recovering lost wages for Queensland workers and making workplaces safer. In the 12 months the department recovered nearly \$10 million in wages, investigated over 8,200 wage complaints and carried out 239 related prosecutions. On the safety front, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland carried out 188 prosecutions, which resulted in fines of \$3.5 million for breaches of legislation. In all, inspectors visited nearly 21,000 workplaces and issued more than 13,000 improvement notices. I look forward to the questions from the committee.

CHAIR: The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, on page 1-24 of the MPS the third dot point under 'Quality' details the number of organisations approved for registration as a registered training organisation. While your target last year was 130, only 98 were really achieved. This was disappointing, I think, because it is a reduction of 32 in the number that you put forward last year. How many of these were approved as far as providing training and delivering training in skills shortage areas? And how many of these were outside south-east Queensland?

Mr BARTON: I think that is about five questions in one, but we will see how we go in answering those five questions.

Mr ROWELL: Well, it is a complex question.

Mr BARTON: They are a bit like your questions on notice that were supposed to be single questions.

In terms of the measures relating to compliance of registered training organisations, they were modified in the MPS from 2003-04 to better reflect the outcomes of the regulatory framework. As you say, the 2004-05 target for the number of organisations approved for registration as a registered training organisation was 130. It is estimated that the actual number of organisations that will be approved is 98. We do not have the actual figures yet because the end of the financial year was only last week.

Similarly, the target for the number of qualifications approved for organisations upon achieving registration and renewal of registration was 549, whereas the estimated actual is 540, so that is a little bit down, too. But these measures, I have to say, are entirely dependent on market forces. That is what determines how many registered training organisations are out there in the market, particularly from the private sector. As they are based on historical data, targets in the past—and in the future—continue to be difficult to predict accurately because we cannot in an absolute sense dictate or determine the market forces that will come to bear during the course of the year ahead. However, they were added to the MPS to demonstrate the vibrant nature of Queensland's vocational education and training sector.

It should be noted that the shortfall in these two measures is not an indicator of a weakening of the VET sector in Queensland. The number of registered training organisations in Queensland has remained relatively static. The 2005-06 targets, as you have noted in that column, have dropped to 100 to reflect these recent trends. We do have a diverse market in the state consisting of 1,091 Queensland registered training organisations that include 610 private providers, 396 schools, 15 TAFE institutes, four agricultural colleges, three universities, 22 government entities and 41 community organisations. Additionally, 704 interstate registered training organisations operate in Queensland under national recognition arrangements. Queensland's registered training organisations represent 26.6 per cent of the total national market. Queensland is second only to Victoria in terms of the overall number of registered training organisations.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, what percentage of the actual expenditure for User Choice in 2004-05 was allocated to the private providers to deliver training?

Mr BARTON: I will wait until we get that sheet so I can be very definite about the actual percentage, but I will make some comments while I am getting that exact figure so I can give you the definitive answer.

We work very, very closely with the private sector. ACPET, a private sector training organisation, was with me in China the week before last when I helped them to facilitate four agreements with Chinese organisations that were signed up. It is quite a significant percentage of the User Choice funding. I was sure I was right at 40 per cent, Marc, but I wanted to be sure. Of the \$106.5 million that was allocated, \$42.5 million, which is 40 per cent in round figures, was allocated for training by private registered training organisations. Again, I want to stress that we have an excellent relationship with the private sector. Late last year even Brendan Nelson, when he and I were in Cairns jointly opening a new aviation training facility, congratulated me on the fact that Queensland does the best on User Choice funding.

Our User Choice funding has increased in this budget as well. We have had negotiations with the federal government on renewed training funding and a renewed training plan. That is not finalised yet, simply because of the nonsense that the federal government is running about industrial relations reform. We have agreed on absolutely everything else, including the level of funding that we provide to User Choice. We know that our networks, our TAFE as an agency, our ag colleges and Aviation Australia cannot do it all and should not do it all. The private sector is a very vibrant training provider in this state. We support it and work closely with it. Of the User Choice funds, 40 per cent were allocated to private training organisations.

Mr ROWELL: I would like to turn to page 1-21 of the MPS and refer to dot point 1 under the heading 'Other key activities for 2005-06'. It outlines that there will be 3.6 per cent growth in the budget for the User Choice program—that is, to \$114.5 million. How many of these new training places in skill shortage areas are you expecting to be funded out of this year's budget for the program?

Mr BARTON: Again I need to make the point that a number of those places are very clearly going to be allocated in the private sector as well. I do not know whether we can give you a definitive number for what we project will be allocated in the forthcoming year because a lot of those places are very dependent on market forces. One of the key issues that I want to stress in terms of our funding of training places this year is that we do again have record funding. Over the past 18 months we have seen an increase in funding in real terms of something like eight per cent. The increase in the number of training places will be reflected by that very significant increase in funding.

Mr ROWELL: Would you prefer to put that on notice?

Mr BARTON: I would not prefer to do that.

Mr ROWELL: It is important that we do—

Mr BARTON: You ask the questions and I answer them. The reality is that we would expect a similar number and similar percentage to what we had this year. Again I stress that what we are seeing in terms of training places—and certainly this was the experience last year and I expect it to be replicated this year—is a very great increase in the number of training places in the traditional trades. That is clearly where the greatest shortages are. There is a very definitive list of which trades they are.

There used to be a high percentage of prevocational courses. When unemployment was higher and young people leaving school could not get a job, there was a greater tendency for them to sign up for prevoc courses because they needed to do positive things to help them ultimately get an apprenticeship or a more senior training role. We have seen a big drop-off in that area.

With what is near full employment now—we were at 4.9 per cent last month and we will get the latest figures very soon—it does mean that most people coming out of school are moving either directly into apprenticeships instead of doing prevoc courses or into employment. They are actually getting jobs. That is changing the face of how training is delivered. That is, in some ways, putting a lot of pressure on the private sector trainers because, as I said in my opening statement, the state systems do 78 per cent of all of the traditional training which means that the private sector has typically been in the other sector which is the sector that has been weakening.

Mr ROWELL: Could you tell me whether these figures that we are trying to tease out represent an increase in the number of new places in skill shortage areas in comparison to 2004-05?

Mr BARTON: In terms of User Choice priority industries let me quote again that, for 2004-05, 60 per cent or \$61.5 million of the base User Choice program budget for apprenticeships and traineeship delivery was specifically targeted towards SmartVET priority industries. This will remain constant over three years and will result in \$184.5 million being directed specifically to apprenticeship and traineeship training in the SmartVET priority industries.

We are very sure that the number of places will increase. We are funding for an increase in the number of places. But coming back to where I left off at the end of the last answer, what we are seeing is a very definitive shift in the nature of training that needs to be delivered. When you have a good look at the green paper which I released with the Premier several weeks ago you will also see that we recognise that shift. There is a fundamental move away from the prevoc courses and the smaller courses that do not necessarily lead directly to jobs. That has been falling. We expect that to continue while we maintain near full employment levels.

Where we are increasing very dramatically is in the traditional trades sector and also in the advanced trade and paraprofessional area, in which we are proposing to do yet more. That is outlined in the green paper which is out for discussion now. That is good for us in the sense that we are getting more places in the areas where the skill shortages are. The skill shortages are in the paraprofessional and advanced trade areas as well.

There is a worrying trend—the Premier has acknowledged it and I have acknowledged it in recent times—that because we have near full employment some young people are actually leaving school and going straight into jobs rather than through some form of training. They run the risk when inevitably the market cycle changes—I hope that will be a long time away; we predict it will be a long time away—of not having skills. We are trying to address that as well. I cannot tell you exactly how many training places there will be for 2005-06, but we have funded for increased training places and we expect the increase in places to be comparable to what it was in the last 12 months.

Mr ROWELL: I refer to page 7 of the answers to non-government questions on notice. Question No. 4 related to the cost incurred for guest speakers and the number of staff training and professional development days for TAFE institutes. The cost for guest speakers at two of these training days was \$10,000 and there is almost \$14,000 for one professional development day. Given that these are very significant costs, will you tell the committee who the guest speaker was for each of the specific training days and exactly what the speaker was speaking on?

Mr BARTON: I make the point, Marc, that I always do my best to answer the questions definitively. I point out that there is a standing order for budget estimates that says that if you want to drill down—I forget how it is couched; I can dig it out if we need to—and ask that level of detail then you have to give me notice so that I can make sure that we can answer the question. It is not a question of you putting questions—

Mr ROWELL: Will you take it on notice?

Mr BARTON: There is nothing to hide here.

Mr ROWELL: Sure.

Mr BARTON: You should abide by the rules, too, and give us notice that you are wanting to drill down into those types of questions. The questions on notice that you have asked comprised multiple questions. The answers are very comprehensive. You did not ask who the speakers were at every training seminar and program that we ran. To have the expectation that I should have that with me now is quite unreasonable, in my view.

Mr ROWELL: That is why we—

Mr BARTON: I do not think it is reasonable for you to turn up to deliberately intend to put questions on notice. We will try to give you an answer. Again I stress that we run an enormous number of training programs. We run staff development programs, too. The figures that you have quoted out of my answer are appropriate figures to get the people that we need for those programs. I will talk to my colleagues about that.

Mr ROWELL: I would like you to take it on notice.

Mr BARTON: I think you should give me notice if you want to start asking who did what program.

CHAIR: You do not have to take it on notice if you do not wish to.

Mr BARTON: I do not wish to. I will consider whether I will provide that information.

Mr ROWELL: That is very kind of you. I refer to page 1-23 of MPS under the 'Quantity'. It outlines the percentage of apprenticeships and traineeships completed and the targets for each of these in 2005-06. These completion rates of 55 and 60 per cent and 60 and 65 per cent will continue, which is very mediocre. There is no increase in the targets for 2005-06. What is your government doing to address this issue? Only 13 per cent of those undertaking public training are completing their training. It is quite important that if we are going to spend this amount on providing training to people they complete their training.

Mr BARTON: Let us have a chat about this. This is one of the fundamentally most important issues that we are addressing. The level of non-completions is certainly of concern, but I do want to make the point that the level of completions in Queensland compares very favourably with every other state.

Mr ROWELL: We should be better.

Mr BARTON: We should be. I wish you would understand that you ask them and I answer them. The real issue that we have is that with near full employment one of the other things that is occurring is that many people are being encouraged to actually go and work at a high level of pay rather than complete their training. That is another one of the add-on problems to the one I mentioned earlier. That was that some young people are coming straight out of school and going into very well paid jobs because the jobs are available without actually getting some form of additional training. That can disadvantage them in the long term.

What we are seeing is a trend in employers encouraging apprentices who are nearly out of their time and who can work at that level to throw in their apprenticeship and pick up high-paid jobs. That might be good for those young people in the short term, but it is not good for them in the long term. This is not in my draft material here, but I had a thorough look at this some months ago because it spooked me when I saw the levels. What shows up also is people who cancel with one employer but start up with another employer. That tends to skew the figures somewhat. They are not really cancellations.

Mr ROWELL: Is that with the indentures?

Mr BARTON: Yes. This is the snag. You are familiar with the period when there were indentures. In that period you did not actually cancel the indenture; you transferred the indenture to an alternative employer. Now there is a training agreement model rather than an indenture model. If they go to a different employer then they cancel with that employer and a new agreement is started. To some degree that skews both sets of figures—the completions figure and also the start-up figure. In some cases you have duplications of people starting. In the same way you have people showing as not completing who are actually completing somewhere else.

Mr LANGBROEK: I refer to the MPS at page 1-20—the Southbank education and training precinct. Given that it is your knowledge that it is the traditional trades that we are most in need of, could you appraise the committee of the logic behind a substantial government investment towards the \$550 million upgrade of Southbank TAFE, which I understand comprises 11 new buildings and four building upgrades, when the current utilisation of the facility is remarkably low and where traditional trades outside commercial cookery are not a focus?

Mr BARTON: Let us have a look at what we have with that project, and I am very proud of that project. Last term I had responsibility for putting the PPP framework together, and it was very pleasing to see that one come over the line.

Mr LANGBROEK: You got one up.

Mr BARTON: We got one up. We got a very important one up. Probably the hardest one to get up is that one because it had all of the features. I reckon building a bridge under a PPP is a no brainer. Doing it where you have an existing site and existing employees while totally changing all of the parameters has a lot of issues, and we have learnt an enormous amount from that. Subsequent PPPs in this department or indeed Education or elsewhere will be much stronger because of it. Southbank is our most important TAFE institute arguably overall. Craig Sherrin, who is known to some of the people who sit over there with you, is the director. He was with me and the director-general when we were in China the week before last because of some of the very good, solid international work that we do through

Southbank TAFE. We see it as the centrepiece in terms of what we are doing with international work. It is the centrepiece with what we intend to do with the paraprofessional area. But I stress that we are not ignoring the traditional trades. That is why I made that announcement this morning on the site that I signed off on or the director-general signed off on last Thursday that we had been working on for eight or nine months to procure, and that will be a major centre for traditional skills for the south side of Brisbane. We intend to do something similar on the north side. We have three or four sites we are identifying now.

It is horses for courses, if I can put it that way. Southbank campus at the moment is very important to us. We do see it with future growth. It will be able to accommodate substantial growth, which is estimated at 20 per cent by 2012. The redevelopment will turn the Southbank institute into a centre of international standing and a key player in that whole South Bank precinct in the Brisbane metropolitan area. Its training opportunities will be fostered which will enable the institute to better serve its markets through partnering with secondary and university organisations, and that is particularly important in developing its potential in the international marketplace.

It is one of the most innovative and technologically advanced facilities in the country—or it will be—creating a seamless transition between schools, vocational education and higher learning. That one is very crucial to what has not been happening well enough, which again is covered in the green paper that we have out for discussion—and I am glad that I have brought it with me—because we are talking about not just that articulation from schools into training but also the articulation from TAFE into higher level courses, paraprofessional courses and the articulation into university. The location of that site right across from QUT, right next to the state high school, which is arguably our most important state high school, will allow it to do much better on that articulation than anywhere else.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you. My next question comes from page 1-22 dot point 3 about Queensland's training infrastructure. The government's green paper that you just referred to suggests a heavy emphasis on infrastructure. Would the government care to apprise the committee of how this aligns with industry's focus on workplace training rather than institutional training?

Mr BARTON: People can look for a brief for me, but let me talk about the philosophy of that. I talked earlier about that very important relationship that we have with the private sector and the important good working relationship we have with ACPET, the organisation of private training providers. But most of the traditional skills are in fact trained through the 15 TAFE institutes. Some 78 per cent of the traditional trade skills that are really leading the supply shortages—the skill shortages—now are done through our TAFE institutes. Some of our TAFEs have been able to increase their throughput of people in traditional apprenticeships by as high as 40 per cent. We are meeting that need, but we are struggling to meet that capacity because of that very great growth. I think overall it is over 20 per cent and some individual TAFEs are over 40 per cent in south-east Queensland. This is what industry are telling us, because we very strongly believe in the partnership with industry. We do not talk the talk like the federal government are doing; we actually walk the walk of working with industry and the private sector. They are telling us that they need us to dramatically increase our capital expenditure to be able to carry that throughput through.

With regard to traditional trades, I just want to mention two as an example. The motor traders group, MTAQ, do a lot of training of apprentices from motor mechanics and panel beaters through their system that we fund. They are publicly funded but trained by the private provider. They do a lot of training in workshops around the state. They are very good at it. They are able to take their trainers direct to workshops. For example, in a small country town you round up all of the apprentices from the local dealers and the local motor mechanics repair shops and do the training in someone's workshop that they make available for that purpose, and we facilitate that and we fund that. The other one that I know is very near and dear to the chair's heart is what happens in the hospitality industry, and there is some very good private provider training done by the hospitality industry association for chefs and cooks. They in fact have put in very significant facilities of their own to do that.

In terms of the capital, we do have that vision for facilities. We have, as the DG has reminded me, reviewed our infrastructure with Treasury. A lot of our existing facilities do need to be modernised and we also see a capacity for some further PPPs on some sites while we deliver that capital expenditure. But the reasons I gave are the fundamental reasons why we are doing it.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Minister. The latter half of your answer leads into my next question. Would the government care to explain whether it has considered the current maintenance costs into the future as the existing infrastructure dates and becomes redundant with ever-changing workplace practices and technologies?

Mr BARTON: The answer to that is yes. In fact, when you look at the arrangement for the PPP at Southbank, I think in today's dollars it is a \$230 million capital expenditure for those 11 buildings and the refurbishment of four existing buildings. Over the life of the project it is bigger than a half a billion dollars in today's dollars—that is, \$550 million. By the time you get to the length of it, the dollar value will have changed of course, too, so it will be more than \$550 million in future dollars. But certainly in today's dollars it is \$550 million. We have also looked very thoroughly at our building maintenance. What part of

the \$550 million is about is that it does include all of the maintenance of the buildings. I must admit that my experience is that government has not in the past been all that good at this. We have been very good at building buildings at the right price, because we can finance them far cheaper than the private sector can, but we have not necessarily been good at doing our homework on what is the whole-of-life cost of the building, including maintenance. In a few of my previous portfolios that used to give me awful headaches.

But we have been provided in this budget with an additional \$4 million per year for the TAFE's annual maintenance program. We do know that we have some facilities that had been allowed to slip over a long period of time—not just by us but also previous governments. That brings the total investment in TAFE's building maintenance up to \$9.4 million per year, and this is ongoing funding that is programmed into the budgets. The much-needed increase in maintenance funding will mainly be used to address a growing number of building issues, including the repair of disability access lifts and airconditioning systems across the TAFE system. But again I stress as part—

CHAIR: Do you require more time?

Mr BARTON: No, I thought it went from two minutes to zero in one second, but I must have been concentrating on my answer. I am sure it did not. I just make the point: I spoke before about the work that we have done with Treasury to look at our future building needs. We are very confident that we are going to be able to refurbish an enormous number of our existing TAFE facilities. Southbank TAFE was the beginning. What we are doing with this major new skills centre on the south side is another one. You will see us progressively go through all of those TAFE institutes over the next few years.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members. Minister, page 1-1 of the MPS refers to a very tight labour market. Can you advise of the state of the labour market in Queensland?

Mr BARTON: I thank you for the question. Since the Beattie government first came to office in October 1998, a total of 382,300 new jobs have been created at a rate of 4,610 jobs per month. This is 1,630 more jobs per month than under the coalition. It is a figure that we are very proud of. More than 64 per cent—that is, 245,200—of the jobs created under the Labor government were full time. Only one in three—that is, 32 per cent—of jobs created by the opposition were full time when they were in government. May labour force data provided by the ABS indicates that the unemployment rate is now 4.9 per cent after reaching 4.7 per cent, the lowest in Queensland since the inception of the series between January and March 2005. Under the coalition, the unemployment rate peaked at 9.5 per cent in February 1997. Unemployment under Labor has fallen by 45,500 persons from June 1998 to May 2005, while under the coalition government the level fell by only 1,200 from February 1996 to June 1998. We have made great progress in the employment level in this state, but we have no intention of easing up now.

Strong economic growth and the lowest unemployment levels in Queensland in 30 years have led to the tightest labour market in living memory. We are also starting to experience the impact of the ageing work force, with fewer young people available to fill vacancies. Although my department is responding to the challenge of skills shortages through a range of new initiatives, including SmartVET, these strategies alone will not fix the problem. Skills shortages are not just about training; they are also about work force participation, approaches to recruitment, the attractiveness of industries, working conditions and our attitudes towards retirement. That is why the Premier and I have announced the most sweeping review of vocational education and training in 40 years. *Queensland's proposed responses to the challenges of skills for jobs and growth*, our green paper, recognises that, while vocational education and training responses will have an impact on skills shortages, broader measures are also required. The green paper canvasses 24 proposals grouped under six key priorities: tackling the urgent shortage of trade skills now; strengthening Queensland's skills base for the future; developing a more responsible and flexible VET system; initiating a new engagement with employers to tackle skills shortages; developing a work force and skills response to the ageing work force; and increasing labour force participation through new skilling strategies for the underskilled.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-2 of the MPS refers to government plans to undertake a review of Queensland's VET system in 2005. I understand that the green paper on vocational education reform delves into the operations of the VET system in Queensland. What do you expect to achieve and when will we see the results?

Mr BARTON: Certainly the green paper, *Queensland's proposed responses to the challenges of skills for jobs and growth*—and I do not go anywhere without it; it is a bit of a bible at the moment for what we are seeking to do—provides an opportunity for all Queenslanders to participate in the most comprehensive review that we have had in 40 years. The review announced as part of Smart Queensland: Smart State Strategy 2005-2015 aims to ensure that Queensland's training and higher education system is able to produce a skilled and flexible work force that can respond to the needs of business and industry both now and in the future. Skills are now widely recognised as a key driver of economic growth, with a substantial role in increasing labour force participation and labour productivity.

The competitiveness of Queensland's economy will increasingly depend on innovation and the availability of a skilled work force. It is also no secret that Queensland's outstanding economic growth, resulting in the tightest labour market in 30 years and a boom in employment in many occupations that were in decline as recently as two years ago, has led to skill shortages. This is despite record levels of funding for training and a flourishing private sector training sector. Skill shortages are also caused by a range of recruitment and retention issues at an industry or enterprise level, including wage rates, work location, work organisation and job design. The way skills are deployed in the work force is also a significant factor. Many current work force management practices unintentionally exacerbate skill shortages. These include an overreliance by employers on a just-in-time approach to skilling, with many employers preferring to recruit already-skilled people that somebody else has trained instead of investing in professional development for their own staff.

The skills reform review is addressing the key challenge for the VET sector: achieving a better match between the supply of skills and the rapidly changing demands of employers and the economy. The green paper proposes a range of strategies aimed at improved VET services across both the public and private training sectors to be more responsive to industry needs. The package of proposed reforms also includes suggestions about ways to improve the relationship between the VET system and industry groups, individual employers and other educational sectors, including universities. In broad terms, these strategies will attempt to tackle skills shortages from two different directions. Firstly it is proposed to reform the way that training is delivered so that skills acquisition better meets the needs of individuals, employers, industry and the economy. This will include new training products and new types of employers. I am not going to get a chance to say what I wanted to say about it, but everybody will have a good opportunity and we are encouraging everybody with an interest in training to put submissions in by the end of August.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, page 1-2 of the MPS indicates that the review of the Queensland VET system will include reforming and modernising the trade apprenticeship system. What proposals are being considered in this context?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question. Tackling the urgent shortage of trade skills now is priority No. 1 in the skills reform green paper and our first priority as a department. In support of this priority the green paper canvasses a range of strategies for reforming and modernising the trade apprenticeship system. In particular, proposals 1 and 2 focus on modernising apprenticeships and establishing a new adult trades apprenticeship system. Strategies currently being considered under these proposals include shortening the nominal duration of some trade apprentices from four years to three years, or two years where appropriate; taking a closer look at apprenticeship wages; up-front intensive skills training so that apprentices are productive as soon as they start their apprenticeship; better arrangements for linking prospective adult apprentices with employers; and streamlined skills assessment so that workers in trade industries can have their existing skills counted towards a trade qualification and become qualified in the shortest possible time.

Other proposals canvassed in the green paper for responding to trade skills shortages include establishing a new specialist trade and technician skills institute—we have just purchased the site for the first of those—which will develop training products and coordinate trades training statewide; a new range of shorter, flexible training products for existing tradespeople to upgrade their skills; improved marketing of trade careers to encourage young people and those wanting to change careers to consider trades options; and a review of the role and performance of group training organisations with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of these organisations.

The green paper is currently available for community comment. A series of forums are being held throughout the state to gauge support for the proposals and identify alternative strategies for alleviating trade skills shortages. The consultation period concludes on 31 August. I am very proud about the way that officers of my department are conducting themselves in those forums. I have had only one complaint about the forums so far and that was from a gentleman who wrote to me at my electorate office a couple of days ago complaining that the forum that was held down in my electorate was held in far too professional a way. If that is the only complaint I get about how we are conducting ourselves as a department and reaching out into the community to talk about the many proposals that are canvassed in the green paper then I will be a very, very happy person. He thought it should have been people sitting around in the room and just having a debate about it, rather than the very professional materials and the very good reports that were brought forward. I am sure that at the end of this process we are going to end up with a far better trade training system to meet those skill shortages.

Mr ENGLISH: Page 1-1 of the MPS refers to current shortages of skilled labour, and it has been mentioned a couple of times this morning. Can you explain how your department is addressing skills shortages, especially in traditional trade areas for which there is still high demand?

Mr BARTON: Thanks for the question. By July 2007 an estimated \$1 billion will be invested in training services for priority industries through the SmartVET initiative, which I announced as part of the 2004-05 state budget. This includes \$118 million for a range of innovative new initiatives being rolled out across Queensland. But although the department is responding to the challenge of skill shortages

through a range of new initiatives, training strategies alone cannot fix the problem. There are many factors that have resulted in current skill shortages being identified by employers, including the way that employers recruit and manage their work force. Strong economic growth and the lowest unemployment levels in Queensland in 30 years have led to the tightest labour market in living memory. We are also starting to experience the impact of the ageing work force, with fewer young people available to fill vacancies. Employers need to stop relying on strategies that have worked in a labour surplus environment and develop new strategies that reflect the increasingly tight pool of both skilled and unskilled labour. That is why the Premier and I have announced the most sweeping review in 40 years.

The skills reform green paper and associated research paper provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors leading to skill shortages. These factors include an insufficient number of people completing training in the areas that are in demand, despite strong local growth in training generally over the last 10 years and record intakes of apprentices and trainees over the last 12 months; the difficulty of the training system in meeting changing and new skills demands from new technology; and major changes to the structure of Queensland's economy leading to a growing demand for high-skilled workers with some process worker jobs moving offshore and lower skilled clerical jobs being replaced by technology. The paper includes 24 proposals that are being tested with the public through a comprehensive statewide consultation process. This includes a comprehensive review of trade training arrangements to tackle the urgent current shortages of skilled tradespeople.

Mr FINN: Minister, thank you for the opportunity today to scrutinise the estimates of your departments. I refer to page 1-2 of the MPS which indicates that the review of the Queensland VET system will also include modernising and repositioning Queensland's network of public training providers. In this context I note that the review discussion paper refers to a proposal to develop a state-of-the-art trade and technician training campus on the southside of Brisbane. Can you elaborate on this proposal?

Mr BARTON: I would absolutely love to. The Beattie government has signed an agreement to purchase a site at Acacia Ridge for the establishment of the southside campus of the specialist trade and technical skills institute. The government, through the Department of Employment and Training, has reached agreement with Macquarie Goodman to purchase the former BHP Brisbane steel mill site for more than \$20 million. Settlement of the property, which is 19.9 hectares in the industrial heartland of Acacia Ridge at Bradman Street, is set for completion within 31 days. The site contains one hectare of modern industrial buildings which will be converted for training purposes. The department's intention is to have a staged reconfiguration and refurbishment plan for the existing structures and surrounding areas to address the skills shortage trade training areas. These include engineering, building and construction, automotive, plastics, airconditioning and refrigeration, foundry, transport logistics, paraprofessional and post-trade training.

Access to public transport made the site attractive to the government. We think it is very important that young people in particular have access to public transport. The facility can be accessed from either Coopers Plains or Banoon Railway Station, and Brisbane City Council bus services also operate nearby. Detailed site planning, including accessibility options, will start after settlement. Once settlement is reached the campus could be open for training in a short space of time. The department anticipates that within 12 months—I will be pushing to get it done a little quicker—the first students will receive training at this site.

The facility is a major step in the government's upgraded training agenda on delivering skills that was proposed in the recently discussed discussion paper, the green paper. The government is investigating a number of sites on the northside for a sister specialist trade and technical skills institute.

I want to stress how keen I am to get that site up and running. When it first became apparent that we might be able to obtain it I went and had a good crawl all over it. They are modern buildings; they all have overhead cranes in them. It was, in fact, the site of the old BHP mini steel mill. Yes, there are a few buildings where we need to do substantial work because they have foundations suitable for rolling mills and furnaces et cetera. But in the main it is a huge big flat area with modern buildings with overhead cranes—absolutely spot on for training in engineering and building construction. Some of it could be modularised for other skills. There is also an enormous amount of vacant land as part of the site for yet other training. We know that we cannot replicate everything everywhere these days because a lot of the equipment you need to put in, particularly for engineering training, is very expensive, but we intend to have two of these, one on the southside and one on the northside. The one on the southside is also beautifully placed to access the western corridor.

Mr FINN: That project is good news for the people of my electorate of Yeerongpilly. I note the question of my colleague regarding the Southbank Education and Training Precinct that is referred to on page 1-20 of the MPS. Development of this project has attracted interest in my electorate also. I ask: can you outline the expected benefits to be achieved from this project?

Mr BARTON: Yes. I might run the risk of repeating some of what I said before, but it is such a good project that it will not hurt. The Southbank Education and Training Precinct project will provide a range of benefits to the state, Queenslanders and students. Rationalising of the three campuses will

result in a consolidated Southbank campus, combining administration and student service functions completely and reducing extensively the costs of maintaining older facilities predominant on all of the campuses. This will also bring about a significant improvement to the working environment for staff, students and all users. The redeveloped campus will be better placed to accommodate substantial growth, which is estimated at 20 per cent by 2012. The project will see the redevelopment of Southbank Institute into a centre of international standing and a key player in the Southbank precinct and metropolitan Brisbane. The redevelopment will foster training opportunities and enable the institute to better service its markets through partnering with secondary and university organisations. This is particularly important to developing its potential in the international marketplace.

Once completed the precinct's education and training facilities will be one of the most innovative and technologically advanced in the country, creating a seamless transition between schools, vocational education and higher learning. Benefits of the redevelopment will also be far reaching and ultimately benefit the regions and rural communities as it will increase remote access to training services offered throughout the centres of excellence and advanced technologies proposed in the redevelopment of the institute.

In terms of economic benefits, the project is expected to provide employment for approximately 200 to 300 building and construction employees during the construction phase; employment and associated services such as architectural design, information technology, engineering and project management; approximately 176,000 apprentice, trainee, cadet labour and upskilling training hours which equates to the creation of employment and training opportunities for approximately 25 apprentices, trainees and cadets per year; ongoing employment of approximately 100 facilities management and support positions over the 34-year concession period; and creation of approximately 75 additional building and construction and facilities management jobs due to the increased life cycle of capital expenditure and maintenance expenditure.

I think, as you said, it will be good for your electorate because it is fairly close to where your boundaries are. In a similar way the southside one is, as you mentioned, very good for Yeronga TAFE because sadly having a TAFE like that, while good for young people to get to, meant some difficulties for neighbours which gave us an even bigger headache. We have already, of course, moved that stuff out of Yeronga TAFE. We have students temporarily located at other campuses. The new site on the southside and the combination of Southbank will make sure that people from your region are well and truly catered for in the future.

Mr WELLS: Page 1-22 of the MPS shows us that the future of sustainable and affordable rural industries training will be secured by the amalgamation of Queensland's four agricultural colleges. Can the minister advise us how this is going to be achieved?

Mr BARTON: I thank you for the question. I know that in previous roles you have taken a big interest in people's training and education in the regions. The agricultural colleges are part of our response to that. We have moved to create the leading agricultural and rural training centres in Australia. The creation of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation achieves the significant structural reforms required to create a sustainable rural training organisation that is responsive to the needs of industry and local communities across Queensland.

The enabling legislation, the Agricultural College Act 2005, had three key objectives: it amalgamated the four agricultural colleges into one viable entity; it created a new corporate governance structure that retains considerable autonomy for the corporation while strengthening accountability of the community and government; and it provides stronger links with industry through the establishment of an advisory board. On 1 July 2005 the Australian Agricultural College Corporation was established. The corporation has taken over all the assets, staff and students of the four former Queensland agricultural colleges, which are now campuses of the new college. This arrangement lays a strong foundation for sustainable and affordable training that meets the needs of rural industries across Queensland.

In the 2005-06 state budget, the government has invested more than \$20 million in the corporation. Generally, these funds cover two areas: \$7.8 million over the next two years including \$5.8 million in 2005-06 to fund the restructuring and integration of the colleges as a single corporation. Funds will be used to improve the information technology infrastructure network, review and realign the business and provide one-off funding assistance. The amount of \$14.3 million in direct grant funding has been allocated to the corporation in 2005-06 to deliver training to support jobs growth in rural and agricultural businesses across Queensland.

The Australian Agricultural College Corporation provides high-quality and relevant, hands-on practical training that is focused on the needs of young people wishing to enter rural industries and mature-age workers who want to get recognition for skills gained in the industry or those wishing to obtain formal qualifications to advance their careers. The college will provide employers in the rural industry sector with work ready graduates. It will also offer employers opportunities to train and upskill existing workers and improve job opportunities for graduates. The corporation will secure increased industry investment and therefore training output will be increased.

Mr WELLS: I refer to the critical skills shortages in the building and construction industry already mentioned by the minister. It is pleasing to note that the department has implemented a number of strategies aimed at alleviating these critical shortages. Could the minister please detail some information relating to the increased training levy to be collected through the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund, referred to on page 1-14 of the MPS?

Mr BARTON: Thanks for the question. The May labour force data provided by ABS indicated that we have an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent. From January to March, the unemployment rate was 4.7 per cent—the lowest in Queensland since the inception of that ABS series in 1978. However, Queensland's buoyant economy is still experiencing significant skill shortages, despite the fact that we have outstripped national growth and trade apprenticeships over the past year. There are now more apprentices and trainees per 1,000 employees in Queensland than in any other state. We are leading the nation on that as well.

The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund has contributed to this growth. Since its commencement in 1999 the fund has created over 5,539 additional apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland. As at 30 April 2005, the fund has provided incentive payments to employers for 1,074 apprentices and trainees against a target of 1,225 for the full financial year, which they expect to meet. Given the current level of activity in the building and construction industry, the fund manager of Construction Training Queensland is very confident that they will not only meet that target but also go beyond that.

The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund also provides funding to support other programs—one of these is the upskilling and cross-skilling of existing workers to create additional tradespeople in the industry. The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund receives its funding through QLeave, previously known as the Portable Long Service Leave Authority. In previous years it was funded to 0.05 per cent of the cost of building and construction work used to calculate the portable long service leave levy. Reforms to the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund introduced in May 2005 will result in the introduction of a discrete training levy this financial year and in the future. The revised levy will result in a doubling of the moneys that are generated and disbursed by this fund.

Additional funds will be used to assist the employment of apprentices and training of existing workers in the building and construction industry. As a consequence, on top of the existing figures, an additional 2,300 training places will be created in 2005-06. This is approximately 1,075 more than achieved in 2004-05. Through this increased training levy and a number of other innovations, my department will continue to ensure that a pool of skilled workers is available to support the building and construction industry. The green paper also talks about how we address this issue.

CHAIR: Do you want more time?

Mr BARTON: No.

Mr WELLS: I am very interested. If the minister could finish what he was saying, I would appreciate it.

CHAIR: You can have another two minutes, Minister.

Mr BARTON: I am also pleased to announce that, in keeping with the Premier's May 2004 announcement, by January 2006 two centres of excellence for the building and construction and manufacturing industries are expected to be implemented. These centres will lead innovation and industry management to develop a range of effective and sustainable responses to skill shortages. That includes the site that I spoke about earlier and the one that we intend to develop on the north side. Also, consultations are under way and we are discussing the urgent current shortage of trade skills, which is partly cyclical and partly structural, within the building and construction industry.

Proposals to address these include interventions to modernise the apprenticeship system, establish the new specialist trade centres and establish centres of excellence in industries that are designated as high priority. We are talking about the building training levy. The CTC at Salisbury has been doing an excellent job with the funds that it got through the levy when it was 0.05 per cent. It has doubled compared to what it was before which will allow the CTC to increase the number of apprentices and trainees that it puts through and also upskill an enormous number of existing employees in the industry. It will then be complemented by what we are doing in TAFE with these two engineering and building and construction centres. The CTC at Salisbury will continue to do its job. It will be better funded through allocations that it gets through the levy. We have other major funding for those same sectors. So it will greatly enhance the number of skilled people available to the building and construction industry. The only other place that I have ever seen more cranes on the skyline than we have around the Gold Coast and Brisbane at the moment is Shanghai.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for elaborating on that. You mentioned the Gold Coast. The boom in the building and construction industry there has meant that particular areas within that industry are showing skill shortages, so I am glad you elaborated on that answer. On page 1-19 of the MPS there is a reference to growth in apprenticeships and traineeships delivered under the User Choice program, which we have spoken about a little bit. Could you detail the growth in User Choice delivery of training to apprentices and trainees over the recent period by the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE?

Mr BARTON: Thanks for the question. The Gold Coast Institute of TAFE is one of our stars in this regard and it leads the government's provision of vocational education and training in the south coast region. I am pleased to advise that this TAFE is a nominee for the Large Training Provider of the Year award at this year's Queensland Training Awards. You never know, you might be there celebrating with them, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: I hope so.

Mr BARTON: The number of apprenticeships commencements in which a Queensland TAFE institute is identified as the primary registered training organisation increased by approximately 25 per cent between 2003 and 2004. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research reported growth in traditional apprenticeships in Queensland, outstripped national growth in the 12-month period to 31 December 2004 and further reported that traditional apprenticeships in Queensland accounted for 40 per cent of all apprentices and trainees—well above the national average of 34 per cent. Once again, we are right out in front, as is the Gold Coast. One reason for this growth is that my department—

CHAIR: The time for government questions has expired, but you could continue for two more minutes.

Mr BARTON: That is the end of the session. You can ask the question again later and we will come back to it.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, the opposition goes to a lot of trouble putting questions on notice together. We did not get the responses, in our case anyway, until yesterday afternoon. There was another question I wanted to ask about publicly provided funding but, in response to the question I asked about guest speakers, you said that it was too difficult to answer those questions and that I should give you more notice. Why is it inappropriate for the opposition to ask questions about issues relating to the responses we get to questions on notice?

Mr BARTON: Let me put it into context. It is appropriate for you to ask questions about the questions on notice. I will do my best to answer your questions, as I will with any other questions. You are looking for a level of specific detail and we have already given you details about a large number of training programs—the cost, how many people attended and the whole bit. You then arrive and say that you want to know the names of the people who addressed those forums. The only reason I am suggesting to you that I would not necessarily take it on notice is that I do not know how readily available that information might be. If I take the question on notice, I will get into trouble if I cannot find out the information in an adequate time. I made a value judgment on that last question. Whether I am right or wrong, I made a value judgment that you were seeking to drill right down into very great detail about an issue. One of the standing orders—and I do not write the standing orders: parliament does; we all do collectively—says that if you want to go into that level of detail then you are supposed to give people notice so that they can make sure that they come along equipped for it.

CHAIR: I ask the member for Hinchinbrook to keep that in mind if he requires questions to be answered in detail.

Mr ROWELL: Considering that we have only had since yesterday afternoon to ask the question, I thought it would be appropriate to ask it today.

Mr BARTON: We lodged our answers by 10 o'clock yesterday morning which, as I understand it, was the requirement under the standing orders and the letter we got from the committee about when our answers were required. Again, we are not being difficult. I can say to you, Marc, that we put an enormous amount of effort into those answers to those questions on notice and they were not straightforward questions. I am not really complaining, but I do think they went a little further than what is intended by the standing orders in relation to questions on notice. Those answers took an enormous amount of work. I can assure you that at 20 minutes to 10 yesterday morning one of my senior staff got hold of me about some suggested changes to one of the answers. So we were still making a decision about how we would respond to the questions 20 minutes before the answers were due to be lodged. It is a two-way street, Marc. We take it seriously and we do our best to give you what you want.

Mr ROWELL: So do we, Minister. It is about accountability.

Mr BARTON: That is right.

Mr ROWELL: I would like to go on with another question.

Mr BARTON: Please do.

Mr ROWELL: It deals with a question that was asked of you by a government member, but I just want some clarification. Page 1-22 of the MPS, dot point 2 from the top of the page, outlines the funding to be allocated to support the amalgamation of the four agricultural colleges into a single corporation. Minister, part of the paragraph notes that funds were used to review and realign the business. I have asked you this previously, Minister, but can you guarantee that this process will not involve a loss of jobs on the campuses?

Mr BARTON: I will be as open as I can, Marc. Again, I am not seeking to fudge this. Of course, what we all have to understand in today's world is that sometimes training needs to change. But that is more so, I guess, in the TAFE institutes where there has been, in the last 12 or 18 months, a fundamental shift in the sort of courses that are being demanded compared to prior to that. We have to adjust our staff. I have so many pieces of paper that I do not know which one is which, but I am not complaining; we will get the right one.

I can give you a guarantee that all of the jobs that are currently at those ag colleges are being held. That is not to say that over time there will not need to be some adjustment because the ag colleges also have to respond to the market. I know that some people, particularly local members from your party who had ag colleges, were concerned about some of the changes. I do not really want to go into detail again—draw all the dirty linen out again—about why we had to have the review. That is not over yet. As you know, there are still some matters residing with the CMC. I cannot give you an absolute guarantee that there might not be some changes out of that, because if people are found to have done the wrong thing they might not be there.

Our intention is to hold the job security for current employees. We will continue to employ the officers the corporation considers necessary for staffing the corporation. Here is probably the crunch statement—

This section applies to a person who immediately before the commencement held the position of a director of a former ...

It is too gobbledegook for me. Wait till I read it. I will come back to you.

Ultimately, we do intend to keep all the people. The people at the ag colleges who were employees on 30 June—last Thursday—became employees of the new central body on Friday. There is no intention to push people over. We said we wanted a seamless transition but, again, there will, over time, need to be some changes to the way the ag colleges are run as this new single college, as opposed to four separate colleges, simply because there were a whole series of factors that were being badly done.

I am the first to acknowledge to you that the students who were being produced were first class, but how they got to that has been done with a whole raft of problems that were wrong that we need to change. We are spending taxpayers' dollars. That is not going to be taken out on the staff of the colleges that are there. They have become employees of the new organisation. Over time I would not like to say someone who is employed now has a job forever. No-one has that level of security in today's society, no matter where you work—unless you are a judge.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, just a little bit more about agricultural colleges. Other than the actual costs of setting up the corporation, what will the \$7.8 million over the two years do to get the colleges back on track in a management and a financial sense?

Mr BARTON: Let us just see if this helps. Additional funding of \$7.75 million, or \$7.8 million in round figures, is provided to finance significant structural reforms, to undertake a major upgrade of the IT infrastructure at the colleges and provide one-off debt relief to strengthen the corporation's balance sheet. As you know, one of the colleges in particular, and the others are not in a much better position—let us be very honest, Dalby technically was insolvent, but they hid it from us by doing a shoddy financial transaction of selling the cattle herd to a company controlled by a member of the board prior to the end of the last financial year, or the year before because it was just over 12 months ago, to appear to be solvent because they had money in the bank, but they did not have a cattle herd any more to use for training people. Then, when 1 July passed, the person who was part of that transaction sold the cattle herd back to the college. That was nothing more than a subterfuge to try to prove to me, as the responsible minister that they report to, that it was solvent when it was not solvent. I just use that example. I did not want to trawl in the dirty linen again, but that is an example of that one college, as it then was—one of four—that was technically insolvent.

We are carrying into the new combined body a technically insolvent college, one of the four. The others also have different levels of financial stress. Part of that funding is to ensure that they do have the balance sheet that they need to be capable of being competitive in the future as well as providing the funding to strengthen some of the very important work that they need to do, particularly in the corporate governance area and the finance area, hence the IT infrastructure. I am trying to think of a mind picture that I could paint, but again this is not an attack on the quality of the students who come out. They are fine people. We certainly had problems with one of the colleges training more people from interstate than they were training for Queensland using Queensland taxpayers' money. It was not fee for service; it was 'Come one, come all. We'll train you. Queensland taxpayers will train people from New South Wales and Victoria.' What a good idea! It is not reciprocated.

But in many ways there were issues of overservicing. To get people at that skill level they went way over the top with the levels of training that were provided, way beyond the norms. We do need to make those sort of adjustments on the way through. But, Marc, I give you a personal guarantee, as well as the guarantee of this government, that this is all about strengthening the outcomes and agricultural training because we had two choices—fix them up or walk away from them like every other state did.

We have decided to stay and make them work and improve them on the way through. We intend to be the national agricultural training provider as a result of it.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I refer to the capital statement for 2005-06.

Mr BARTON: Okay.

Mr ROWELL: There is no funding commitment for 2005-06 for new capital works for any of the four Queensland agricultural colleges, soon to be the campus. They are now the new corporation. Minister, is this an indication that the government does not have an interest in providing the required facilities and equipment to ensure that high standards of training can be provided?

Mr BARTON: There is a capital grant. If someone could look at that other statement for me. My figures indicate that we do have a figure for capital grants in 2005-06 of \$1 million. I have not dug it out. I have it here, but I will ask someone else to look for the reference that you provided in the capital works statement because we are putting in a million-dollar grant subsidy. But, again, it subsidises the maintenance and development of assets at the agricultural college. It is not intended for this grant to wholly finance asset management practices at the agricultural college.

In the past the department has invested significantly in the facilities of the colleges. It is envisaged that as need arises further investments will be made in the future. I think, as you know, it probably depends how we are defining capital, but capital can include the IT infrastructure and it can include other issues, not just bricks and mortar. As we have said, we do have a million in there for capital grant subsidies in this budget, but we also do envisage that over time there will be further capital investment on some of those campuses; I would not like to say which.

My director-general is, in fact, the corporation sole for the new Australian ag college. Again, Marc, you would appreciate—it is the seventh today—that up until seven days ago they were still in the hands of either the previous board or, in the case of Dalby, the hands of an administrator that I appointed after the previous board had put their hands up and said, 'We can't do this, please appoint an administrator.' I did not end up sacking them: they resigned or they asked me to appoint the administrator. In fact, we have only just got our hands on this in an environment where we do not know exactly what we have out there in some cases, as was shown by the experience 12 months ago at Dalby when people were even hiding from me the fact that the college was insolvent.

I expect that as we properly take over them as the corporation sole, in the hands of my director-general, what will need to be done will become more obvious. But, of course, we would not put a block of capital into the budget just in case we needed it. There is a process that allows ministers to go back to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee if they have needs of that nature that emerge. I would expect that if there have been significant investments in them, over time I would expect there will continue to be further significant capital investments in them.

Mr ROWELL: On page 1-24 of the MPS, the first two dot points under quality measures, 'The level of stakeholder satisfaction with VET training services and products'; there is no increase in the target set for 2005-06 for students and employer satisfaction with the estimates is expected to stay around the 80 per cent mark. Minister, are you confident of improving your delivery of training over the next year? Does this mean that employers and students will have to wait for what might come out of your government's green paper before seeing any improvements?

Mr BARTON: I am very confident that we are going to see a high satisfaction rate because we are putting an enormous amount of effort into the green paper and we are talking about it a lot because we are very proud of it as a set of proposals. I have described it in other places, and I will say it here again: this is the most important proposed reform for 40 years. It was over 40 years ago that four-year apprenticeships came in. Yes, there have been adjustments on the way through, but it is a very significant change.

That is not the only thing that is happening. We do not have all of our eggs in the basket of the green paper saying, 'We're out there for discussion. We have put huge efforts into the green paper, and when we get this discussion period over and make value judgments about it, it will all be beaut from there on in.' We took very, very solid decisions last year with the whole SmartVET strategy to improve TAFE and training delivery in this state. We are following through those very significant changes of last year—the SmartVET structures and the increased funding that came with that.

As you have seen, we have finalised the commitment to the Southbank through the PPP. Last year we also decided where we were going with these major centres of excellence for engineering and construction training et cetera. Last year we also formed the Mining Skills Centre of Excellence. It had its first meeting about a week ago, I think.

Major changes are under way already. We believe that very significant changes will come out of the green paper; I am fairly confident they will. I describe a few of the proposals that we put in there as rolling a hand grenade into the room to see what the reaction will be, because there are a few issues in there that are going to be pretty hard for some people to accept, and we know that. But we think there needs to be a public debate about it, and there needs to be a debate within government about whether

that is the way to go. I go as far as to say that in a few cases we have not only rolled a grenade into the room; we have pulled the pin out first and rolled the grenade into the room to see what response we would get. But with satisfaction ratings, typically over 70 per cent was considered best practice. We are over 80 per cent, and we intend to stay at over 80 per cent.

As the reforms roll out—and I think TAFE institutes, in particular, can become even more relevant, because they are very relevant now, they are well regarded and are doing a great job—I think TAFEs will become even more relevant. I expect to see those figures rise further than that again.

Mr LANGBROEK: I would like to turn to the shared service provider Corporate Solutions Queensland. Page 1-47 of the MPS indicates that this is the second year of operation for SSPs—shared service providers—and the criteria for judging the success of the SSPs and the initiative are continuing to be improved. I would have thought that the bottom line would be: is it saving money compared with the previous regime? I wonder whether the minister can outline if the shared service provider is providing a better bottom line and to what extent in terms of numerical amounts. You may be able to provide us with that information.

Mr BARTON: I was just checking with my director-general. I guess the answer to your question is, yes, it is saving funds. Corporate Solutions Queensland, which we are associated with, is one of five. Again, this is not me ducking the question. The overall responsibility for these really resides with the Treasurer, not with me. There is an expectation which the DG has mentioned to me about what the government expects the savings to be right across government through the shared corporate services, but I really do not know that it is my place to quote figures that are really Treasury figures at my estimates. In the context of your question, yes, there are savings. Yes, there are efficiencies. Yes, we believe it works very well for us in terms of our involvement with Corporate Solutions Queensland, which services my departments.

Mr LANGBROEK: It is your department. Therefore, wouldn't you like to know the actual amounts that are being saved?

Mr BARTON: I am not trying to be difficult. I think it comes down to where is the line between the Treasurer and other portfolios. The figure I have is a whole-of-government figure, not just for my departments. I think that is really a matter for the Treasurer, not for me, if there are going to be announcements or detail about those figures but I can assure you that there are very substantial savings.

Mr LANGBROEK: At some stage, then, it would be appreciated if we could get some sighting of them. Otherwise it seems to me that, with shared service provisions, we are hearing there are savings but we do not necessarily hear about them from the particular department that is supposedly saving money.

CHAIR: You need to ask the relevant question of the relevant minister. If that question is better posed and answered in a whole-of-government sense by the Treasurer, then it is outside the portfolio of this particular minister. This minister does not need to take it on notice and he can answer the question in the way that he has. You may need to find other means and methods to achieve the answer that you are looking for.

Mr BARTON: We have just been having a chat here. I have to say that, while my DG is the responsible officer for Corporate Solutions Queensland, it provides shared services across 12 agencies not just my own. If I start quoting figures for its savings, I am not just talking about my departments; I am talking about other people's departments as well. I am not trying to be difficult. If other people come and paddle in my patch, I kick them in the shins. I think if I paddle in the Treasurer's patch he is entitled to kick me in the shins.

Mr LANGBROEK: I can understand that. I just would have thought there was a certain amount in inputs for what it would cost this department and what it had cost prior to shared service providers, and what I am drilling down to find out is what the costs or savings are that are provided by shared service providers, but I think we have gone through that.

Mr BARTON: I do not really want to go any further than that. I am not ducking it. I just think it is probably a question for someone else.

Mr LANGBROEK: For my final question, can we go to page 1-17 of the MPS under 'Vocational Education and Training'. I note also the answer to question 4 of the non-government questions on notice about it being a bit difficult to provide details of training seminars and things like that in the Department of Employment and Training because it is such a complex organisation. My question is: what is the government doing to deal with the key resource of vocational education and training, and that is the currency of skills and the improvement in the stature of the profession and vocational education and training of teachers?

Mr BARTON: That sounds like a free kick dorothy dixer.

Mr LANGBROEK: It is just that there was no answer in the question on notice.

Mr BARTON: No, I love the question; let me talk about it, because it lets me talk about the vision and what we are doing. We already have through SmartVET, the funding that we put in last year, a whole raft of new innovative proposals out there that are working, because vocational education and training is the key driver of what we are doing to address the skills—

CHAIR: It is the end of the session, Minister, but we can provide two minutes for you to continue your answer.

Mr LANGBROEK: Madam Chair, my question is about teachers, not VET itself.

Mr BARTON: About teachers?

Mr LANGBROEK: About the teachers providing VET—upskilling them and their status.

Mr BARTON: We are certainly taking steps to upskill our teachers. You will also find in the green paper—I hate to keep harping back to it—a whole raft of proposals where we are fundamentally looking at change in the way our teachers deliver training. That impacts directly on the teachers. We have a great deal of pride in our teachers. We believe that we are putting professional training into them. We are putting an enormous amount of self-development issues into teachers. In the last enterprise bargaining agreement, there was a whole range of flexibilities put in place to make it easier for them to do their jobs. The old TAFE that I went to in the 1960s is long gone compared to the modern TAFE. We have some incredibly gifted professionals as teachers in our TAFEs.

We are also seeking a little bit of change that I think is important and that shows up in the green paper, but if we are really going after those skills shortages in traditional trades then it is also very important that most of your teachers in that area have come from that trade background or through that trade background. At the moment they have to add on an educational degree. In the old days they got a training qualification such as the ones that we deliver, and they reported to a teacher who oversaw a lot of the other things that they did not have because they did not have education degrees. But we need to find ways and incentives to get a lot more people from those backgrounds who know what my old man—who is another tradesman—also used to refer to as the trade secrets. You do not get them out of textbooks. You get them from walking behind the old tradies who say, 'Don't do it that way, son. I will show you a short cut.'

CHAIR: The next round of questions are from government members.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, page 1-3 of the MPS mentions that the department will invest \$911.7 million in jobs and training in 2005-06. Can the minister advise the committee of the assistance provided by his department to the people in the electorate of Redlands?

Mr BARTON: Yes, I would love to because you are one of my neighbouring electorates, so what is good for you many times is also good for me in terms of my constituents of the services that are provided. In 2005-06 the state electorate of Redlands will share in an estimated government investment of \$342.4 million in the greater Brisbane region to help create 3,607 jobs and provide training to approximately 102,000 students across the region. So that is for the region; Redlands will get its share.

Since its inception in October 1998 to 30 April 2005, a total of \$3.25 million in assistance has been provided in the Redlands electorate under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative—a program to help people get jobs and some skills experience and improve their work ethic. A total of 712 people from the Redlands electorate have been assisted with 627 people having achieved employment outcomes. This includes a total of 310 apprentices and 194 trainees including school based positions. I have to say that your electorate reflects what we are trying to do all over Queensland with the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program. They are very good percentages—627 out of 712 got jobs. I know a lot of people think the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program is about painting the rocks white; it is not. It gives people real work experience and real skills. Typically, we are getting six out of every 10—your percentages in Redlands look a little higher—back into real work.

It also includes assisting a lot of people into apprenticeships and traineeships—310 people got apprenticeships and 194 got traineeships. They are incredibly good outcomes which also reflect the fact that our Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program is a big component of training. It is not listed as being vocational education or training; it is listed as job programs, but a very significant slice of that is direct training. So, when I quote to Brendan Nelson that we are spending \$3 for every \$1 that he puts into training, I am not including that. By the time we put in the training component of those programs, it is more like \$4 to \$1.

I am also pleased to announce that in relation to the BUC initiative funding, from July 2004 to April 2005 a total of 113 job seekers in the electorate of Redlands found jobs through the initiative. That was made up of 17 people who found employment after participation in programs—that is just in one year—and 96 additional apprenticeships and traineeships. Again, a lot of them were school based apprenticeships and traineeships, which is the way of the future and what we are jointly working with the department of education on for the future. Your electorate is right at the cutting edge, John.

Mr FINN: There has been a number of comments this morning regarding apprentices and trainees undertaking training in Queensland. I was particularly interested in your comments regarding the construction levy in the CTC in Salisbury, which is also in my electorate of Yeerongpilly. I was

interested to read on page 1-19 of the MPS a detailed increase in the number of apprentices and trainees in Queensland and growth in traditional apprenticeships outstripping the national growth. Can the minister provide some further detail regarding this?

Mr BARTON: Yes. As you have a TAFE campus in your electorate, I know how important those figures are to you also. It is part of the achievement. When we came to office in 1998 there were 46,000 apprentices in training in Queensland. The record levels of apprentices and trainees in training have continued. In 2004-05 that had risen to 71,969 apprentices and trainees in training as at 30 December. We do not have the figures for 30 June for obvious reasons, but that represents an annual increase of 6.3 per cent. I am not talking about an increase of 6.3 percent but an annual increase of 6.3 per cent. Nationally there has been a decrease. Not only are we leading the way; we are streets ahead. Elsewhere the numbers of apprentices are falling. In this state they have gone from 46,000 to nearly 72,000—a 6.3 per cent per year increase—while nationally they are falling.

Growth in traditional apprenticeships outstripped national growth in the 12-month period to 31 December. NCVET reported that traditional apprenticeships in Queensland account for 40 per cent of all apprentices and trainees in Australia. They are pretty good figures when we are not quite 20 per cent of the population. Growth in apprenticeships is particularly evident in high-demand trade areas such as construction, where we are up 1,016 or 31 per cent over the 12 months to December 2004.

Yes, there is a shortage out there. We had a 31 per cent increase in the number of apprentices in building and construction. A lot of that is as a result of the training levy that we talked about earlier as well as our own direct funding. The mechanical and fabrication area is up 584 commencement or 26 per cent. So in terms of the fitters, the boiler makers—those people we need for all the big new mining and port projects—there has been a 26 per cent increase in a year. The electrical and electronics trade—this is very near and dear to the director-general's heart because he also has energy—is up 43 per cent or 493 commencements. We know how hard it is to get an electrician to your home to put in a new power point. There is a skill shortage. We are doing our bit in that regard. The automotive trade is another area. We all like our cars to be fixed so that they continue to go fast. It is up 489 or 28 per cent. So a key part of that is our effective prioritisation of user choice funds which grew from \$80 million in 2000-01 to \$114 million in 2005-06. We are putting our money where our mouth is.

Mr FINN: That is a good set of figures. In the MPS there are several references to the Beattie government's education and training reforms for the future agenda. I particularly refer to 1-4 which refers to young Queenslanders. Could you outline what the department is doing to help 15- to 17-year-old Queenslanders increase their employability?

Mr BARTON: We are working very closely with the Department of Education and the Arts and training stakeholders to provide young people with a range of flexible and innovative options that they need to enhance their future career opportunities. The number of young Queenslanders commencing school based apprenticeships and traineeships increased by 16 per cent in the 2004 calendar year compared with the 2003 year, with a total of 6,420.

Since the inception of school based apprenticeships and traineeships approximately 30,000 students have taken part in the initiative. They are a vital pathway. Queensland has half of all of the school based apprenticeships in the nation, which is a pretty good figure. We have 20 per cent of the population and we have half the school based apprenticeships. I do not want to give my mates a kick, but New South Wales does not have a single one. They have some traineeships called new apprenticeships, but they do not have a single school based apprenticeship in a traditional trade. We are right out there.

School based apprenticeships and traineeships are a vital pathway for people wanting to improve their learning and employment opportunities while still at school. They have been and will continue to be funded as a priority through the User Choice program. Importantly, public funding will continue to be directed to those areas that will provide young people with the best opportunity for sustainable employment. This is particularly so in industries that are critical to the economic prosperity of Queensland.

Queensland has considerable success in school based apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements. There is room for more improvement which we aim to achieve. School based apprenticeships and traineeships will be further improved as a result of the proposals identified in the green paper. That also includes proposals to modernise apprenticeships and market a new look for trade careers. We want more people. We want the image of trades back to where it was 20 or 30 years ago.

The department is set to achieve record enrolment numbers in vocational education and training for 15- to 17-year-olds by providing more than 48,000 enrolments in this target group in 2005-06 to enhance young people's transition from school to further education, training or employment. An employment preparation program Get Set for Work has also been developed as part of the education and training reforms to re-engage young people aged 15 to 17 who left school early or were highly likely to leave school without obtaining a senior qualification and, as a consequence, find themselves unemployed and disconnected from learning.

Get Set for Work seeks to develop those young people and give them the skills and confidence they need. That is at a cost this year of \$11.5 million. We are also putting in a further \$6.5 million to expand the places under Get Set for Work from 600 to 1,500. There are some other initiatives. It is a key part of our priorities.

Mr WELLS: The minister just mentioned that Queensland has 50 per cent of these school based apprenticeships in Australia. I know that you have referred in some detail to the issue of school based apprenticeships. I wondered whether you could give some more information about school based apprenticeships and traineeships and the numbers that are involved in this imaginative and fruitful pathway for young Queenslanders?

Mr BARTON: I will probably run the risk of repeating a few of the goodies, but it is a good news story. They increased in the 2004 calendar year by 16 per cent to a total of 6,420. Some 30,000 people have come through that process. School based apprenticeships and traineeships remain a major focus for us. We set a target of 10,500 school based apprenticeship and trainee commencements over a three-year cycle to 30 June 2004. The target has been more than achieved with approximately 16,111 students taking advantage of this initiative between 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2004.

In support of the government's education and training reforms for the future, school based apprenticeships and traineeships provide an effective transition pathway from school to further training or employment for young people and assist in addressing critical skill shortages across Queensland. In 2004-05 we expanded funding arrangements for school based apprentices and trainees under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle. As at 30 April 2005 the initiative had allocated 693 school based apprenticeships and traineeships in the public sector, provided 410 incentives to private sector employers in rural and remote locations to employ school based apprentices and trainees. Marc, we are looking after the rural areas as well.

We have committed \$2.9 million for 23 Get Set for Work projects to provide employment preparation assistance to 616 early school leavers and students at risk of leaving formal education. The initiative has allocated \$11.5 million in 2005-06 to increase access to training and employment pathway options for 15- to 17-year-olds in support of the full implementation of the government's education and training reforms for the future agenda for 2006. That is the initiative that Anna Bligh and Education and my department and I are working in partnership on.

Almost \$5 million of this funding has been earmarked for 1,700 school based apprenticeship and traineeship places in public sector agencies and in identified rural and remote areas within the private sector through the Youth Training Incentives program. This includes an expansion of rural and remote locations for school based apprenticeships and traineeships to a further 41 shires.

The Get Set for Work program will receive \$6.5 million in funding to increase places by 900 and provide 1,500 places for 15- to 17-year-olds who are either early school leavers or at risk of disengaging. It is a very good program. This is stopping 15- to 17-year-olds falling through the cracks and making it relevant so that they want to stay at school.

Mr WELLS: In my electorate it has helped not only kids who were at risk of not completing but also kids who have completed but went on to a more satisfying career as a result.

Mr BARTON: Yes.

Mr WELLS: On page 1-3 of the MPS there is a reference to investment in the Mining Centre of Excellence. Can the minister elaborate on why the centre was established and the role that it will play in addressing the skilling issues in Queensland's mining sector?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question. This is one initiative that we are very proud of. We are working closely with industry to develop a shared future skills agenda for Queensland's major industries. This is one example. We are up and over the start line now.

In keeping with the Premier's announcement in May 2004, the mining industry skills centre and Mining Centre of Excellence has recently been established. It will be centred in new premises in Mackay, we anticipate, by December 2005. They are currently operating out of offices in Mackay that housed the old mining ITAB. It is a partnership between government, industry, unions and the Queensland Mining Industry Training Advisory Board—the old ITAB. It will drive a coordinated approach to skills formation strategies for the mining industry. Senior executives from Xstrata Copper, BHP Billiton, Mitsubishi Alliance, Peabody coal and the Queensland Resources Council together with the CFMEU and the AWU have agreed to sit on the governing body for the centre which will be chaired by the Director-General for the Department of Employment and Training.

It had its first meeting last week. It was a very successful meeting. We are well on the way to having a purpose built facility built in Mackay at a very strategic location for the mining industry. It will lead strategies to refocus industry and government capacity and training investments that will address emerging skill shortages in trade positions, plant operators and statutory positions.

In consultation with industry and other stakeholders the mining industry skills centre will establish industry recognised benchmarks for training and resources and assessment to ensure true portability of qualifications from site to site and enterprise to enterprise. From 2004-05 the government had allocated

\$2.2 million per year for three years to establish the mining industry skills centre. Industry is more than matching this with an investment of over \$3.5 million in the first year alone.

We have also approved some simulators. It is not just aircraft pilots who train on simulators. It can be done for mining equipment as well. We signed off on those a fortnight ago. That was worth \$3.2 million. This centre will be at the cutting edge. I am very pleased that this is a genuine tripartnership government. The mining industry unions and the mining industry employers are not just coming with commitment, the industry is coming with dollars.

Mr ENGLISH: There are numerous references in the MPS to activities to address the skill shortages, and you have mentioned it numerous times. Can you tell us what your department is doing to specifically address skill shortages in the manufacturing sector to make it more attractive for young people?

Mr BARTON: We are succeeding in attracting more young people to careers in manufacturing, especially through apprenticeships and traineeships. As at April 2005 the number of manufacturing apprentices and trainees in training had increased by approximately 600 since 30 June 2004 and 1,000 since 30 June 2003. School based apprentices undertaking manufacturing related qualifications also increased from 60 in training as at 30 June 2003 to over 300 as at 30 April 2005.

In 2004-05 my department injected \$67.3 million across its training and skills development programs for the manufacturing industry. A further \$78.4 million is provided in 2005-06 to continue to develop a highly skilled manufacturing work force. The department is also implementing the manufacturing industry initiative, which is one I put together when I had the state development portfolio, to address skill shortages in the industry and to enhance the image of careers in manufacturing. That has been a major issue for all trades but particularly for manufacturing where it is high-tech, clean and there are very skilled jobs and good career paths but there is still a public perception that it is dirty, low paid and there are no career paths. We are dramatically changing that image.

The manufacturing industry initiative is now part of a \$1 billion SmartVET strategy that focuses upon the priority manufacturing subsectors of aerospace, biotechnology, boat building, electronic equipment manufacturing, engineering, food processing and light metals. Skill shortages in manufacturing industries may also be addressed through a range of other SmartVET initiatives, including cadetship, accelerated apprenticeships, industry training partnerships, improved recognition of prior learning, skills formation strategies and the establishment of Skilling Solutions Queensland.

In April 2004 I was pleased to launch careers in manufacturing which is a key element of the manufacturing industry initiative. Careers in manufacturing aims to enhance a positive public image of the state's manufacturing industry and to attract quality new entrants into the industry particularly through apprenticeships and traineeships. We have produced a range of targeted material including brochures, a DVD, a manufacturing web portal to provide students with information about training and career pathways, job success story and the way to get started in the industry. The strategy now links closely with the whole-of-government marketing strategy Create it Make it Live it to lift the image of manufacturing in Queensland.

The strategy is built around real-life case studies and industry champions, apprentices and trainees. I have to say that some of the people we have used are just great. One of them is a young woman who is an aerospace apprentice. These are top of the world people. There is also a young guy from down on the Gold Coast from Riviera who expressed views about quality and job skills like no-one I have ever met before could do.

CHAIR: Fantastic, Minister. I know that there is a lot more that you would like to say and that we would like to hear, but in the interests of stretching our legs I will pull up there. It being 10.30, the time allocated for the consideration of the estimates for the Department of Employment and Training has now expired. The committee is now suspended for 15 minutes and will resume at 10.45 to examine the estimates for the Department of Industrial Relations. Thanks to the minister and the advisers.

Proceedings suspended from 10.30 am to 10.47 am

CHAIR: The committee will now examine estimates for the Department of Industrial Relations. In accordance with standing orders, at least half of the time for questions at today's hearing will be allocated to non-government members. The time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner, with any further extension of time for an answer to be agreed to by the chair. The initial extension is for two minutes and anything further we would consider. I also ask that officers identify themselves before answering a question for the benefit of Hansard. The first round of questions will be from non-government members, and I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr BARTON: Just before the member for Hinchinbrook asks that question, I was asked if I would provide a list of names of people who had participated in internal development programs. In the break I have had an opportunity to talk to my senior departmental people, because I was concerned about

whether there were privacy or other issues. I am assured that there is not, so I would like to table that for completeness now. Sorry to hold you up for 30 seconds.

Leave granted.

Mr BARTON: It is just providing the rest of the answer that you wanted. I could do it as a question on notice. I thought it was tidier if you actually get it right now.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, on page 2-23 of the MPS within the first dot point under the recent achievement details for 2004-05 only 78 Queensland workplace agreements were lodged, a 13 per cent decrease compared with the previous year. Since your government's changes to the Industrial Relations Act in July 1999, the number of QWAs filed and approved has plummeted. In comparison to the 55,300 AWAs approved in Queensland in the first three years up to the end of April 2005, only 2,662 QWAs have been approved. Minister, would you not concede that your government's changes to Queensland workplace agreements has rendered them unpopular?

Mr BARTON: I love the question. I really could not ask for a better first question. It is not a matter that we have made changes that have made them unpopular; they are simply unpopular. We had a similar question here 12 months ago. The answer then is still the answer now, except that now it has a little bit more focus on it because of the outrageous proposals of the Prime Minister and the federal coalition, and I thank you for your comments of concern about what their outrageous proposals are and your leader's comments of concern about the outrageous proposals of the Prime Minister. But the harsh reality is that the work force in Queensland has seen through this nonsense of even our QWAs, which, in many ways, mirror the existing AWAs. People much prefer to be part of collective agreements, but Queensland—someone probably has a sheet for me somewhere—certainly does have the highest percentage of collective agreements and they do continue to rise.

In terms of the QWAs, they have been falling, or the increased numbers have been falling, simply because workers do not want to be involved in agreements where there is a capacity for them to be coerced into giving away hard-won conditions and they prefer to be part of a collective environment. I was about to be a little bit cheeky and say, 'Yeah, the rise in them's falling.' I was about to say, 'Oh, goody!', because I have to say that that is pretty much my view—that is, that QWAs are an anachronism. We have left them in the act because it was there. It has been the view of a succession of state governments, including this state government, that it is indeed ideal if you can have a level of complementary provisions with the federal act. So we left the QWAs there, largely consistent with AWAs. Ours are open. They are not secret deals and, frankly, I think it is desirable that they be open. Industrial agreements traditionally have been open and publicly available. We hear an enormous amount about transparency and accountability from government, yet some people want to make dirty deals that employers do with individual employees secret. We do not agree with that. Frankly, we have left them in the act consistent with the previous AWAs, or fairly consistent, except that we do have that change. We are not unhappy at all at the fact that people are choosing to be part of collective agreements rather than individual contracts.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I refer to the accommodation costs for government employed staff attending training sessions and workshops in attachment 1 to non-government question on notice No. 4. It is a very similar question to one we asked before. Minister, is it the case that the figure for accommodation in one case was \$4,740 for the cost of accommodation for a government employee attending? If so, how can you justify this exorbitant cost for accommodation? That is question No. 4 on the questions on notice that we received back.

Mr BARTON: Question 4. Which sheet are we looking at?

Mr ROWELL: We are looking at sheet 7. It is actually sheet 7.

Mr BARTON: Sheet 7?

Mr ROWELL: Yes, 'Cost of each employed attendee by travel and accommodation'. That is the heading at the top of it.

Mr BARTON: On page 7?

Mr ROWELL: Yes. When you look down in accommodation, at the top of the heading it talks about cost of each government employed attendee by travel, accommodation, room and other equipment hire.

Mr BARTON: I seem to have two different sheets here.

Mr ROWELL: Can I send it over to you to make it easier?

Mr BARTON: It might help. I am trying to identify what you are talking about.

Mr ROWELL: It is page 7.

Mr BARTON: Yes. I cannot find the formal words you are talking about.

Mr ROWELL: The cost down the bottom with regard to the workshop for the CQWHSQ 2005 for operational planning, when you go across to the actual accommodation it says \$4,740.

Mr BARTON: Can anyone find it, because I cannot find it yet? What number is the page of yours?

Mr ROWELL: Page 7 of question 4.

Mr BARTON: He has page 1 on his and I cannot find it on page 7, so—

Mr ROWELL: I will send it over to you then. I have put a ring around it, Minister.

Mr BARTON: I think we are under a misapprehension. I think I am now looking at the same page. It is attachment 1 and I have page 1.

Mr ROWELL: The attendant is behind you actually.

Mr BARTON: Okay, but you were telling me it was page 7. It is page 1. No wonder I could not find it on page 7. It is actually page 1. I think you are under some misapprehension here. The title is not real good. It equates to about \$110 per person per room, which are hardly exorbitant accommodation costs. So what is the problem?

Mr ROWELL: It said each government employee attending. Is the heading a little bit misleading?

Mr BARTON: I think you are looking at the wrong column. That is the total cost. Which one? Are we talking about the CQWHSQ 2004 operational planning meeting?

Mr ROWELL: It is 2005.

Mr BARTON: Okay, 2005. It says here that the total cost of each participant is \$313.88.

Mr ROWELL: What about the \$4,740?

Mr BARTON: That is the total cost for everybody.

Mr ROWELL: It said each.

Mr BARTON: No, it does not actually. The only place it says total cost of each participant is two columns prior to that. Is that correct?

CHAIR: Do you seek an extension of time?

Mr BARTON: I do not care. I have answered the question.

Mr ROWELL: What you are saying is that, while it might say each—

CHAIR: Is this your next question, member for Hinchinbrook?

Mr BARTON: Make it your next question and I will try to answer it for you, and I will be quick.

Mr ROWELL: While it might refer to each employee, what you are saying is that the total cost of each participant in the previous column does not necessarily relate. What I am saying is that it quite clearly says on the top heading 'Cost of each government employed attendee by travel, accommodation, room and equipment hire' and then when you look down at accommodation it says that. All I want you to do is explain what that really means—that is, the \$4,740.

Mr BARTON: There is another column further up that says the total cost per participant, the total cost per participant. It may well be that that whole glad bag of seven columns under that title—that does appear to be a bit misleading—are total costs, not per person, which is what you are concerned about. I would be with you. If it was a cost per person, I would be wanting to know why they were all staying in presidential suites.

Mr ROWELL: I wanted it clarified. All right then.

Mr BARTON: If you come back to the column immediately before that, there is a column saying total cost of each participant. In that particular seminar it is \$313.88 without needing to drill down further, which I really do not want to do here. I do not bring every account that the department raises. Again, I just stress that without wanting to reopen that whole debate we have given you very comprehensive answers—very comprehensive answers. Last time you wanted to know who the guest speaker was. I have now provided that. But if you want to know who had a buttered bun, I cannot tell you and I do not want to know and I have no intentions of finding out.

Mr ROWELL: Page 2-6 of the MPS provides the staffing outputs. Minister, will you please detail from these outputs how many inspectors across the department are able to undertake electrical safety audits and investigations as part of their employment? Could you provide the number of senior electrical staff inspectors employed in your department and where these senior inspectors are currently based across Queensland?

Mr BARTON: I do not think that is a fair question. We will give you what we can give you now. Again, you are reaching in for great detail that really is suitable for a question on notice, not hitting someone now. We have 26 inspectors in the Electrical Safety Office.

Mr ROWELL: Would you like to take it on notice?

Mr BARTON: No, because I think it is an unfair question. These are the sorts of things that you should be asking in questions on notice, not wanting to drill down how many inspectors there are and where they are based. I am sure it is in an annual report, I am sure it is somewhere else that you can readily get hold of, but I have not brought all of that with me. We have 25 inspectors in the Electrical Safety Office and we have about 16 in Workplace Health and Safety. They are located in a range of

locations right across Queensland where the department has offices. But to expect me to know exactly every location of every inspector in the department off the top of my head here at a hearing is a little bit rich. These are dedicated to that, and there are other inspectors who would also come across these areas to some degree. It is not real black and white. So to take it on notice, I am not even sure what the question is other than—again, I hate to keep trying to debate process, but you are asking us for how many inspectors there are and where they are located. All I can tell you is they wear blue shirts with the Beattie burger on it and 'Industrial Relations', 'Occupational Health and Safety' or 'Electrical Safety Office' on the other side.

Mr ROWELL: Page 2-33 of the MPS is the output for electrical safety services and it details whether a number of different targets have been met for the 2004-05 financial year. Of the 1,900 electrical investigations conducted in 2004-05 how many of these were timed out due to their length and can you explain how this works?

Mr BARTON: How many—

Mr ROWELL: Were timed out.

Mr BARTON: Timed out?

Mr ROWELL: Yes.

Mr BARTON: What does that mean?

Mr ROWELL: How did you arrive at the actual time that they spent, the time of the actual inspection? Were they actually timed as far as the amount of time that was involved in the inspection and was this recorded? Across the department there are a number of inspectors and, of course, their time is absolutely essential.

Mr BARTON: What are you suggesting, that we put a stopwatch on them?

Mr ROWELL: But usually they do write down exactly the amount of time they go to a particular inquiry and the time that they spend at it.

Mr BARTON: Could I come back to a little bit of philosophy about management. Of course we monitor our people. We have a very good management system in this department, as we have with my other department, as we have with every department I have ever been responsible for. Our people in management and supervisory positions do overview what people are doing to make sure that we are getting good value for money out of our employees and that our employees are working as effectively as they can. Sometimes you find that, whatever the job is, if someone is taking an enormous amount of time on something that you would think should be done quicker it usually means that there is a problem that needs some additional support, for example to that person in the form of training, or that the job is bigger than anyone envisaged.

Not only do you want to know how many there are and where are they located; now you want to know how long each one of them spent on each job. Fair go! How long does it take you to read the bloody MPS and concoct these questions? How long is a piece of string? As I say, we do monitor it—we have proper management structures in place—but you are really getting to that point again where you are drilling down and wanting detailed answers that no-one could be expected to answer here at a hearing. Frankly, it also falls into another category of the standing orders for estimates about putting onerous requirements on departments in terms of even questions on notice.

Of course, in proper management structures we monitor how many prosecutions they do and how long it takes; we monitor how many visits they do, how many inspections, how many audits. That is a proper management role. I do not know that anyone records anywhere that inspector 15 did 55 of these and he spent four hours on this one and two hours and three minutes on this one. I just do not know how we answer that question. I am not trying to be difficult. I just do not know how you answer it. Obviously, you are looking for something else. It might be better if you put what you are digging for on the deck and we will try to answer it for you.

Mr ROWELL: Can you explain why the senior electrical safety inspector is not required to have an electrical contracting licence to undertake investigations as currently required by Q-Build workers performing the same work? If the case would be conceded, the community would have every right to be concerned as to whether our inspectors are legally qualified to undertake this type of work.

CHAIR: What is your question exactly? It sounds like a statement to me. Can you clarify and tighten up the question and ask it.

Mr ROWELL: If this is the case, would you concede that the community would have every right to be concerned as to whether our inspectors are legally qualified to be undertaking this type of work?

Mr BARTON: They are doing work under the act. I think we need to drill down into the act if we are going to get to the bottom of this. I am happy to have you briefed about that provision because it is pretty clear that we have got a whinger or malcontent in the division somewhere who is feeding nonsense to you. They are not doing contract work. They do not need a contractor's licence because they are not contractors; they are inspectors. They are properly qualified for their role in accordance with

the Electrical Safety Act. There is no requirement for an inspector to have a contracting licence. We do have this backed up with legal advice, because obviously the malcontent has raised it before. If he is not happy working for the department he should go somewhere else. In turn, this has been properly backed up with legal advice. Again I stress that contracting licences are for people who are actually doing electrical contracting work. My inspectors are not out there doing electrical contracting work, but they are very highly qualified people who have the necessary licensing, have the necessary skills and are appropriately and adequately covered by the provisions of the act.

Mr LANGBROEK: Can I thank the staff from the Department of Industrial Relations for being here. Minister, I would like to turn to page 2-29, electrical safety services. Given the fact that the Ombudsman recently attacked both the Electrical Safety Office and Workplace Health and Safety for breaching their own guidelines and had concerns about the investigation into 12 deaths, including the tragic case of a three-year-old and her mother who were electrocuted by fallen powerlines back in 1998, what steps has the minister taken to improve investigative procedures and what has the department done concerning compensation to these grieving families?

CHAIR: It might be a question in two parts. Do you want to ask it in two separate questions?

Mr LANGBROEK: Happily.

Mr BARTON: Let me talk about this in a broad sense first, even before I go to my briefing notes. I think there is a misnomer here which I have been concerned about since the first media came out when this report was released I think last Thursday morning by the Ombudsman. I am not trying to pick on the media because it is a very complex issue and a very complex report over issues that have been going on since the mid 1990s. There is a perception as a result of the way the stories were presented, and not just in the *Courier-Mail's* story but also by ABC Radio and various others. I want to say that I am not being critical of the media, because they have had to try to cover a very complex set of issues. But it appears from those stories, if you were not familiar with it, that, in fact, the Ombudsman has just found all these problems in the Electrical Safety Office and the Department of Workplace Health and Safety that have been doing the wrong thing up until now, it has been uncovered by the Ombudsman and we are being asked to respond.

In fact, these problems all occurred in the 1990s, right back to the mid 1990s. As a result of inquiries then and recommendations from coroners there was major change made. In fact, there was legislative change made in 2002. The Electrical Safety Office that was criticised was the old Electrical Safety Office as it was when it sat with the Department of Energy. That Electrical Safety Office and the old Workplace Health and Safety, pre the legislation in 2002 that brought them over—they were sitting in two separate departments—had not been coordinating as well as they could and should have been. The government responded at that time. There have been various coroners' reports—and they have come back one at a time—into a number of tragic deaths, but the Ombudsman has then completed an overall review of that, which is appropriate, and also listed a whole host of things that he considered should be recommendations. There were 92 recommendations of which 87 have already been implemented.

The steps that the Ombudsman talked about are not new; they are recommendations that we already knew about. In fact, three of the five that are outstanding—and if I could have a little bit of time it would be probably easier than asking another question.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr BARTON: Three of those five relate to proposals that have been put to families of the deceased with regard to, I understand, compensation. I understand that the families, which is their right and their decision, have chosen not to respond. I am not sure whether that means that they are going to seek other measures for compensation or not. I think that is a matter for them. Three of those are not complete simply because until the families do respond to us we cannot go any further on three of the outstanding five. We are seeking to work out appropriate compensation for those families. Two others are in train and we simply have not completed them yet. My deputy director-general says that the two remaining are in relation to long-term projects and that substantial progress has been made in both of them. The two projects are crane electrical safety and the assessment of the design and operation of Versalift elevated work platforms. They are works in progress; they are not straightforward. Three we cannot complete despite our desire to and they relate to that crucial issue of compensation.

I want to really set the record straight because I know how difficult it is to report complex issues. You cannot report something that takes 150 pages in eight column inches or a 20-second grab on radio. The perception is certainly there that I am presiding over two divisions of a department that are incompetent. That is not the case. I would have to say that the two divisions previously had problems, but that has been fixed and we are well on top of it now and both those divisions are very, very professional.

Mr LANGBROEK: My next question relates to page 2-30 of the MPS. Dot point 4 refers to the Electrical Safety Office launching an expensive TV advertising campaign promoting the use of safety switches in homes, particularly highlighting the potential dangers for children, and I ask: are these life-

saving devices installed in all government buildings including schools—and I realise you may not be able to answer that—and TAFE colleges? If not, why not?

Mr BARTON: I had to deal with this recently when I was the acting education minister. The issue is safety switches in schools. In school classrooms most plug-in electrical equipment must be either connected to a safety switch or tested and inspected annually. In the office areas of schools, most plug-in electrical equipment must be either connected to a safety switch or tested and inspected every five years. The department has promoted the installation of safety switches and has spent over \$360,000 in the last two years on advertising to this end, with a further sum in excess of \$190,000 budgeted for safety switch advertising up to 30 June 2005.

Typical government buildings would be comparable. I had the information on schools because the issue was raised by people in the media several weeks ago, and understandably so. A few children had had shocks, which we had investigated. Thankfully not only no-one was killed but also no-one was seriously hurt. All new schools have safety switches installed as the schools are built. Progressively the switches are being updated in schools. Again, our role is to inspect and to encourage; I do not make judgments for Education and nor am I in charge of Education's budget.

Fairly consistent with this is an issue that the Ombudsman raises in his reports on electrical safety. He asked my director-general, not me, to review whether our current program was adequate. Our current program with housing is that all new homes since 1992, I think it is, have to have safety switches installed. As a house changes hands, within three months of settlement they have to be installed. So we are progressively catching up, so to speak. To make them mandatory overnight was something that the government was not prepared to do. There has been very significant consultation on that.

Our estimate is that 75 per cent of domestic residences now have safety switches installed and that is because there has been some time given for that changeover requirement. It is our intention to revisit that and have a look at that later in the year. Whether or not we will take a decision to make it mandatory or have a further phase-in period to hustle it along, I do not know. I am not going to pre-empt the review. My experience has been, and I think it would be your experience as well, that when you unilaterally tell people that they must spend money and that they must spend it by a particular date you usually get a pretty harsh reaction. That is why it has been done in the way that it has, with a phase-in period. Our numbers are the best in the country. We are leading the nation.

I would accept that, yes, it would be desirable for every house to have a safety switch. Every time I buy a house that does not have one it is the first thing I put in. Of course, that has been mandatory for some time now. We catch up when people are buying houses. The cost of \$600 or \$700 does not worry them then, whereas it would if you just spring it on them and they have not got \$600 in their personal budget and then you say, 'Tough bickies—go put it in.'

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Minister. In 2002, as you mentioned, Queensland legislated for the mandatory installation of safety switches within three months. Can you tell me how many prosecutions or fines have been issued for noncompliance? I am not trying to drill down here. I think this is reasonable.

Mr BARTON: I do not know whether we have those figures over that period of time. We would have the numbers of prosecutions that we have done in the last year but whether we have drilled down to the number involving safety switches—there is no hiding; we do not mind telling you this information if we have it. We do not have a break down of information in relation to safety switches. We have total figures. I probably quoted them in my opening statement when I was talking more about award breaches. The Electrical Safety Office finalised 22 prosecutions between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2005. The total cost in fines was \$144,766. I do not have a break up.

Mr LANGBROEK: So some of those may be noncompliance of safety switches.

Mr BARTON: No, that is all.

Mr LANGBROEK: Some of those 22 prosecutions may be, potentially—

Mr BARTON: I would think some would be, but I could not definitively tell you. If it is really important to you, I will find out.

Mr LANGBROEK: I think people have had three years to comply and if they are not complying now then probably we should start fining people.

Mr BARTON: We are developing a review of safety switches in domestic residences. The purpose of the review is to develop appropriate mechanisms for increasing the installations. We are going to look at the whole thing. No doubt you will come back and remind me towards the end of the year if we have not said anything publicly, which is appropriate. We do want to enhance this. That is why we spend a fortune on advertising—whether it is TV ads, or paper ads or radio ads. We actually do want people to install safety switches. My wife nearly fried a couple of years ago. She was playing with an iron which she knew she should not have been playing with and it blew and the safety switch saved her. Things happen.

Mr LANGBROEK: It is an important issue.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members.

Mr WELLS: Page 2-18 of the MPS makes reference to the federal government's agenda for a national industrial relations system. Can the minister explain the Queensland government's posture with respect to these proposed so-called reforms?

Mr BARTON: Very clearly, what we have in this state is a success story that says that the rhetoric of the Prime Minister is irrelevant to this issue, particularly so far as Queensland is concerned. The Prime Minister says that we need to do this so that we can get economic growth so that we can create jobs so that we can go forward. What we have in this state right now is the strongest economic growth in the nation. In fact, our economic growth is about double the national average, and we have consistently been the leader in economic growth and ahead of the national average for five or six years now. We have the lowest unemployment in the country—4.9 per cent is the most recent figure available. I think there will be some more figures out today, but I have not got them yet.

We have the lowest level of industrial disputes. Up to March 2005 we were standing at just 4.3 working days lost per 1,000 employees compared with Victoria. I am not trying to pick on Victoria, but I have to draw the comparison because Victoria has the unitised system that John Howard says that he wants. The Kennett government handed over its state industrial jurisdiction to the federal government and the Victorian Labor Party government chose not to pull it back. So where you have the unitised system that John Howard says will give you economic growth—'We will give you prosperity, we will give you more jobs, we will give you low levels of industrial disputation'—Victoria is lagging on jobs growth, lagging on economic growth and has an industrial disputation level of 10.2 per 1,000 employees compared to Queensland's 4.3 per cent. We also know that our system is widely supported by the business community, particularly the small business community. I notice an article in the *Courier-Mail* today in which Patrick McKendry, on behalf of the National Retail Association, acknowledges the concerns of small business about the system because of the loss of common rule awards.

We believe that we have a system that is the cornerstone of delivering economic prosperity to this state. We have jobs growth that is more than double the national average. Here in Queensland we are creating 40 per cent of all the new full-time jobs in the nation. We are delivering economic outputs and we are giving people fair conditions and a low number of disputes, and John Howard wants to come along with his brave new world and throw the whole thing away. We are going to oppose it very, very solidly. We will take High Court challenges, if necessary. The Premier and I have announced other legislative changes that we will bring into the parliament before the end of the year. If John Howard and his government want to run over us then they will have to run over us, and we will see them in the High Court and we will see who wins.

Mr WELLS: I refer again to page 2-18 of the MPS. Can the minister give some information about how deregulation of the labour market under the federal government's IR so-called reform agenda will impact on Queensland families?

Mr BARTON: Yes, I can. The only reason that we go to work is to get a decent lifestyle for ourselves and our families. That is the fundamental reason. The federal government's proposal is very bad news for Queensland workers and families. It will undermine basic employment rights of job security, fair wages and fair working conditions that are crucial for working class families. Employees who work in businesses with up to 100 employees can be unfairly dismissed with no right to seek a remedy.

Kevin Andrews, I think his name is, claims to be a Christian. He has been saying that there are other remedies. Yes, there are—antidiscrimination commissions and what have you—if it is a relevant matter but they are legally driven and the average worker does not have the financial capacity to go to them. Just over 1,000 cases are handled by our state Industrial Relations Commission each year. That is hardly a plethora of people running off to the state commission for unfair dismissals but it is an absolutely crucial safety net for people who are dismissed unfairly. Our estimate is that, in taking it out to firms with 100 employees or more, the great bulk of the private sector work force in Queensland—I think it is in excess of 75 per cent—will have no recourse to unfair dismissals. Queensland is also the state with the highest percentage of small business. If John Howard were to get his way then 75 per cent of the employees in the private sector would have no recourse if they were dismissed in an unfair way.

Also, if the federal government had had its way in the national wage case, then workers in this nation on minimum wages would be worse off by \$50 a week. That is what would have happened if the Howard government's submission had been accepted at the national wage case, rather than the reasonable balance that was achieved by all of the states, including Queensland, getting together and putting arguments forward to find a happy medium between the ACTU's claim and that of the Howard government's claim, which was basically to give them buggar all. Working families in this state have every reason to fear that their minimum wages will be dropped, that they will have no recourse if they get sacked and that, as recently as yesterday, Kevin Andrews was forced to admit that employees could be forced to trade away two weeks of their annual leave. That is just to mention three issues, but there is a whole range of other conditions.

Mr FINN: Minister, I would like to come back to industrial disputation. One of my concerns is the current upheaval of Australia's industrial relations system and the impact that that will have on levels of industrial disputations. I note that page 2-16 of the MPS makes reference to industrial disputation. Can you outline the current levels of industrial disputation in Queensland and Australia and how they have changed over time?

Mr BARTON: Yes. We have historically low levels of industrial disputation in Queensland at this time. Again, up to March 2005, Queensland's quarterly strike rate averaged 4.3 working days per 1,000. I have repeated that because they are brilliant figures, and we will be repeating them over and over again. Victoria had 8.2 averaged over a 12-month period. That figure is different from the 10.2 average that I mentioned before because it is a different time frame. Victoria's figure is still double what ours is.

The QIR Act introduced by the Beattie government has contributed to our historically low strike rates, with its emphasis on good faith bargaining and conciliation by a strong, independent umpire. The state industrial relations regime, like other state industrial systems, has been very effective at conciliating and resolving disputes before they get out of hand. In fact, recent comments by a senior executive of BlueScope Steel praised state industrial relations systems for providing swift access to remedies without the need for crippling economic damage.

State systems have a record of resolving disputes quickly and efficiently, unlike the federal system, which governs IR in Victoria. The headquarters of the AIRC is in Victoria, and it has not even been able to fix up disputes that are in its own backyard.

During the period since its election, the Beattie government has ensured progression to very low industrial dispute levels with the quarterly strike rate averaging, over the entire period of the Beattie government, 9.3 days lost. We are now down to less than half of that, which is well below the national average of 14.1 during the same period. It is less than two-thirds of the national figure over a seven-year time frame. To put it into context, during the period of the Borbidge government the state recorded a quarterly average strike rate of 26.5 days lost—currently it is 4.3—and the national average at that time was 24.5.

I applaud the work that our Queensland Industrial Relations Commission does because it also has a difficult role. It does a good job. Recently there was one of the two matters I have personally intervened in. When I say 'intervened', in the end the commission did it without formal intervention by me but I sent one of my officers down to the conference. One night, at about 6 o'clock, we were faced with a set of circumstances such that there was going to be a wildcat strike. A couple of thousand kids in the member for Redlands' area were going to be left on wharves and footpaths. There were going to be no buses. QIRC was able to meet straightaway. It took until about 9.30 to round up the parties. By 11 o'clock we had a settlement. It was fixed. The kids were picked up for school the next day. You do not get that sort of service in the federal body. I know that because I used to be an advocate in both tribunals in an earlier working life.

Mr FINN: Thanks, Minister. Another of my concerns regarding the Howard government's IR changes is the removal of independent determination of national minimum wage cases. I note on page 2-17 of the MPS that the government prepared a submission to the 2005 national wage case. I ask: can you outline the government's approach to wage fixing as evidenced by its submission?

Mr BARTON: Yes. I probably got a little bit ahead of myself before, stealing some of your thunder. Let us just go back over it again because it is crucial. In just the last one the Queensland government and all of the other state governments—and we have done this consistently for a period of time and well before I came into the role—collectively got together and had a good look at what they thought was a fair outcome from minimum wage hearings. I do not have the figure here, but I think the claim for the last national wage bench—it probably will be the last ever national wage bench—was \$28.60. The Queensland government and the other state governments put forward \$20 and the commission awarded \$17. The federal government was arguing for \$11 a week. We argued for \$20 and all the other states argued for \$20. The commission, in its wisdom, granted \$17. We had similar outcomes in the one before that. I think we argued for \$20. The claim was for about \$29, we argued for \$20 and I think the Howard government argued for \$10 or \$11. I think the commission came down with \$19.

Reducing wages is not achieved just by taking money out of pay packets; it is achieved when you do not give an increase that at least keeps people up with inflation because inflation takes it out of the pay packet. Had its submissions been accepted, the Howard government would have ensured that the lowest paid workers in this country, including in this state, would now be \$50 a week worse off. This is the very same group that is now saying, 'Trust us. We're not about reducing wages.' It also wants us to hand over the state system to it. That will mean that our employees under common rule awards do not have anywhere to go. It is promising that it will put in place some form of quasi common rule award, but when Kevin Andrews was in town last week he was asked about that by employer groups and he could not answer it. He does not know how he is going to do it. He is out there saying, 'I have this legislation. I am going to bring it in, but I am going to create a vacuum.' He does not know the answer.

Mr FINN: Thanks, Minister. I turn now to the renegotiation of enterprise bargaining agreements covering Queensland government agencies. This is referred to on page 2-36 of the MPS. Minister, can you provide details of current public sector wage bargaining with particular reference to the energy sector?

Mr BARTON: Yes. We as a government aim to be a good employer. We are an employer. I guess, collectively, we are the biggest employer in the state and we aim to be a good employer. We have agreements negotiated with unions to meet the needs of each agency and its employees, resulting in differences between agreements across the sector and different operative dates. We are now in the middle of a number of negotiations which I am very confident we will be able to conclude successfully and with a minimum of fuss. Agreements that are currently under negotiation include Department of Public Works, Q-Build field staff; Education Queensland, teacher aides; Queensland Ambulance Service; Main Roads; WorkCover; Q-Comp; Queensland Health employees, other than nurses; and Queensland Health visiting medical officers.

In addition to that we also oversee the work of government owned corporations. I am pleased to advise that the government has been able to work with the majority of unions in the electricity industry to achieve wage outcomes that greatly assist in the implementation of the electricity distribution and service delivery review—the Somerville review. That showed very clearly that we could only meet the skill shortages by training a hell of a lot more people—and we are—and by meeting wage rates that were comparable because a lot of our electrical staff, including staff in the government electricity bodies, were being poached or being attracted to the resources boom that is on. If you are an electrician and there is such a shortage, why would you stay at a much lower wage rate when you can go down the road to a project?

We did successfully seek to negotiate outcomes there. We did negotiate increases in wage rates at 3.5 per cent plus a further one per cent contingent on achieving stated productivity measures. We also put in place what are known as the EDSD attraction and retention allowances of \$1.50 an hour from 16 February 2005, plus \$1 an hour from 16 February 2006, plus a further \$0.55 an hour from 16 February 2007 for specific technical and field staff. There was also one-off payments of \$1,500 from 16 February 2005, a further \$1,000 from 16 February 2006 and \$500 from 16 February 2007 for specific professional and technical staff not identified as being the field staff. I make no apologies for the fact that we went out to pay the field staff. Some people wanted to rock the boat, but there have now been ballots of all employees. They have been accepted by huge majorities. In Ergon about 92 per cent of employees accepted. A week ago in Energen about 90 per cent of employees accepted. In Powerlink I think about 78 per cent accepted. We now have formal commission approval for both the Ergon and Powerlink agreements, and I expect to have those agreements. That is going to be crucial to us to retain our existing technical and field staff and to attract new employees to allow us to complete the job of putting the distribution network back in place.

Mr ENGLISH: Page 2-29 of the MPS refers to strategies the department has developed in response to the recommendations of the Ombudsman's workplace electrocution project. As you said in a previous answer, it is quite a complex issue. Can the Minister please detail how the department has progressed these recommendations and the outcomes of any action that has been taken?

Mr BARTON: Yes. I think it probably would be helpful, even though we took a bit of time on it before, to just talk about it a bit more in the broad sense. Recommendations from the Workplace Electrocution Project and the subsequent electrical safety task force were fundamental in reviewing the regulation of electrical safety in Queensland. The department implemented the majority of the recommendations and a number of electrical safety initiatives before the release of the Ombudsman's report, so we were well under way. Some of the strategies that have been developed to address the issues in the report include the implementation of legislation which incorporates a framework of obligations and specific requirements aimed at improving electrical safety in Queensland; the appointment of an independent commissioner of electrical safety who provides advice on electrical safety matters and who chairs the Electrical Safety Board and board committees established under the legislation—he reports direct to me; and the review of the enforcement framework and investigation protocol to improve safety and administration issues identified by the Ombudsman.

The implementation of the new legislation—that is the 2002 legislation—means that Queensland is the only state to mandate the retro-fitting of safety switches in domestic residences on change of ownership. We are the only state that does it. That is why we are well ahead, because the other states have not faced up to this in any shape or form yet. The implementation of these initiatives has coincided with a decrease in electrical fatalities for this period. We are concerned that there is a bit of a blip in the last 12 months, so we are renewing our efforts, but there has been a very significant decline in the number of electrical fatalities.

The Electrical Safety Office has also been progressing recommendations of the reports and various projects aimed at improving electrical safety in Queensland. Various projects have addressed safety issues of high voltage powerlines including updating an industry code of practice, conducting education and awareness campaigns, improving the effectiveness of cable joins and conducting

compliance audits of the crane industry. Ongoing work includes regular consultation with crane industry representatives and education campaigns designed to highlight the public's awareness of electrical safety.

The two real outstanding recommendations that were in the Ombudsman's report relate to crane safety and those high-lift type vehicles. The same issues are involved in this area as pertain to crane safety. People get on them and they are looking at where they are going to place the thing they are carrying and they run into the powerlines that were above them that they did not realise were there.

Mr ENGLISH: On page 2-30 of the MPS you refer to recommendations made as a result of the review of the electrical distribution network, the Somerville report. Minister, can you please provide details of what action has been taken to implement these recommendations as they relate to electrical safety in Queensland?

Mr BARTON: Yes, I would love to. The review of electrical distribution service delivery addressed electricity distribution network performance, expenditure programs, and systems and processes. The Queensland government, together with industry bodies, worked to develop an implementation plan to address the findings and recommendations of the review. The Electrical Safety Office has developed a range of strategies for increasing the electrical safety of distribution networks including auditing of the electricity entities. These audits target specific management systems that affect distribution network safety such as vegetation management systems, high voltage switching systems, pole and cross-arm maintenance systems, recruitment and training, and live line accreditation.

Prearranged and unannounced field audits are also conducted to ensure the entity's safety management systems and other safety procedures are being implemented at an operational level. The recommendations of the review implied that significant changes were required to the distribution networks. A challenge during these upgrades is controlling the electrical safety risk posed by heightened activity and ensuring that people performing the network installation and maintenance work are appropriately trained and licensed.

The Electrical Safety Office has recruited additional staff, including regional electrical safety inspectors, to deliver the compliance, inspection and enforcement services required as a result of the review's recommendations. Again I would stress that the electrical safety commissioner, who reports to me, was actually a member of the Somerville review team. That means that he has a very intimate knowledge of exactly what was found during that review.

One of the really important things for us, as the Electrical Safety Office responsible for electrical safety standards, is that when there is such a heightened amount of work we will have a lot of new people entering the distribution system in particular. It will not affect Powerlink so much because Powerlink owns the major transmission lines, and I think it is pretty right.

Certainly in Ergon's and Energex's networks we do anticipate not only training a large number of new people and a huge number of new apprentices but also attracting a lot of new people whose skills we need. Making sure that they are operating safely is going to be absolutely crucial, because we do not want to rebuild the electricity network at the expense of injuries or lives because we are not up to speed. So we have renewed our efforts in this regard in terms of our electrical safety officers' activity, and training has redoubled its efforts for training electrical people for those energy corporations, and we are confident we are going to do it well.

Mr ENGLISH: On pages 2-30 and 2-32 of the MPS you refer to educational campaigns aimed at increasing awareness of electrical safety issues in Queensland. The TV campaign has already been mentioned, but can you outline the full range of promotional activities undertaken to educate the community on electrical safety issues within the industry?

Mr BARTON: As you have seen, the government takes electrical safety very seriously. We are running a number of educational campaigns including keeping safety switches in the minds of householders, and we have talked about them at length. Currently the department is running a campaign that focuses on alerting the public to the difference between a safety switch and a circuit-breaker and the need for safety switches to be tested once every three months. A lot of people think a safety switch and a circuit-breaker are one and the same thing. Sadly, the circuit-breaker will come on but probably after the current has killed you, because it will not pick it up as quickly as a safety switch.

Over the last year, the department has also run other campaigns targeted at particular electrical safety issues—namely, 'Safety Switches Save Lives'. Another very important one is 'Don't DIY, Get a Licensed Electrical Contractor'. That is crucial. We are in an era of do-it-yourself home renovations. They are some of the most popular television shows around. Everybody thinks they are an instant bricklayer, carpenter and concrete form setter, and some of them think they are instant electricians. You can go down to Bunnings—I am not knocking Bunnings—or Mitre 10 and buy all the electrical fittings you want off the rack. Once upon a time the only way you could get them was through an electrical contractor. Now they are there for everyone to pick up. There are increasing numbers of people who think, 'I can do this,' and they read a diagram. It is not that simple.

I must admit that I let my electrical licence go a couple of years ago. In some ways I think I shouldn't have because I would make a lot more money going back to my trade than I am making now. So I cannot do it myself either because I have let my licence go. Another campaign is 'Steer Clear of Live Electricity' to try to get the message across. In the old days it used to be called 'Look up and Live', but still there are issues relating to cranes and high-lift platforms. Steer clear of it. 'Maintain Electrical Equipment' is another campaign. I think all of us, probably me included except for my very fast car, tend to think that things do not need to be maintained. They run, so they are all right. With electrical equipment you do need a level of maintenance over a period of time.

The total costs associated with running the campaigns and education programs are approximately \$1.255 million. The department is working in conjunction with the electricity industry to provide ongoing guidance about its obligations under the electrical safety legislation. I have to say that we have a good relationship with the industry and with the private contracting association as well.

CHAIR: Minister, page 2-9 of the MPS states that one of the key services provided by Workplace Health and Safety involves inspection, advisory and enforcement activities to promote compliance with workplace health and safety laws and standards. Could you outline what the department is doing to assist council in managing complaints regarding asbestos sheeting in homes? I think there are two minutes left to do that.

Mr BARTON: Thanks for the question. As we have seen, it is a very topical issue at the moment, particularly in schools, but it is one that we need to be concerned about at a broader range of places. I know on the Gold Coast there has been the issue of the old boat shed—I think it is called the boat shed. Again, we are concerned about dangers from this increase in home renovators. People decide to knock down the fibro wall in the old car port and do something fancy with it without realising what they are dealing with. Basically every house built in Brisbane or Queensland prior to about 1984 has some asbestos in it, including the people with brick veneer tiled roof homes who say, 'We have not got any fibro in our house,' but even the tilux sheets that appear in some bathrooms are asbestos based. Vinyl tiles are asbestos based. So when people get excited about asbestos in schools I understand why, but in the main most of them are living with more asbestos than exists in the schools right now.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from non-government members.

Mr ROWELL: Referring to the same sector that was mentioned by a government member about safety and security with communities, we talked about inspection, advisory and enforcement activities. Is it possible that, despite being issued with a safety notification or prosecution, unlicensed contractors could continue to perform up to hundreds of additional jobs? If that is the case, could you provide any details and cases where this may have occurred?

Mr BARTON: Where what may occur?

Mr ROWELL: Where they are not licensed and where notifications or prosecutions have been issued and that unlicensed contractor could continue to perform up to hundreds of additional jobs such as installing airconditioners and that sort of thing.

Mr BARTON: We have had a few examples. There are a couple that we were very familiar with, Marc. I think the example that you gave was airconditioner installations. Let us talk about Maryborough. Maryborough probably had the worst offender. A guy by the name of David Chester was convicted in the Maryborough Industrial Magistrates Court on 1 November 2004 on 12 counts of unlicensed electrical work and unlicensed electrical contracting work. Mr Chester, following his first conviction, undertook further electrical work and has been charged with further offences. An electrical contractor was also convicted of issuing false test certificates for Mr Chester and was fined \$4,000 in the Maryborough Industrial Magistrates Court. He is probably the worst example, and he has gone missing.

Mr ROWELL: Like Patel probably.

Mr BARTON: We might find him in Seattle, I guess. I will have to send Tony McGrady over to bring him back. We had this guy. Frankly, it showed up. He did a shoddy job, someone made a complaint and we picked him up and charged him with 12 offences and convicted him. Even after we convicted him, he went off and did it again. We caught him again and we have charged him with further offences. The only reason we do not have those further offences finalised is that he has gone into smoke.

It is a bit like the problem I had when I was the police minister. You cannot have a police officer standing on every corner in case someone does something wrong. Then they would sneak around behind the police officer and do it behind the fence. He is probably the worst offender that meets the concern you have. What happens if we convict them and they head off and do more? Well, in this guy's case we caught up with him again and we charged him again. Whether he is operating somewhere under a false name or whether he has gone interstate or what has happened to him, we do not know. We cannot find him to finalise the processes. All I would say is that I would be pretty confident if he sticks his head up again around Queensland doing illegal work we will pick him up again and nail him for the other offences as well.

Mr ROWELL: On page 22 of the MPS, dot point 5 under 'Services' refers to information, education and training activities to assist industry employees and the community to reduce the risk of injury, fire, explosion and improved electrical safety. Minister, is it the case that there is no training course as far as these inspectors are concerned? Could you please fill us in on that, particularly on electrical fire investigation?

Mr BARTON: You have been talking to this recalcitrant again, haven't you?

Mr ROWELL: No, there are no recalcitrants out there; there are people who are concerned.

Mr BARTON: I will let the DG answer this in terms of the amount of training that our people get. I normally do not flick questions, but, rather than him whispering in my ear again and me telling you the figure, he knows the figures off the top of his head.

Mr Henneken: Mr Rowell, both in workplace health and safety and electrical safety we have a very comprehensive training program which is 20 weeks. It leads to a diploma in workplace inspection and it is seen around the country as the best training of its type around. In addition, in the Electrical Safety Office about half of the inspectors are also trained in fire investigations or in working out whether a fire was caused by an electrical fault. In those cases we do work very closely with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the police. For example, if you look at what happened at that boarding home in Sandgate, our investigators were in there with the police and with the Fire and Rescue Service to work out that part of the cause was an electrical fault.

Mr BARTON: I do not know who is telling you that they do not get any training. I wanted the DG to give you the actual hours that our inspectors are trained, and I guess it would be true that not every single one of them gets specialist fire training but they get an element of it in their broad training and about half of them are trained in that very specialist area. You must have a dud whom we will not let do it complaining to you.

Mr ROWELL: Well, there are people who are concerned out there, Minister. On page 2-10 of the MPS, dot point 1 refers to the fines of \$2.92 million resulting from the finalisation of 150 prosecutions in 2004-05. It is dealing with workplace health and safety. Row 3 on page 2-15 indicates that \$2.92 million in fines is returned to consolidated revenue. When we look at what happens as far as speed camera fines and that sort of thing, a lot of that money then goes back into reinvestigating road safety issues. I think it would be very appropriate if this revenue could be used for improving the advisory service for workplace health and safety. Is there any prospect of this occurring? Do you understand what I am getting at?

Mr BARTON: I know what you are getting at. Let us just put it into context. Yes, \$2.92 million in fines have gone back into consolidated revenue. Let us have a look at the way government works. You know this; you have been a minister in the government. Consolidated revenue typically goes back to Treasury—back to the central government. The Cabinet Budget Review Committee, which I had the privilege of being on for the last 12 months—I am real proud to have been a member of the CBRC for this budget; the best budget ever—in its wisdom then reports to cabinet, which makes decisions about where we spend money.

The speed camera issue is a little different. In fact, I think it was Vaughan Johnson who introduced the speed cameras fines. There was an amendment moved by Jim Elder, the shadow minister for transport at the time, so that the revenue did not go into consolidated revenue and it was used on education issues. I will be quiet, but we think we can do it even better than that in the future. I would be encroaching on a colleague's turf were I to say something. If the police round up people and then the courts fine them, that revenue goes back into consolidated revenue. If environmental officers round up someone and prosecute them, that revenue goes back into consolidated revenue. But what happens in the budget process is that, as department's need specific funding to do positive things, we argue our case for that.

The director-general has given me another interesting figure. In terms of occupational health and safety, we have put on additional inspectors and developed additional programs. We had an additional need to meet other than the building industry boom. We got an additional \$4 million last year. This year we got \$1.2 million on top of what we got before.

In terms of doing the positive stuff and not just putting on more inspectors to prosecute people who have done the wrong thing, I point out that we have greatly enhanced our funding of auditing. We are much more proactive. We do not just wait for an accident to occur and then turn up. We have placed a lot of emphasis on being proactive in these areas. We have been doing the advertising to promote a whole raft of safety issues. Another one is the tractor roll-over issue.

When you say is it possible to do it, I probably want to say that I agree with you. I would rather keep all the revenue and have the total discretion to do what I like with it, but that is not the way government works. We get back it another way through the process.

Mr ROWELL: I could see some parallels and that is why I asked the question. What I want to refer to now are the safety guidelines for handling crocodiles. I refer to page 2-11 of the MPS at dot point 5 which refers to a safety guide for working with crocodiles in captivity. Does this guide provide practical advice for controlling risks for a handler who takes their baby into the crocodile enclosure too?

Mr BARTON: I do not want to say anything too controversial at a budget estimates hearing. Let us make no bones about this. We were about to have a review of the provision for handling crocodiles when a certain incident occurred with a certain high-profile figure who wears khaki shorts and shirts who took a baby into an enclosure. Let me assure you, we brought forward the review that we were about to have into those guidelines. That particular high-profile individual was very much part of that review.

A little aside is that I spoke to a group of visiting Americans several months ago who assured me that while he was big in the United States, he has been locked out of nearly everything in the United States. It cost him very dearly. It was a pretty silly thing to do for a range of reasons. It was not just silly because he put his kid at risk but very silly because it had a commercial impact for him.

Our guidelines provide practical advice for controlling the risks associated with working with crocodiles. It is not a mandatory regulation as such; it is an advisory standard. Anyone who breaches the advisory standard thus resulting in an incident could be prosecuted under our traditional provisions for having an unsafe work environment.

In fairness to the gentleman who wears the khaki outfits, I did look at all the footage that was taken that day and not just the bit that ran on channel 7 and one of the things you can do with a zoom lens is make it look like the crocodile was there and he was here with baby Bob and the chook was there. He was actually about three lengths of the crocodile back. He was a long way back from the crocodile and he threw the chook.

Mr ROWELL: You and I know how quickly crocodiles can move.

Mr BARTON: I was a north Queenslander originally and I have been around a few crocs and I, like you, Marc, know how fast they can move. There are a large number of other crocodile shows out there in Queensland. In the main, most of them did not have standards as good as his very good world-class operation. It was not as bad as it looked on TV. But, yes, we did tighten it up very considerably. It gave him quite a lot of heartburn while we were consulting with him and others. He was not happy about it all. We now have a compliance campaign well under way to make sure that not just his show and his activities but all the others across the state are complying with the new guidelines. We cannot afford to have people mauled by crocodiles and we certainly do not want kids put at risk. Have a good look at the guideline. We are happy to give it to you. It is a solid document.

Mr LANGBROEK: I would like to come back to the issue of industrial relations and 2-1 of the departmental overview. I refer the minister to an answer to a question on notice from non-government members. At 10 o'clock yesterday the minister said that, at this stage, the federal government has not provided any details of its proposed legislation. Yet in answers to questions from government members just a few moments ago I heard the minister refer to potential High Court challenges. My question relates to the ACTU advertising campaign. I understand that workers are protected from unlawful termination. So do you concede that the advertising campaign is misleading and deceptive, especially the ad that implies that workers with families can be sacked for not working shifts at short notice?

Mr BARTON: I would like to table a copy of the Prime Minister's statement to federal parliament on 26 May about his proposals for industrial relations reform. Anyone who understands industrial relations who reads this statement by the Prime Minister would be under no illusions that there is no scare campaign by the ACTU or indeed the Labor states. Everything said in the ACTU campaign and by the Premier and me relates to the Prime Minister's own words. I table this statement and I suggest that you read it because it will shock you.

Leave granted.

Mr LANGBROEK: Minister, yesterday you said you had no details.

Mr BARTON: When did I say I had no details?

Mr LANGBROEK: In the answer to question on notice No. 9. It states, 'At this stage they have not provided any details.'

Mr BARTON: We have the detail of the Prime Minister's words. There has been no discussion with the states. Marc, I am not knocking the minister, because I understand that Kevin Andrews has briefed the shadow minister. I have no problem with that. I think it is appropriate that he does. I think it is more appropriate that Kevin Andrews actually briefs and talks to the state minister for industrial relations whom it is that the Prime Minister wants to hand over the state's industrial relations jurisdiction. They have not talked to me as the responsible minister. They have not even spoken to my director-general and his staff at departmental level. We do not have the bill.

We have had ministerial councils for workplace relations cancelled. There was supposed to be one in October last year. Then there was to be one early this year and they cancelled that. Then there was to be one a month or so back and they cancelled that. Now they have it set down for 5 August, which is when I was to be on leave. I am coming back for it. I am not missing that for anything.

What we have is the Prime Minister's statement. We have had the nonsensical statements of Mr Andrews around the place. They are saying what they will do, but there has not been a word to the states about the detail. Yet they have been up to Commerce Queensland and they have briefed the shadow minister, which I think is appropriate. I think it is more appropriate that he also brief me when he is asking me to agree to hand over the state system to him.

We cannot mount a High Court challenge until we actually get the legislation. If the legislation reflects what is in the Prime Minister's statement, my God, we will be in the High Court as fast as we can get there. The ACTU campaign frankly is absolutely, scrupulously, religiously honest.

Mr LANGBROEK: In that case I want to ask a couple of other questions about those supposed claims. I understand that awards will remain and be protected and that overtime and penalty rates will not be stripped from awards and the right to strike is enshrined in legislation. Can you comment on the claims about abolishing industrial awards and taking away the right to strike?

Mr BARTON: Let us talk about this. He talks about the right to retain awards. They are completely gutting the Australian Industrial Relations Commission even to the point of taking away their ability to set the minimum wage. They are setting up a new quasi judicial body to set minimum wages. The Prime Minister's own statement says that the AIRC is only going to have responsibility for settling disputes—in other words, holding compulsory conferences, banging heads, trying to get parties to agree to be sensible in a dispute environment. But they are gutting the minimum standards for awards. They acknowledge that. In terms of the AWAs—

CHAIR: We can extend that part of the session if you want to.

Mr BARTON: Yes. This is a question that I love. I can tell you the only standards that an agreement has to meet. If you want to work in Kevin Andrews's department you have to sign the AWA as put in front of you or bugger off, to use some crude words. The only things that will be required in a new AWA are annual leave, personal leave, parental leave and the maximum number of ordinary working hours.

But they are not even set on a no disadvantage test against the awards as the existing AWAs are. We have already seen Kevin Andrews come out and say, 'By choice you can give up two weeks of your annual leave.' What choice have you got when even in his own department a new employee is told, 'There's the AWA. Sign up if you want the job or bugger off'? Where does an employee with no bargaining power who is currently under an award go?

We are being told that we should hand over the state system, which has a very strong system of common rule awards—a level playing field for small business, in other words. At some stage in the future they will put in a quasi system of common rule awards under the federal system. But they do not know how they are going to do it. They have not thought about it. That is what we are being told by the people who go to Commerce Queensland briefings and come out very concerned about what they have heard. They come back and say, 'Gee mate, what does this mean?'

We say that they are removing people from award protection and they are busting standards. The AWAs can be below the previous award standard. Over time there will be no awards left to compare them with. This is the name of the game. Heaven help small business because it will be cutthroat. The person who can screw his or her own employees the hardest in terms of wages and conditions will get the business of their competitor down the road who has not been able to or prepared to treat their employees so badly. In this state at the moment small business like common rule awards. They know what the standard is and they know that the standard applies to their competitor as well.

Mr ROWELL: It is a bit like the sugar millers and the sugar growers.

Mr BARTON: I am with you.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members. Minister, I know that you are very passionate and very excited about this particular area, as are we all from our varying perspectives, but can I ask you to temper some of your colloquialisms in the interests of using parliamentary language.

Mr BARTON: I am a north Queenslander; I cannot help it.

CHAIR: With reference to page 2-17 of the MPS, could you provide some information on what actions are currently being taken in relation to the exploitation of outworkers in the clothing industry?

Mr BARTON: Yes, I can.

CHAIR: I think this may have been an issue on the Gold Coast, too.

Mr BARTON: Yes, it certainly has. In terms of outworkers, a key element of the strategy to tackle exploitation was the appointment of a Vietnamese liaison officer in late 2002. The officer's role involves providing clothing outworkers with employment information and establishing trust and understanding within the community about the role of the department. The liaison officer has made significant progress in raising the department's profile in the Vietnamese community. Examples of such activity include participating in community events, publishing regular articles on employment matters in a community

newspaper, and working one day a week from the Vietnamese Community Association in Darra to promote the role and responsibilities of the Department of Industrial Relations. Legislative protection of outworkers' employment entitlements has also been strengthened by amendments to the Industrial Relations Act. These amendments make it possible for outworkers to recover unpaid entitlements in circumstances where they are not certain who is responsible for the payment of their wages.

The code of practice on employment and outwork obligations for textile, clothing and footwear suppliers is being rewritten to make it easier for manufacturers to comply with their obligations. A summary will also be published in Vietnamese to encourage Vietnamese employers to meet their employment obligations, particularly in respect of outworkers. The peak bodies governing non-government schools in Queensland have also agreed to encourage member schools to adopt the code of practice on a voluntary basis. This will ensure that manufacturers of all school uniforms for government and non-government schools across Queensland will be required to observe the code.

The Department of Industrial Relations has also just completed an extensive audit of the clothing industry across the state targeting in particular those employers who supply to government and who employ outworkers. The results of this audit will be available in the coming months. In conjunction with the University of Queensland, the department has conducted research into the nature of outwork within the Vietnamese community in south-east Queensland. A key recommendation of this research was that labour market opportunities for outworkers would be improved with better English language skills. As a result, opportunities to offer English language classes to Vietnamese workers is being explored with a number of potential partners. The department also maintains strong ties with agencies in Victoria and New South Wales to ensure that an effective network protects outworkers across the eastern seaboard where the majority of manufacturing occurs in this industry. This comprehensive strategy demonstrates that this government is serious about protecting a marginalised group of workers who, through their circumstances, may not enjoy the same opportunities as other Queenslanders in the work force.

CHAIR: Page 2-18 of the MPS makes reference to a focus on increasing compliance with wages and entitlements, in particular audit campaigns conducted by private sector industrial relations services and subsequent wages adjustments. Can you provide some more detail in relation to the activities undertaken by the industrial inspectorate in 2004-05 and highlight the Gold Coast region again, if you would not mind, as well as the statewide figures?

Mr BARTON: Yes, I would love to. During 2004-05 more than 8,200 wage complaints were investigated resulting in nearly \$10 million worth of wages being recovered for Queensland workers. The statewide audit campaigns were conducted in a range of industries, including transport, hospitality, retail, hairdressing, real estate, security, clothing trades and trolley collectors. These industries were chosen based on complaint activity in the industrial inspectorate and inquiries made of the inspectorate. In 2004-05, 2,781 employers were audited across Queensland resulting in over \$1.2 million arrears of wages being adjusted for employees.

Poor time and wages record keeping by employers continues to be an issue. As a result of audit campaigns conducted in the city of the Gold Coast from Coolangatta to the Logan River, a total of \$70,000 arrears of wages has been adjusted. That includes your electorate and mine. We are both Gold Coast members, although some people still seem to forget that. So it has been a fairly successful audit period through there on behalf of employees in this area. Audits were conducted in the fields of hairdressing, clothing manufacturers, trolley collectors, nightclub workers and vegetable processors.

Under the Hairdressing Industry Award, a total of 268 employers were audited which resulted in about \$40,000 in arrears of wages being adjusted. This relates to an 85 per cent compliance rate. With regard to clothing manufacturers under the Clothing Trades Award—Southern and Central Divisions 2003, 53 employers were audited within the clothing manufacturing industry. The audit resulted in more than \$1,500 arrears of wages being adjusted. The compliance rate within the industry was 96 per cent, which is pretty good. With regard to trolley collectors, under the state Retail Industry Award, six employers were audited resulting in more than \$2,700 arrears of wages being adjusted. The compliance rate was a very low 33 per cent. So when you see the poor kid pushing a million trolleys around the car park, be nice to him because there is a good chance he is being ripped off by his boss as well and not being paid properly.

CHAIR: Not just dodging cars.

Mr BARTON: Not just dodging cars; they have to dodge the crooked boss, and that is even where an award is in place. Only a third of the ones that we have inspected are paying right. Heaven help those employees when we get an AWA system in place.

With regard to nightclubs—and this one will be of interest to you, Madam Chair, because there are lots of nightclubs on the Gold Coast—under the Hospitality Industry—Restaurant, Catering and Allied Establishments Award—South Eastern Division 2002 one employer was audited and almost \$14,000 in arrears of wages was adjusted against this employer. With regard to vegetable processors—I will not name the award; it is too complicated—one employer was audited and more than \$12,000 in arrears was picked up. It is being positive. We are not just waiting for the complaints to come through the door. When we see a trend, we put the troops out in the field and we are being very proactive.

Mr FINN: Minister, as a member of the Beattie government, the Premier's catchcry of jobs, jobs, jobs still rings in my ears regularly. I note that the unemployment rate for the month of June for Queensland was 4.9 per cent. I am wondering if you could outline how the Queensland figure compares with other states and the national unemployment rate?

Mr BARTON: They have just been released, so it is jobs, jobs, jobs. The Queensland unemployment rate for the month of June was 4.9 per cent. I have to say this revision after the event is always interesting. They revised the May figure down from 4.9 per cent to 4.8 per cent. So notionally we are up 0.1 per cent to 4.9 per cent, which is where we thought we were in May anyway. New South Wales was 5.2 per cent, Victoria was 5.3 per cent, South Australia was five per cent, WA was 4.8 per cent and Tasmania was six per cent. The national unemployment rate remains steady at 5.1 per cent. Employment growth over the year for Queensland is 5.7 per cent and nationally it is 3.6 per cent, so we are still fighting way above our weight. Queensland is the second highest now. WA had 6.2 per cent. With all of its resources, WA's growth has just slipped in front of us. Queensland leads the nation, though, in actual jobs growth, with Queensland recording 106,600 jobs compared to WA's 61,200. So we are well above our weight.

This performance really reinforces our argument again that our systems are working very well in this state. Coming back to what we were talking about in IR, we know that our IR system is capable of generating the most jobs generated in Australia and the highest growth, and the figures that have just been released this morning in terms of our employment levels and our jobs growth just reinforce that again. Again, I make the point, which I have been consistently saying, as have most of the senior people with the private employer organisations in this state apart from one up on the hill at Wickham Terrace that seems to be the employer branch of the National Party, that in fact—

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr BARTON: I do not know what they say, Marc. They do not talk to us. They say that if it is not broken do not fix it. Again, it comes back to what we have been talking about in response to questions from both sides of the table in front of me. The proposals that are being put forward by the federal government in our view will damage Queensland's capacity to keep this performance up, because I know that one of the major selling points Queensland has is our excellent industrial relations. It was that way last term when I was responsible for business attraction. It is still that way. In fact, it is even better now. People will come to Queensland because of our growth. We get the growth because of good IR and they will come because of our good industrial relations, and that is reflected in the latest jobs figures. It is great news—absolutely great news.

Mr FINN: Thanks, Minister. I want to turn to a matter that has been important to some workers in my electorate. I refer to page 2-16 of the MPS regarding the portable long service leave scheme for contract cleaners. Can you please outline the benefits of the portable long service leave scheme for contract cleaners and whether the introduction of the contract cleaning scheme will affect the financial viability of the building and construction scheme?

Mr BARTON: Let us have a look at it. This is one of the things that we are very proud of as a government, and I know the member is also. Some of the lowest paid people that we have in this state work in the contract cleaning industry. It is also an area of not just low pay but also a lot of women employees and a lot of non-English-speaking women employees. Getting them their long service leave portability was very important, because people do work in this sector for many, many, many, many years and very seldom with the one employer simply because of the nature of contracts that change over. So this reflects this. It is a great scheme. It is in response to industry concerns. It was actually negotiated predominantly by the missos union and the employer association of contract cleaners who collectively came to government and put to us a view that they wanted to participate in a way that was comparable to what has been happening with the building industry long service leave scheme for many years.

It is being managed by the same group that managed the building industry long service leave scheme, but it will be totally independent. There will be no cross-subsidisation. We have done very thorough audit reports in terms of what the expectation was in terms of costs of administration. So it does in fact have the benefits for people and the economies of scale of working with the building industry long service leave scheme without putting anyone at risk. So we have a scheme that will be funded by a portable long service leave levy calculated at two per cent of the ordinary wages paid to contract cleaning workers. Again I stress that all employers in the contract cleaning industry are required to register with the scheme and submit returns with levy payment for each worker engaged by that employer. The levy will be payable quarterly, with the first return due in October 2005. Yes, we have put penalties in place for non-complying employers. But we do not expect to see that, because this is one of those examples where, again, in a tripartite way employers in that sector, the union in that sector and the government have all come together to do something that is for the benefit of low-paid workers.

I might sound like a broken record, but one of my great concerns if the John Howard proposals on IR get up is that the people who are going to get hit the hardest are people like this who are under state awards, under common rule awards—that is, these people and the clothing outworkers that we talked about before, and they are another one of our success stories. Again, they are mainly non-English-

speaking women working from home who potentially could get ripped off and people such as this who, despite all of our good work, would just disappear back into the vortex again.

Mr WELLS: I refer the minister to question on notice No. 10 and also to page 2-10 of the MPS. Could the minister please detail the progress of the regional workplace health and safety compliance audits specifically for the Brisbane north region where my constituents live?

Mr BARTON: I am very happy to do that, because we are pretty confident that we are having a very strong presence in the north Brisbane region, including your electorate which is part of that region. Compliance campaigns for 2004-05 were identified using an evidence based approach based on workers compensation data and the five industry and three injury action plans. I would also like to highlight audits conducted in the north Brisbane region on timber floor finishers and retail butchers. The audit on timber floor finishers addressed issues such as noise, dust, vibration and the use of solvents. These audits are partly completed. The remainder of audits are scheduled for completion in July 2005 with the final report scheduled for January 2006.

To date, workers from seven companies all with less than 20 workers have been monitored while performing floor-finishing tasks at 20 different work sites. Health surveillance of 15 workers and in excess of 140 personal exposure samples were collected for specific and scientist analysis. A preliminary analysis indicates that workers were exposed to airborne isocyanates, solvents, wood dust and noise in excess of 130 dB. No excessive exposure to hand/arm vibration was reported. In the audits of the retail butcher shops, in the Brisbane north region 38 retail butcher shops were audited primarily for machine safeguarding, because that has been a real area of concern. Young apprentices lose bits that they should not lose. Some 120 improvement and eight prohibition notices were issued to employers for failing to comply with legislative standards relating to meat-mincing machines, meat-tenderising machines and meat bandsaws.

In addition, 40 improvement and two prohibition notices were issued for noncompliance of electrical safety switches and testing and tagging of electrical equipment. These butcher shop audits identified major risk areas of plant and machinery safeguarding, staff training, manual handling and tool use and hazardous substance handling. In your area as well, which has been a key part of that, we are pretty confident that those audits, particularly in those butcher shops, have resulted, through the improvement notices in particular that we have given, in far safer work environments for the people who work there; in particular for the apprentices who work there because I cringe every time I hear about a young apprentice butcher who loses a hand. It is not pretty.

CHAIR: Minister, I could become a vegetarian. That brings to a close the committee's examination of estimates for the Employment, Training and Industrial Relations portfolio. On behalf of the committee I want to thank the minister and his advisers for their attendance today and all the people who are here. The hearing is now suspended for lunch and will resume at 1.30 to examine the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Education and the Arts.

Mr BARTON: Before you close, could I thank yourself and everybody on the committee for the way they have conducted themselves today. I hope that we have transmitted the information that people sought. We have certainly tried our best. I want to thank my department and all of its staff and my personal staff for the enormous effort that they have put in. I can assure you that to come along here and answer, in each department, probably no more than 30 questions requires a huge effort and we are all better informed as a result of it. I am sure that the committee are much better informed as a result of even those 30 questions.

CHAIR: I also want to thank Hansard for their work this morning, too. We look forward to seeing them this afternoon.

Proceedings suspended from 12.31 pm to 1.31 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

In Attendance

Hon. AM Bligh, Minister for Education and the Arts

Mr M Watt, Senior Policy Advisor

Ms L Johnston, Senior Policy Advisor (Arts)

Department of Education and the Arts

Mr K Smith, Director-General

Mr L Tabrett, Deputy Director-General, Arts Queensland

Ms R Logan, Director, Strategic Resource Management

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

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

Mr A Wagner, Chief Facilities Officer, Strategic Facilities Branch

Ms L Englert, Assistant Director-General, Office of Curriculum

CHAIR: I welcome the Minister for Education and the Arts, the Hon. Anna Bligh MP, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance. The proceedings today are governed by the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. Members of the public are reminded that they cannot participate in the proceedings and may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. In accordance with the standing orders at least half the time for questions at today's hearing will be allocated to non-government members. The time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning will be given 15 seconds before the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time to answer questions may be given with the consent of the questioner, and that is for a further two minutes, with any further extension of time for an answer to be agreed to by the chair. I also ask that officers identify themselves before answering a question for the benefit of Hansard. My final request is that if you have a mobile phone would you please make sure that it is turned off and if you have phone calls to make please do so outside the chamber.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Education and the Arts open for examination. The committee will begin by examining estimates for the Arts. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you have five minutes to make an opening statement if you so desire.

Ms BLIGH: Thank you, Madam Chair, and members of the committee. It is a pleasure to be here for estimates once again. Can I start by saying that I think there is no better indication of the Queensland government's commitment to our state's future than our commitment to education and the arts. Our government is dedicated to giving our school students the best possible start not only by substantially increasing funds to improve school facilities and reform our education system but also by launching a range of new initiatives to ensure that they obtain the very best possible as residents of the Smart State.

In 2005-06 the department's \$455.1 million Education capital works program is an increase of \$138.9 million on last year and will deliver \$147 million for new schools and classrooms in growth areas throughout Queensland and allow for the acquisition of additional land. It will also deliver \$187.8 million for building improvement programs, including Smart Schools Renewal, Building Inclusive Schools, toilet upgrades, core facility upgrades and the Wired for the Future program.

A further \$81.6 million will deliver facilities for the phase-in over the next year and the full introduction in 2007 of the preparatory year of schooling. A further \$13.2 million will be allocated to the Cooler Schools program in the Cooler Schools zone. An additional \$25.5 million will be provided to plan and provide other capital works, including teacher accommodation and support for the Smart School Subsidy Scheme.

In addition, the budget provides for new funding for a range of other education programs, including a projected 286 full-time equivalent teacher allocations to meet enrolment growth; \$7.2 million as the first instalment of the \$120 million 10-year accelerated roof replacement system which will replace 1,100 roofs in 370 schools throughout Queensland; a \$127 million package to reinforce the Smart State's education bedrock over the next four years that will include \$45.8 million over the next four years to establish two Queensland smart academies to harness our best and brightest students who are our next generation of Queensland leaders. One academy will focus on science, maths and technology, while the other will focus on the creative arts.

\$56 million will be allocated over the next four years to transform our schools into smart classrooms with improved information and communication technology access and technical support to all state schools. The provision of laptops and computers for 1,500 state school teachers by 2006 in a \$3.5 million trial to improve learning and communication through technology will also be allocated. \$8.3 million over the next three years will develop and then implement the Queensland Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Framework. An additional \$1.8 million will support the critical needs of refugee students as part of the English as a Second Language program, and \$1 million will be provided for textbooks, resources, allowances and home schooling support. An additional \$4.4 million will be allocated to targeted maintenance. This is a considerable investment in our school infrastructure and will underpin the historic reforms to the education system that are evolving and advanced across all levels of schooling from our students' first steps in primary school right through to their final years.

Our government's commitment to a thriving arts and cultural sector is equally strong. We continue to invest new funds into our arts and cultural industries to ensure they are among the best in the world. The government is dedicated to establishing major cultural facilities, to creating jobs in the arts and to capturing audiences to build upon what is truly a creative Queensland.

In 2005-06 the Education and Arts department will provide \$168.7 million for the Millennium Arts program to advance the redevelopment of South Brisbane's world-class Queensland Cultural Centre and associated projects, including the new Gallery of Modern Art and the redeveloped State Library of Queensland. Recurrent funding of \$18.7 million will be provided for the preliminary program and fitout for Millennium Arts projects throughout the state. In addition, the 2005-06 budget will provide \$2.5 million a year for operation of the Workshops Rail Museum at Ipswich, matching funds of \$500,000 to the Queensland Performing Arts Centre for the replacement of significant pieces of theatrical production equipment; \$6.5 million for capital maintenance requirements of the Queensland Cultural Centre and \$700,000 for the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy.

The budget also allocates new arts funding, including \$2.5 million to the arts and cultural sector for small to medium organisations to support high-quality one-off initiatives. This is the largest single injection the government has made to this sector in any one year. An additional \$1 million will be allocated for the expansion of the Queensland Music Festival into five more regional centres. We are also putting in new funds to expand our reputation as an international leader in children's arts programming with the allocation of \$325,000 to develop Cine Sparks and \$200,000 for the expansion of the highly successful Out of the Box Festival.

The government's investment in arts and culture is bold, innovative and underscores Queensland's standing as a leading proponent in social, cultural and economic development.

CHAIR: The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, welcome. This is my first public opportunity to congratulate you on your wedding.

Ms BLIGH: Thank you.

Mr MESSENGER: And also I welcome members of the Education and Arts department. Minister, I refer you to page 1-73 of the MPS and funding allocated to the Pacific Film and Television Commission for domestic film and television production. It is in that first paragraph under 'Assistance to the Arts'. I refer to \$2.5 million which was loaned to Southern Star Endemol in 2001 for the production of the *Big Brother* series. What is the interest payable on that loan and what is the time frame for that repayment?

Ms BLIGH: It is a loan through the Queensland Treasury Corporation and the interest on the loan is determined by the QTC. I am just getting some further advice about what that is at the moment in number terms. I should say that QTC loans are generally lower than commercial rates. We will get the current rate. Can I just clarify that it is a variable rate so that is why I do not know what it is from day-to-day, but we will come back to you with what it is in the last quarter.

Mr MESSENGER: And the time frame for the payments?

Ms BLIGH: It will be the length of the loan. Again, I would have to get you some details on that.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer once again to the same page, 1-73 of the MPS, and funding allocated to the Pacific Film and Television Commission for domestic film and television production. I refer to the general guidelines for all Pacific Film and Television schemes which is published on the PFTC web site. I note that it states that applications relating to reality TV are not eligible for funding. How is it possible that the *Big Brother* series received funding or have the funding guidelines been breached?

Ms BLIGH: The detail in relation to the eligibility requirements for each of the programs for the PFTC are obviously extensive and complex. I might call Mr Robin James, who is the director of the PFTC, to outline the circumstances of this case in more detail.

Mr James: In answer to your question, reality television is not eligible for investment from the production fund, which means we do not invest in reality television programs. That does not mean we do not have the capacity to provide incentives, which we do, and to provide loans, which we also do, to cashflow that production.

Mr MESSENGER: Pursuant to that answer, there is a difference between investment and incentive payments?

Mr James: Yes, there is.

Mr MESSENGER: Could you detail the investment payments made to *Big Brother* to date and also any incentive payments?

Mr James: Just to clarify that, we do not invest in *Big Brother*; we do not invest in that production. We do offer incentive packages to *Big Brother* to attract it here. The components of that incentive package are twofold: one is a \$2.5 million loan which is used to cashflow that production. That loan was first made in 2001-02, from memory. It was for 12 months and it has been rolled over each year as each new series of *Big Brother* has been produced. Application is made to have that loan renewed and we do that and we have done that in the past.

The second component is an incentive package. Now, what happens with reality television, as happens with all production that is attracted to Queensland, is that we offer an incentive package to encourage the employment of Queensland cast and crew. Every major production expending more than \$1 million in the state is eligible for that incentive package and that can range from big movies such as *Aquamarine*, which has just finished shooting for 20th Century Fox on the Gold Coast. That received an incentive package. It did not receive any investment, as all production that is not developed from this state does not receive any investment.

Mr MESSENGER: The general guidelines state that they apply to all PFTC schemes.

Mr James: It only applies to the investment scheme.

Mr MESSENGER: The investment rather than the incentive scheme?

Mr James: The PFTC has a whole range of schemes and the investment scheme only applies to productions that we have developed and then choose to invest in.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to page 1-73 of the MPS, once again funding allocated to the Pacific Film and Television Commission for domestic film and television production. Under the current guidelines, there appears to be no limits placed on the content of projects receiving funding. Now, is it correct to assume that a porn film, for example, could be successful in obtaining funding under these guidelines, whether investment or incentive?

Ms BLIGH: Firstly, I am very aware that there is a degree of community concern about some of the content of *Big Brother Uncut*, and I can appreciate some of that concern. As a television program, *Big Brother Uncut* or, indeed, any other television program is required to meet Commonwealth government guidelines for television timing and content. The responsibility for what can be put to air for television is not a state responsibility. It is governed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority—which was formerly the ABA, the Australian Broadcasting Authority—which is the authority that deals with unsuitable content issues. I understand that at least one complaint has been made to that federal authority and it is investigating that complaint. Obviously I look forward to hearing the outcome of that investigation.

Mr MESSENGER: I understand that there is a petition being started by the member for Maryborough against the state government investing or providing incentive payments for programs of dubious content quality.

Minister, I refer you to page 1-73 of the MPS and funding allocation to the Pacific Film and Television Commission for domestic film and television production. I refer to \$100,000 in grants provided to Warner Bros for the production of *Superman Returns*. Given that a majority of filming is to occur in New South Wales, can you confirm for the committee the total amount of funding provided to Warner Bros for this film and also the estimated number of days of production in Queensland?

Ms BLIGH: I understand that the \$100,000 to which you are referring is an incentive to the production under the cast and crew salary rebate incentive. In order to access funds under that program, as I understand it, the production will have to be able to demonstrate that it has employed a certain number of Queensland employees across a range of categories of employment. It is not always easy to distinguish the border when you are filming. The border does not mean much between Coolangatta and Tweed Heads in terms of locations, but in order to access this grant the production would have to demonstrate the percentage of employees involved in the production that were Queenslanders. It does not really matter whether the Queenslanders go across the border to Tweed Heads or Byron Bay for some of the production, as long as they are Queensland people who have the jobs. Do you have anything to add to that, Robin?

Mr James: The only comment I would make in relation to that project is to repeat that there is a \$1 million expenditure required before any incentive payment is made by the PFTC. On that particular aspect of the production of *Superman Returns*, there is an expectation that about \$4 million will be spent on the production of miniatures which are used in the production of the film and on computer graphics which are also associated with the production of that film, and that will take place at the Warner Roadshow Studios.

Mr MESSENGER: In relation to how cast members or people employed by those production companies become eligible Queenslanders, I have heard hearsay evidence that there are people from New South Wales who register a PO box in Queensland and classify themselves then as Queenslanders.

Mr James: It is a reasonable question. Their eligibility is based on whether or not they have been on the electoral roll in Queensland for six months. The commitment that an individual makes and the appropriate certification that is required to be on the electoral roll we believe is sufficient proof that they are actually Queensland residents.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer to page 1-61 of the MPS and the delay in progressing the Bert Hinkler Aviation Museum. Will you remain committed to this project in spite of the change? This also relates to a question on notice.

Ms BLIGH: I think the answer to the question on notice spells out in quite clear detail the background to some of the delays with this project. The Queensland government was the first level of government to financially commit to the project in its original form. After the Queensland government commitment, we were then able to secure federal government funding. The original funding committed by both the state and the Commonwealth would have been sufficient for the project as it was originally conceived. It has gone through some rescoping by the proponents and they have then come back to various levels of government asking for an increase.

The Commonwealth made a commitment to that increase for a larger facility as part of its election commitment at the end of last year. There had been no approach made formally to the state government until I received a letter from the mayor in May this year. I put that in the answer to the question on notice. I was approached by the Mayor of Bundaberg in May this year. That was obviously too late for this year's budget. I have given a commitment in writing to the mayor that we will now consider it in the light of that request. Obviously I now have to take that to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee. I am unable to give an ironclad commitment to an exact amount of funds. If you read the tone of the letter to the mayor, we are very supportive of this project. Quite reasonably, Treasury will now want to have a look at the bid and to assess the request and look at the Commonwealth's contribution to make sure that it is all fine before we make any commitment. As I said, I think our record on this project demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm for it and we would be very keen to make sure that we can do everything to progress it.

Mr MESSENGER: What I was trying to ascertain was your personal level of commitment to the project.

Ms BLIGH: Absolutely. I have given the mayor in writing a piece of correspondence that indicates my personal enthusiasm for the project and the government's commitment. It is just not possible for me to give a financial target on that given that I have not had an opportunity to take it to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee. As I said, it was the state government that made the first financial commitment to this project. As I understand it, without that financial commitment from the state the Commonwealth would have been very unlikely to have come to the party. The Commonwealth has now been able to, as part of an election process, put forward additional funds. I now have to go back through our budget process. This is all normal in a project of this size. When the proponents rescope, I think levels of government do not have much choice other than to go back and look at their ability to meet the new scope of the project.

Mr LANGBROEK: Welcome, Minister, and staff from the department of the arts. I would like to congratulate the department on the creative generation of most concerts that I have enjoyed with members of my family. I would like to ask the minister about the Pacific Film and Television Commission. I am interested to see that the only new initiative for film seems to be \$0.3 million for the PFTC Cine Sparks film festival. Can the minister tell the committee what the state government is doing to generate additional film production in Queensland? I have heard from film people on the Gold Coast that the PFTC seems very Brisbane oriented. Therefore, I would like to know what the Queensland government is doing to help the film studios on the Gold Coast.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. In fact, it gives me an opportunity to put on the record other support for the film industry. Our government is a very enthusiastic supporter not only of the film industry broadly in Queensland but also the film industry on the Gold Coast. The member may not be aware of various attempts by some of his colleagues on his side of the House to undermine that in previous terms of government, and I would be happy to fill him in on them sometime.

In relation to our broad support for film, we made a number of election commitments to expand programs through the PFTC—a total of \$4.5 million over three years. This budget sees this year's allocation of those funds, so they are new initiatives. There is an additional \$750,000 to the domestic production fund, which provides equity investment to increase domestic film and television production. We have seen an increase in local production from \$25 million in 2003-04 to \$35 million in 2004-05.

I think there is a view that the film industry in Australia generally and in Queensland has been going through hard times. To some extent that is true. It is very heartening to see that, in fact, there has been an increase in production in Queensland. Some of that additional funding in the domestic

production fund saw us in a position to secure productions such as *The Proposition*, which was set in Winton, which is a long way from the Gold Coast but nevertheless important. There was \$11 million for *Mortified*, which is a children's television production, and \$10 million for *H2O*, both of which are television production programs. I think I am right in saying that *Mortified* is the first Australian Children's Television Foundation production ever to have come to Queensland and it is based on the Gold Coast. It is a long-term series, so that means long-term employment and production on the Gold Coast.

We have also put in \$450,000 for the Digital Development Scheme to develop animated projects and other digital technology for use in feature films, \$200,000 in the New Media Filmmakers Fund and \$100,000 in the Indigenous Filmmakers Fund to develop projects made by Queensland Indigenous filmmakers. We have also seen funding—and this is very important to the Gold Coast—to secure the Screen Producers Association of Australia annual conference on the Gold Coast. It is held at the Sheraton Mirage on The Spit on the Gold Coast. Last year was the first conference and this year will be the second. We have secured it for three years. I understand that it was very successful last year and we hope to do it beyond the three years. This conference brings every screen producer and film related person of any significance around the country to the Gold Coast so that they see it as a location and they get to meet people from Warner Bros and other parts of the industry, including post production companies. It was a great coup for us to get it here. It is very significant for the Gold Coast and over time we will see it reap real rewards.

Mr LANGBROEK: On page 1-9 under the heading 'Support for the Arts', I note that the Queensland government has still not committed additional funding for the Queensland Orchestra. I understand that the ratio of funding is 71 per cent from the Australian government and 29 per cent from the Queensland government. I understand that perhaps the Queensland government would like to change this ratio. I know that the federal government has made a sizeable contribution to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the Queensland Orchestra. Can the minister inform the committee why the Queensland government has not contributed to the Queensland Orchestra like its federal counterparts?

Ms BLIGH: I am very happy to answer that. I would have loved to have been in a position to say exactly what has been happening with the Queensland Orchestra as a result of the federal orchestra review but, unfortunately, we are still in negotiations with the Commonwealth government. While it has made a global allocation in the Commonwealth budget, it has not negotiated with every state what that global amount means for each orchestra. We are in that process now, so there are discussions occurring. The Queensland state government funds the highest ratio in the country and we also fund the highest in raw dollar terms. The Queensland government support for our state orchestra is stronger than the state government support of any other orchestra in the country. We are very proud of that.

Because of continuing financial difficulties, the Queensland government put in an extra \$750,000 in last year's mid-year review. So it goes over two financial years. Those extra funds are over a calendar year, if you like. I wrote to the federal government at the time and asked it to match those funds on the basic ratio. It refused. So it has not put in any new funds to our orchestra. While we are currently in negotiations I am unable to tell you what the Commonwealth government has committed for the Queensland Orchestra. There are some particular difficulties associated with the Queensland Orchestra in relation to some other parts of the review. You may or may not be aware that all of the orchestras are subsidiaries of the ABC.

Mr LANGBROEK: I read the report.

Ms BLIGH: They are federal bodies. One of the recommendations of the review is to break that nexus. There are some things to recommend that. In Queensland, however, the premises that are occupied by the Queensland Orchestra are owned by the ABC. It would be a very big mistake if we moved the Queensland Orchestra from the ABC premises and put it into debt because it has to buy new premises. That is a particularly complicated issue in the Queensland context that we have to work through with the Commonwealth. I am hopeful that we will have some commonsense applied to that, but I think at the moment everybody is just trying to work out how to manage those sorts of issues. So it may be that they stay on the premises on some kind of arrangement even though they are no longer an ABC subsidiary. All of those are complex issues, and they have to be worked through carefully because we may otherwise inadvertently seriously disadvantage them by that more than any of the funding agreements we may or may not have.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members.

Minister, I wish to draw to your attention the response on 10 June from the member for Burnett to the arts budget in the House where he stated that there is a drop of approximately 2½ per cent in recurrent funding assistance for the arts. Minister, is this correct, and have there been any new arts initiatives in this year's budget?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I did notice that in the budget reply speech of the member for Burnett that he made a number of assertions about cuts to the arts budget. I do think it is important for me to take the opportunity today to correct those statements because, in large part, they are very wrong.

There are a couple of issues. Firstly, I draw the committee's attention to the table at 1-63 which is the output income statement for assistance to the arts. I assume that in doing his calculations the member for Burnett simply looked at the bottom line on the income area, which is total income, which does reflect some change and some decrease in total income. It is not, in fact, a reflection of state government funding. As to state government funding, if you go to the bottom of the page opposite, which is 1-62, in that table you will see 'state contribution', which demonstrates a significant increase in state government contribution to the arts generally.

The significant change there, if you look under 'grants and other contributions', is that during the 2004-05 year there was an additional \$3 million that came by way of a grant or other contribution. That is simply funds that came into the portfolio through the sale of land at Coomera by the museum, which it then used to fund its contribution to the new front door, if you like, of the museum. In fact, the state contribution into the arts has increased not decreased.

I would also caution the committee that in looking at the arts portfolio, not dissimilar to the education portfolio there are really two categories of funds. One is controlled funds. That is what this output income statement refers to. But if you turn to the table on page 1-75, you will see that there is also a component of the arts budget that is 'administered payments'. They are funds that are administered by the department which are paid directly to the statutory authorities. You will see that there is, similarly, an increase in funds in total payments to the statutory authorities. On any measure, there has been an overall increase—and quite a significant one—in the arts budget generally this year. In fact, it is a nine per cent increase in recurrent funding for the arts. I think it is important for me to put that on record.

CHAIR: Did you cover the Queensland Museum in your answer? I am just wondering because I have a recollection that the member for Burnett also stated that there had been a drop in funding to the Queensland Museum of proximately \$50,000. I know you mentioned it, but I cannot recall if it was that amount.

Ms BLIGH: That is right. Similarly, if I can draw members' attention again to the table of administered items on page 1-75, you will see that funds to the Queensland Museum have in fact increased this year. If we go to provisions specifically about the museum at 5-5, under 'grants and other contributions', that is the item on that table that incorporates the government's allocation. You will see that that has increased. There is a change in the expected total income to the museum. As I understand it, this is due to a small expected decrease in interest revenue because of the large capital expenditure on the renovation of the premises last year. The funds basically came from the museum selling land that it held at Coomera. It used those funds, after they had sat in the bank for a while accruing a bit of interest. It used those funds then to make a contribution to the renovation to the front of the museum. There is no reduction in government contributions to the activities of the Queensland Museum in this financial year. In fact, it is an increase of \$1.27 million.

I know the member also referred, in his response, to user charges at the museum, seeing increased revenue. There is increased revenue from user charges at the Queensland Museum. That is a very positive reflection of increased volume and increased use of the Queensland Museum. I would like to take the opportunity to commend the staff and the board of the Queensland Museum. At a time when they have had some disruptions because of building work, we have actually seen an increase in the volume of paying visitors to the range of the museum's campuses throughout the state. Some parts of the museum are free and some have user charges.

The increase in income from user charges reflects an increase in volume. As I said, that reflects a great deal of effort and work by the staff and the volunteers of the Queensland Museum. I am sure the committee will agree that having more people in our museum generally, and having more people who are willing to pay for some of the paying exhibitions and programs, is a very positive sign.

CHAIR: Finally on the subject of the member for Burnett's response to the arts budget on 10 June, there was a further assertion that there is a drop in funding to the State Library of Queensland of approximately \$350,000 despite an increase in user charges. Minister, I wonder if you can tell me if that is correct.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is almost third time lucky for the member for Burnett. There is a slight reduction in state contributions to the library, but it is for a very specific reason, which I will come to in a moment. The assertion by the member that there is a \$350,000 cut is again just simply wrong, and the member has taken total revenue as opposed to state contribution. I would caution the member and other members of the committee, when they look in the arts portfolio, to understand that the statutory authorities gain revenue and income from a range of sources. They also access Commonwealth research grants and other funds from bequests. There are all sorts of revenue sources for these bodies in addition to state funding.

However, in relation to the library specifically, I hope people will be aware that it is going through a very significant redevelopment program. Some additional funds were provided last year because the redevelopment was a staged process, and the stage that it was in last year was actually relocating the entire collection from its South Bank site to the other campuses. Those funds are not necessary this

year because the collection has been relocated, but we will need to put more funds into the library next year because it will be moving everything back in and gearing up for the opening of the redeveloped library.

So, there is a slight decrease, but it is a decrease of \$145,000 in a total library budget of more than \$44 million. It is a relatively small decrease, but it is certainly not of the size that the member for Burnett outlined. As I said, they were the only comments on the arts in the member's speech, and I thought it was important that we put that to bed.

I make a couple of comments again in relation to user charges at the library. The State Library of Queensland is free, and it has a vast array of services. The user charges—and I thought it was important to specify this—are not to people wanting to use the library. They are charges that the library gains because it has a program called Queensland.combooks, where it has an arrangement with other library services throughout Australia and New Zealand. It purchases non-English speaking book stock for centralised collections for the State Library here and for other libraries. That allows all libraries in Australia to purchase in bulk and thereby to get a better deal. Those libraries pay a small fee to the Queensland library to do that on their behalf. It is a cost recovery fee but it is, nevertheless, counted as revenue.

The service also has another program of application hosting where, as a lead organisation across the sector, it uses a system called Voyager library management system to host library catalogues of some other government agencies. Those agencies access the SLQ catalogues via the internet. That results in economies of scale and reduces capital management and support costs across all agencies. There is a small service fee for that. Those two services gain nearly \$1 million in revenue for the State Library of Queensland. That accounts for the category of user charges.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, the Redlands community is a very artistic community across what is the broad spectrum of the arts in Queensland. I know it has benefited very much from the RADF program. Recently you announced an evaluation of the RADF program. Can you explain to the committee why this evaluation is being undertaken? Can you also explain the purpose and achievements of the RADF program to date?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question and for his enthusiastic embrace of the arts in his own area. The RADF program, the Regional Arts Development Fund, was actually commenced in 1991. It was an initiative of the Goss government after a comprehensive review of government support for the arts. I think it is timely that we have a look at its achievements and that we consider how best to apply the funds.

It is considered one of the most successful regional arts programs in the country. I have often had other state ministers talk to me about it. It has \$3 million in Queensland government funding plus an anticipated contribution from local government on a matching basis of about \$1.38 million. We have a higher matching ratio for the smaller councils so that we make it as fair as possible. Its purpose is to ensure that we can support professional development and employment of artists and art workers and cultural development right across the state. It is a way for the state government to work with local government to make that happen. One hundred and twenty councils out of 124 eligible councils participated in the program in 2004-05, so it has a very high uptake rate. Two local councils and 17 Aboriginal councils and community organisations participated in an aspect of the program dedicated to Indigenous programs. It is estimated that in the 2004-05 financial year that 1,600 projects, workshops and professional developments were supported by the fund. It is a very cost effective program, and it is very localised.

Having been established in 1991, it was evaluated in 1994, 1995 and again in 1999, so it is five years since the last evaluation. I think it is important that we go back and have a look at how it is going. We wanted to make sure that it is continuing to meet the program aims. It is not being evaluated because of any concerns about the ongoing nature of the project. It will continue. To date we have appointed an external contractor. The University of Queensland's community service and research centre, based at the Ipswich campus of the Queensland University of Queensland and known as the Boiler House, was appointed in June this year. The contractor will work with representatives of Arts Queensland, the LGAQ and local councils to evaluate, using a consultative process, the success of the program. The LGAQ, as I understand it, is supportive of the evaluation and will be consulted throughout the process. Hopefully the recommendations will be delivered before the end of the year so that we can incorporate those into next year's allocation and development of the program.

Mr FINN: Minister, I would like to turn to the public art program Art Built-in. I refer to page 1-59 of the MPS, which notes the administration of the government's two per cent for this program. Can you please provide details of any successful outcomes resulting from Art Built-in since it began in July 1999?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I think that the Art Built-in program is an extraordinary example of the kind of impact that government policy can have on artistic endeavour. It is a program that I think most people would agree is having an extraordinary impact on changing the nature of public space across the state, particularly in the capital city. It has opened up a very robust discussion about arts and culture and the quality of the built environment. I personally think it is a sign of

a healthy program when people are debating its merits. I often have people debating with me some of the public art that is now commonplace around the city and in some of our new buildings.

It has succeeded in increasing the public's exposure to innovative, contemporary and very engaging public art forms. Anybody who has stood and had a look for a moment at Daniel Templeman's *Confluence* outside the Brisbane Magistrates Court will know that it is a talking piece, as is Sebastian Di Mauro's *Drift* underneath the new building at 33 Charlotte Street. The Toowoomba artist Jill Kinnear undertook a piece for the Suncorp Stadium called *Veil*, which has been an award winning piece and recently won the overall design award for this year. I congratulate Jill for that.

There are also some great examples in regional Queensland. Arthur Pambegan Jr's *Flying Fox Story Place* at the William McCormack Place in Cairns is a good example as is Sophie Cadman's *Jelly Babies* at CoCA. Anybody who has driven past the Cairns Centre of Contemporary Arts will have seen the large, oversized, resin coloured jelly babies. You can actually buy a miniset. If any of you want to stop at the shop there, they are a great investment. Kevin Todd's *Clouds 2003* at the Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE at Mooloolaba is also a very striking example.

Overall, the program has created 1,012 jobs for artists and artworkers across the state—879 of those jobs have been for artists directly, while the remaining 13 per cent have gone to public art project managers and curators. Eighty per cent of all Art Built-In allocations have gone to artists' fees and artworks. To date \$19.4 million has been spent in active or completed projects. Some \$6.9 million of that has been spent in the regions and 428 jobs, or 42 per cent, of all jobs have gone to regional artists and artworkers, which I think is a very good indicator of the strength of the statewide program.

It has delivered support for small businesses and manufacturers of material. Much of these artworks often require significant fabrication materials and there is some significant development of those industries. Local businesses and fabricators—some urban art projects, for example, and other non-art specialist companies such as Albert Smith Signs—have benefited from artists commissioned under the policy. Since Art Built-In was started by the government there has been a noticeable increase in private sector commissions, especially in public art in Brisbane, and I am very pleased to see property developers picking up on that idea.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, that is all the time we have allocated for the arts today.

Ms BLIGH: There is never enough time for the arts.

CHAIR: As per the agreed schedule, the time allocated for the consideration of the estimates for the arts has now expired. The committee will now commence examining the estimates for education. I thank all officers and staff from the arts area.

The committee will now commence examining the estimates for education. I remind officers to state their name and position for the benefit of Hansard when they are answering questions. The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call on the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I will start by asking a big picture question on the education department, and I refer to the departmental financial summary on page 1-17 of the MPS. This percentage is not there, but I am sure that the minister is aware of this percentage that I will quote. In 2003-04 Education received 26 per cent of the total budget. In 2004-05 Education received 25 per cent of the total budget, and in this recent budget, 2005-06, Education received 24.7 per cent of the total budget. What we have seen is a decrease. Why is the budget for education in Queensland reducing as a proportion of the total state budget? It is probably best demonstrated in the budget highlights, where it says, 'General government expenses by purpose—education \$6.3 billion or 24.7 per cent.'

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As I recall, we discussed this in last year's estimates. I understand the way that you want to see this. I have to say that I still regard it as I did then, as an element of voodoo economics. I would rather have 24.7 per cent of a hugely bigger pie than 26 per cent of a lower pie. I understand you keep calling this a drop in real terms. There is no accountant in the world that would recognise this as a drop in real terms. There has been a significant increase in real dollars and in real terms in the sense that once you take out inflation and enterprise bargaining increases it is still a real increase. So, on any recognised measure, the Education budget in Queensland has continued to grow.

When the government makes a significant investment, as we have, in another area of government activity such as infrastructure, it is inevitable that there will be some movement around the margins about what percentage of the increased pie is allocated to every other government department. I am sure the member for Burnett is not saying that he does not support the government making a significant increase in an area like infrastructure. You simply cannot grow the pie and have every single bit have exactly the same slice of it. All I care about, frankly, is that we keep continuing to see significant increases in the Education budget to make sure that we are matching the government's very big vision for education; that we continue to see increases in the capital funds, in the maintenance budget and in the recurrent funds that will ensure we are paying our teachers what they deserve; that we are putting in place new initiatives; and that we are supporting the programs that we have committed to. I understand that the member might want to continue to try to make something of it. I do not think that it is an issue. I

think that the very significant real growth in the budget is one that I am very proud of and one that our government stands by.

CHAIR: Before we continue, can I suggest that perhaps the media have enough pictures now of the changeover of advisers. They might wish to complete their filming.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, even though you acknowledge that you do not think it is an issue, once again I refer you to the departmental financial summary on page 1-17. According to the Productivity Commission, Queensland schoolchildren are receiving \$600 less than the national average each year despite Queensland's GST windfall. Minister, when will you bring Queensland education funding up to the national standard?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. The sorts of comparisons that are done by the Productivity Commission I think are important for governments to look at, but I do not think they tell you the whole story and they do not tell all the component parts of a story about how organisations are funded and how activities are funded.

Queensland is the only state in Australia that has seen continued growth every year in its primary and secondary enrolments in state schools. There are a number of other states where real numbers are declining. That is for a number of reasons, but certainly one of them is that we are a relatively high-growth state in population terms. What that means is that many of our schools, particularly in highly populated areas such as the south-east corner, are full to capacity. Our classes are on the class size targets and all of the schools have reached their capacity. So the resources that are going to the schools are being used to the most effective capacity.

In other states, there are a number of parts of those states where, for example, if you have a teacher in front of a classroom it costs the same to the state whether there are 20 children in the classroom or 25 children in the classroom but the per capita allocation to the children on the Productivity Commission's calculations will be higher, because you are dividing the teacher's wage by 20, in this case, and 25 in that case. So that is one of the reasons behind the differences in per capita allocation.

I should also say that the most recent Productivity Commission figures for the 2002-03 financial year do not include Queensland's very significant investment in the last couple of financial years in the ETRF initiatives, the prep year, the new facilities and the class size reduction programs. So, until we see the next couple of Productivity Commission reports, I think it is very difficult to make meaningful comparisons for 2005-06.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, just as a way of moving on to the subject of asbestos, I would like to refresh your memory a little bit. I would refer you to page 1-8 of the MPS and the asbestos roof replacement program. I will quote from a letter that I received from Ricky Fenwick, who was a student at Macgregor High. He said—

It took us about 50 minutes to go backwards and forwards picking up old materials and putting them in the bins. The wall would be about three metres long by about two metres high. The two teachers were knocking down the walls in front of us while we were all standing there in front of them ...

And he mentions the teacher's name. The letter continues by stating that teacher X was hitting the walls with a sledgehammer and teacher Y was handing it to the children. Minister, have you undertaken any investigations as to how many teachers or students may have potentially been exposed to asbestos fibres while you have been minister?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Before going on to specifically answer it, can I table for the benefit of the House a letter I sent to the Clerk this morning of which the member would be aware about reports in the *Courier-Mail* today that a question I answered on notice—question 839 to the member for Moggill—was inaccurate on the advice I had received from the contractors. I have submitted the now complete answer on the basis of that advice as well as a letter from the contractor. So I table it for the benefit of this committee.

Leave granted.

Ms BLIGH: I would like to repeat comments that I have made in the public arena on the parliamentary record, and that is that I apologise unreservedly for any inaccuracies in the material that I tabled in the previous answer.

In relation to the Macgregor incident, as I am sure the member is aware, that matter was investigated thoroughly. There is absolutely no justification for teachers using children to assist in those sorts of projects, particularly where there is asbestos present. Sorry, I am just reminding myself of the facts so I am being accurate. I just want to be absolutely accurate about where we are in the process. There has been an investigation, and the investigation indicated that there may well be matters to be addressed by the teachers. As I understand, one of the teachers concerned has resigned. Another teacher is currently the subject of a show cause process about disciplinary action.

Mr MESSENGER: The question was, though, how many teachers and pupils have been exposed to asbestos fibres while you have been minister? Do you know how many?

Ms BLIGH: I am unaware of any incidents other than those that have already been in the public arena. The member may be aware that principals were reminded in a specific directive from the deputy director-general earlier this year of their obligation to ensure that work carried out in buildings is done in a safe manner and that asbestos registers are checked. Work being carried out in a safe manner includes not doing work in classrooms where children are present. As a result of that directive I have not been informed of any other incidents. If the member is aware of any, then similar investigations will occur and the matter will be taken very seriously.

Mr MESSENGER: So what you are saying is that you do not know how many students or teachers have been exposed to asbestos fibres while you have been minister?

Ms BLIGH: Sorry, I thought your question was whether there had been any other incidents of students being involved in removal, such as that at Macgregor.

Mr MESSENGER: What I am trying to do is quantify the problem. How many teachers and students have been affected?

Ms BLIGH: What do you mean by 'affected'?

Mr MESSENGER: Been officially acknowledged as being exposed to asbestos fibres.

Ms BLIGH: You can only be exposed to fibres if they are air borne. I am advised that all testing that has been undertaken in our schools has seen negative results. No airborne fibres have been found in any of the testing that has been undertaken in relation to any concerns that have been expressed or any regular checking.

Mr MESSENGER: But surely those students at Monto High who have been carrying asbestos product out of the classroom or the schoolroom or those people at Macgregor would have been exposed to airborne asbestos fibres because they were disturbing it. A number of teachers and students must have been exposed.

Ms BLIGH: These are technical areas and I am happy to get someone to answer some of the technical questions. One of the questions on notice asked about WorkCover claims. I answered that. There have been three since 1995 and there are currently none.

Mr LANGBROEK: My question refers to page 1-14 and maintenance. Minister, now that you have admitted to misleading parliament by providing incorrect information about asbestos dust testing, can you tell the committee the total number of schools that have been tested, including the 26 listed for March and April, any prior to that date and May and June and, shall I include, the first seven days of July and other contamination rates similar to the March-April results which showed a staggering 50 per cent contamination rate?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for Surfers Paradise. I think it would be helpful if I gave some background to the question on notice. The member for Moggill had asked a previous question—and I do not have it in front of me—about whether there was any dust testing undertaken in schools. My recollection is that he asked: how many schools have had dust testing undertaken? The question was badly framed because he did not ask how many schools have had dust testing undertaken in the last 10 years or the last 12 months.

Mr LANGBROEK: I have both the questions here. The question was: will she detail all schools that have had air or dust monitoring and release the results of the tests for each such school across the state?

Ms BLIGH: I am not trying to mislead. You will see there that he does not say for a month, for 12 months, for 10 years.

Mr LANGBROEK: I think he would like them all.

Ms BLIGH: Can I answer it? I could have said, 'Give me a time frame and then I will answer you,' but I did not think that was reasonable. I asked for the last two months data to be collated in order to give him a reasonable answer to a question that was very open-ended. He then asked for the name of the schools. I was happy to give him the information.

The information was provided by Parsons Brinker Hoff, the company engaged to undertake the testing. The information that was provided by the company was then provided by me to the parliament. I was advised yesterday afternoon that the material they provided was wrong. I have made that public and have provided the corrected advice to the parliament. On the basis of them admitting that they have given me erroneous material, I think it would be irresponsible for me not to make sure that any further material made public is comprehensively checked. I am in the process of checking the material for May and June this year. When that has been comprehensively audited and checked and signed off by them, I will make that public. I hope to do that as soon as possible.

I can say that all of the air monitoring shows negative results. We do need to be very open and put as much information on this as people need into the public arena, but I do ask that we try to be sensitive to the concerns of people and that we are as accurate as we can be. When we talk about the testing it is important to continue to remind people that the air testing has shown, in all cases currently before you, negative results.

Mr LANGBROEK: Can I make a point about that first answer. It is not really a question but more an observation. It seems that because the air monitoring was quite clear that was what was mentioned there. There was no mention in that first answer of the dust sampling which was put in the subsequent answer. I am happy to move on. You have not really answered my first question about any other tests apart from the March-April ones. Have there been any prior to that date or any since—obviously in May, June and the first week of July?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member. It probably is helpful if I explain the circumstances in which testing is conducted. I am sure you are aware that there are routine maintenance checks of schools. It is probably better if I start from the beginning with asbestos. Asbestos is a material that has to be closely monitored. All the scientific advice provided to me and to the government—not just our government but all governments—and all of the relevant national standards indicate that this material is only dangerous if it deteriorates or is disturbed in a way that would allow fibres to become air borne and thereby inhaled.

Buildings constructed in Queensland in the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s or 1980s—whether they are schools or houses in our electorates—contain asbestos. Many of us in this room sat in asbestos classrooms for all of our schooling lives. This was long before anybody knew it was dangerous. Luckily we do now know that it is dangerous and we have a program in place and all of the highly dangerous material was removed.

The material that is not dangerous is sitting in our schools. We monitor it. Where it is deteriorating such as in a roof or there has been an act of God such as a hail storm that has disturbed it or—as has been the case in a number of recent incidents—workmen have disturbed it we act. It is an interesting phenomena that as we put all of the ICT money into schools a lot of these jobs have happened because they have been cabling old classrooms for computers. Workmen cabling for computers have disturbed the material by putting a drill through it. So there is a hole and there is dust. They then test the dust and the air. They have specialist removal of the dust and seal the hole.

Of course there have been incidents other than those listed for those months. There have been times when there has been inadvertent damage caused by workmen, staff doing something, a hail storm or some other form of damage to schools. Wherever there has been that damage there are arrangements in place for that to be acted upon immediately. If there has been a big hail storm we go straight in and seal the area and as soon as possible replace the roof. We do not have people in the area.

It is not surprising that there are high levels in the data you have there because it is details where there has been a concern like, 'God I have just drilled through this panel. I think that is asbestos. We had better check the dust.' It is not surprising that the dust that has been checked has tested positive. I am very relieved that it has been small amounts of dust that has not become air borne and it has been removed as quickly as possible.

Mr LANGBROEK: Given that, I suppose there could very well be incidents where we are not quite aware then of the fact that there has been damage to walls, roofs or whatever. I am very concerned about your admission that dust testing is only carried out in response to concerns expressed by parents or teachers. Will you launch a statewide dust testing program to help identify which schools pose the most risk to the health of students and teachers?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for Surfers Paradise for the question. Any suggestion that it is just up to parents and teachers is nonsense. The reality is that it is only the people who are in these buildings—whether they are school based staff; that includes teachers, teacher aides, janitors and other people—who will notice things. Mostly it is principals who are ultimately responsible. Much of this has been identified by workmen and not teachers. It is the person who puts the drill through the wall who then notifies the principal. Action is then taken.

There has been heightened speculation and discussion and public debate on this in the last few months. Some of the testing has been done because people have noticed some dust, we go out and check it and it tests negative. That is good. I referred earlier to the fact that there are continual rolling maintenance checks in schools. Principals are responsible for all aspects of safety in their schools. Asbestos is only one part of that. Certainly principals are required to monitor whether their schools are healthy and safe places. That is the monitoring process in every school, every day, every week.

I do think it is important to put it in context that schools will inevitably have things happen in them. Concrete can crack and that is a danger to children. Playground equipment gets old and can become very dangerous. Principals have to monitor all of those things as part of an ongoing process of keeping their schools safe.

We do have an ongoing monitoring process—that is, the principal, the janitor, the school based staff have responsibly in our system for keeping children safe and making sure that their school environment is an appropriate one. Whenever they identify a problem, whether it is a broken window or dust that needs checking, they have to act on that. It would take away funds from replacing this material if we had people running out hoping to find dust. We really need the people who are there using the

buildings all the time to be responsible for identifying that something is wrong with a building and it needs to be checked or fixed.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members.

Mr WELLS: I note that on page 1-23 of the MPS there is reference to draft guidelines in relation to healthy food in schools. I understand that the minister launched the strategy. Would the minister care to elaborate on that for the *Hansard* record?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased to advise the committee that earlier today I launched a new initiative and strategy to ensure that we are making healthy food and drink choices in our schools. This is becoming a critical issue for schools around the country. Recent data shows us that up to one in four children are now overweight or obese. There has been a 300 per cent increase in obesity in children in the last 10 years.

This is reaching epidemic proportions and requires us to take quite dramatic action. That is what the new government initiative does. What we have put in place, in conjunction with Queensland Health and a range of school stakeholders including parents and tuckshop associations, is a program that will see a traffic light system of food in our school canteens and through other school activities. I will come back to that.

In essence, green means go. You can have plenty of these foods and fill the menu. They are foods with which we are all familiar—fruit, lean meat, vegetables, salad rolls et cetera. Then there is the orange or amber category which basically means caution or select carefully. We should exercise caution in using these foods and also be careful not to serve them in too large sizes. This category would include, for example, processed luncheon meat. Obviously, red means stop. In this case we are saying occasionally. Foods such as fatty, salty, sugary foods, chocolates, deep fried chips will not be forbidden from our schools but will be limited to being served on two occasions in a term. What we are really saying is that these are special treats and should be treated as such. They should not be on the daily menu.

One of the things that is unique to the Queensland strategy, as opposed to those in other states which have adopted a similar traffic light system, is that we are expanding it beyond the canteen to other school based activities such as fundraising, vending machines, excursions, camps, classroom rewards, sports days and curriculum activities et cetera. What we are really looking for is a whole school culture that focuses on good, healthy choices. It is possible for schools to continue to have, for example, fizzy drinks or chocolate drives, but it would be limited to special occasions, say the last day of term or the school sports day or the school fete.

We will now work with schools across Queensland to ensure that we have a phased-in implementation. I thought I should say that we will work with schools until July next year, so they have a 12-month phase-in period to get healthy tuckshop menus and then we will expect schools to be operating as healthy tuckshops from the second term next year. From the first term of 2007 school tuckshops that are continuing not to comply with the policy may find themselves in a situation where their right to operate a tuckshop is removed from them. We are taking it very seriously and there will be sanctions, but they will not be sanctions where we pursue volunteers for fines or anything like that.

Mr WELLS: The traffic light system is a bit like a drivers licence point system I suppose: you can go through a red light a few times before you lose your licence.

Ms BLIGH: Quite so.

Mr WELLS: Further to that, there is not a lot of point in having healthy food in a tuckshop if you have sponsors at sports events and the like sponsoring things that are completely unhealthy. What steps are being taken to ensure that sponsorship arrangements are appropriate?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. He is absolutely right: there is no point having healthy tuckshops if the soccer team is being sponsored by a company that is handing them out chocolate bars after school, and we have had some examples of that. I recognise and the government recognises the benefits through schools partnering with local businesses, and we certainly want to continue to encourage those arrangements. But we need to make sure that those arrangements are appropriate. As I have said, those arrangements will have to comply with the policy. If it is a chocolate drive, it will have to count as one of your two events for the term. If it is something like an ongoing sponsorship of the school football team jerseys for example, then schools will have to have only those sponsors which are promoting healthy products, and there are now quite large corporations.

We have already in Education Queensland an arrangement with Coca-Cola, but the only product that they promote in their sponsorship is Mount Franklin water, so they do not use their sponsorship arrangements to be advertising unhealthy products to schoolchildren in school based activities. I understand that this may require some transition for schools and some schools may even be in some contractual arrangements, and we will have to work that out with each school so that there is no serious disadvantage. But I would say to those who are worried about their income, and I know that there will be some schools worried about their income from tuckshops as well as from these sorts of arrangements,

that there was a time not that long ago where we all heard dire predictions that if we stopped cigarette companies advertising and promoting sporting events major sporting events in this country would disappear. Not only has that not happened, but there is a whole generation of young Australians who were horrified that we ever even did it. I think we can have some confidence that if we work this carefully we can make it happen.

It is important that we put out the rules very specifically and that schools understand what is required of them. That is what the sponsorship guidelines do; they dovetail with the canteen guidelines. Overall, I would hope that it means a very healthy school environment. I should add one last point. Parents will still be responsible for what goes in their children's lunch boxes. That is not something that the government can control, but I would hope that the advent of these sorts of initiatives and programs in schools will start discussions between children with parents and that over time we would see this sort of programming having an influence on what is in school lunch boxes. For the benefit of the committee, I might table a copy of the document, which has endless tables of green, red and orange food and will be I think very useful—with the CD-ROM—for tuckshop coordinators.

Leave granted.

Mr FINN: Minister, education in rural and remote locations can be both challenging and rewarding, and I refer to page 1-53 of the MPS which talks of services provided to students in these areas. Can you please tell the committee of any new initiatives to support the delivery of education in rural and remote areas?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know that while he is actually a Melbourne boy in origin he spent enough time in Townsville to know that there are some schools not that far off the coast that are often in quite remote circumstances because of distance between schools in those regions. As a result of the government's commitment to lift the numbers of young people completing schooling and to see them finish 12 years of either education or training and the new laws that will come into place next January, we have done quite a bit of work over the last 12 months to look at how students living in towns that only have P-10 schools will be able to meet their legal requirements. I have recently approved a policy that will see some enhanced services to enable them to do that.

Basically, there are a number of P-10 schools that are within 70 kilometres of their nearest high school—that is, of their nearest years 11 and 12 school—and that is where children from those communities are currently going to years 11 and 12, and those arrangements would continue. However, there are 13 schools that are in such remote locations that they are not able to access by any reasonable form of transport any year 11 and 12 options. What we are putting in place is a new arrangement where students can enrol for years 11 and 12 through a school of distance education but access support as they undertake those studies at their P-10 school.

Previously, schools of distance education and local schools were completely separate entities. What we are looking at is an entitlement that would allow students to access their local school where they have done their P-10 years. Those schools will provide a study room. They will provide equipment such as computers. They will provide internet and library access, as well as a staff member for a certain number of hours a week to assist those students to work through their school of distance education arrangements and to graduate successfully from years 11 and 12.

Those 13 schools are Alpha, Baralaba, Bwgcolman, Dirranbandi, Doomadgee, Inglewood, Injune, Mornington Island, Normanton, Quilpie, Richmond, Tambo and Taroom. This is a new service. It is a new initiative, and I am looking forward to those schools being able to work with us to make it work. Those students will also receive all of the normal services from their school of distance education and they will also be eligible for the Australian government's Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme, which is currently \$3,000 per year.

Mr FINN: Minister, schools, whether in rural or remote areas or in urban areas or indeed even in Melbourne, often require support through behaviour management programs. I notice that page 1-10 of the MPS refers to a new behaviour management package that is designed to strengthen student engagement and school discipline. Can you please outline this new package to the committee?

Ms BLIGH: Some of us know that Melbourne is becoming an increasingly remote location. I thank the member again for the question. The 2005-06 budget sees the allocation of new funds for the first time in a number of years to assist with a range of new initiatives in terms of behaviour management. The package is called the Better Behaviour, Better Learning package. It is a \$3 million addition to the existing \$25 million that is spent specifically on these sorts of programs. The package has been developed partly in response to the consultations on our discussion paper around the Education (General Provisions) Act review and a subcommittee of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Educational Renewal, which did a very good solid piece of work on behaviour management issues.

The package will detail the responsibilities of students and teachers and parents to improve student management and engagement in school. It will include a new statewide state school code of behaviour that ensures that all students, teachers and parents understand what is expected of them as a minimum level of behaviour in every Queensland state school. Members are probably aware that at

the moment every school has its own behaviour management plan. That can mean a degree of flexibility for local issues—which I think is important to retain, and we will retain that—but there will be a state school code of behaviour that will be uniform to every school and will be very clear to parents and children that, no matter what state school you go into, these are the minimum requirements in terms of your behaviour. Schools will be able to supplement that with specific things about maybe particular parts of the school that you cannot access at certain hours and those sorts of issues that can be very local.

It will also see a new centre for behaviour management established to coordinate professional development and leadership skills, and each school will have its own agreement about those local issues. To support that package, we will double the number of state school based alternative education sites from five to 10. We will allocate 10 extra guidance officers who will be providing services to students needing intensive support, so they will be dedicated to those very high need end students. We will also be evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the current behaviour support and intervention strategies. People will be aware that we have some 290 behaviour management teachers and we will be looking at the current allocation, not in numbers but what those teachers do and how we might be able to get the best possible use of those across the system. We will also be working with school based police, guidance officers, the school based nurse and senior guidance staff as well as the youth support coordinators to make sure that this strategy is targeted at that end of the spectrum that really needs a bit more thinking and work.

CHAIR: Minister, I note at page 1-8 of the MPS it states that the 2005-06 budget allocates the department with new funding to employ a projected 286 full-time equivalent teachers to meet enrolment growth. I am very familiar with enrolment growth on the Gold Coast. This is a large increase and it has demonstrated the continued growth of Queensland schools. Is this the total increase that you expect in new teachers for Queensland schools?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I confirm that this budget does allocate funding for a projected additional 286 FTEs for enrolment growth. Obviously predicting enrolment is not a precise business, but that is the sort of growth that we would anticipate. It is not surprising when we consider that Queensland is overall a growth state, and we are seeing enrolment growth in all sectors of schooling. So the state, the independent and the Catholic sectors are all seeing enrolment growth in real numbers. Queensland, as I said earlier, is the only state that is continuing to see enrolment growth in its government primary and secondary schools.

While the confirmed 2005 enrolments are not known until day 8, the current projected increase in state schooling is 488,340 students. It will increase to that, sorry, from its current of 485,290. If we were increasing by 500,000 a year, we would be in real trouble. This strong growth requires the projected increase that I have mentioned. All up, we would anticipate an estimated growth of 396 extra teachers in the beginning of 2006. In addition to the 286 new teachers for enrolment growth, we would see additional teachers for students with disabilities. But we will also be putting specific initiatives in place that will see new teachers, including, as I outlined, additional teachers in the 10 alternative schooling sites, additional guidance officers and six new teachers for Queensland's internationally recognised instrumental music program. This is the first increase in the instrumental music program. This is actually the first increase in instrumental music program teachers for 10 years and will really take the pressure off in those high-growth areas that have not seen any new allocation because it is not an enrolment driven program. Between 2001 and 2004 the government put in place 800 new teachers, and those teachers have now been reallocated to reduce class sizes in the middle years. All of those figures I think show a high degree of confidence in enrolment growth in the state system. The member is right; a very large proportion of that is happening on Gold Coast.

CHAIR: Of course. It goes without saying. I note at page 1-10 of the MPS, among other references, you refer to the funding that the government is allocating to continue the roll-out of the landmark reforms to the senior years of schooling, the Education and Training Reforms for the Future or the ETRF. I know that students in my electorate are benefiting from these reforms, so I wonder if you could elaborate on the funding allocated in the new financial year to support ETRF and the benefits that these reforms are providing to students.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future, as everybody knows I hope, are based on making sure that every young person aged 15 to 17 is either learning or earning—that means in school, in training or at work or a combination of those areas. The legislation will become effective in January 2006. We will see a new requirement for all students to complete year 10. Members would be aware that currently students are legally able to leave school at age 15, even if that is some time in grade 9 or early in year 10. So the new requirements will not be so much age based as trying to get everybody to complete year 10 or reach the age of 16 and then enter into a compulsory participation phase for a further two years or until they have gained a Senior Certificate or a certificate level III vocational qualification or turned 17. There is an exemption for full-time work.

There are a range of initiatives to underpin that initiative. We have recognised that year 10 is a very critical time for young people to plan for their future and we are requiring all schools to put in place

student education and training plans for year 10 students. In 2005 approximately 55,000 year 10 students in state and non-state schools will have an opportunity to complete one of these plans. It is not a legal requirement yet, but we are trialling it in every high school and by the end of this year we would hope to see every year 10 student have one of these plans which is really an important part of making sure they do not slip through the net.

There is a range of initiatives that have been funded through the Queensland Studies Authority in the 2005-06 budget to underpin these programs, and they include the implementation of a new system to register all students so they can monitor the progress of young people and bank their credits towards their senior qualifications; improved online services to provide students, parents and guardians with easy access to information about achievements and progress towards those qualifications; and funds to fully implement web based and freecall telephone based information services on career pathways.

We have also allocated a total of \$900,000 worth of funds to establish and coordinate a community mentoring program statewide. Job Futures was the organisation selected through tender in November 2004 and it commenced the program operation in January this year. We also have six trial sites which commenced operation with the mentoring program at the beginning of this year. The regions are Corinda, Ipswich and West Moreton, Gold Coast north and Gold Coast south, Logan and Beaudesert, Mooloolaba and Nambour, and Townsville. We have also seen new funds to put in place the Youth Support Coordinators program and the central purchasing unit, which is an innovative program to reach out to young people already disengaged and bring them back into the education and training sectors. That program is already delivering services to about 670 very high needs young people with \$4 million over three years.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from non-government members and I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer to page 1-22 of the MPS. Halfway down the page it refers to the cabling that was undertaken in 2,132 classrooms. Once again we are dealing with the topic of asbestos.

Ms BLIGH: Sorry, are you on a page of the MPS?

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, 1-22.

Ms BLIGH: You are referring to something specific on that page?

Mr MESSENGER: Halfway down the page it refers to cabling in 2,132 classrooms in 194 schools.

Ms BLIGH: Yes.

Mr MESSENGER: The minister referred in a previous answer to this question. Was any cabling undertaken which disturbed asbestos material while children were present and, most importantly, can you give a guarantee to the committee that the school asbestos register is, in its current form, accurate?

Ms BLIGH: There are two parts to the question. Yes, there were some cases where children were present. That is already on the public record. Schools where that has occurred have advised parents. Where children were in classrooms parents have been advised in writing so there is no cover-up or any attempt to hide that. That is already, as I said, in the public arena. There has also been a directive, as I alluded to earlier, issued to principals. Perhaps I just should go back to laws on some of this. The management of schools is a constant juggle between centralised control and devolution of authority to principals. In the independent sector there are some denominational groups of schools, but largely they are independent schools and operating completely without a centralised process. In the Catholic and the state sectors they are system-wide and, as I said, there is a constant tension that you manage and juggle about what you put to principals and what you kind of make happen centrally.

The safety and health of our schools is primarily a responsibility of principals. You have to make some judgments about the ability of professional people at that level to make good decisions. When it became clear to me that some principals were allowing children to stay in classrooms while work was being done I did not think that satisfied a reasonable level of safety, whether it was asbestos or not. I am as concerned about mishaps happening from work that has nothing to do with asbestos as I am with asbestos. So, a directive was issued earlier this year to principals that no work—whether there is asbestos in the classroom or not—can be undertaken in classrooms or buildings that children are present in, such as libraries, while children or staff are present in those rooms. I am happy to table the directive if that is of assistance to the member.

Leave granted.

Ms BLIGH: The precautionary principle should prevail—that is, if there is any doubt then you should treat it as if it does have asbestos and therefore treat it with all caution.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, you still did not answer the important part of the question which was relating to the schools asbestos register, a very important document. If it is not accurate then we can get in all sorts of problems.

Ms BLIGH: They are as accurate as they can humanly be in the sense that all checking has been done by qualified officers who have been into those schools and done thorough searches of all the buildings and they have recorded everything that they have identified. Given the prevalence of this material, given that it goes back 60 or 70 years, I think it would be simply irresponsible to ever say—for anybody to ever say—that there is not one spot somewhere behind a blackboard or something that nobody got to. That is precisely why principals, as well as people who own their own houses, should act on the precautionary principle and that is that if there is any doubt you should treat it as if it might be dangerous material. So, there are some things about which there is no doubt and that is a brick wall, but if there is any doubt, if it is fibro-looking material and there is any doubt, you should treat it as if it is dangerous. That is the principle, as I understand it, on which building sites work, on which builders work. I should just say that as part of the roof replacement program there will be further auditing done, as I understand it, by the Department of Public Works of other building material at the same time. It is something that I think needs to be continually updated and it is. So, if material is identified in any testing that is not on the register then the registers are updated.

Mr MESSENGER: Once again I refer you to page 1-8 the MPS and the Asbestos Roof Replacement Program. Can you provide the committee with an assurance that all state schools containing asbestos display a sign, and I have a sign here, an asbestos sign. I seek leave to table the sign.

CHAIR: Is leave granted?

Mr ENGLISH: No.

CHAIR: There is an objection from the committee. The committee might deliberate in private to take a vote on whether we will accept the tabling of that sign.

Ms BLIGH: I am aware of the sign. I am not sure whether it needs to be tabled. I know what you are talking about. I am happy to answer the question rather than get into the technicalities of tabling.

CHAIR: If we do not need to do that we will not adjourn; we will continue. Are you happy with that, member for Burnett?

Mr MESSENGER: Yes.

Ms BLIGH: In terms of that question I might call Al Wagner, who is the director of facilities, to outline that information for you.

Mr Wagner: Could you just repeat that question?

Ms BLIGH: We have not actually finished the question. As I understand it, you were asking whether every school has got one of those.

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, an assurance that all state schools containing asbestos display this sign.

Mr Wagner: Not to my knowledge, no.

Mr MESSENGER: They do not?

Mr Wagner: No.

Mr MESSENGER: Why not?

Mr Wagner: I am not 100 per cent sure it is a legislative requirement to do so.

Mr MESSENGER: Building owners and managers should ensure that the asbestos materials register is readily available and accessible to building occupiers, particularly those doing maintenance work. I was of an understanding that that sign—

Ms BLIGH: I might be able to help the member. The issue about signage has again been one that has been in the public arena and I have made public comments on it. I am happy to repeat them here. I understand that South Australia has a process where they actually do not just use that sign but actually have labels in classrooms. I was asked whether we would give consideration to that and I have asked the department to give some consideration to that. I think it actually has a lot to recommend it. There is one small caveat and that is I would not want anyone to think that because a piece of material does not have the sign on it—because in schools with 1,500 kids if someone tears the sign down you would not want that to be your only protection; you would have to have other protections in place—therefore it is safe. You would still have to have the other protections. But that is not insurmountable. I think you can work your way through that.

These are schools. People do not just walk in and start working. They have to go and see the principal. They have to say, 'We are here.' They have to discuss the project. They do not have authority to start work on a project unless they have actually got authority from the principal, and most work is only done after there is quite a bit of discussion about what the work is and how it will be done. There are a range of safety issues that principals have to take into account when any work is done in a school, and they involve whether there will be any need to fence off the area for children's safety or whether there will be noise issues and therefore it has to be done at a time that school is not in session. There are literally dozens and dozens of issues that principals have to negotiate with contractors prior to work

being undertaken. The presence of asbestos in the material that the work is being undertaken on is one of those issues. I would suggest to you that actually having to sit down with the principal—and the principal has an obligation to say, ‘This is the register. The work you will be doing is on that register and therefore you need to take precautions’—is a much more comprehensive system to make sure that these things occur.

I have not ruled out the signs. I have asked our department—I do not know about that particular sign—to look at the ones that are in operation in South Australia and to give some consideration to how they might work there and to get some advice from the South Australian department about how long they have been there and to what extent they are working.

I do not think we should have our minds closed to any new ideas or good ideas. This is a difficult area. It is difficult material. As I said, we are not the only agency that is dealing with it. People have it in their homes, it is in buildings—anything built in that time. So if we have other ways of making it better I am happy to take any suggestions.

Mr MESSENGER: Just from that response, both from yourself and your departmental officer, it would seem that Queensland schools do not have adequate signage and would not be in accordance with the Queensland government department of works asbestos management guide, which says that buildings that have asbestos or materials with asbestos should install suitable signage in a prominent place in the building indicating when and where an asbestos material register for the building may be inspected. Now, you would think that signs like this in schools that are on the asbestos register would be in all schools. That would just be an obvious first step.

Ms BLIGH: I have said to the member that we are currently looking at signage. I do not know what else you want me to say. I think I have answered the question fully. We have been very open about it.

CHAIR: Member for Burnett, the minister has already answered that question. Can you move on to the next question, please?

Mr MESSENGER: Still with asbestos, once again page 1-8 and the Asbestos Roof Replacement Program. Given the department’s previous record in using student labour for the removal of asbestos material, can you guarantee that the asbestos removal program will not put students at risk once again?

Ms BLIGH: I think that is about the stupidest question you have asked this afternoon. There is no history here. This is just nonsense. This is a program that has been operational under your side of politics when Bob Quinn was the minister and when the former member for Moggill who was minister for public works was operating. This program is undertaken by highly specialised people and will continue to be. Where a school breaches all of those guidelines and requirements, through something like the incident that we discussed before, that should be seen for what it is: a monumentally stupid breach of the requirements and something that is actually notable because it is so unusual in the system.

I think it is important, as I said earlier, to just be a little bit sensible in our discussion about this. There is a great deal of care taken in our schools. My experience, I have to say, is that people are not attracted to the profession of teaching or the job of principal unless they care deeply about children and their safety. My experience of every principal I have met in the state and non-state sector is that they take that responsibility very, very seriously.

That does not mean that from time to time there are not things that can only be put down to human error. As I said, sometimes it is stupidity. But to damn a whole system and all the people who work in it and all the people who take such great care everyday I do not think does you any credit or the work of this committee any credit. I take the opportunity to recognise the work our principals do to make sure that this material is protected, that our students are safe, that they advise parents and they do everything that is reasonably possible on the basis of all known science.

Mr LANGBROEK: I refer the minister to page 1-52 of the MPS in relation to students enrolled in distance education. The department has extended services in both distance education and for students with disabilities. Can the minister tell the committee the number of advisory visiting teachers that the department has working with students with disabilities in the distance education area, because I understand that the answer is none?

Ms BLIGH: I will take that on notice and come back to you. It is a detail question.

Mr LANGBROEK: The government’s response to the ministerial task force on inclusive education, which was in June 2004, made a raft of recommendations. Recommendation No. 6 recommends the implementation of open and transparent dispute resolution processes as well as an independent complaints mechanism. I note that the deadline for implementation of this recommendation was June 2005, and I have not heard anything about it. Can you tell me about the delay?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. There has been a slight delay in the implementation of that. I set up a task force and one of the recommendations was that I appoint an ongoing ministerial council. It took slightly longer than expected to pull together all of the proposed members of that council. They required appointment by cabinet. That has now been achieved. I think

that council has had two meetings. Obviously you would expect that the complaints resolution process would be one of the high priorities of that council. There are, as I understand it, written procedures for resolving complaints. The work has been completed, but it has not been finalised through me.

Mr LANGBROEK: Under the heading 'Shared service provider' on page 1-102 of the MPS, amongst other things, as a shared service provider Corporate and Professional Services provides general legal services and management of litigation. I understand from a complaint that I have had from someone who is a volunteer at a school in the minister's electorate that this person is not covered by education department insurance, or parents and citizens insurance or the Civil Liability Act. What action has the minister taken to protect and indemnify school volunteers from being sued in the course of carrying out their duties, such as sports coaching?

Ms BLIGH: We may be at cross-purposes but my understanding is that volunteers in Queensland schools who incur any liability as a result of undertaking their duties are actually covered.

Mr LANGBROEK: By?

Ms BLIGH: By the department, through the Queensland Government Insurance Fund. My understanding might be wrong. I would have to have a look at the circumstances.

Mr LANGBROEK: That is the advice that I have had, that they are not covered because they are not employees of Education Queensland. Sometimes teachers will ask them to assist with coaching, as has happened in this particular case. They are not covered by P&C insurance.

Ms BLIGH: There are a couple of issues. I am not entirely sure of the circumstances. My recollection is that the amendments to the civil liability legislation actually protected volunteers, wherever they were, from being sued.

Mr LANGBROEK: Again, the advice I had in this case was that this particular person did not feel that they were covered by all of the Civil Liability Act and therefore was concerned about his or her position.

Ms BLIGH: This is not the kind of issue that we can resolve in an estimates committee. It requires some opinion on the basis of the application of the law to a set of circumstances that I am not privy to. I would be happy to talk to you about more details and to resolve it outside of the work of this committee.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you. I refer the minister to page 1-52 of the MPS in relation to disability services. I know that the ascertainment process is being replaced by the new education adjustment process, but why are there students in mainstream schools who have been ascertained at the highest level of six, which means that they are identified as regularly needing attention, who are going without specialist therapy for several months?

Ms BLIGH: Again, I would have to know the circumstances of each school.

Mr LANGBROEK: I can quote Woody Point as an example.

Ms BLIGH: I would have to get advice about each school. I know the way the process is supposed to work but if it is breaking down somewhere then I would need to look at the circumstances. There is sometimes a delay in children accessing support if there is some delay in their ascertainment because they might be in a school that has not been able to get someone to come in and do that work. In the cases that you are talking about, their needs have already been established. You are saying that there are children getting nothing.

Mr LANGBROEK: Some have been ascertained who are not getting any therapy.

Ms BLIGH: You are talking about Woody Point Special School.

Mr LANGBROEK: I am talking about Woody Point, but there is a school in the electorate of Albert that has had contact with me about that. Children have been ascertained and are supposed to get a certain amount of therapy per week and are not getting any or are getting half an hour every few months.

Ms BLIGH: There are individual circumstances in each of these schools and I would have to find out the answers for you. It may be that at a particular school there is a vacancy. From time to time therapists resign, retire and we are filling a vacancy. That might be the reason. It might be that there has been some break down in the procedures and we need to investigate that. From time to time I get correspondence about long gaps and in the majority of cases it has been when a vacancy of a therapist is being filled. I do not know whether that is the circumstance in your case. There has been an increase last year and this year in a number of the therapy areas, so it is not about any decrease in therapy or a decrease in funding for therapy. Again, I would be happy to take the names or to take correspondence and look at the specific circumstances.

CHAIR: I suggest to the member for Surfers Paradise that questions about specific circumstances of specific individual students might be better asked of the minister separately or perhaps as questions on notice. That is the end of non-government questions. We have a few minutes for government questions.

Mr WELLS: Page 2-4 of the MPS refers to a destination survey called Next Step. Would the minister please give us some more information about that survey and its results?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. He is correct. We have, indeed, undertaken a survey of all young people who completed year 12 in 2005 to look at their destinations post school. The program is called the Next Step. Almost 40,000 students, 39,458 students, were sent surveys and some of those were also done via the telephone. They were sent out earlier this year and the survey closed on 6 June.

This is the first time we have ever done this in Queensland and we hope it will form some baseline data to help us make some assessment of how our legislation over the next couple of years is working. The response rate for a first time ever survey was very high. It was 60.2 per cent, or 23,748 students responded to the survey. In an environment where they were not advised in year 12 that this would be happening and they did not know about it, I think that is a very good result that bodes very well for future survey measurement.

This idea is based on a program that has been operating in Victoria. It was conducted by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research in conjunction with the University of Melbourne, which undertakes the program in Victoria. So over time we hope to get some comparable results. The Catholic and independent schooling sectors were part of the survey. It was for all young people regardless of their school of origin. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Catholic and independent schooling sectors for their assistance. I hope it is a survey that over time will provide some very good quality information for all schools and all sectors so that we can get a better picture of how we are going at preparing young people for life beyond school.

We will be looking this year at publishing the state and regional reports of this data, and in 2006 we will then report the destinations as a separate publication for every school. What we mean by 'destination' is that at the end of six months after leaving school are these young people studying full time, working full time or in some training environment? Let us see where they are actually going in terms of the pathways beyond school. We can already measure, for example, whether they are offered a university place, but that does not tell us ultimately six months later whether they are still at university or whether they even accepted the place. I think there is much to be learnt and I am looking forward to seeing the results when they are collated and made available to me later this year.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, I would like to think that the majority of Queenslanders are aware of our ETRF agenda generally and certainly the senior phase of learning trials. Could you please expand on the funding and grant program that is linked to the ETRF program?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As already stated, the Education and Training Reforms for the Future is designed to improve outcomes for students in the senior phase of learning. We understand as a government that additional financial support will be required to make all of this happen. To that end, we have put in place a number of grant programs that assist young people to access further pathways, with a focus on re-engaging young people who are either disengaged from schooling or who are at high risk of doing so.

From 2003 to the end of the 2006 financial year, we have allocated \$11.7 million over the trial areas. That will see 61 strategies for re-engaging young people funded in schools in those areas. We have seen \$4.22 million allocated statewide, which has funded over 180 strategies or programs, and \$5.25 million will be allocated in 2005-06.

The trialling of local initiatives, as identified in district youth achievement plans, is aimed at improving participation, retention and attainment of young people aged 15 to 17. This is a very localised program and local regions have to determine the best way the funds could support their circumstances. The funds do not only go to schools, although in some cases they do, but also go to TAFE institutes, other education and training providers, community agencies, local government authorities and other organisations who are working with young people. So there are some quite innovative programs out there.

For example, in the Emerald trial area, youth learning and support centres and Fresh Start programs were funded to the tune of just over \$89,000 in 2004-05 and more than \$105,000 in this coming financial year. An integrated youth learning and support centre in each major community in the Emerald area is operating and those centres are providing Fresh Start programs, training, workplace coordination and information and advice regarding learning and employment pathways and career options. Centres have already been established in Clermont, Emerald and Blackwater, with additional centres to be established in Woorabinda and the gem fields, with an affiliated centre in Dysart.

A Fresh Start coordinator will regularly visit each centre and develop and coordinate Fresh Start programs for young people. In June 2004, the centres identified that there were 111 young people who would be eligible for these services. Over the past year the number of disengaged young people has reduced to nine as a result of those services supporting their learning and earning needs. There are currently eight centres operating across the Emerald area. I chose the Emerald example because I think

in its early phases of ETRF people were concerned that it might be much more difficult for schools and communities in these areas where there are fewer options. I think this is a great example of local knowledge working well.

Proceedings suspended from 3.28 pm to 3.45 pm

CHAIR: The committee will now continue to examine the estimates of expenditure for Education. The next round of questions will be from non-government members.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I refer to the introduction of a full-time prep year as mentioned on page 1-36 of the MPS. It is a very simple question to start with. What is the final capital cost of the prep year?

Ms BLIGH: I am unable to answer that question definitively because we have not finalised the building program. We have allocated up to \$350 million. We have allocated \$56 million of that to non-government schools. That brings the amount down to \$294 million. We do not anticipate, on the basis of current estimates, that the state school sector will use all of those funds but, as we have learnt in the past, when you actually go out and start building you often find a range of circumstances confronting the builders that add to the cost or require a rescoping of the project. At this stage I am unable to give you any final data. When the project is finished we will be able to tell you what the final costs were.

Mr MESSENGER: This is an area that has created a lot of nervousness within many school populations and many school communities. There is a perception that it could be underfunded. Correct me if I am wrong—and I am sure you will—but we are going to go from something like 97 schools in 2006 that are providing prep year through to 2007 where we will have maybe 900 schools providing prep year, and you still have not organised the capital budget.

Ms BLIGH: No, I have. Every school has been advised of the projected building or refurbishments for their school subject to final enrolments. Not only has every school been notified; every member of parliament has also been notified of the projected solution for the schools in their electorate. You will note in those letters that the projected solutions are subject to enrolments, and that will be refined next year for those that are built next year.

The building program is starting now. Yes, it is an ambitious program, but I am very confident of the solutions meeting the needs and of being delivered on time. There has been extensive consultation with P&Cs and principals in every school in the state sector. I understand that the Catholic sector has been doing system-wide consultations with its schools as well.

The budget is a budget of up to \$350 million for both state and non-state schools. We have made an allocation of \$56 million directly to the non-state sector, and it is now responsible for how that is allocated to the schools in its sector. The remaining funds are, as I have outlined, at this stage projected to be above what is necessary on the projected building program, so we have quite a large contingency built in. If we get to this time next year and require any changes to that, then the budget process will look at that. But there is no concern in government about any tightness of funds in this area in terms of meeting the needs of the program that we have outlined to schools.

While you would expect that school communities would have a keen interest in the location, the shape, the size and the nature of any new building in their facility, I have to say that my experience is that increasingly schools are quite excited about the opportunities. If you have any particular schools that are worried about the solution, as I have indicated to members repeatedly I would certainly welcome any discussions that you want to have with me or any officers of the department.

You will remember that the building program is not all for 2007 because half of the cohort will be in 2007 and the full cohort will be in 2008. As 2006 progresses and 2007 enrolments start, we will have a much better idea of final enrolments. We have certainly budgeted on maximum enrolment levels in most cases. In addition to the buildings, there are also questions that we still have to go out to contract on, I think, in relation to furniture, fitout et cetera.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to the introduction once again of the full-time prep year as mentioned on page 1-36. Will you provide a definitive list of those preschools that are earmarked to be sold off and the proceeds forecast to be raised from the sale of those preschools?

Ms BLIGH: I am just getting some further information. I can advise the committee that the government will be looking to maximise the sale of facilities that will no longer be needed for classrooms. Obviously the receipts from the sale will go back into building programs. The motivation behind selling some of these facilities is as much about the long-term maintenance of facilities that schools do not need as it is about any benefits from the sale. In many cases these sites, as you would be aware, are off-site, and in some cases they are not even in the line of sight of the schools; they are a couple of blocks away. If there are no students in those facilities, in many cases schools are quite keen not to be responsible for their maintenance. You still have to mow the lawn, paint the buildings and keep them safe. If they are not being used regularly that becomes quite a difficult thing to manage.

What we have done is identify all of the off-site preschools. In the process of developing the solutions for every school that I referred to in the last answer we have been able to identify eight schools that will require their off-site preschools for the prep year. That is largely because the site of the school

is too small to fit any new buildings on and the preschool is next door, if you like, or, in one case at least I think, across the road. In eight cases we have done that. I can give you the names of those schools. I am being reminded that in question on notice No. 949, asked on 31 August 2004, you asked me to list all off-site preschools. They are actually on that list, so there is a comprehensive list already on the record.

The eight that to date are being retained for prep accommodation are Dunwich, Hambleton, Toowong, Currumbin, Junction Park, Bli Bli, Drayton and Stanthorpe. In the remaining cases we are now involved in a consultation process with schools, and final decisions about the future of the other facilities will be made in 2006. I have yet to make decisions on all of the others. Some of those may well join this list, but not because they are needed for prep; they might be needed for some other purpose.

I am not shying away from the fact that in the majority of cases we will be relinquishing these buildings because the long-term effect on school budgets and time of maintaining buildings that you are not using is not efficient and we should avoid it.

Mr MESSENGER: How much money do you expect to raise from the sales? Have you projected that?

Ms BLIGH: There is an estimated value that if all 65 sites were sold it might raise in the vicinity of \$20 million, after you deduct program management and disposal costs. That is very much a guesstimate at this stage. In every case you would have to go to the market. In some cases you will find the market value way above the estimate and in some cases it will be below. As you can see, it is not a massive contribution to the cost of the programs. It is more about that long-term issue of maintaining buildings that you do not need.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, once again I refer you to page 1-36 of the MPS. Are you aware of the estimated cost of increasing teacher aide hours for the prep year from 15 hours per week to 30 hours per week?

Ms BLIGH: The approximate cost is \$2 million per hour per year, for every additional hour that you provide—not to every single person. If you increase the allocation from 15 hours to 16 hours it would cost \$2 million. So it depends on how far you progress.

Mr MESSENGER: Per year?

Ms BLIGH: Per year.

Mr MESSENGER: Not per week?

Ms BLIGH: No.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, once again I refer you to page 1-36 of the MPS. Will all the prep buildings have disabled access? What additional support will be provided for prep children with a disability and their teachers?

Ms BLIGH: You would be aware that there are both refurbishments and new buildings. All of the new buildings are being built with disabled access. In each of the refurbishment cases it will be a site-by-site decision. Given that we are working, in some cases, with quite old buildings et cetera, it may be that there are two prep classrooms and one has disability access. There will be solutions found for every case so that children with a disability can access prep at their local school.

I should also say that the new Commonwealth provisions in relation to disability access under the Disability Discrimination Act come into effect, I think, later in 2005. We will be working to comply with that. Obviously in older schools there will have to be some creative solutions, but we will be obliged to offer this service to children with disabilities and we have an obligation to make sure we meet those needs so that no individual student would be disadvantaged.

Mr MESSENGER: Just taking you back to a question about the teacher aide time, do you have any plans to increase teacher aide time from 15 hours to 30 hours?

Ms BLIGH: I think I am already on the public record as saying in response to some industrial action from the Queensland Teachers Union in the second term that there have been a series of discussions. I undertook that the department would enter into discussions with the Queensland Teachers Union and the Miscellaneous Workers Union, which represents teacher aides, and those discussions have been continuing. I do not think it is reasonable to comment any further on those discussions at this stage, but when and if there is a resolution in those discussions I will obviously make that public.

I should say that we changed the provisions in the trial schools last year to allow schools to use other hours in the school to supplement their prep classes. Some have chosen to do so and some have not. We have been evaluating what has happened in those schools that have and have not done that. Those evaluations are also informing the discussions.

I think it is probably worth saying again on the record what the government's thinking has been in the allocation of hours to this area. It is tempting to think of prep as simply doubling half-time preschool.

In fact, it is quite a different program for a different group of children. With the new age provisions that will be coming in, of the children that will be sitting in our prep classrooms half of them are children who are currently sitting in year 1 classrooms with no dedicated allocation of teacher aide hours. Given that we have a slightly older group, given that the nature of the curriculum is different and given the fact that we have children full time and are therefore able to deal with some of the socialisation issues much more quickly, including toileting—the evaluation has shown that the issues people were concerned about have not been an issue in trial schools; issues such as toileting are managed within the first week and then the children develop a pattern—it has not been an issue. That was the government's thinking about the allocation of time into that group because it is, as I said, a different group of children and a different program.

I have been honest about this from the start. There are mixed results from trial schools. Some trial schools report that this is not a problem and not an issue, and other trial schools are finding this a bit of a struggle. It probably puts more pressure on them at the beginning of the year. So there are a range of issues being discussed at the moment as part of these negotiations, and I am very hopeful that there will be some sensible resolution, but it is too early for me to go much further than that.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I will refer you to the Cooler Schools program, as mentioned on page 1-8 of the MPS. I refer to your comments reported in the *Sunday Mail* in January of this year that it would cost in excess of \$500 million to aircondition the remaining schools in Queensland. Can you provide the committee with an outline of how you arrived at this figure? Does this estimate rely on Q-Build prices?

Ms BLIGH: The figure, as I understand it, was an estimate. No-one is pretending that it would be absolutely accurate and, as I understand it, it was done pretty much on the basis of known classrooms to not have airconditioning outside of the zone multiplied by the current cost of providing airconditioning into those classrooms. That is basically how it was done, and obviously it was in today's dollars because you would not do any program like that over one financial year.

In relation to the cost per classroom, I am happy to have an opportunity to advise the committee that at my request earlier this year some work was done by Q-Build looking at the standard that is applied and required, and we believe that we are in a position for the next round of Cooler Schools to reduce the cost per classroom from \$26,000 to about \$18,000. That includes everything from electrical upgrades for the school et cetera. That is the average cost—obviously some will cost more and some will cost less. I am very aware that to the lay person, including me, that sounds like a very high amount, but I have come to understand that with between 20 and 30 children or adults in a room all day long then the standard that is required of the equipment is very different from what you might have in your own home, where at most you are going to have two or three people wandering through the room at any given time. It is quite a serious safety issue in terms of air quality, and it is one that we have to make sure that we apply those standards to.

We are doing what we can to work within the Australian standards as well as trying to bring the cost down, but it is always going to be costing more than domestic airconditioning until we see new technology coming in, frankly. I hope that one day we can see much more environmentally friendly technology that helps us to cool without the cost to other non-renewable resources.

Mr MESSENGER: One of the comments that was made to me by P&C committee members is that the technology within airconditioning had gone ahead in leaps and bounds over the last couple of years and they did not feel as though the government was keeping up with that change in technology. I refer you to the Cooler Schools program once again. Will you commit to airconditioning all special education classes at state cost, and that is at the very least?

Ms BLIGH: Sorry, just state the question.

Mr MESSENGER: Would you commit to airconditioning all special education classrooms within the state as a first priority?

Ms BLIGH: I should say now that what currently occurs is that where there is a demonstrated medical requirement and where a child's condition or disability is exacerbated by heat—and we have a number of cases such as that—and the child is in a special school or in a mainstream environment, it is possible for us, and it does happen now, to aircondition those classrooms. There is a commitment by the government which I have repeated often that we will look at expanding our investment in airconditioning when we have completed the zone. You will see that there is less put into the Cooler Schools zone this year than last year, and that is because we believe we are now at the real end of finalising the zone. That means we are now in a position to start thinking about what, if anything, we do after this. I think we need to see how that program goes but obviously that is a broader decision for government.

Can I go back to that question you raised about technology. There is a technology called enthalpy, which is emerging technology about considerably reducing the recurrent operating costs of airconditioning. Q-Build is trialling it in a couple of schools with a view to seeing whether it does over time reduce the costs. If it can be demonstrated that it does, then we would certainly look at moving to that technology. So, while I can appreciate that the P&C representatives that you referred to are keen,

as I am, to make sure we are using the best technology possible, you would also appreciate we have to make sure it is tried and tested before we launch into putting it in every school.

Mr LANGBROEK: I would like to revisit the indemnity insurance issue for volunteers, leaving the specifics of the situation that I mentioned to you about the school in your electorate because I think this has implications for a lot of people and a lot of schools throughout the state. I have a copy of the guidelines for parents and citizens associations regarding liability. Something that I have read in it states—

Volunteers who are not members of the P&C cannot apply to the Minister to be indemnified. However, volunteers may be protected from liability under the *Civil Liability Act 2003*.

And it says 'may'. I would like some sort of assurance from you about volunteers who are not members of the P&C and not education department employees as to their indemnity cover if some incident happens where they are threatened with being sued.

CHAIR: Minister, that does refer to legislation in another portfolio.

Ms BLIGH: I will be careful how I answer it. I should preface my remarks by saying to the member that the rules covering questions explicitly prohibit the eliciting of a legal opinion, and I am not going to give one here, but I would draw the member's attention to this document which I am happy to table which is the Queensland Government Insurance Fund policy. It has a specific section in relation to volunteers and it says that any person who works without payment other than out-of-pocket expenses for the agency and acts under the direction and supervision of the agency is a volunteer under this fund. This fund extends cover to volunteers under another section of the policy. So I will give you a copy of that policy. The proviso is that they diligently and conscientiously carry out their duties, as you would expect in any insurance cover. I seek leave to table the provisions of the Queensland Government Insurance Fund, which is the fund that operates for Education Queensland.

Leave granted.

Ms BLIGH: I am not sure on what basis the person who has raised this with you has been given advice, but I suggest that again we would have to look at the circumstances.

Mr LANGBROEK: I just think there are concerns for volunteers throughout the state.

Ms BLIGH: If they are a volunteer for any government agency working under the supervision and direction of the agency—so not someone who just wanders in and does not tell anyone they are there and then claims to be a volunteer—for example, a mum who is reading with students and the teacher is in the room, people who are coaching school teams or working in tuckshops would be covered for a claim, on my reading of that fund. As I have said, I caution that the Civil Liability Act is the responsibility of another minister, and you should possibly talk to the Attorney-General. Secondly, I am not qualified, and nor do I seek, to give a legal opinion and no-one should rely on my comments in that regard.

Mr LANGBROEK: That is understood. At 1-52, again, disability services, in 2002 there was a review of speech language impairment services. Can you tell me how many children were cut from government programs as a result of this review? I understand that you probably will not be able to give me the exact number but some sort of ballpark figure as to whether there was a certain number before or after.

Ms BLIGH: In order to answer the question I probably need to have more information on the review. I am not aware of any review in 2002-03 of children receiving services.

Mr LANGBROEK: I have here that in 2002 there was a review of speech language impairment services. I will move on, then.

Ms BLIGH: I am not being obtuse; I am actually not sure what you are referring to, but I am happy to go back and ask people who might have some of that history.

Mr LANGBROEK: I will move on and we can come back to it.

Ms BLIGH: As I outlined earlier, there have in the last two financial years been increases for the first time in a number of years in speech language therapists appointed to the department. We have allocated specific funds to see that category of staff grow for the first time.

Mr LANGBROEK: That comes back to the question I was asking before when you reassured the committee that there has been an increase. So you are confident there is no endemic lack of resources or lack of speech therapists or various disability services for schools in a number of different areas throughout the state that are not covered by the overall increase that you mentioned before?

Ms BLIGH: In addition to the increase, obviously I need to acknowledge that there is also an increase in school enrolments and school population. It is always a matter of increasing your resources at the same time as you are increasing your demand, and I am very aware that in a number of parts of Queensland there are shortages of therapists, so we have allocated the position but we are still trying to fill the vacancy. That certainly causes a reduction and in some cases no service. If there is no speech language therapist to fill a vacancy, then we have to keep working to find one. We talk to Queensland Health to try to put in arrangements where we can share the therapist at the hospital or the community

health centre or some of those sorts of arrangements, but they do not always satisfy the demand or the need. The reason why I have made it a priority in the last two budgets to put in place more therapists is a recognition that we need to keep pace with the demand. Like everybody, you can always do more with more resources.

Mr LANGBROEK: Again, on 1-52, disability services, I understand it is a common practice—and I have heard this from constituents—for education staff particularly on the Gold Coast and Brisbane south areas to say to parents of students with disabilities that their children should only attend mainstream schools on a part-time basis because there is not enough support. Are you aware of this? They say, ‘Don’t come every day; come four days a week.’

Ms BLIGH: No, I am not aware of that and I would regard that as a breach of departmental policy if parents were being advised for those reasons. There are good reasons why children from time to time undertake part-time schooling at a mainstream school, and in some cases part-time schooling at a specialist facility, for a period of time while they make a transition from their special school into a mainstream environment or from another program such as the one operated by Autism Queensland where they might have some split shifts. So there are good reasons why parents would be advised that it is in their child’s interests for a period of time to have services provided for maybe three days a week in the special school and two days at a mainstream school and then build up over time. But if people are being advised that their children should not be enrolled full time for any reason other than it is in the child’s interests, then I would certainly want to know about that.

All children with disabilities have the same entitlement under Queensland law to full-time education and, unless their disability prevents them in some way, then, as I said, I would regard that as a breach of policy. So I would certainly want to know about that.

Mr LANGBROEK: My next question is quite topical. Following the recent flooding on the Gold Coast this week, I visited a local school affected by water damage which needs to immediately replace items such as carpets. Why are schools forced to dip into their own minor works budget and not get assistance from the department?

Ms BLIGH: Schools are provided with a number of allocations. One is for planned maintenance—that is, maintenance issues that they look forward over a year to developing. They also have funds made available for unplanned maintenance, and unplanned maintenance is obviously those things that occur that you did not plan for—for example, a vandal attack or a flood as you have outlined. If their unplanned maintenance funds are not sufficient for the purpose, there are also discretionary funds held at the district office. If you are aware of a school that has not been provided with that assistance, then, again, I would certainly want to know about it.

I do not know the school that you are talking about specifically, but as you would expect there is always a bit of creative tension between schools and the district office about whose funds get used for what purpose, and I would expect that in any system, but ultimately I expect that everybody will put their best efforts into making sure that the school is safe and that the children are protected. Schools are expected to use their unplanned maintenance money for unplanned maintenance before they make a call on another source.

I have just been advised in relation to that specific school. So my answer stands for general unplanned and unforeseeable things, but because that school was declared a disaster area it will be fully reimbursed for all the equipment that has been damaged and lost.

Mr LANGBROEK: I actually did not identify the school, and it is interesting that you mentioned that sometimes there is tension between schools and the district office. As a footnote to that, when I mentioned to the headmaster of that school that I was going to be coming to estimates this week, he or she said, ‘Please don’t mention which school it is.’ Are you aware of a culture of bullying, like we have seen in the health department, in the education department? I am sorry to ask this but it was said quite genuinely to me, ‘Please, do not mention where we are.’

Ms BLIGH: I should first of all clarify that my comments were not about you raising it here. Inevitably in all systems—no matter what service you are running—if you can find someone else who will help you pay for it you do. It is the nature of things. I do not say that in any disparaging way. I expect principals to make the best of the dollars that they have got. I am not surprised that, from time to time, they might put their hands up for support from their district office for a number of reasons. I am equally not surprised that the district office would say, ‘You use your funds first and then we will help you.’ That is what I meant by some creative tension. I actually think it is healthy. I do not think there is any problem with that sort of argy-bargy that occurs from time to time.

Mr LANGBROEK: If you are a soft touch it will just be, ‘Go and get it.’

Ms BLIGH: That is right. Can I say in relation to your second question that the education system is a very big system. We take issues of bullying, whether it is in the school playground or in the workplace, very seriously. There are a number of programs in place. Prominent posters on bullying have been distributed to schools. Can I continue with this answer?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms BLIGH: I am not surprised that a principal perhaps would not want the shadow minister to raise their issue with a parliamentary estimates committee, because people do not particularly like to be the focus of that kind of attention. There is no retribution for those sorts of things. This is a pretty robust environment. Principals are expected, as they are in the independent sector and the Catholic sector, to actively promote their schools and to refrain where appropriate from bringing their schools into disrepute. I expect them to make professional judgments about that and they do. I do not expect them to cease being citizens. I do not expect them to not exercise their rights as citizens. I expect local members of all political persuasions to be active in their schools. If principals are not talking to you while you are there then you have a problem.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members.

Mr ENGLISH: There has been public and professional debate and discussion about schools reporting year 12 results. Can you please tell the committee what information will be released publicly and when that will occur?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. As he will be aware, in April last year the government released a discussion paper about schools reporting aimed at providing more information to the parents and the community generally across a range of areas. We sought responses from the community on eight specific proposals. I was very pleased that we got 700 responses and a very strong response from parents. The reforms were aimed at providing not only more information but also greater consistency of reporting practices so that parents are in a position—particularly those who might have children in different schools or in different schooling sectors—to make some sort of comparison and judgment about achievement.

One proposal was about the publication of year 12 outcome information. Parents were very supportive of that. The steering committee comprising representatives of parents, school systems—that is, Catholic, independent and state—and teacher unions provided advice to me on what year 12 outcomes could meaningfully be reported. As of 2006 we will be reporting publicly—that is, publishing through newspapers—year 12 results for 2005 of all schools, state and non-state.

There will be a range of indicators. Some schools and community members have very legitimate concerns about making sure that this information is put into the public arena in a responsible and meaningful way. To that end, rather than choose any single indicator that would narrowly focus on the activities of schools, we have determined a very broad range of indicators that will be published across a table. They will show the breadth of curriculum that schools offer, the number of students who are completing or continuing in school based apprenticeships or traineeships, the percentage of senior students who achieved vocational education and training certificates, the percentage of eligible students with an OP between 1 and 15 and the percentage of students who seek and are made an offer through the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre.

I am very concerned to make sure that the media does not use the information inappropriately and in a way that would unfairly shame schools in a way that is not productive. There are arrangements in place with media outlets in Victoria whereby they agree to publish the information in exactly the same way as it is provided. That is certainly the path that the government will go down here in Queensland.

I can understand the concerns of those who are worried about this initiative. Some of those concerns were articulated in today's *Courier-Mail* in a piece by Christopher Bantick. I think the issues he raises are echoed across the education sector. Balancing that is the very real and genuine interest of parents in the performance of their child's school and trying to make some quality assessment about what schools offer, where they excel and where their strengths are. I am very confident that many schools will have an opportunity to show off in this process. All schools have been provided with their results in each one of those areas for the 2003 and 2004 cohort. They know what this data is going to look like. There will not be any surprises here. You would expect some fluctuations from year to year, but you will not see big differences. Principals are aware of that.

CHAIR: Minister, I am sure that you will agree that ICT, information communications technology—computers in the classroom and the like—has come a long way since we were at school. I know that it continues to be a significant part of the government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future agenda. Page 1-22 of the MPS refers to the three-year transition period for the ICTs for Learning strategy. Now that this strategy has been completed, can you tell us what initiatives are in place to ensure that we continue to provide students and schools with the very best and up-to-date ICTs?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am sure that when she was at school, because she is such a young member of parliament, there were computers in the classroom. When I was at school you needed a whole classroom for a computer. There certainly were not any there then. Anybody who has visited schools recently will know that there have been very dramatic shifts not only in terms of the amount of equipment that is in the classroom but also in terms of the way it is being used.

Today students are surrounded by and fluent in using information communication technology. That is exactly what we want to see. The Smart Classrooms strategy replaces the three-year transition strategy that was very much targeted at getting the hardware in place and was completing the government's commitment to achieving a one to five ratio and to starting to build innovation in those schools that had already met those targets.

There were a number of targets put in place in the previous strategy. I am very pleased to say that the department has exceeded all of those set for it. It has replaced approximately 26,000 computers, increased the number of desktop computers by 21,000, cabled over 2,000 classrooms for local area networks and internet access and achieved significant integration of ICTs into the curriculum.

The new strategy, the Smart Classrooms strategy, continues the momentum that has been established over the last three years. The year 2005-06 will see \$14 million provided as the first phase of a new \$56 million program. It will be targeted at a number of areas. Firstly, \$3.5 million in 2005-06 will be used to provide laptops or personal computers to 1,500 state school teachers in a very focused trial to determine whether provision of that sort of equipment will assist teachers demonstrably to go beyond their current practices and integrate ICTs into their normal classroom practice and the delivery of the curriculum.

Most people do not actually realise—most people take a personal computer in their workplace for granted—that teachers do not actually have their own personal computer, in most cases. We think that has to be the next step. A \$1.4 million package this year, as part of \$5.2 million over four years, has been allocated to non-state schools to assist them in this process as well.

What we want by the end of 2007 is for students to be able to communicate with other students across classes and schools in Queensland, interstate and around the world. The next stage of this process is really about the software and what its capabilities are and making sure everyone is on the same page and using it to its maximum.

We want parents to become more adept at using this equipment and more involved in their child's education with electronic access 24/7 to their child's school, their child's work, their progress, their achievements, their absences, their assessment dates and other information about their child at school. We want teachers to be able to access resources online 24/7, access academic results, enrolments and attendance and record those things online as well. We will see schools access more technical support, with a significant enhancement in technical support through a central help desk and increased professional development for teachers.

CHAIR: I suspect there will be many students who will be more advanced in the use of technology than their parents. We might have to start training up the parents at some point. In the budget highlights at page 1-8 of the MPS there is mention of Queensland's smart academies. This sounds very intriguing. Could you provide the committee with advice on this initiative?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member. This is a very exciting part of the Smart State 2 proposal announced by the Premier earlier this year. We are proposing to put in place two new academies—one in science, maths and technology and one in the creative arts. We will see a total allocation of \$45.8 million to establish these two academies over the next four years, including \$40 million in capital costs. We anticipate enrolments of up to 450 students at each of the academies. They will be for senior students in years 10, 11 and 12. We expect to take the first enrolments for years 10 and 11 students in 2007 and year 12 students in 2008. The location and merit selection process for these new academies is yet to be finalised, but it will involve a unique partnership with universities, industry and a range of cultural organisations, in the case of the creative arts academy.

We will encourage, through these academies, high achievers to fast-track their studies, to gain valuable work experience and to combine schooling with their tertiary studies. Importantly, we want it to be an opportunity for the professional development of our teachers statewide. They may be able to enter into a secondment program and work in these academies for a period of time and be exposed to industry-level work and university partnerships. They can then take that experience back into their own schools.

This is another addition to our focus on the needs of gifted and talented children. These academies build on the framework for gifted education that were released in 2004. That framework includes a policy and guidelines for acceleration of students within the compulsory years of schooling. It is the responsibility of all schools and teachers to implement that. The resources to do so include a web site with practical resources for that acceleration and other gifted and talented programs as well as eight learning and development centres staffed by specialists to assist schools to implement the framework.

More than 250 teachers and administrative staff attended six state professional learning conferences in term 1 this year, funded through the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program. This was designed to make sure that we have a high number of people out in the regions who understand the need to implement this framework.

Mr FINN: There would be some fine sites in the electorate of Yeerongpilly. I can help you out with some venues for those.

Ms BLIGH: Collocate with the tennis centre perhaps?

Mr FINN: With the tennis centre or with a food science centre. You mentioned in your opening statement, and it is also detailed in the MPS, that there has been a substantial increase in capital funding for Education and the Arts in 2005-06. I am wondering whether you could advise the committee how this increase in funding will be distributed.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. We indicated at the last election that we were committed to commencing the building of nine new schools in this term. In 2004 and 2005 we delivered 382 additional classrooms in permanent and relocatable buildings. We have already delivered stage 1 of the Narangba Valley State School and new stages at the Calamvale Community College and—I am sorry the member for Mudgeeraba has gone—the wonderful Clover Hill State School in that electorate, Flagstone State Community College, North Lakes State College in the electorate of Murrumba, Tannum Sands State High School and Upper Coomera State College at a cost of approximately \$51.3 million.

In 2005-06 we will see an increase to \$147 million for new schools and stages of schools. That includes \$108 million for facilities and classrooms for growth. In 2005-06 we will see a new primary school open at Drewvale on the southern side of Brisbane at a cost of \$12.3 million and a new P-12 school at Caloundra start its first stage at a cost of \$11.6 million. Both of those are scheduled for the first day of the first term in 2006.

Coolangatta Special School will also be relocated in the Currumbin Valley as part of this year's budget. We are in the final stages of land acquisition and I hope to be in a position very soon to announce the final location for that new school. I gave a commitment that the school would be relocating in this financial year, and we are on track to see that relocation occur in the 2006 year. Given that it is a relocation and this has happened in many other similar circumstances, it is not critical that it open on the first day of school because the children are already catered for in their existing school, but certainly we are on track for some time in 2006.

Mr FINN: Going on from there, I might return to issues relating to the introduction of the preparatory year of schooling. Some of my colleagues have spoken of this or mentioned it. Clearly the introduction of the preparatory year is going to require a significant capital commitment to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place. I am just wondering if you could advise the committee on how delivery statewide of this undertaking is being managed?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased to again indicate that the government has allocated up to \$350 million for the prep year capital investment. That includes, as I have said earlier, \$56 million to the non-state sector. Tenders were called in February this year for what is the single biggest Education capital works project in the state's history. Three major tenders have been let and will cover the majority of the approximately 16,000 classrooms to be either built or refurbished. Approximately 400 new classrooms and refurbishment or redesign of an estimated 600 general classrooms and 600 preschool classrooms will be undertaken. Site by site, principals have been consulted and facilities solutions identified for each school. There are some additional sites where special solutions have yet to be found, but there are only a small number of those.

Nine schools will receive double storey special buildings because the site is very limited. In 2004-05 we spent more than \$20 million on the planning and tendering process and the early stages. In 2005-06 we have budgeted for \$81.6 million. As I outlined earlier, all members of parliament have been advised about the particular solutions for their schools and advised that that is subject to further confirmation of enrolments. As I have outlined, we will make a decision later in this financial year—early in 2006—when we have been in a position to consult with each community about the offsite preschools. But that is, I think, an integral part not so much for the capital program but about managing the transition to connect to an early childhood phase in each school.

Very much the government's reforms have been conceived of and structured towards thinking about schools in stages of early years, middle years and senior phase. What most schools are doing in relation to thinking about the location of their prep is taking the opportunity to rethink early childhood in their school and, wherever possible, putting the prep in a place that facilitates the creation in the school or the upgrading of an early childhood precinct. So it is not just a building program. What we are getting as a result of these discussions that are happening in schools is some really very exciting thinking about what should happen in the early years of schooling and integration of the curriculum between what happens in the prep, year 1 and year 2.

I think people will be aware that in the past it has differed at each school, but it has been the case for a number of preschools—and this is exacerbated where they are off site—that the program has been largely disconnected from the school, and we think it is really important that we have a seamless transition for children at all stages of schooling. This capital program gives us a chance to do that.

Mr WELLS: Minister, I have a couple of questions about facilities. But before I begin I would like to make the customary ritualistic abeyance to the ministerial program statement, particularly page 1-13. The Smart State Building Fund was a core undertaking of our government and it has flow-on consequences for such funds and programs in your department as the Smart School Renewal Program, Core Facilities Program and Wired for the Future. I wondered if you could give some details to the committee of the progress of those programs?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to say that each of these programs is progressing very well. We made a \$350 million commitment in the last election for the Smart School Renewal Program and the first tranche in 2004-05 was for \$50 million. This program includes the next \$137 million and includes the Smart School Renewal Program, which has seen \$38.3 million in this the third year of a four-year program going into the renewal of buildings. But, again, it is much more than

that. The member for Surfers Paradise is not here, but one example in his electorate is that the Surfers Paradise State School has been allocated \$411,000 for a major classroom upgrade to support arts initiatives. So it is not just that the school has chosen to refurbish a building but that they have taken the opportunity that this program provided to think about the priorities in their curriculum area and to use this refurbishment to provide arts initiatives that would otherwise, because of the structure of their old classroom, not have been possible. So there are endless examples of that in that program.

Almost 200 state schools and high schools will benefit over the life of the program. Some \$15.3 million will be spent also on the Core Facilities Upgrade Program, which is providing upgrades to administration blocks and libraries where the schools have outgrown them if you like. Many of the schools had libraries or resource centres or admin blocks that were built that were adequate for their original size. Because of population growth, the school has expanded but those facilities have not, and this program for the first time allows them to get some priority for that purpose. Some 53 schools will benefit over the life of that program.

Both the Smart School Renewal Program and the Core Facilities Upgrade Program have seen an 11 per cent increase in approved funding from the program contingency to offset cost increases since the funding was announced in December 2003. Because it is a four-year program and the building price has increased dramatically, we have increased funds into there from the program contingency to ensure that schools are getting what they thought they were getting two or three years on.

Some \$42 million has seen the continuation of the Wired for the Future program to provide electrical upgrades to schools, and 200 schools have already benefited. This program is one of those that can sound very boring but is actually very important. As we were seeing more airconditioning and more ITC cabling going into schools, we were seeing critical pressure being put on the school's electricity program and we have had to upgrade in many cases. I am pleased to mention the most essential part of the program, and that is the toilet upgrade program. This is the second year of a three-year \$34 million initiative. We plan in 2005-06 to spend \$22.15 million. Some \$14.93 million will relieve shortfalls in the number of pedestals and \$7.22 million will refurbish existing amenities, and I cannot stress the importance of that program enough. It is very dear to the heart of some of my own staff.

Mr WELLS: With the indulgence of the committee, before I ask my next question I might refer to the remark of the chair that we need to educate parents in computer technology.

CHAIR: And many other things.

Mr WELLS: This is exactly what is happening at Deception Bay State School with the assistance of the department. The Community Renewal Program put an internet cafe in the school supported by the department. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the minister and the department for that initiative in my electorate. But I am asking a question about facilities. In 2001 the government instituted a new maintenance program to assist schools in addition to their annual maintenance allocation. The Triple R program, which is mentioned in the ministerial program statement at 1-14, is that program. Could the minister please advise as to the progress of that program?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. First of all, can I say thank you for recognising the work that is happening in a number of the renewal projects, because they have really allowed schools to think very differently about what they do and what they can do. I would like to acknowledge that the member for Murrumba was the architect of the notion of school renewal and tying it to curriculum rather than seeing it simply as a building project. I think you must feel very gratified when you see some of the work that is happening as a result of that. I think you might also have been the architect of the Triple R program. It was a commitment made, on my recollection, in the 2001 election campaign. Funds were made available for repainting, reroofing and reticulation, which are largely projects whose size and cost make it very difficult for schools out of their own allocations to ever contemplate taking them on.

Some \$46 million since 2001 has assisted 818 state schools in all 89 electorates across Queensland. I am pleased to say that we have extended the program from 2004-05 to 2007-08 with another \$66.4 million. In 2004-05 there were more than 350 projects at state schools. In 2005-06 more than 360 projects at state schools are anticipated. We have also put in place the high priority maintenance program, and this year will be the final year of a three-year \$18.8 million program, with \$7.5 million in this financial year. In total, nearly 600 state schools have benefited from replacement flooring and upgrades to classrooms, playgrounds and tuckshops. In the electorate of Burnett for example, there has been \$394,000 spent in this program on schools in that area.

Together with the base funding for schools, that brings total maintenance funding for 2005-06 to \$96 million. This is actually a good example of something that I referred to earlier about finding the balance between devolving funds and decisions and responsibilities to schools and retaining some central programs that maximise the effectiveness of the dollars and have some central priority decision making around them. So the Triple R and the high priority maintenance programs are centralised maintenance programs that identify high priority projects across the state. They supplement school maintenance funding where schools make decisions about what is the priority for them with their maintenance funds for a particular financial year with the assistance of Q-Build, which does monitoring

at schools for maintenance needs. So, as I said, I think it is an example of the constant tension, if you like, between devolution and centralised control over what is happening with resources.

Mr ENGLISH: Could you please outline some of the new initiatives to support Indigenous education?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is no secret I think that the educational outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders are much worse than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and I have to say unacceptably worse. It is not by a small margin but by an unacceptably high margin. Our government is very serious about tackling this issue. We recognise that it is complex and it is one that others have tackled before us, but we are not going to take our eye off the ball. We have put in place a program called Partners for Success that focuses on four key priority areas: attendance, retention and completion, literacy attainment, and work force and leadership. We have put in place approximately \$15.4 million to support the strategy in 2005-06.

We are supplementing this with a discussion paper this year—it has been issued—called *Bound for Success*. It is about building on those ideas but looking at them in the very specific geographic context of Cape York and the Torres Strait. It is currently out for consultation, but there are a number of proposals in it. One includes multicampus colleges to assist in that transition from year 7 to year 8 and completion of high school. That involves bringing schools together either in multicampus colleges or in hubs where all schools in a particular group, even though they might be across a wide geographic area, are sharing best practice with each other to support the transition—that is, making sure that there is not a big difference from one school to the next if children move—along with much better monitoring and ongoing monitoring of individual students and where they are going. If they leave a state school to go into a boarding environment and that boarding placement fails, we cannot just let that child fall out of the system. We also need to make sure that we are actually monitoring in conjunction and partnership with the non-government sector what is happening to children when they leave their communities and what happens when they come back into those communities along with improved pathways and stronger leadership and accountability for school staff.

I will be meeting with Minister Nelson in a couple of weeks time to talk about how Commonwealth and state existing resources might actually be applied in slightly different and more innovative ways to get better outcomes for the investment that is being made. We have also supported our new Institute for Indigenous Leadership in Education at Cherbourg. This institute is being led by Chris Sarra. It is based at Cherbourg State School where he has achieved such outstanding results. I am sure that people will be aware of the work that Chris has done. It is becoming so well known that principals from all over the country and the world are actually arriving at Cherbourg and wanting to talk to him.

We had to actually make a decision about whether he could be the principal of the school or continue to do this best practice work. In partnership with QUT we have established this institute. He is still based at Cherbourg but there is now a new principal at the school who can take on all the duties of principal without losing much of what Chris has to offer to not only his only school and community but also to building a generation of leaders in schools who can really tackle these issues.

Mr ENGLISH: I remember seeing some of the multi location campuses you were talking about on a visit to Weipa. You touched on the Commonwealth support, but can you provide us with more details about Commonwealth support for these initiatives?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Schools receive funding from the Commonwealth to support Indigenous education and that is over and above their base enrolment allocation. I recently signed the Indigenous Education Agreement with the Commonwealth and I have to say I did so reluctantly to ensure the continuation of programs. I was reluctant because I have some concerns, and I have outlined them in other forums, but I think it is important to place on record here that the agreement that the Commonwealth offered continues to see no parity between the additional funds provided. They provide base allocation for enrolments to non-state and to state schools, and then they provide additional funds for children in disadvantaged categories such as children from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background or children with a disability but they provide more funds for those children in non-state schools than in state schools. I have never understood the rationale for that. When I asked the Commonwealth minister he was unable to provide it, but they have nevertheless continued it in this agreement.

They have also substantially changed the way that funds are provided to support parent and community engagement and that is a really critical issue to getting good outcomes for children. I have raised in the parliament that the way that the program has changed to a submission based funding arrangement has resulted in the kind of bizarre circumstance where a number of schools in Cape York are now getting no funds from the Commonwealth even though they are the most disadvantaged. I think it is pretty clear that the submission based system is not advantaging them a lot or assisting them.

This has been the subject of a recent senate inquiry and that senate inquiry tabled their report this week. My department is still reviewing it but I think we can now say that it is official: this program has been a shambles and a debacle. I would like to quote from the report—

The committee—

that is, the senate committee—

has found that preparation for managing the process of change—

from one system to the other—

was manifestly inadequate. The Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) should have been aware from experience, from a knowledge of the needs and culture of Indigenous people and through its extensive regional and local network, of the requirement to prepare well for policy changes.

I would ask the indulgence of the committee to complete this answer.

The government should have anticipated that direct dealings by DEST with school principals and school communities on sensitive funding issues had the potential to raise apprehension in schools. The new funding arrangements not only reduced the amount of funding they could expect to receive but caused a reduction of the critical involvement of Indigenous parents in the running of schools.

I would have to say they are very damning comments and I would hope that the federal minister, who professes a personal interest and commitment in this area, will take on board a series of recommendations from that senate committee about fixing this. They are not difficult issues. It is about a change to the program. I call on Brendan Nelson to apply himself to these recommendations and to implement them as soon as possible. This area is just too important for us to get it wrong on this kind of stuff.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Burnett?

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, a point of clarification in regard to the prep year and I would refer you to 1-36 of the MPS. A number of times during this hearing we have heard you say that you have put aside \$350 million to refurbish classrooms and build new ones for the prep year, yet Premier Beattie was saying in February 2004 in media statements that he was setting aside \$395 million for the same purpose. Why the reduction in the budget of \$45 million?

Ms BLIGH: My recollection is that we actually discussed this last year. The \$395 million was put forward when we made the commitment in the election campaign on the basis of our understanding of what the costs were likely to be. That was before we had gone to the market, it was before we had gone into each and every school to look at what the solutions might be, it was before we had a comprehensive knowledge of how many classrooms would need to be refurbished as opposed to how many would need new classrooms.

The \$350 million figure has been on the public record, I think, in last year's budget; if not, certainly in public comments. If we have not discussed it at last year's estimates we have certainly discussed it in the parliament or at some other time. The difference is really about an estimate that was made as part of an election commitment and when we went out to the market and to every school and talked to Catholic and independent sectors we were able to refine that to \$350 million. As I have said, that is still an estimate given the size of the program but it is still a generous estimate. I mean, we do not need to spend \$45 million that we do not need to spend.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you for that point of clarification. I refer you to page 1-25 of the MPS and the department's responsibility to create a safe and supportive school environment. Can you provide the committee with the number of serious injuries, illnesses and dangerous events that have occurred in state schools last year?

CHAIR: I think that might be a complex and involved question.

Ms BLIGH: If I could ask you to repeat the question. I heard the end of it properly, but you are asking in relation to which part of the MPS?

Mr MESSENGER: Can you provide the committee with the number of serious injuries, illnesses and dangerous events that occurred in state schools last year?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I think you have gone back to last year's questions and are simply asking them again, because I recall having this debate then. We have had some discussions this afternoon about finding of balance between devolving authority and responsibility to schools and to principals and retaining some control over the system at a central level. This is, I think, a good example of an area that really rightly needs to be the responsibility of the people who are there on the ground and that is the principals. The only way that that information could be accurately gathered firstly would be to find accurate definitions that were uniform in every school for each one of those headings. How you would define each and every one of them would have to be uniform for it to be meaningful information. Then you would have to require every principal at every school to record that data and to put it into head office on a regular basis.

Certainly schools are required to record where there has been an injury at the local school level in case of insurance claims, whether it is for staff or students, but having to centrally collate it just adds more paperwork to principals. You have to weigh up the amount of paperwork you ask your principals to do with the benefit you will gain from doing it.

There is, for example, a requirement that principals provide central data about suspensions and exclusions. That is reported in the annual report. Exclusions have potentially a life-changing effect on young people. It is a very important part of the disciplinary process in school, but it is equally important

that it not be overused or abused. It is important, I think, that the public has an interest in knowing something about the disciplinary processes in school. So that is collected centrally. You have a view, which you prosecuted last year, that we should have principals doing this paperwork in their schools every time—you could easily find a definition on the list that you have provided—a child falls over in the playground, every time a child is ill, every time a teacher is ill. Do we include the presence of head lice in the school? I am not going to ask principals to do this. Should you ever be on this side of the table that is something that you can do, but I do not think that that is a reasonable use of principals' time. I expect them to make professional judgments. If you are aware of a case where they have not you should bring it to my attention.

Principals are busy people. Schools are very busy places. Any minister in this position has to be careful about saying, 'I want this and I want that and I want this', because very quickly principals are spending hours in the office that could have been hours spent out in the classrooms. I want them in classrooms, I want them with their teachers, I want them with students, I want them talking to parents. Inevitably there will be paperwork, but we have to find a good balance. Critical incident reports are done at school level. Any information that is required for insurance, et cetera, can be sought from that level.

Mr MESSENGER: Should I be on that side of the table I would expect to follow education manuals and I would just remind you that the policy statement states that the provisions of the Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 and regulations, the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 1997 and the Electrical Safety Regulation 2002 detail a statutory obligation to record and report accidents and incidents in all educational facilities.

Ms BLIGH: They do that.

Mr MESSENGER: The reason that they do that is that the correct and timely reporting and recording of hazards, injuries, illnesses and dangerous events enable early identification and subsequent analysis of risk. Once identified, hazards can be controlled thereby reducing their impact on staff, students and others. I would put to you that by not being able to provide me with those figures you are, in fact, putting our children's safety at risk.

Ms BLIGH: I cannot help but repeat my answer: I comprehensively disagree with you. Our principals meet their statutory requirements by completing critical incident reports. The list that you outlined earlier included, for example, illness. In a school of 500 children and 50 or 60 staff—

Mr MESSENGER: You already have that information.

Ms BLIGH: —there would be illnesses. Illnesses are not critical incidents. Every time a child has a runny nose the principal has to fill out a critical incident report?

Mr MESSENGER: There are definitions here: serious bodily injury, serious injury, injury.

Ms BLIGH: That is not the list you read out before. Principals are required to complete critical incident reports and they do so. But I do not ask them, and the agency does not require them, to collate those and forward them in centrally and for that all to be collected and reported centrally. What is required is that district executive directors work with schools and if there are issues that need to be looked at in terms of workplace health and safety then those are attended to. I go back to my earlier comments: principals are people who want to work with children, who care about their schools, who have to ensure, under legislation and under their general duty of care, that they do everything in their power to meet the basic requirements of health and safety.

I believe that our principals do a great job of that and, while you raised it last year and you have raised it this year, I am unaware of any examples that you have brought to my attention where you think a principal has failed in this regard because they have not done more paperwork. Most educational theory and management theory will tell you that you have to find a good balance about the red tape that you put in the way of service delivery. I want most of my people as much as possible on the front line, in the classroom, talking to their teachers, et cetera. They do comply with their statutory requirements but paperwork for paperwork's sake gets in the way of good outcomes for kids.

Mr MESSENGER: With respect, this is not about creating more paperwork for principals; I am talking about data which is already compiled to allow statewide analysis. What I am talking about is data that you should have at your fingertips to ensure the safety of our children at our schools. You are responsible for the safety of our students at our schools. Are you telling me that you have absolutely no idea about data relating to those critical incidents?

CHAIR: Member for Burnett, can I ask you to refrain from making a speech rather than asking a question under standing order 115. It is also my express feeling that the minister has already answered the question. I would suggest that we move on to the next question. I might suggest also that you frame your questions in such a specific way that you may have a reasonable chance of achieving an answer that you seek.

Mr MESSENGER: I am just trying to seek data on critical incidents.

CHAIR: You have not asked specifically for particular data in the way that you think that you may have and the questions that you have asked the minister has already answered.

Ms BLIGH: I have advised the member quite clearly that this information is not collated centrally. I can advise you that the internal audit program of the department on a rolling basis audits schools and does approximately 600 schools a year to see whether they are complying with a range of legislative requirements and any failure to meet those sorts of things would be identified in the internal audit. So, there is a rolling program where half the schools are done on an annual basis. But the information is not collated centrally so I am unable to answer your question. I believe that to provide an answer would be an unnecessarily onerous task on the department because it would require every principal to sit down and go through all of their critical incident reports and report against those criteria and I do not think it is a reasonable ask, but I am happy to tell principals that you want them to do it.

Mr MESSENGER: As equally I will be able to tell, minister, the parents and children of this school that you do not really care for their safety.

CHAIR: That is very close to being unparliamentary. I would be careful.

Ms BLIGH: Yes. In fact, I find it offensive and untrue and I ask for it to be withdrawn.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw.

CHAIR: Next question, member for Burnett?

Mr MESSENGER: I refer you again to page 1-25 of the MPS and the department's responsibilities in creating a safe and supportive school environment. Can you or can you not tell this committee how many electrical incidents occurred last year? Are you then able to tell the committee how many school buildings are at increased risk by not having a safety switch installed?

Ms BLIGH: I think John-Paul asked a question on notice about electrical incidents. I am just making sure we have accurate information here. I will take on notice the question about how many incidents. Is that what you are asking: how many incidents were reported this year? What was the second part of the question?

Mr MESSENGER: What monitoring is undertaken to ensure that all schools have regularly tested electrical equipment in compliance with the Electrical Safety Regulation 2002?

Ms BLIGH: The audit unit that I referred to earlier that undertakes auditing for schools has a standard check when it goes in and audits school compliance. The unit asks the following questions: is there a program within the school for testing of electrical equipment? Is there a program for testing of safety switches? The technical word here is RCD but that means safety switches. Do electrical leads have a current electrical certification attached? Is the class of work for each electrical item identified to ensure appropriate electrical protection is determined—for example, either RCD or safety switches, testing and tagging or a combination? As I have said, the internal audit unit visits approximately 600 schools a year. They are just some of the sorts of questions it would ask as part of a total audit of the school's compliance with regulations and legislation.

CHAIR: Are you taking any part of the question on notice?

Ms BLIGH: Yes.

Mr LANGBROEK: I have asked a question on notice about that.

Ms BLIGH: I knew there was a question on notice. Can you ask the first part of the question again so that I am clear and then I will take it on notice.

Mr MESSENGER: Can you or can you not tell this committee how many electrical incidents occurred last year? Are you then able to tell the committee how many school buildings are at increased risk by not having a safety switch installed?

Ms BLIGH: Can you clarify whether you want the number of incidents in the last financial year or the calendar year? The 2004-05 financial year?

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, that would be good. Minister, I refer to the behaviour management support package mentioned on pages 1-9 and 1-10 of the MPS. How many incidents of assaults occurred in state schools last financial year in a physical sense?

Ms BLIGH: The information that is collated is in relation to school disciplinary absences and expulsions and the reasons for those disciplinary measures. There are a number of categories. I do not think the category is called assault. There are categories such as drugs and alcohol et cetera. There is a category that captures these sorts of activities. I can get the data for that, the last published figures. Physical misconduct is what it is called.

Mr MESSENGER: Also including teachers.

Ms BLIGH: Yes, it includes both staff and students. Physical misconduct would involve incidents which do not constitute assault but would also pick up assault. It would involve incidents which do reach that threshold. This is the 2004 data for physical misconduct and it will be published in the annual report. Total incidents leading to a short suspension, which is less than six days—it might be better for me to give you all of this in writing.

Mr MESSENGER: Could you also include a breakdown of how many assaults were reported to the police? Do you keep that statistic?

Ms BLIGH: That would not be collected centrally. You would have to direct that question to the police minister. Part of the reason for that is that the school does not even necessarily know if a parent, for example, takes a matter to the police and makes a complaint. Schools are not the only source of the complaint. The event might have occurred at the school. The parents might have taken the child out of the school and subsequently made a report to the police and they would not have necessarily notified Education Queensland or the school that they have made that complaint.

Mr MESSENGER: Once again I refer to the same page. What is the number of students who have completed anger management programs and what was the total amount of funding dedicated to anger management programs in state schools last financial year?

Ms BLIGH: Again, it depends on what your definition of an anger management program is. Schools have a range of behaviour management programs and each school determines what suits its school culture and school environment. Some schools have a spare classroom which is used as a responsible-thinking classroom where children go if they have got to the stage that you would describe as needing anger management, where an available teacher works with them and discusses how they could have handled the situation differently. So they are taken out of classrooms and required to do work. That might fit into the definition of an anger management program.

There might be a whole lot of other things that happen at schools that are either very formal programs that include those words in the title or much more informal work that helps young people and children deal with anger issues. Again, that is not material that would be collated centrally. Every school has its own behaviour management plan and that plan is underpinned at each school by appropriate programs that meet that school's requirements.

It is important to put this in context. There are 1,300 state schools. There are 500,000 students attending every day for more than 40 weeks a year and a total of approximately 80,000 staff—that is the number of actual bodies, not FTEs. You would expect that a number of programs would fit into this category. As I alluded to in answer to the question you asked on notice about the number of professional development activities, it is simply not possible to give you all of that data. It is important that not only the government but also all sides of politics, particularly local members with schools in their electorates, make it absolutely clear—and I alluded to this earlier in answer to a question from the member for Surfers Paradise—that there is no place in our schools for bullying and there is no place in our schools for violence, whether it is violence of children against teachers, violence of teachers against children, violence between children or violence between teachers.

I think you asked a question on notice about the number of grievances in relation to bullying and harassment. I reported a number in answer to that question on notice but, in the context of 65,000 FTEs, it was a relatively modest number. But even one incident is one that I would like to think does not happen.

Mr LANGBROEK: Minister, I would like to go back to my previous questioning about a review of speech language impairment services. No-one seemed to know what I was talking about. I have made some more inquiries and I would like to specifically draw your attention to this. A statewide review of speech language impairment services was conducted by Kathy Vidler in 2002 while she was seconded to the Disability Support Services Unit from the Metro West District, where she was speech language pathologist in charge. It is understood that the review resulted in thousands of children being cut from the ascertainment register. My question to the minister is: given that your predecessor, the Hon. Dean Wells, said on 10 September 1998 that he promised a fairer system for students with disabilities, can you tell me how this review has led to a fairer system for children with disabilities?

Ms BLIGH: I am very happy to give the member some further information because I suspect that you are operating on the basis of information that is simply not correct. There was a review of the definition of speech language impediment. In 2000, there were 1,074.5 students who were ascertained at levels 4, 5 and 6 in speech language impairment. In 2005, there were 1,669.5 students at levels 4, 5 and 6. So there has been an increase of approximately 600 students ascertained in that area and there has been an increase every year. It is not that there was some big drop.

Mr LANGBROEK: So there was never a cut.

Ms BLIGH: There was never a cut in total numbers. Some children, as part of that review, in their ascertainment moved from speech language impediment to intellectual impairment. There may have been some children who moved from a level 4 to a level 5 or a level 6 to a level 4, but any suggestion that there have been thousands of children cut off the register is incorrect. There were 1,000 in the year 2000 and then 1,500, 1,900, 1,600, 1,500, 1,600. So there was a drop between 2002 and 2003 when the review was done, but some of those children would have moved into other levels or other categories. It is also the nature of speech language impediment.

I do recall some of this work. Speech language impediment ranges from conditions which with therapy actually improve and are cured, if you like. That is what we should aim for. It is actually a very positive thing that some children who were firstly ascertained at levels 4, 5 or 6 now do not have an ascertainment at all. That is what we should aim for, particularly in this area. There are some children in speech language impediment areas who will have that impediment for most of their lives. Perhaps there

was a bit of a culture there that once you have the ascertainment it is forever. In fact, we should be doing everything we can to make sure that those children whose language impediments can be overcome are overcome in our schools and that they are able to participate and lead a completely normal life.

If you look at the totals across all of the disability categories—I am happy to give you this data—you will see that in 2000 there were 5,656 students; the number has now risen to 7,042. In 2002 there was a total of 6,198.5; it rose in 2003 to 6,693. In 2002-03, there was some movement of children in and out of categories—some children might have manifested early with speech language impediment but, in fact, they have an intellectual impairment. That growth every year has been backed up with increased funding.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Minister. My next question is about the Wired for the Future program on page 1-26 of the MPS. I know the member for Burnett has already asked you about this. I just want to ask you about an anecdotal incident that happened in my office a couple of months ago. I got an anonymous phone call, which I did not act on at the time, from someone at Emerald who claimed that their child had been electrocuted some time ago. I did not act on it because I do not act on anonymous accusations. Then yesterday another member of parliament rang my office, having received the same claim. Can you confirm or deny whether this happened? It is a serious claim. I thought I would bring it up now.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am aware of an incident at Emerald. I am aware that it was investigated. I am not sure whether the parents have been made aware of the outcome of the investigation. There was an incident and it was investigated. Whether it was the incident that was reported to you is something we will never prove. The school at Emerald is not a big school and it does not have a hugely fluctuating population. There was an incident and it was investigated. I am happy to get you some more information in relation to it.

CHAIR: Are you taking part of that question on notice?

Ms BLIGH: Yes, I am happy to take that question on notice.

Mr LANGBROEK: I would like to turn to the issue of the shared service providers, mentioned on page 1-102 of the MPS, and ask whether this was something that was brought in to bring savings to the department. Can you confirm that there has been savings and of what magnitude?

Ms BLIGH: Yes. I am happy to say that there has been some savings. I refer that question to the Director-General, Mr Ken Smith.

Mr Smith: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair. There have been small savings from the implementation of the shared service provider initiative. I think we are just trying to get the exact details. The performance returns or savings in the 2004-05 year were approximately \$526,000.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you. Madam Chair, I would like to turn now, under the learning section of the MPS at 1-22, to the new maths syllabus and ask a question so that the minister may be able to inform the committee. Is it true that the new natural maths program being introduced into Queensland primary schools will phase out traditional arithmetic in favour of new methods such as chunking, which limits multiplication to two two-digit numbers, and that therefore under the new syllabus children may be, as I see it, using calculators by about year 3?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. For something of that detail I would have to refer you to someone with more curriculum depth. I might ask Lesley Englert, who is the director of the curriculum strategy branch, to make some comments. Just before she does, I should say that when I launched the maths syllabus as a trial at Holy Spirit School at New Farm a couple of years ago, one of the features of the new maths syllabus is that it brings algebraic concepts into learning at a much earlier stage. I think that was certainly a very important part of that program.

CHAIR: Would you mind giving your name and position?

Ms Englert: Certainly. Lesley Englert, assistant director-general curriculum. Your question was about, I understand, the new maths syllabus losing some of the things that were part of the old maths syllabus that were valued.

Mr LANGBROEK: That is right. The comments I have had from parents is that they were concerned that their children were not going to be learning multiplication the way they used to and that they will also be using calculators at a very young age, which is something that these particularly maths focused people are not happy with.

Ms Englert: They will still be doing multiplication. They will have a greater understanding of why they are doing multiplication the way in which we learnt it. When we learnt multiplication we did it as a rote thing rather than necessarily understanding why we were doing lots of three or lots of 28; you know, when you are multiplying three by 28 or something like that. They will still learn how to multiply. There is a deeper understanding of why you do it that way. It is not necessarily different; it is just a deeper understanding of it. I think it is an excellent new syllabus. They still do times tables.

Ms BLIGH: I think it is not so much whether they learn multiplication but how. So they will still be doing times tables and learning that by rote?

Ms Englert: Yes.

Mr LANGBROEK: I think the use of calculators at a young age is something that concerns a lot of parents as well; using them in grade 3.

Ms Englert: They do use calculators at a younger age, but it does not replace the times tables, the rote learning and the understanding of why they are doing particular algorithms in a particular way.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you very much.

Ms BLIGH: Madam Chair, if it is all right with you, I might take the opportunity to provide further answer and material to a question asked earlier by the member for Burnett in relation to asbestos management. The member referred to the asbestos management guideline that is issued by the Department of Public Works in relation to the requirements for signage. I think the way that the member for Burnett has used this material and quoted from it indicates precisely why this area needs to be treated so carefully and how very complex it is. I would like to table the asbestos management guideline for the benefit of the committee.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: The minister's time will be extended for two minutes.

Ms BLIGH: The guideline refers to asbestos material. It defines 'asbestos material' as 'installed thermal or acoustic insulation materials containing asbestos'. Signage, the member is correct, is required in those circumstances.

Asbestos material was removed from state schools during the 1990s when the Department of Public Works audited state schools for asbestos. Asbestos material is not in Queensland state schools. It should not be confused, as the member for Burnett did, with asbestos product. It is a technical area. They are technical terms. Asbestos product is defined as anything that contains asbestos. They are two different types of beast, if you like. There is no legislative requirement for signage unless asbestos materials are present; that is, thermal or acoustic insulation with asbestos in it. I have been advised, as I said, that any asbestos materials were identified and removed in the 1990s as part of the audit that was done. Schools with asbestos product have a building management plan including an asbestos register, not an asbestos materials register, which is the register that requires the signage. There is no requirement under the Department of Public Works guidelines or legislation for signage as indicated by the member for Burnett.

To correct the public record following Mr Messenger's comments, which could be misinterpreted, as I have said, I have tabled the public work guideline. As I have said, I can understand that this is confusing. It is a complex area. They are technical terms. It is an area of complex science, and a proper analysis is required every time you consider what may or may not be necessary. There are different kinds of asbestos.

CHAIR: Does the Minister seek further time?

Ms BLIGH: Just a few seconds.

CHAIR: You have one more minute.

Ms BLIGH: The asbestos to which this guideline applies requires the sign that the member referred to before. There has been no breach in schools in relation to signage for the kind of asbestos that is in our schools. I have to say that in order to really understand this it requires a great deal of work. Cheap stunts are not going to advantage or advance the issue. I would caution the member to get fully briefed on it before he makes these sorts of wild assertions. I reassure the committee and others that this guideline has not been breached by the Department of Education.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The next round of questions will be from government members.

Mr ENGLISH: Minister, I understand that there is an independent review under way of the powers and functions of the Board of Teacher Registration. Could you please outline to the committee the benefits of this review?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am sure he will recall that we have been through an extensive review, as he alluded to. That was looking at the powers and functions of the Board of Teacher Registration, and it was conducted by Professor Marilyn McMenemy in 2004. Professor McMenemy is a very respected academic who has extraordinary experience in this field and background. I would like to take the opportunity that this committee provides to place on record my appreciation, and that of the government, for the work that she did in the review. Like many areas that are being reviewed, it required not only a great deal of attention to detail and hard work with all of the complex issues involved; it also required her to navigate the competing interests of a number of stakeholders. I think she did an outstanding job.

Extensive consultation was undertaken. Four hundred and forty submissions were received, and 75 per cent of those were from teachers. The report was presented to me in October 2004, and cabinet endorsed all 84 recommendations of the report. Seventy-four recommendations will be addressed through new legislation. The draft bill and regulatory impact statement have been released for public

consultation. That public consultation closes on 8 July, which is tomorrow. Major features of the new system include significant strengthening of the standards of professionalism with a five-year program of reregistration required as opposed to the current once off registration for life, and the renewal will be based on both criminal history checking and evidence of continued professional learning. There will be greater flexibility for entry with professional standards that emphasise practice rather than qualifications. There will be enhanced child protection measures including the automatic suspension for those charged with serious sexual offences involving a child, automatic cancellation if the person is convicted, mandatory disclosure of a change to criminal history and mandatory reporting by employing authorities, and an enhanced power for agencies in government to share information about these matters.

We have seen an enhanced disciplinary process, fairer and more transparent processes for those who are undergoing those disciplinary hearings, and a fairer representation of stakeholders. The Board of Teacher Registration is to be renamed the Queensland College of Teachers. I should say that they are the proposals that government put out. I look forward to seeing what the community's reaction is in the outcome of the consultation that is closing tomorrow. The implementation committee that will oversee the process from here includes the director-general, the chair of the Board of Teacher Registration, the deputy director-general of non-state education and higher education, the executive directors of AISQ and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. It is also proposed that the fees for teacher registration will be increased as a result of these initiatives.

Mr FINN: Minister, aside from the many great state schools in my electorate, there are also several independent schools that provide excellent educational services for local parents and children. Pages 1-14 and 1-15 of the MPS refer to the non-state schooling sector. I am wondering if you could elaborate on the relationship between your department and the non-state sector?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I am sure that when he used the word 'independent' he meant it in the broader sense of the word, but I also acknowledge some very important Catholic schools in his electorate, particularly Mary Immaculate, which will be the venue for the launch of the first Catholic Education Week in a couple of weeks time.

Non-state schools offer a diversity of choice of education options for parents, children and families. They are a very significant partner in the delivery of the government's education reforms. We are seeing close collaboration in the development of the preparatory year and in the curriculum guidelines for that year. It has been a very important part of the implementation. In 2004, 207,900 students were enrolled in 457 non-state schools in Queensland. The schools have received recurrent state funding of \$332.2 million in 2005-06 compared to \$303.7 million in 2004-05. It is an increase of \$28.5 million in their base allocation, or 9.4 per cent.

Their relationship with government is managed through, firstly, the non-state schools accreditation board, which approves the accreditation of new non-state schools and changes in accreditation. Again, I want to take the opportunity to recognise the work that all of the members of that board, and particularly the representatives of sectors, do in making sure that those new organisations seeking to establish schools have to meet a suitably high threshold. Equally, the non-state schools funding committee and the non-state school capital grants authorities all do, I think, a great deal of work above and beyond what I think their own schools might appreciate from time to time because of the nature of the work to ensure that funds are allocated fairly and equitably, and that they maintain the reputation of the non-government schooling in terms of quality of education.

I would like to take the opportunity to recognise the work they have done in partnership with the government in relation, as I said, particularly to many of the reforms that required cross sectoral work in the senior phase, in the Queensland certificate of education, in some of the new work that is happening around the curriculum and assessment and reporting framework, and in the implementation of the preparatory year. I think that there is much to be gained from that collaboration. I am very heartened by some of the work that is happening, particularly in regional areas.

Mr FINN: Minister, similarly in my electorate there are significant numbers of students of non-English speaking backgrounds, many of whom are refugees. In recent times they have particularly come from African countries of origin. Whilst these students provide a great cultural enrichment to local schools, they do have a range of special educational needs. I am wondering if you can outline what the state and federal governments are doing to ensure that these students reach their educational goals.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. He is right; there is a growing and significant number of students from refugee backgrounds in our schools. Education Queensland currently supports approximately 1,585 refugee and humanitarian entrant students. It is an increase from 1,243 students from 2002, so you can see it is a growing group.

I think it is interesting and important to understand that the profile of refugee students has changed dramatically in the last few years. We now have very large numbers of young students coming from African countries who have experienced very complex psychological, physical, social and educational backgrounds due to war and civil unrest in their countries of origin. Many of these young people have experienced not only the trauma of war but also have spent a lot of their young lives in refugee camps. Consequently, unlike previous entrants under similar programs, many of these young

people are coming into our schools with little or, in many cases, no experience of schooling. So they may be 12- or 14-years-old, but they have not undertaken any of the basics that would equip them for literacy and numeracy, let alone the socialisation of being in a school, which is a very organised institution.

These traits, as I said, have not existed to this extent in previous groups of students joining our classrooms. They do require, I think, a rethink of the strategies that have worked before and the way that we have, in the past, traditionally allocated ESL dollars. I think that the previous mechanisms have worked, by and large, for the students who are coming in, but giving a short-term injection, if you like, of English as a second language support to students who have never held a pencil, who are not literate in their own language and who have never sat in a classroom is really not meeting those children's needs.

Consequently, I am pleased that we have been in a position this year to allocate an extra \$1.8 million over the 2005-06 year. That follows on from the additional \$1 million which we provided for semester 1 in 2005 this year. We are in the process of developing a new allocative model to recognise the specific needs that I have described. But the support will allow us to have additional language tuition, additional teacher aide hours, homework assistance and counselling, and other locally determined services. As I said earlier, many of these children are in highly traumatised states, and we need to meet those needs before we can start to talk about education basics.

The ESL program supports refugee students and the state contributes to the Commonwealth new arrivals funding and general Commonwealth funding to support numeracy and literacy and special needs, and we provide 25 FTEs in the ESL program. The Commonwealth has not recognised the changing profile of refugee students in the funding formula. I was very disappointed recently when the Commonwealth failed to support moves by state ministers to get the Commonwealth to rethink its own program. I do hope that it takes on board what we have said and starts to do some good work in this area, because these students are possibly the most disadvantaged that have ever sat in in some of our classrooms.

Mr FINN: You mentioned in that response literacy and numeracy, and I refer now to the \$164-plus million detailed in the MPS to drive improved literacy and numeracy outcomes in state schools. Can you detail to the committee how this money will be spent?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The government, as I think you would be aware, is very committed to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for students. We understand that, unless students have a very good solid grounding in the basics, it is very difficult for them to go on and take advantage of all the other opportunities we offer at other levels of schooling and in a range of subject areas, let alone the ICT opportunities that are opening up.

The \$164.3 million worth of targeted initiatives in the 2005-06 literacy and numeracy program will be allocated as follows: \$70.3 million will support 601 primary support teachers in learning difficulties and 322 secondary support teachers in learning difficulties; \$42.6 million to fund the equivalent of 997 teacher aides in primary and secondary schools supporting literacy and numeracy; \$21.3 million will fund the Reading Recovery Program; \$12 million will see the Literacy Enhancement Program, which is funded by the Australian government, to supplement existing literacy and numeracy initiatives within school; \$14.5 million will underpin the year 2 net for teachers and support for the diagnostic net plus grants for reading, writing and number intervention support; and \$1.25 million will see intervention support grants for literacy and numeracy following the year 5 test.

There will also be \$2.1 million for professional development in literacy and numeracy throughout districts and schools and the coordination of national literacy and numeracy week. Literacy is important, as I have said, and we have put in place a system where all schools—primary and high school—are required to have a whole of school literacy strategy. I am pleased to say that they now do, and that is monitored actively by executive directors when they are working with schools.

The year 2 net was commenced in 1996, and it tracks the progress of all students across years 1, 2 and 3 on the development of continua in reading, writing and number. Written reports are provided to parents at the end of year 1 and 3 and midyear in year 2. The 2004 results in terms of reading, writing and number indicate that we have very high numbers of students who do not require any additional assistance at that point. So in reading, 75 per cent of students require no further assistance. In writing, it is 85 per cent, and in number it is 80 per cent.

Those results reflect a continuing improvement from year to year in the midyear literacy and numeracy performance since 1996. While I would obviously like to see those numbers much closer to 100 per cent, I am very pleased to see that the year 2 net which was put in place as an initiative of the Goss government to make sure we had a safety net in place for students in the early years is working and making a difference. That is probably enough on that one.

CHAIR: I wanted to ask about students with disabilities. You have spoken somewhat already about the support that Education Queensland provides for students with disabilities, but I wonder if you could speak in particular about the Education Adjustment Program.

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. The number of students with disabilities in Queensland schools as at day 8 this year was 15,567, which is an increase of 5.6 per cent on 2004. In 2005 we saw an additional 136 teachers, bringing to 2,805 the total teachers in our system who are supporting students with disabilities. There was an additional 5,338 hours of teacher aide time per week in 2005, leading to a total of more than 70,500 hours per week supporting students with disabilities. We also support approximately 227 full-time equivalent occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech language pathologists for students with special needs in communication.

The total estimated recurrent state funding on top of the enrolment funding that goes with these children is \$317.6 million this year. In keeping with the government response to the final report of the ministerial task force on students with disabilities, the ascertainment process ceased at the end of 2004. It has been replaced by the Education Adjustment Program, and that is a product of more than four years of research and consultation including with parents. It will be introduced gradually over the next three years.

The best way to understand this is that, in essence, the ascertainment process was to ascertain whether a child had a disability. The EAP process is to focus much more on the child's educational needs—to work out what is the educational adjustment that is needed for this child to succeed at schooling to the extent of their ability. It identifies, as I said, adjustments to be made by teachers and by the schooling system. It is also considerably more efficient and is better able to identify individual student needs and less time-consuming for teachers and parents.

The member for Surfers Paradise raised a question earlier about delays between ascertainment and support, and I had a lot of complaints for a long time about the backlog for ascertainment. When we really drilled down and had a look at that, we found teachers had to complete up to 14 forms and it took up to 25 hours of teacher time to complete. So, for those teachers that I alluded to earlier who are allocated to support students, 25 hours per ascertainment was being taken up. What we have tried to do is remove some of the impediments. EAP requires four forms and takes less than a quarter of the time. So we free up those teachers from the paperwork to be working in the classroom with students and with teachers.

The transition will obviously take some time, and we have put in place 10 EAP transition coordinators to support the introduction over the next three years. Resources have been allocated to districts for distribution to school SEUs, SECs and SEDUs, and capital funding for students with disabilities is also being improved, with \$27.9 million this year under the third year of the building inclusive schools program.

Madam Chair, with your indulgence, I have a couple of questions that were taken on notice or other matters that I think I should table and then if we have an opportunity for another question we could do that.

CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

Ms BLIGH: I meant to do this earlier when I tabled the correction to the question about asbestos. There was a question asked on notice for the estimates committee about the reporting of suspected abuse of children. The answer that I provided indicated that that was data for state and non-state schools. I just need to correct it. It was actually just for state schools, but it included data that was reported to the Queensland Police Service. The numbers are right but inadvertently the words 'non-state schools' were included in the answer. So I table the corrected version.

Leave granted.

Ms BLIGH: The member for Surfers Paradise asked a question in relation to AVTs and schools of distance education. I will give a general and then a specific answer. There are more than 370 AVT FTEs—full-time equivalents—allocated to districts across the state to support students with disabilities who are not in special ed units or special ed classes. These 370 AVTs are to support students with disabilities in mainstream schools and they are allocated to districts on the basis of enrolments. SDEs that are located in a district are able to have access to those AVTs if they have students enrolled who have a need for that support.

In addition, there are 11 FTEs allocated to the seven SDEs that are just for them to support students with special needs in their enrolment. So there are 11 FTEs but they are spread across, so there is at least one for every school of distance ed, but they can also access the additional ones in the district that they are located in if they have a need.

There is a relatively low number of students who have very high needs who are enrolled in schools of distance education. It might surprise you that, if a child has level 5 or 6 ascertainment, it is more likely that their parents will seek support for that child in a regional centre that has a mainstream school. Nevertheless, there are children with disabilities in SDEs, and I think that answers your question.

During the arts component of the estimates hearing, I offered to get additional information on the \$2.5 million loan for the *Big Brother* production as a result of a question asked by the member for Burnett. The interest rate that is paid by *Big Brother* is a variable rate and it has ranged from 2.3 per

cent to 2.7 per cent over the last four years. PFTC subsidises the QTC interest rates through its own funding from government. The loan is not for a specific term but is a rolling facility. The principal would need to be repaid if *Big Brother* ceased. So it rolls over every 12 months, but should that cease then the principal would have to be repaid. It is like an interest-only loan; that is probably the best way to describe it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. There is probably time for one more question.

Ms BLIGH: I am happy to give you an early mark.

CHAIR: I think we will stick to our time frame. I am interested in international education and export. In the MPS it is mentioned that there are 1,300 students from approximately 20 countries enrolled in Queensland's state schools, and I have had the opportunity to meet overseas students in our schools but I did not realise they were such a good number. Has there been an increase in international students enrolled in Queensland schools in the last couple of years since 2003?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is I think appropriate that we finish on an international note, given that we have just seen the announcement of the city for the Olympics. For those of us who are addicts watching the Tour de France and following Lance Armstrong's progress, it is fitting that we have some contemplation of international questions.

I am very pleased to confirm a rise in international enrolments in Queensland state schools. We have seen a 20 per cent increase in full fee-paying international students in the past financial year from 720 to 840. There has been a 20 per cent increase in full fee-paying international students, which I think is very encouraging. The majority of these students come from China, Japan, Brazil, Korea and Germany. In 2004-05, state schools hosted 245 study groups, with 8,190 participants mainly from Japan. That is, 84 per cent of those in the study groups were from Japan. It has generated \$2.7 million and \$1.9 million of that has been paid to schools.

Approximately 370 schools across 32 districts are accredited to host the study tours. Obviously the presence of international students in our schools and in our classrooms will make a significant contribution to the whole cultural experience of being in a school, and many of these students form lifelong friendships and build international links between our country and the countries that they come from as well as offering an opportunity for our students to learn a lot more at a very real level—at a playground level—about what life in another country is like; everything from language to food.

In the export education area, education continues to be a major export earner across all sectors, generating \$926 million in the 2004-05 calendar year. That includes higher education, VET schools and ELICOS, which is English language providers. Queensland is the third largest exporter after New South Wales and Victoria, with higher education the largest part of the sector, representing 60 per cent of all international student enrolments in Queensland and a number of our universities have very significant numbers.

Countries from the Asian region remain the main source of students. But other areas of significant growth include South Africa, India, the United Arab Emirates, China and Japan. Again these students make a great contribution in our universities not only financially but also, much more significantly, culturally. They build lifelong partnerships that will only advantage our respective countries in the future.

CHAIR: I think that I have met some from South America, too. That could be an emerging market. On that very happy and bright note, that brings the committee's examination of estimates for the Education and the Arts portfolio to a close. I remind officers that the responses to questions taken on notice at the hearing are required to be returned to the committee by 10 am on Tuesday, 12 July 2005.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister, her advisers and the support staff who have been here all afternoon. Thank you for your attendance. I thank the committee members for their diligent approach to the hearing today and particularly for the smooth flow of questions and the sessions. I thank the research director, Jo Mathers, for being of enormous support and assistance. I particularly thank Hansard and the time keepers. That concludes consideration of the matters parliament referred to the committee on 10 June 2005.

Ms BLIGH: Could I take a moment on behalf of the portfolio of Education and the Arts to thank the committee for its time this afternoon. Can I place on record my thanks to the officers of the Department of Education and the Arts, particularly my Director-General, Mr Ken Smith, and Leigh Tabrett, the Deputy Director-General responsible for the Arts portfolio. This is a time that certainly tests the agency and I think strengthens its performances. I would like to recognise the hard work that has been put in by everybody involved. I thank them for that. I thank the parliamentary officers—Hansard, the research director and others—who have made this afternoon run very smoothly. Can I say to all of those long-suffering people sitting behind me that I hope we have not been too boring.

Committee adjourned at 5.47 pm