



Estimates Committee C

2005

Report to the Legislative Assembly

Introduction

Pursuant to Standing Order 167(3) the Legislative Assembly, by Order made on 20 May 2005, referred to Estimates Committee C for investigation and report certain proposed expenditures contained in the *Appropriation Bill 2005*. The organisational units and portfolios allocated to the committee were as follows:

- Employment, Training and Industrial Relations; and
- Education and the Arts.

A public hearing was held on 7 July 2005 to take oral evidence from the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (Mr Barton) and the Minister for Education and the Arts (Ms Bligh). The transcript of the committee's hearing is available on the Queensland Parliament's Hansard web-page at: <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Hansard/>.

Prior to the public hearing, the committee put twenty questions on notice to each minister. Responses to each of the questions were received on 6 July 2005.

The committee has considered the estimates referred to it by examining information contained in:

- budget papers and ministerial portfolio statements;
- answers to pre-hearing questions on notice;
- oral evidence taken at the hearing;
- documents tabled at the hearing; and
- answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing.

Answers to pre-hearing questions on notice, answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing and documents tabled at the hearing, together with minutes of the committee's meetings, are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

Employment, Training and Industrial Relations Portfolio

The *Department of Employment and Training* provides training and employment strategies and programs delivered through two departmental

outputs: employment initiatives and vocational education and training services. The following table sets out details of the department's appropriation for 2005-06 compared to the previous financial year.¹

	2004-05 Budget \$'000	2005-06 Estimate \$'000
Departmental Outputs	620,002	597,035
Equity Adjustment	(6,803)	12,899
Administered Items	1,885	1,414
Vote Total	615,084	611,348

Key elements in the 2005-06 budget estimate proposed by *Employment and Training* include:²

- \$911.7 million investment in jobs and training;
- continuation of the *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* initiative; and
- continuation of the \$1 billion three year *SmartVET* strategy.

Issues canvassed at the hearing for *Employment and Training* included:

- compliance of registered training organisations;
- *User Choice* expenditure allocated to private providers to deliver training;
- training places available in skill shortage areas;
- staff training and professional development for TAFE institutes;
- apprenticeships and traineeships;
- upgrade of Southbank TAFE;
- investment in training infrastructure;
- vocational education and training system;
- amalgamation of agricultural colleges;
- Building and Construction Industry Training Fund;
- *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* initiative; and
- the *Mining Centre of Excellence*.

¹ Queensland Government, *Ministerial Portfolio Statements: Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations*, State Budget 05-06, 2005 at page 1-7.

² 2005-06 Highlights, at page 1-3.

The *Department of Industrial Relations* provides industrial relations, workplace health and safety and electrical safety services delivered through five departmental outputs: workplace health and safety services; private sector industrial relations services; administration of the industrial court and commission system; electrical safety services; and public sector industrial and employee relations services. The following table sets out details of the department's appropriation for 2005-06 compared to the previous financial year.³

	2004-05 Budget \$'000	2005-06 Estimate \$'000
Departmental Outputs	53,353	55,669
Equity Adjustment	287	477
Vote Total	53,640	56,146

Key elements in the 2005-06 budget estimate proposed by *Industrial Relations* include:⁴

- \$690,000 additional one-off funding for development of a web-based tool, allowing employers and employees to verify employment information via the *Wageline* website;
- \$675,000 additional one-off funding for progression of various *State Government Departments Certified Agreements 2003* commitments; and
- \$1.2 million funding to target priority workplace health and safety issues.

Issues canvassed at the hearing for *Industrial Relations* included:

- Queensland workplace agreements;
- electrical safety audits and investigations;
- television advertising campaign promoting safety switches;
- proposed national industrial relations system;
- industrial disputation;
- 2005 national wage case submission;
- public sector enterprise bargaining agreements;
- response to the recommendations of the Queensland Ombudsman's report - *The Workplace Electrocution Project*, June 2005;
- recommendations of the independent panel's review - *Electricity Distribution and Service Delivery for the 21st Century*, July 2004;
- workplace health and safety inspection, advisory and enforcement activities;
- education and training programs for inspectors;
- fines resulting from workplace health and safety prosecutions;

- guidelines for working with crocodiles in captivity;
- ACTU advertising campaign;
- workplace health and safety compliance audits;
- *Outworker Strategy*; and
- the portable long service leave scheme.

Education and the Arts Portfolio

The *Department of Education and the Arts* provides education, skills and innovation delivered through seven departmental outputs: four state schooling outputs (preschool education, primary education, secondary education and students with special needs); assistance to the Arts; assistance to non-state schooling; and assistance to tertiary institutions. There are five statutory bodies reporting to the Minister which include: the Queensland Studies Authority; Library Board of Queensland; Queensland Art Gallery; Queensland Museum; and the Queensland Performing Arts Trust. The following table sets out details of the department's appropriation for 2005-06 compared to the previous financial year.⁵

	2004-05 Budget \$'000	2005-06 Estimate \$'000
Departmental Outputs	3,859,411	3,694,018
Equity Adjustment	286,746	387,062
Administered Items	1,443,739	1,590,291
Vote Total	5,589,896	5,671,371

Key elements in the 2005-06 budget estimate proposed by *Education and the Arts* include:⁶

- \$455.1 million education capital works program;
- \$45.8 million funding over four years for two new Queensland Smart Academies;
- \$14 million additional funding to state and non-state schools, totalling \$56 million over four years, for the *Smart Classrooms* initiative;
- \$3.5 million additional funding to provide laptops or personal computers for state school teachers;
- \$8.3 million over three years for development and implementation of the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework*;

³ Queensland Government, *Ministerial Portfolio Statements: Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations*. State Budget 05-06, 2005 at page 2-5.

⁴ 2005-06 Highlights, at page 2-3.

⁵ Queensland Government, *Ministerial Portfolio Statements: Minister for Education and the Arts*, State Budget 05-06, 2005 at page 1-18.

⁶ 2005-06 Highlights, at pages 1-8 and 1-9.

- \$168.7 million for the Millennium Arts Program;
- \$2.5 million funding for the arts and cultural sector for small to medium arts and cultural organisations to support high-quality one-off initiatives; and
- \$1 million additional funding for the expansion of the 2005 Queensland Music Festival into five additional areas.

Issues canvassed at the hearing for *the Arts* included:

- funding allocated to the Pacific Film and Television Commission;
- incentive packages offered to *Big Brother*;
- content of film and television production projects;
- Bert Hinkler Aviation Museum;
- funding allocations for the Queensland Orchestra, Queensland Museum and the State Library of Queensland;
- Regional Arts Development Fund; and
- the *Art Built-in* program.

Issues canvassed at the hearing for *Education* included:

- asbestos issues including the roof replacement program, removal procedures, dust and air monitoring and testing, and signage regarding asbestos materials register;
- healthy foods in schools initiative and strategy;
- services to students in rural and remote areas;
- behaviour management program;
- additional funding for full-time equivalent teachers;
- *Education and Training Reforms for the Future*;
- advisory visiting teachers;
- recommendations of the ministerial task force on inclusive education;
- indemnity coverage for school volunteers;
- *Education Adjustment Program*;
- *Next Step* destination survey;
- preparatory year program;
- sale of preschool facilities;
- teacher aid hours and costs;
- *Cooler Schools* program;
- speech language therapy services;
- services for students with disabilities;
- unplanned maintenance funds for schools;
- publication of year 12 results;
- information, communication and technology (ICT) services and the *ICTs for Learning* strategy;
- Queensland Smart Academies initiative;
- Smart Schools Renewal Program;
- Core Facilities Upgrade Program;
- *Wired for the Future* program;

- *Triple R* maintenance program;
- Indigenous education initiatives;
- reporting of serious injuries, illnesses and dangerous events in state schools;
- compliance with electrical safety regulations;
- implementation of new mathematics syllabus;
- Board of Teacher Registration review;
- Non-State school assistance; and
- International student enrolments and programs.

Recommendation

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the *Appropriation Bill 2005* for the organisational units and portfolios allocated to it, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

Acknowledgements

The committee thanks ministers and their staff for their cooperation and assistance during the estimates process.

Dianne Reilly MP
Chair

August 2005

Committee Members

Mrs Dianne Reilly MP (Chair)
Mr John-Paul Langbroek MP (Deputy Chair)
Hon Dean Wells MP
Mr Marc Rowell MP
Mr John English MP
Mr Simon Finn MP
Mr Robert Messenger MP

Secretariat

Miss Josephine Mathers (Research Director)
Mrs Julie Shortell (Executive Assistant)

STATEMENT OF RESERVATIONS

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

**Rob Messenger MP
Member for Burnett**

The process of Estimates Committee hearings in relation to the Ministerial Program Statement for the Department of Education and the Arts highlights yet again the weaknesses in the operations of Estimates Committees in Queensland as a mechanism for scrutinizing expenditures by government Departments.

These weaknesses include:

- The limit on the number of Questions on Notice able to be asked as part of the Estimates process.
- The receipt of replies to such Questions on Notice less than 24 hours prior to the actual hearing meeting of the Committee.
- The limited time available for the conduct of hearings for each Department thus limiting the capacity of the Parliament to explore issues of concern to finality
- The limit on each questioning session generally to 20 minutes thus inhibiting the capacity to pursue issues of interest until finality is reached.
- The use by Ministers and Government Members of questions to provide a basis for propaganda statements rather than genuinely exploring issues relating to departmental expenditures.
- The failure of Ministerial Program Statements to contain comprehensive, consistent and readily understandable performance standards that are consistently applied on a year by year basis.

In addition to these general comments about the Estimates Committee process the hearings of Estimates Committee C on 7 July 2005 also highlighted the following matters where the response of the Minister was unsatisfactory:

- The Minister's acceptance of the current Pacific Film and Television guidelines which fail to place any restriction on the content of those films that are funded with taxpayer dollars.
- The Minister's failure to acknowledge or address the recurring reductions in the Queensland's education budget, in real terms.
- The Minister's failure to grasp the severity of the asbestos risk within our schools and her reluctance to undertake a comprehensive monitoring and testing program in schools.
- The lack of adequate signage and failure to adhere to national guidelines regarding the safe management of asbestos.
- Under the Minister's guidance, the Beattie Government has wound back the commitment to the prep year. During the last election, the Premier committed \$395 million to fund the capital component of the prep year, however this commitment has now been slashed by \$45 million.
- The failure of the Minister to provide comprehensive details of those off-site preschools that are forecast to be sold off, whilst acknowledging that the Beattie Government is predicted to raise \$20 million from the sale.
- The Minister's admission that QBuild prices for air-conditioning of schools have been grossly inflated in the past and have therefore been subject to some revision. Unfortunately, the cost to air-condition an individual classroom still remains prohibitively high for many schools.
- The Minister's unwillingness to commit to air-conditioning special education classrooms.
- The failure of the Minister to provide details of injuries, illnesses and dangerous events, in accordance with the Department of Education Manual HS-08 which states that statistics must be compiled to allow the identification and evaluation of this information on a district and statewide basis.
- The Minister's failure to acknowledge the electrical safety risks in schools, and her misguided belief that safety switches are not necessary to protect children from electrical accidents in schools.

- The failure of the Minister to provide up-to-date data in relation to bullying and physical misconduct and her inability to provide any comprehensive details regarding anger management programs conducted in schools.

I trust that these concerns will be duly noted by the Committee.

Rob Messenger MP
Member for Burnett

STATEMENT OF RESERVATIONS

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Marc Rowell MP

Shadow Minister for Employment, Training & Industrial Relations

Member for Hinchinbrook

The process of Estimates Committee C Hearings on 7 July 2005 in relation to the Ministerial Program Statement for the Departments of Employment and Training and Industrial Relations highlighted the following matters on which the response of the Minister was unsatisfactory:

- The continued refusal by the Minister throughout the Hearings for Employment and Training and Industrial Relations to provide information relating to the expenditure and core functions of these portfolios. The Minister's comments that providing detailed information '*is quite unreasonable*' goes against the central purpose of the Estimates process and the ability of the Opposition to keep the Government accountable on expenditure appropriated. If the Minister is unable to personally provide the information requested in a question, he could have asked one of the many departmental staff in attendance to give these details to the Committee. This process was utilised by other Ministers during the Estimates Hearings.

Further, in the absence of the Minister being able to provide this information or this departmental advice being on hand, the Minister absolutely refused to take any questions on notice. This again reflected the Minister's unwillingness to comply with the Estimates process.

- The unwillingness of the Minister to provide details on the number of new training places budgeted for in skills shortage areas under the User Choice program was of concern. The User Choice program is intended to provide flexibility in training for employers and their apprentices and trainees and without these details the Opposition can not be satisfied whether the Government is maintaining a commitment to new places under this program.
- In response to questioning by the Opposition on what the government is doing to address the continued trend of very mediocre completion rates for apprenticeships and traineeships, the Minister was unable to answer what strategies were being employed to improve on these numbers in 2005-06.
- The Minister's failure to commit to long term staffing levels at the campuses of the new Australian Agricultural College Corporation, that will be crucial to ensuring local jobs and the continuation of the high standard of training provided by the colleges in regional and rural Queensland.

- For the second year in a row the use of Queensland Workplace Agreements (QWA's) declined. The Minister refuses to concede that it was his government's changes to the agreements in 1999, allowing for unfettered right of entry for union officials, that has rendered them unpopular.
- The lack of processes put in place by the Minister to track unlicensed contractors who despite being convicted continue to perform electrical work, such as the installation of air conditioners. Given the dangers that electrical work by an unlicensed contractor could pose, the Minister's admission that his department is unaware of the whereabouts of just one particular serial offender referred to is very concerning.
- The unwillingness of the Minister to investigate reinvesting revenue collected from fines, as a result of workplace health and safety prosecutions, into improving the advisory service for this output of the Department.

Marc Rowell MP
Shadow Minister for Employment, Training & Industrial Relations

28 July 2005

John-Paul Langbroek B.D.Sc.(Hons) MP

STATE MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Statement of Reservation

Estimates Committee C

July 2005

Department of Industrial Relations

Corporate Solutions Queensland

In relation to a relatively simple question regarding shared service provider Corporate Solution Queensland, the minister was unable to provide figures for the savings accrued under the new regime by comparison to the old regime.

The question I asked had two parts; is there a saving under the new regime by comparison to the old regime and if there is I asked the minister to appraise to the committee the amount being saved?¹

The importance of this question was to give the committee the opportunity to see if this particular regime and its implementation were saving Queensland money and whether or not the current regime was more efficient than the previous regime.

The minister told the Committee that while he was not “ducking the question” responsibility for such issues resided with the treasurer and not him. Even though the minister stated that “(his) DG is the responsible officer for Corporate Solutions Queensland”² he could not give the figures for savings under this regime because they were “whole of government”³ figures.

The actions of the minister are unacceptable and unprofessional. If he has the figures at hand for a regime that his Director General is responsible for he should provide those figures and not try and skirt the issue. The aim of the estimates process is to make public figures that point to the performance of various programs of a Government. To not make these figures available inhibits this aim.

Advertising and safety switches in schools

In response to a question on safety switches the minister spent a small amount of time explaining that his department was there to encourage the education department to install safety switches in all schools.

¹ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 15

² *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 15

³ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 15

He stated that his department had spent \$360,000 on advertising the importance of safety switches in new homes and was looking at investing another \$190,000 in continued advertising.⁴

It is the view of the Liberal Party that safety switches should be updated in all schools as soon as possible to avoid the situation that the minister alluded to: an electrocution or a serious injury. For the minister to spend such little time discussing this very important point, deciding instead to talk about safety switches in domestic residences, is disappointing and indicates that the rate of installation of safety switches will not improve.

Department of Education

Asbestos Dust Testing

During the estimates hearing I asked a question on asbestos dust testing that had two parts. The first part dealt with the number of schools that had been tested for asbestos dust and the second part related to the contamination rate of those schools.⁵ The question was asked primarily to place on the public record once and for all the correct information without any confusion as the minister, on the day of Estimates Committee C had admitted misleading the house in an answer to a question by Deputy Liberal Leader, the Member for Moggill, Dr Bruce Flegg MP.

Instead of answering the question immediately the first response from the minister was more intent on dealing with the framing of the question from the Member for Moggill than answering a question about an issue that had been clearly defined. It was evident to members of the committee that the minister did not particularly want to answer questions about asbestos dust testing. This was evident as after asking the first question on asbestos dust testing a subsequent question, asking for more detailed information about testing prior to or after the March-April testing period, had to be asked because it was not touched upon in her response to the first question.⁶

The minister also congratulated herself that the dust testing results could be put into perspective by saying that “it has been small amounts of dust that has not become air borne and it has been removed as quickly as possible.”⁷ I would encourage the Minister to explain how the dust was not at some stage air borne and what the reason for dust testing is if dust simply present on surfaces in classrooms or staffrooms does not pose a threat to children and teachers.

When asked a question regarding how a certain school comes to be tested, the minister said that dust must be reported by someone who sees the dust and the principal notifies the department. The minister refused to say that there would be dust testing in every school in Queensland.

It is the Liberal Party’s position that every school in Queensland must be tested for asbestos dust to provide peace of mind to parents of Queensland school children.

Special Needs Students

When answering a question regarding special needs students, not receiving treatment the Minister seemed unwilling or unable to answer questions on the topic.

Instead the minister’s first response to the question was that she would “have to know the specific circumstance of each school.”⁸

⁴ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 24

⁵ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 46

⁶ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 47

⁷ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 47

⁸ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 53

Despite providing the minister with two specific examples, with special reference given to the circumstances of special needs students not receiving attention at Woody Point State School, the minister was still unable to provide even a global answer as to why students who required weekly treatment were going months without treatment, if in fact they were receiving treatment at all.

It is the view of the Liberal Party that special needs students should receive whatever treatment they need to assist, as best is possible, in their development. To have students missing treatment because there is not enough money for these services is irresponsible.

Indemnity for Volunteers

I was also concerned at the inability of the Minister to answer a question regarding insurance cover for volunteers.⁹ It is very important that parents who are asked by teachers to coach teams or to help out with students are covered by insurance; otherwise the very important positions that these parents fill will not be filled and many opportunities that students currently have will no longer be available.

The minister seemed unwilling or unable to clarify the situation. So much so that the Minister had to be asked two separate questions on the issue.¹⁰

In future I would hope that the Minister or one of the departmental staff present will be able to answer relatively straightforward questions, such as these, about their portfolio.

John-Paul Langbroek MP

State Member for Surfers Paradise

⁹ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 58

¹⁰ *Hansard* Estimates Committee C 2005 at 58