

WEDNESDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2020

ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE— EDUCATION, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND RACING

Estimate Committee Members

Ms KE Richards (Chair)
Mr JP Lister
Mr MA Boothman
Mr N Dametto
Mr BL O'Rourke
Mr JA Sullivan

Members in Attendance

Dr CAC Rowan
Dr A MacMahon
Ms FS Simpson
Mr SSJ Andrew
Mr MC Berkman
Mr TL Mander
Mr JP Bleijie
Mr BA Mickelberg

In Attendance

Hon. G Grace, Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing

Ms S Durham, Chief of Staff

Department of Education

Mr T Cook, Director-General

Mr D Anson, Deputy Director, General, Corporate Services

Office of Industrial Relations

Mr C Allen, Deputy Director-General

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Dr E Woods, Director-General

The committee met at 9.00 am.



CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this hearing of estimates for the Education, Employment and Training Committee open. I acknowledge that we are meeting on custodial land of the oldest living civilisation in the world. I pay my respects to both the Jagera people and the Turrbal people and their elders, past, present and emerging.

I am Kim Richards, the member for Redlands and chair of the committee. Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs, is the deputy chair. The other members of the committee are: Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Mr Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; and Mr Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford.

Today the committee will consider the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 and the budget estimates for the committee's areas of responsibility. I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at my discretion as chair or by order of the committee.

The committee has authorised that this hearing is broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. I ask that all mobile phones now be switched off or set to silent mode. I also remind everyone that food and drink is not permitted in this chamber.

The committee will examine estimates for its portfolio areas as follows: Education, Industrial Relations and Racing from 9 am until 2 pm; and Employment, Small Business, Training and Skills Development from 2.30 pm until 5.15 pm.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 for the portfolio of the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing until 2 pm. The committee will suspend proceedings during this time for breaks from 10.30 am to 10.45 am and from 11.45 am until 12.30 pm.

The committee will commence with the examination of estimates for the Education portfolio area. The following non-committee members have sought and been granted leave to participate in the hearing in accordance with standing orders. There will be a number of members moving in and out of the chamber. I note that we have the shadow minister for education, Dr Christian Rowan, the member for Moggill, currently present. I also acknowledge the Assistant Minister for Education, the member for Keppel, Brittany Lauga.

I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and subject to the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in the Legislative Assembly apply in this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, argument or opinion.

I intend to guide proceedings today so that relevant issues can be respectfully and fully explored and to ensure there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members of the committee.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of Education, Industrial Relations and Racing open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair. I will make an opening statement. Good morning, everyone, and welcome. I really do welcome the opportunity to address the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I am joined at the table today by Tony Cook, the Director-General of the Department of Education; Duncan Anson, the Acting Deputy Director-General; and Ms Sharon Durham, my Chief of Staff.

The re-election of the Palaszczuk government for four more years has afforded me the privilege of continuing my role as Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations while adding the very important portfolio of Racing. During my time as education minister, I have visited schools across the length and breadth of the state including more than 150 school visits in the past two years. This was despite schools being shut for part of term 2 and all the COVID restrictions being in place for most of 2020. It is an honour to meet all of the students and school staff everywhere I go and to see the great work that they are all doing.

The 2020-21 state budget delivers for every single student across Queensland. Once again, the Palaszczuk government is delivering a record Education budget, with more than \$14.2 billion being allocated over the next 12 months. That also includes a record spend of \$1.9 billion on school infrastructure over the next 12 months, with the highlight being the five new schools—adding to the eight we opened this year—that will open on day one of the 2021 school year.

We will also spend an additional \$1 billion over the next four years, including almost \$400 million for nearly 50 new classroom buildings, creating 1,300 jobs; \$235 million for 26 new halls and performing arts centres, creating 775 jobs; \$100 million for refurbishment and renewal projects in schools; and \$45 million for local shovel-ready projects in schools. We are also investing an additional \$180 million over three years for new school infrastructure in Catholic and independent schools. It takes our total infrastructure funding support to that sector to \$350 million over three years.

Building new school infrastructure is important for the world-class facilities it provides and the jobs it creates. Having a world-class education system is not just about bricks and mortar. It is about investing in our people and investing in the future. Our teachers truly are the foundation of the world-class education system we have here in Queensland, setting up our kids for a great future.

We will employ 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 new teacher aides over the next four years. In addition, we will provide 300 aspiring teachers with financial support, mentoring and a paid teaching internship to complete their teaching qualification and take up a guaranteed teaching position. The budget also provides increased mental health support for students, with an additional \$100 million being allocated for the additional 464 wellbeing professionals and 20 GPs.

In the Industrial Relations portfolio, the budget strengthened workers' rights by employing eight additional frontline inspectors to ensure compliance with labour hire licensing laws and to stop wage theft. The amount of \$6.1 million will be invested over the next four years to pursue targeted campaigns in the construction, security and contract cleaning labour hire industries, with a particular focus on regional Queensland. We have also committed up to \$5 million for medical research into improving the health and wellbeing of workers suffering from occupational dust lung diseases.

In Racing, we see the continuation of the hugely successful country racing package, with further funding committed through to July 2023, as well as two transformative infrastructure projects at the Gold Coast Turf Club and a new Greater Brisbane Greyhound Centre.

Thank you for the opportunity, Chair, to make an opening statement today. Now I am happy to take questions from the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I acknowledge the arrival of the member for South Brisbane, Dr Amy MacMahon. I call the member for Southern Downs.

Mr LISTER: I defer my question to the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS volume 2 page 24, my first question is to the director-general. Director-General, is the Deputy Director-General, Jeff Hunt, currently suspended on pay or without pay?

Mr Cook: Mr Hunt is currently suspended on pay.

Dr ROWAN: I refer to the Crime and Corruption Commission report titled *An investigation into allegations relating to the appointment of a school principal*. The CCC has offered a confidential report to the chief executive of the Public Service Commission in relation to disciplinary action. Director-General, can you confirm whether you are named as a subject officer in the Public Service Commission disciplinary determinations?

Mr Cook: I am aware of that matter. That would be a question for the Public Service Commission. I have not seen any correspondence between the CCC and the PSC.

Dr ROWAN: So you are not aware whether you are named in there?

Mr Cook: I have not seen that correspondence. That is correct.

Dr ROWAN: Given that you endorsed senior executive officers of the department to test the successful principal candidate of the Inner City South State Secondary College by putting the then candidate in front of the former deputy premier—that is contained within the report—Director-General, how do you respond to the Crime and Corruption Commission's assessment that you and other senior officers fundamentally undermined the accountability and transparency of the recruitment and selection processes?

Mr Cook: My detailed response in relation to the CCC investigation is included in the public report. I am happy to read that into the *Hansard* if that assists, but it is about 23 pages long. I have been very explicit around that. That information is public and available to the committee.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, a deputy director-general in the department was found to have had ongoing extensive contact with the former member for South Brisbane over the appointment of the Inner City South State Secondary College principal.

Mr SULLIVAN: I raise a point of order, Chair. What relevance does this have to this budget or the previous year's budget?

CHAIR: Thank you, member. I take your point of order. Member for Moggill, could you share with the committee its relevance to the appropriations that are before the committee for examination?

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS volume 2, page 24, departmental overview on staffing at page 33, what I am asking about is the operation of the department and how this relates to the interaction of senior departmental officials with the government. We are talking about a \$14.2 billion budget in relation to the operation of the department, so with your discretion, Chair, the line of questioning will become further evident as I continue.

Mr SULLIVAN: The director-general has just outlined that the individual the member is asking about is on leave. I do not understand how it is relevant to this year's budget and appropriations.

Mr LISTER: As the member for Moggill has said, we are talking about a \$14 billion budget here, and the administration of that budget is down to officers such as the director-general. I think it is fit and proper and relevant to the public interest that these matters be discussed.

Ms GRACE: This matter was extensively looked at by the CCC. All of the reports are public. It has now been referred for further investigation. I think it is inappropriate while that is happening under the Public Service Commission or under the auspices of the CCC that this line of questioning occurs. Unless there is something new, what we are seeing from the LNP is the same old LNP.

Mr LISTER: We do not know if there is nothing new yet. We would need an answer to the question first.

CHAIR: I will allow some latitude, but I think you need to make the question direct and appropriate to the appropriations that are before us.

Dr ROWAN: The substance of the matter is, Director-General, are you aware of any other circumstances now or in the past that you know of where senior officers in the department have subjected themselves to potential interference and influence by any other politician?

Mr Cook: Sorry, Member, could I ask you to just ask that question again? Am I aware of any senior officer in the entire department who may have—over a particular time period? I am just a bit—

Dr ROWAN: Are there any other circumstances now or in the past that you know of where a senior officer in your department has subjected themselves to potential interference and influence by any other politician?

CHAIR: Member, I am struggling to understand how this is relevant to the appropriations before us today. I think this line of questioning is more appropriate in other forums, so if you could move to a new line of questioning, please.

Dr ROWAN: I really want to ask: who is the mystery MP? On page 55, paragraph 398, there is a mystery MP. Who is the MP the former deputy premier did this as a favour for? Surely that is being looked at by the department now.

Mr SULLIVAN: That is an imputation.

Ms GRACE: I rise to a point of order. It is an imputation. It is not up to the director-general to interpret the CCC report.

CHAIR: Member, I again ask that your next line of questioning be appropriate and relevant to the appropriations that are before the committee today.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS, volume 2, page 24, 'Departmental overview', again, can I ask the minister: do you operate a private email account for government business?

Ms GRACE: No.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, do you exert control over any other email accounts that are used for government business?

Ms GRACE: Do I exert control over any other email account that is used for government business? My ministerial email account.

Dr ROWAN: Do you have control over anyone else's email account, given their user name, passwords or anything like that at all?

CHAIR: Member, I fail to see the relevance to the appropriations bill with this line of questioning. Please move to your next question.

Ms GRACE: The answer is no. How on earth does—

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Please move to your next line of questioning.

Dr ROWAN: One final question, Chair. Minister, have you ever sent an email to stacia1 @bigpond.com?

CHAIR: Member, I have asked you to move to the next line of questioning. I do not see that this is relevant to the appropriations bill before us. This time is important time that should be spent examining the bill before us as it relates to education, so please move to your next line of questioning.

Ms GRACE: And the answer no.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS volume 2, page 25 and the state government's additional \$26.5 million over two years for regulation of the early childhood sector, Minister, can you outline the Department of Education dataset reporting requirements of early childhood providers and any associated additional costs that early childhood education providers will have to meet in order to fulfil their compliance obligations?

Ms GRACE: As you know, this amount of money has had to be picked up by the state because without any consultation and without any reference to the state the federal government vacated any funding for this area. The state government had to step in at the last minute without any consultation, any information or anything like that. They just walked away, so as a government we have had to pick up the entire funding of it.

The increased funding of \$26.5 million over the two financial years is to ensure the ongoing regulation. These are national standards. It is under the Australian government, and we provide the regulating under those national quality assurance standards. We are contributing all of the money towards that in relation to doing this. I think the department does an outstanding job in relation to regulating these centres and we far exceed the targets of the national average. We are around 87 per cent of services assessed and rated. We are meeting or exceeding the NQS, the National Quality Standard, compared to 81 per cent nationally. There is a small number that are regulated under a different act, and the regulatory authority which my department undertakes does an amazing job. It undertook 5,413 physical and telemonitoring visits to the service. During the period they issued 533 compliance actions in response to breaches either identified during a monitoring visit or as a result of investigations.

I am not sure whether that has answered your question, but the regulatory authority does an outstanding job. I congratulate them. I know that some of those people are in the room here this morning. We have had to pick up the full funding because without any consultation the federal government—and remember, we are regulating national quality standards set at a federal level—walked away without letting any of the states know that they would no longer continue to fund this very important work of my department.

Dr ROWAN: I want to come to RTI 200674, which was released by the department. For the benefit of the committee, this RTI is a series of text messages between the former deputy director-general and the former deputy premier. Director-General, can you explain why the deputy director-general was texting the former deputy premier about a departmental operational matter such as this, and can you explain the 'sealed with kiss' response from Ms Trad to Mr Hunt?

CHAIR: Member, can you please explain to the committee the relevance of that question to the appropriations before this committee?

Dr ROWAN: Again, Chair, this relates to the operation of the department, senior officers of the department and their interaction with senior cabinet ministers in the government. This is the oversight of the public administration of a \$14.2 billion budget. I think the people of Queensland have the right to know of the interaction of senior officers of the department and the interaction with the government, because it goes to the fundamentals of culture and administration and professional Code of Conduct standards. I think it is important for the people of Queensland to understand the interaction—

CHAIR: No. This is reverting back to the same line of questioning as previously. I do not think you have relevantly explained how this relates to the appropriations before us. I would ask that you consider your next question carefully.

Dr ROWAN: We will move on. My next question is to the director-general. Can you please advise what salary range is applicable for a deputy director-general role in the Department of Education?

Mr Cook: That information is publicly available in the department's annual report.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, do you know whether any new appointments for a deputy director-general have been made in the Department of Education in the past 12 months?

Mr Cook: That is correct. Someone has, yes.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, are all appointments of DDGs based on merit and not their personal connections?

Mr Cook: The process is always based on merit.

Dr ROWAN: Always open and transparent?

Mr Cook: The process is always transparent.

CHAIR: Member, put your questions through the chair, please.

Dr ROWAN: Again with reference to SDS volume 2, page 33, staffing: Director-General are there any conduct concerns or allegations involving any current deputy director-generals in your department?

Mr Cook: Can I just ask for the question again? Sorry, it is just a bit fast.

Dr ROWAN: Sorry, Director-General. Are there any conduct concerns or allegations involving any current deputy director-generals in your department?

Mr Cook: On the basis that one of those deputy director-generals is on suspension, my understanding is yes, there is.

Dr ROWAN: Apart from the one who is on suspension?

Mr Cook: Not to the best of my knowledge apart from the one who is on suspension.

Dr ROWAN: No others? Again with reference to SDS volume 2, pages 24 and 33, staffing. Director-General, in August of this year the head of your department's integrity unit came under fire for computer hacking not once, but twice. Director-General, can you confirm that this very senior officer was responsible for investigating and determining any disciplinary matters of departmental staff who were found to be in breach of Code of Conduct matters?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question.

CHAIR: Again, I question the relevance to the budget estimates process.

Mr LISTER: Chair, the operation of the department, including staff selection and discipline, is under the budget. It is funded by the appropriation of the parliament. I think it is entirely relevant and in the public interest that the question be answered.

CHAIR: I will allow some latitude to the director-general in how he responds to that question.

Mr Cook: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the member for the question. I understand the point you are making is information that was made public recently. The head of that particular area had a responsibility in relation to integrity matters within the department.

Dr ROWAN: Was this senior officer's conduct ever referred to the Queensland Police Service?

Mr Cook: Not that I am aware of.

Dr ROWAN: So there were no—

CHAIR: Through the chair please.

Dr ROWAN: Through you, Chair, were there any matters that did require that to occur that you are aware of?

Mr Cook: Matters in relation to?

Dr ROWAN: The conduct of the subject officer.

Mr Cook: Not that I am aware of.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, through you, Chair, I understand that the Queensland Association of State School Principals released a position paper in March this year that was highly critical of the way in which allegations were being handled by the department. What was your response to those concerns, Director-General?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of those concerns coming directly to me. I am aware of that information being made public recently through a media article. In relation to that particular area, there has been significant work undertaken in the integrity space over the last 12 months. We have been looking at particularly the amount of issues that we are managing, that we are dealing with, and we have been looking at how we manage that more effectively, considering we have a workforce of 94,000 people

approximately. Part of that work is looking at a triaging system where we can actually identify the particular complaint quickly and make a decision about whether that complaint is best dealt with at the local level or whether that complaint needs to be dealt with through other mechanisms. As a result of that, we are starting to clear, I will admit, a backlog that did exist in that particular area, as you would expect with an organisation our size.

Our data is made available publicly through the CaPE process, so that is available on the Public Service Commission's website. When you look at the number of misconduct issues that are being dealt with at the moment, I understand the percentage of that in terms of the workforce is approximately one per cent.

Dr ROWAN: With that backlog, Director-General, and through you again, Chair, are there systemic failures within the integrity unit of the Department of Education?

Mr Cook: I do not accept that proposal. There is work that we need to do to improve our practice, as there always is, and we are focusing on that work.

Dr ROWAN: What is the timeline for that work to be progressed and implemented?

Mr Cook: That work is ongoing. We began that review about 12 months ago as part of an internal review we did of the process. We have been working with our stakeholders, including the principal associations, to actually forward that and we have been having regular meetings with them in relation to improving our practice in this area.

Dr ROWAN: Through you, Chair, again, how many school principals have been under suspension in the last 12 months?

Mr Cook: I do not have that data available to me. I know that in terms of the total number of suspensions it is less than 0.01 per cent of all our staff.

Dr ROWAN: Would you be willing to take that on notice and provide that back to the committee—the exact number?

Ms GRACE: It is up to me to decide. We will try to get some information. What do you want? Do you want a percentage? Do you want a number? What exactly would you like? We will try to gather that.

Mr LISTER: We would like—

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, the minister is just trying to clarify the information that is being sought.

Ms GRACE: The way that I would handle this is we will try to find the figure, if it is a figure you want. Do you want numbers or do you want percentages?

Dr ROWAN: A number and a percentage if you are willing to take that on notice.

Ms GRACE: We will try to get that. Chair, we will try to make that available before the end of this questioning.

Mr Cook: To confirm, Chair, the figure I gave was correct—less than 0.01 per cent of the department's workforce is currently suspended. I do not have that breakdown with principals, but we will endeavour to get that before the end of the hearing.

Dr ROWAN: Further to that, I guess the next question may need to be taken on notice as well—

CHAIR: I will just correct you. That was not taken on notice; they will be coming back in the session once they have received advice.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you. I will look forward to the information. Again, Director-General, I would be interested to know how many of these were suspended on full pay and the actual cost that was associated with that. Are you able to provide that?

Mr Cook: We will do our best endeavours to see if we have got information available for this afternoon by two o'clock.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, if you are happy to take that. I guess the other thing I would like to know is the cost of the relieving principals to cover for those. Director-General, are you able to provide that at the moment?

Mr Cook: Whether we can get that information in the next few hours, I am not sure, but we will do our best.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, through the chair, there appear to be a myriad of integrity matters related to the Department of Education and associated staff. Does this reflect on your leadership and oversight of the department as Minister for Education?

Ms GRACE: No.

Dr ROWAN: Are you concerned about the culture within the department at all?

Ms GRACE: In the Public Service we have over 94,000 employees under my department. When you look at the figures of those who may have some issues or whatever, they are minute. The vast majority of public servants are dedicated, loyal and committed workers. In any organisation, you are going to have some issues that may require to be investigated or pursued. I do not think the Public Service is any different. They are done under proper processes and under proper principles. I would expect nothing less. I think every public servant is a dedicated officer. If they do stray, they will be caught and dealt with, and they will be caught and dealt with under proper processes and under the Public Service guidelines, which my department implements whenever this occurs.

Honestly, this is trying to kind of tar my leadership or somehow the director-general's on a few cases that can occur in any organisation. No government—not only in Queensland or Australia but the world, for that matter—is immune to any kind of issue that may arise that requires investigation. I do not think any government would put their hand on their heart and say that. I think recently even the Prime Minister more or less sacked the CEO of Australia Post for actions that they believed to be inappropriate. To somehow tar leadership with something like that I think is inappropriate and it is an imputation. I completely reject any of the premise of the question. My department always acts with top integrity, and I commend the public servants. Those who may stray are dealt with, as I said, under very good policies and procedures.

Dr ROWAN: Again, through the chair, to the minister to clarify that, given the matters relating to the head of the integrity unit, the conduct of certain deputy director-generals and also the findings in the Crime and Corruption Commission report, are you satisfied with the performance of senior officers in the Department of Education?

Ms GRACE: When you say satisfied with senior officers in the Department of Education, these matters have been fully investigated. We have some of the top integrity investigations under the CCC. We followed all procedures. All of those are transparent and all of those are available publicly. For those people, I offer them the protections that they are entitled to, without making public comment while some of these are still under investigation. In relation to some matters, I believe they are closed but I am not going to make public comment condemning anyone while they are still under investigation. I think it is irresponsible to ask me to do that.

CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to move to government questions and I call the member for Stafford.

Mr SULLIVAN: Good morning, Minister, Director-General, and your teams. Through you, Chair, with reference to page 27 of the SDS, can the minister inform the committee of developments with independent public schools?

Ms GRACE: That is a good question. I thank the member for the question and I welcome him in his capacity now as the member for Stafford. I welcome him to the parliament, as I do to all the new members who are in front of us, including the member for South Brisbane.

Independent public schools have been a feature of the Queensland education system since 2013. They have been funded to the tune of \$88 million over that period, which includes \$12.8 million from the federal government—which unfortunately only went to 2016-17—and a total state contribution of \$75.8 million. Since the federal government ceased their funding in 2016-17, the Queensland government has fully funded IPS, with an annual contribution of \$12.5 million. As I said in the House last week, IPS has always been part of the department's annual operational budget and nothing has changed in that respect.

Funding is continuing next year. We made a commitment that we would continue funding for this term. It is paid in the calendar year so it obviously comes in in January; it is paid at the beginning of the year. We are honouring that commitment that we made, with 250 IPS schools to each receive their annual \$50,000 grant. I will be expecting full transparency in how schools use that annual funding in relation to that. Taking a step back, as the committee may be aware in 2018 we commissioned an evaluation of IPS aimed at refining the model and sharing the benefits across all schools.

If there were benefits in IPS, what were they and how can we make sure that all schools can benefit in that? We did that. Following the release, I established an implementation committee comprising a broad range of educational stakeholders—including an IPS alliance group who have been coming—principals associations of state and high schools, P&Cs Qld and the unions. Over the past 12

months the committee has worked with the department to implement the report's recommendations which centre around school support, staffing, governance—which is an issue that I particularly want to get my head around—and, of course, leadership.

In that time, great strides have been made to scale up the benefits of the IPS initiatives to all schools, improving school performance and strengthening school leadership. As a result, all Queensland state school principals are now empowered to make local decisions around resourcing and staffing, providing greater autonomy in decision-making and an increased capacity to work in new ways. In fact, the advice from my department is that there is very little difference between IPS and those schools that do not class themselves as IPS to the point even now where I think money is about the only real significant difference between the two, even though they carry out very similar activities following the review.

In fact, the implementation of the recommendations is well advanced. The committee has identified several matters that would benefit from broader consultation next year, which we want to take. This includes the question of the funding that was originally intended to allow IPS schools to set up school councils. Some of them have been around since 2013. If they do not already have their school councils set up in terms of establishment costs, we really are starting to question exactly how this \$50,000 is being spent in those schools that have been around for quite some time, that is, seven years. Now IPS schools are well established. They have adopted it in the same way. In terms of government issues for IPS schools, we require further consideration. We look forward to working with the committee on these important matters. IPS has served its purpose, but any good government always reviews what it has in place.

I noticed an article recently from New South Wales where that minister is making sweeping reforms to similar IPS schools there. In relation to Local Schools, Local Decisions and the policy of governing principles, they are talking about winding back control of schools and reducing the power of some principals who may not be performing as well. Even in New South Wales they are reviewing it and deciding how the department may step in to override some of the schools that are not meeting some of the benchmarks they are supposed to be.

Any good government always reviews this. We have a great committee that is working. We have funding this year. We want to see where we go into the future. Remember, it was our government that brought about the 250 IPS schools. Most of them were established under us, but we do want to have a look at it. Like New South Wales, we have not actually decided yet. The government will make a decision in due course about exactly where we go.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms GRACE: Thank you.

CHAIR: Member for Stafford, a follow-on question?

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair. In relation to page 27 of the Department of Education SDS and its reference to the Building Future Schools Fund, can the minister provide an update on the delivery of a new primary school in Brisbane's inner west?

Ms GRACE: Yes, thank you. I thank the member for the question. We have a record in delivering new schools. It is second to none and includes the delivery of eight new schools alone in 2020, five more for 2021—Palmview State Primary School, Palmview State Special School, Gainsborough State School in Pimpama, Baringa State Secondary College in Caloundra South and Brisbane South State Secondary College. Three more schools will open in 2022—a new primary school in North MacLean, another primary school in Caloundra South and a special school on the northern Gold Coast.

In 2023, a new primary school will open in Brisbane's inner west. This will be the first primary school to open in the inner suburbs of Brisbane in more than 60 years. The most recent primary school to open in Brisbane's inner suburbs was Seven Hills State School in Morningside, which opened in 1960. This new primary school will take the pressure off several local schools in the area, particularly Indooroopilly State School and Ironside State School. We have already delivered additional accommodation at both of these schools—\$6 million in a multistorey classroom block at Ironside State School completed in January 2017, and a \$10 million two-storey learning centre at Indooroopilly State School completed in March 2020. We are aware of the growth. We are investing where we can. However, further expansion of these schools in terms of the land lock is probably not viable because they are constrained in their green space and play space, particularly for a primary school.

I have always said that the community will be consulted widely on the location of the new inner west primary school. Today I announce that from early January—4 January 2021—the first phase of online consultation will begin. This online phase will continue to be supported by four drop-in sessions

throughout the month of February for the community to meet face-to-face with the project team. We are looking at the next couple of months when people can input online or attend face-to-face meetings. We can talk about what they are thinking, what they would like to see and, obviously, explore all the options in relation to the proper location of a new inner west primary school. It is very difficult. These suburbs do not have a block of land available as do new developments, so we really have to determine the best way we can cater for future growth in the inner west.

These consultations will now start in the early year, from 4 January, and continue on for at least two to three months; we are giving the community plenty of time. We will include feedback on elements such as master planning, school design, catchment, school naming—all of those things. No-one will miss out. Obviously dates, times, venues et cetera will be determined. We will put that out extensively in the community. I am excited that the process will be underway in the new year to ensure this vital new school is delivered for day one, 2023. It might sound far away but, trust me, when we count back there is not a lot of time to build a new school. We want to get moving. We want to get the consultation done. We want to get to building this new school. Thank you for that question.

CHAIR: That is fantastic. Time does move very quickly. I encourage the community to get involved in that consultation process; it is very important. Member for Rockhampton, you had a question?

Mr O'ROURKE: Good morning.

Ms GRACE: Good morning.

Mr O'ROURKE: With reference to page 27 of the SDS, can the minister inform the committee of initiatives in the budget to support student wellbeing?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question because, in terms of the budget and what we announced during the campaign, this was probably one of the most important steps forward in relation to assisting students with health and wellbeing. We know that school can be a wonderful time but that may not be the case for all students. As minister, I am acutely aware of the challenges facing students and their mental health. Students report that they are feeling worried about their families, their studies and the future, particularly following the experience of COVID-19. We have heard of—it is very sad and I even hate to repeat it—increases in domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown. Often, people impacted the most are the families, particularly young people within those families.

During the learning-at-home period, they also missed their friends. Many were anxious about returning to school as well, particularly in terms of health and maybe in terms of what some of them had experienced in the family unit. We know the research shows that there is a clear connection between student mental health and their results at school. It is vitally important that every student knows that support is there whenever they need it. That is why we announced this package. Last week's budget delivered on our pledge with \$100 million for a game-changing student wellbeing package that will ensure every student in every primary and secondary state school will have access to a health professional in their school to support their mental health and wellbeing. We will do this by substantially increasing the number of professionals in our schools, with 464 new frontline positions in the Queensland state school system over the next four years.

As part of the \$100 million, general practitioners will be placed in the 20 secondary schools of greatest need, providing access to medical care and advice free of charge in a familiar environment. We are trialling the 20. I look forward to implementing them. This \$100 million package is a game changer when it comes to addressing the serious and complex mental health issues some of our students are confronted with. It makes health care, including mental health care, more accessible. For the first time, health and wellbeing professionals such as psychologists, youth workers, guidance officers, behavioural specialists and allied health professionals will be employed in a coordinated way across the state, providing every student with access to professional, confidential support if and when they need it. This major funding commitment—and this is the great part—will move us towards a ratio of one health professional for every 500 students in line with the standard recommended by the Australian Psychological Society. We will now be meeting the Australian standard of one to 500. This compares to the current situation where there is one guidance officer for every 1,060 students. We will be doubling the ability of students to access this.

Some great support will be available. We are very much looking forward to implementing this policy. The package builds on the proud record of the Palaszczuk government when it comes to tackling issues of student safety and wellbeing. For example, we accepted the recommendations of the cyberbullying task force, eminently chaired by Madonna King, and put money towards implementing them. I absolutely love my Ministerial Student Advisory Council, where we talk about issues directly

with students. It is amazing the feedback they give us about what we do. For example, in relation to some of the posters we had developed in relation to bullying they said, 'It ain't hitting the mark,' so we changed them completely. What we went out with was so much better than what we had done. That came straight from the student advisory council. Also in April 2020 we opened Jacaranda Place, which replaced the Barrett Adolescent Centre, famously closed by the LNP. Every child deserves a world-class education. We will do what we can to help them with their mental health. This is a very exciting project and the budget delivers on our commitment.

CHAIR: It is a wonderful initiative and I am really looking forward to seeing that roll out. It is so important.

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to page 27 of the SDS and its reference to the Great Schools Great Future policy, can the minister advise how the \$1 billion boost over four years will ensure Queensland students continue to learn in world-class facilities wherever they live?

Ms GRACE: Once again, we have a record spend in relation to infrastructure. All Queensland students deserve to learn in modern learning facilities no matter where they live. Our \$1 billion education infrastructure boost is a boost. It is a lot of money going into infrastructure. We can see the results all around the state, in every electorate. I do not think there are too many electorates that have missed out on a substantial infrastructure spend so we can give young Queenslanders modern facilities. No matter where I go, people talk about some building in their electorate that is second to none. I commend the director-general and his department. The designs of what we are building in schools these days are not what they were. They are modern, they are state-of-the-art and they provide a fantastic learning environment for our students.

There is \$235 million for 26 new multipurpose courts and performing centres, upgrades to 11 existing halls and new halls. The Hall State School in the Rockhampton electorate, Wilston State School in the Stafford electorate and Warwick state school in the Southern Downs electorate will all be getting halls. The hall is such an integral part of a school and I am so happy to see 37 additional structures included in this funding. Eighteen hall structures will be built in regional Queensland—that is nearly half—including at St George State High School, Ayr State High School, Oakey State High School and Gladstone Central State School.

Our \$433 million for new classrooms and updated admin facilities at 46 schools will provide new classrooms and facilities for the anticipated 8,000 additional students we will be getting every year for the next four years. There is \$180 million in capital funding for Catholic and independent schools. They provide a vital choice in this state. They will be getting additional support as well, which I know they have greatly welcomed. There is an additional \$60 million per year over three years for the construction of non-state schools and upgrades to existing schools. This boost includes \$110 million for refurbishment and renewal projects and \$45 million for shovel-ready projects.

This is very exciting. It is almost to the point where, honestly, there is little chance of us walking into facilities of schools that are not being renovated or updated or have had a bit of a lick and polish. I encourage every principal and every business services manager to spend their money. We know that they have it in their bank accounts. We know exactly how much is in there. I think all members want to walk into modern, updated facilities. I will be doing all I can to work with the principals associations, school business services managers and school principals to ensure they spend their money and upgrade their facilities—a lick of paint or updated carpet. Modernising is often not expensive but it makes a world of difference to the environment of students. I am encouraging everyone to spend the money. I give a warning, if you give me the ability to do so, Chair: if you cannot spend it on your school, I am sure there is one in another electorate that would like that money. Spend up, because if you do not spend it we may reprioritise that funding to a school that can spend it. They do a marvellous job. Honestly, I am very excited about this program of works and I am looking forward to rolling it out over the next four years.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I was definitely pleased to see the daggy lime green and orange go from our library in its refurbishment.

Ms GRACE: I was, too.

CHAIR: With reference to page 27 of the SDS, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government is continuing to back our teachers to provide world-class education for all Queensland children?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I can honestly say that I do not speak to one family that does not have immense increased respect for teachers following COVID-19—particularly the shutdown and remote learning and the manner in which teachers interacted with families. The

support that was given was second to none. It was truly wonderful. I commend every teacher, principal, teacher aide and staff member. They all assisted in relation to this and they did an absolutely wonderful job.

The experience through COVID-19 has really brought home again the fantastic job that teachers and teacher aides do every day. As we come to the end of the school year—today is the last day; school is out for summer—I once again pay tribute to their hard work and dedication. They really are the foundation of it. That is why we have promised an additional over 6,000 teachers over this term. We have employed 6,000 since 2015 as well as 1,500 teacher aides. We will be employing another 1,139 teacher aides as well. This investment in the front line puts downward pressure on class sizes, ensuring all students get the individual attention they need to make the most of their education. In the budget delivered last week we continue this investment. As I said, we made an announcement of over 6,190 teachers and teacher aides.

I am really excited about the Turn to Teaching internship program to provide 300 aspiring teachers with financial support. Under our award there is an internship rate of pay. They will be interned with the department, they will complete their teaching qualification, they will be mentored and then they can take up a guaranteed teaching position. The investment in our teaching workforce means that local communities get the teachers and the skills they need. We keep our teacher-to-student ratios at nation-leading levels by planning for future expected enrolment growth and we continue to attract and secure, hopefully, high-performing aspiring teachers from other fields into the Queensland state school system.

I think we have done an exceptional job since we have been elected in making sure we maintain staffing ratios. When we came to government we were under the teaching numbers required. I think the previous government needed to employ over 500 additional teachers to keep pace with growth. It did not do that, so we had to restore those frontline services and keep employing teachers to maintain class sizes. We have done an excellent job. The budget provides for our commitments once again. I look forward to backing our teachers, as we always do, and doing what we can to continue to assist teachers, teacher aides, principals and staff, who work so hard to ensure that students get a world-class education.

CHAIR: Certainly, in what has been a very trying year, our principals, teachers and school communities have been amazing.

Ms GRACE: Although some teachers say that the increased respect did not last very long!

CHAIR: I think there are a lot of parents who thought their level of respect had increased.

Mr DAMETTO: Referring to the SDS in relation to the NAPLAN review that was commissioned by the Victorian, New South Wales, Queensland and ACT governments, will the minister detail how the proposed replacement test will specifically achieve better educational outcomes in terms of literacy and numeracy for Queensland students?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, member for Hinchinbrook. That is a great question. We have received the report and it is currently with the Education Council for consideration. I believe the three states regularly get together about the report to have a look at it. Quite clearly, with the Education Council, we need consensus in relation to any changes to NAPLAN. That means full consensus, and at the moment we are not getting that from the federal government. The last time we met it was a bit disappointing in that we did not actually address any of the great possible initiatives that are in that NAPLAN review.

The three states were keen to explore some of those and to refer it to the senior officers of all of the departments of the three states and one territory, the ACT, that commissioned that report. The federal government did not agree and unfortunately it has now been shifted to this Friday. We have an Education Council meeting happening then. We do have some very good suggestions in there. I do not know whether we support all of them, but after 10 years the three major states—the eastern seaboard states—decided it was time to have a look at this. Feedback was coming through from parents, from teachers, from principals, from unions and from students themselves that it was not all smooth sailing when it came to NAPLAN and there were concerns, and you may get them as members of your respective electorates as well. I remember sitting in a regional centre about 12 months ago and there was a family sitting beside me and one of their girls was obviously school age, around year 3. I said, 'How did she go in NAPLAN?' The parent just offered to me that they did not send their daughter to do the NAPLAN test. They thought it was unnecessary and they did not really value it. It was interesting having that conversation just at random with somebody who knew who I was and who just raised their concerns with NAPLAN and thought that in year 3 their daughter did not need the additional stress and decided not to send them. We are seeing quite a few parents thinking that way.

There is some manipulation as well that we are aware of where some students unfortunately are encouraged not to take the test in certain schools because it may do something. We wanted to have a good look. We thought 10 years was a good period of time. We want to take the federal government with us. It is on the agenda, member for Hinchinbrook, at the next Education Council meeting, which is to be held on Friday. I hope that we can make some progress. The three major states are meeting as well as the states and territory to discuss what we can do, but without a consensus approach—it is a national system—we cannot move very much.

If you read the report, which is publicly available and which was released on 28 August, member for Hinchinbrook, you can see that there are some elements in there that I think are good ideas. Some I am not too sure about such as changing, for example, the years that are tested. I am not sure whether that is going to make much of a difference, but that is the kind of discussion we want to have in a meaningful and open way. Given the fact that with COVID we did not proceed with NAPLAN this year, I think the door is now open to really have a good look at it. We can reset. We can enhance and we can look at this in a mature way. I just hope that the federal government and Minister Dan Tehan engage in the dialogue and we can do something through the Education Council on Friday, but thank you for the question.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. I know it is a hot topic amongst parents in the Hinchinbrook electorate and also the students.

Ms GRACE: Yes. Thank you. I look forward to receiving some of the comments from the member for Hinchinbrook. It would be good to see what they are saying on the ground now.

CHAIR: I welcome the member for Maroochydore, Fiona Simpson.

Dr ROWAN: I just want to come back to the director-general. Director-General, earlier you mentioned that the deputy director-general, Jeff Hunt, was suspended on pay. Can you advise the committee how much this particular deputy director-general has been paid since being suspended?

Mr Cook: Thank you for the question. The salary of Mr Hunt is available publicly. That is available through the annual report. Mr Hunt has been suspended, I think, from May this year and so I am happy to calculate that later, but the information is generally public.

Dr ROWAN: Just to clarify, you are not willing or are unable to provide that figure at the moment as to just how much has been paid since the suspension?

CHAIR: Member, I think he has just said that that information is publicly available and he is happy to do the calculation if you are unable to.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I want to come back to the SDS volume 2 at page 33 and staffing, particularly given that the selection and the appointment of school principals and the remuneration of school principals is something that is very important within budgetary matters. Minister, in the CCC report a mystery MP was mentioned in the report as organising a meeting with Jackie Trad. Who is the mystery MP?

Ms GRACE: Ask the CCC.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, I am asking you. You are unaware of who the mystery MP is?

Ms GRACE: Ask the CCC. It is not my report.

CHAIR: Member, the minister has answered your question. It might not be the answer that you want. It is sailing very close to the wind in terms of its relevance to this estimates before us, so I would ask you to put your next question please.

Mr LISTER: The question was 'does the minister know the identity' and that was not answered, so could I suggest that the minister could assist by answering that question?

Mr SULLIVAN: That is seeking an opinion.

CHAIR: Correct.

Mr SULLIVAN: It is not related to the appropriations at all.

Mr LISTER: It is not an opinion; it is a question of whether she does or does not know the—

CHAIR: Order, Deputy Chair. I have asked for the next question to be put.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I ask you the same question: do you know who that mystery MP is in the CCC report?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of any details in relation to that incident that is outlined in the CCC report.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Director-General. With reference to the SDS volume 2 at page 27, Director-General, I would like to ask you how school air-conditioning units are installed in schools in terms of how the funding is distributed, so the methodology around that?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In relation to air conditioning, as it is with all of our major infrastructure projects, we undertake a procurement process. That procurement process in relation to air conditioning in particular is undertaken through what used to be the department of housing and public works, and I am sorry but I cannot remember what the new department is called now but am happy to reveal that a little later. In relation to that, it is a tender process. The work that is undertaken is we assess what each school desires and what each school needs in terms of their air conditioning and the units that are currently in there. There was an audit that was undertaken 12 months or so ago. Based on that, contracts are let. Those contracts are let to individual suppliers and the installation and the relevant work around energy upgrades is undertaken as a result of that.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, how many schools in Queensland currently do not have air-conditioned classrooms? Do you have a figure?

Mr Cook: As of 7 December, 649 schools were identified through the audit as requiring air conditioning. Some of that air conditioning was additional air conditioning on top of air conditioning they already had and some of that was air conditioning in a very small number of schools that had no air conditioning at all. In fact, I am not sure whether there were any that had no air conditioning. P&Cs across Queensland over the last decade or so have done some incredible work supporting schools in relation to air conditioning. As of Monday this week, of those 649 schools—and I think that is the announcement that was made by the government earlier this year, the 650—427 of those schools have air conditioning installed that is fully operational. Of the remaining 222 schools, many of them will have some level of air conditioning already, but 134 of those schools are still being assessed in terms of their air-conditioning need and 88 of those schools require either internal or an external upgrade. Of the 1,249 state schools that we have in Queensland, there are 222 that do not have total air conditioning based on the government's air-conditioning program. They will have partial air conditioning. As I indicated, 134 of those are still being assessed and 88 require either an internal or an external upgrade.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, there have been numerous examples whereby air-conditioning units have been installed but are unable to be turned on. Could you advise the committee why that is the case?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In relation to air conditioning, as happens with many works that we do in schools, often there is additional work that we need to do in terms of electrical upgrades. Some of those electrical upgrades require significant upgrades in terms of transformers. Those transformer upgrades are undertaken through Ergon and Energex and some of those transformers come from overseas. As you can appreciate, if we were putting 90 air conditioners into a school there is going to be significant electrical work that is needed to be done in relation to that particular installation.

In relation to the work that has been happening since the start of the year, a decision was made about installation of air conditioners, particularly in relation to COVID, and the work that companies were doing or not doing during that period. We were able to provide small businesses a significant amount of work by installing air conditioners into schools during a particular period when they may not have had other work available to them. The other issues we had to consider were supply of air-conditioning units from other countries. As you are aware, supply in terms of sea or air has been affected by COVID. We ensured that if air-conditioning units were available we purchased those units—through our contractors—and had those installations made immediately. We accept that in some of those cases there were electrical upgrades that had to be undertaken at a future time, and we advised the schools of that. We also did significant work around managing what we call the power load, I guess, of those individual schools.

While there might have been some very small cases where air conditioning units could not be used, we did work with those schools on how they would schedule their classes where if the air conditioning was needed—and remember in many cases this was during winter where air conditioning was not required—they could actually look at some of their timetabling. We also worked with schools where capacity at those schools is not at full capacity and so the classrooms that were actually being used by the schools were prioritised. There are some classrooms in some schools that actually are not being used. Where air conditioning units were installed in those classrooms they were not a significant priority for us in terms of energy upgrades.

Having said that, we are working with all schools, individual schools, in relation to any concerns they may have around fast tracking programs. We have significant contractors involved around that. Many schools will have that work done over the school holidays—of course, today being the last day of school. I think we have another 50 or so schools over the school holidays to ensure that any outstanding energy works to be done will be completed.

CHAIR: Thank you. It has certainly been quite a feat throughout COVID to deploy and accelerate the program that we have seen to date across my Redlands electorate.

Dr ROWAN: Just to clarify, in relation to those electrical upgrades, why could they not be done at the same time as the installation of the actual units themselves? They seem to be two separate things where the air conditioning units are installed but the electrical upgrades could not occur at the same time. I am just trying to understand.

Mr Cook: Thank you for the question. As I indicated, part of our priority work was ensuring that (a) we could have tradespeople in schools working during the COVID period, but also that the units that were available could actually be purchased and installed. If we had waited until some of the electrical upgrades were ready, some of these electrical upgrades will take three to four months to complete because some of them are actually significant transformer upgrades that require Ergon and Energex to perform not the Department of Education or Housing and Public Works. That work is done with other work that Ergon and Energex undertakes. If we had done that there would be no air conditioners in those schools and none could be used, whereas we installed air conditioners into those schools and some could be used and we prioritised the use of those air conditioning units. We had a choice of having no air conditioners in those schools and them not being used and waiting for three months until the electrical upgrade could be undertaken or to install air conditioners at that time, to employ the local businesses, to ensure we had the supply of the air conditioning units to enable in many cases, at least half if not more, those air conditioners to be used at that time while electrical upgrades were being undertaken at the same time.

Mr LISTER: I refer the next question to the member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the minister. Under your charter letter there is a section about integrity and accountability. I ask the minister have you actually read the CCC report that talked about a member of parliament who had brought a principal to talk with the Deputy Premier, Jackie Trad? Have you read that CCC report in regard to that principal being brought before Jackie Trad?

Ms GRACE: Yes.

Ms SIMPSON: I ask you who is the mystery MP?

Ms GRACE: I suggest you ask the CCC. This question has already been asked.

Ms SIMPSON: You must know who this MP is.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, through the chair, thank you.

Ms SIMPSON: Through the chair, Minister, you must know who this MP is.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, this question has already been asked. Please move to your next line of questioning.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, Madam Chair, I refer to the fact that this minister has a charter letter specifically around integrity and accountability and the issue—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I am not going to debate this issue with you. The question has already been asked. I ask you to move on to your next question.

Ms SIMPSON: Let me put my next question without being shut down and this being a protection racket. Minister, who was this mystery MP? You must know.

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for Maroochydore. Are you disrespecting the chair?

Ms SIMPSON: I refer to the Clerk's ruling earlier this week and I reference the fact that these estimates hearings give us the opportunity to ask issues about integrity and accountability. Minister, in regard to your charter letter—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore—

Ms SIMPSON: Madam Chair, can I put a question about integrity to the minister?

CHAIR: Put the question, please.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, you have a charter letter about integrity and accountability. Surely you would have familiarised yourself with the circumstances where there have been an allegations of inappropriate approaches by members of parliament trying to go around the processes of recruitment for a principal by bringing people directly to a minister. Has the minister made herself aware of those circumstances?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I know that you are very aware of the standing orders. You are one of the longest serving parliamentarians and you are a former Speaker—

Ms SIMPSON: I am, Madam Chair. That is why I am asking this question about integrity and it should not be shut down.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I question the relevance to the appropriation bill before us now.

Ms SIMPSON: Under the ruling earlier this week we do not have to refer to a specific page, but I do refer you to a specific page in accordance with the staffing section—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I am not asking for a reference.

Mr SULLIVAN: I am sitting next to the chair and I cannot hear her. Can you please let the chair do her job.

Mr LISTER: Can I make a point. I said earlier that it is a very large budget and everything the department does is funded by the appropriation before us. As the Clerk said on Monday when he was examined at estimates—he was quite explicit—there does not have to be a specific reference to an item in the budget, it is anything that has been funded by the appropriation and I refer you to standing order 181(g) which says a member may ask a question which is relevant to the examination of the appropriation being considered. I think it is self-evident that the conduct of the department, the operations of staffing, the discipline investigations and so forth are all conducted with funds appropriated by the parliament. Can I ask for just a little bit of latitude in order for us to be successful in our search for the truth?

Mr SULLIVAN: To the member's point of order, there are other issues that offend the standing orders, including the many imputations in the member for Maroochydore's questions. There are facts that she puts that are very questionable.

Ms SIMPSON: I will table the section from the CCC report. It is not an imputation. It is on the public record from the CCC. My question to the minister is in regard to her charter letter on integrity and accountability—

Mr SULLIVAN: The point of order has not been ruled on.

Ms SIMPSON: If this member does not think that integrity and accountability is an estimates or a budget issue—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I warn the member for Maroochydore under standing order 185(1) that your conduct is disorderly. If it continues I will have no option but to ask you to withdraw. On both of those points of orders, I acknowledge that you do not require an SDS reference, but what I have asked is for the member for Maroochydore please explain to me how this question is relevant to the appropriation bill before the committee.

Ms SIMPSON: Absolutely. If you want a reference, which it appears that is the case—

CHAIR: No, member, I did not ask for a reference, I asked for you to explain how it is relevant to the appropriation.

Ms SIMPSON: Staffing processes and integrity of how people are appointed, particularly to principal roles, are supposed to be a matter independent of ministers. However, there is a CCC report that shows that there were blurred lines where there were members of parliament taking potential principals to meet a minister. That is an integrity issue. I will table the relevant section of the CCC report.

CHAIR: There is no relevance and I rule your question out of order. Please move to your next line of questioning.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, the CCC report into the principal selection stated at page 55 that the Deputy Premier met with a potential applicant as a favour for a member for parliament. Minister, were you asked who the mystery MP was?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, you are disrespecting my ruling. I have asked you to move to a relevant question to the appropriation and cease from this line of questioning.

Mr LISTER: Chair, can I state again that there is hardly anything which is not relevant to the appropriation here, in my opinion, and I would submit to you that everything that the member for Maroochydore wishes to put to the minister is entirely relevant to the appropriation. It is funded by the appropriation. The conduct of the department, the conduct of its officers and its operations are 100 per cent in the public interest and relevant to the appropriation.

Ms GRACE: Chair, I might be able to diffuse this particular performance we have before us and I am happy to answer the question. The CCC gave a public report. If the CCC felt that they needed to name or to put anything in their report, they are free to do it. I suggest that the member for Maroochydore allows the CCC to do its job. That has been done by the CCC. The report is public. There are no inferences in relation to that matter in the CCC report whatsoever. The line of questioning is ridiculous. I am sure that if the CCC felt that it was worthwhile or felt that it was necessary to put names in their report nothing would have prevented them from doing so. This line of questioning is absolutely laughable. I still will answer in the same way. If they want to know who the 'mystery person' was then I suggest that they write to the CCC and ask under proper processes whether in a public report they deem it appropriate to put that name forward. They did it for obvious reasons. They did not put it in their report. I suggest she follow the proper channels to find out if they are so desperately wanting to know.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, in light of the CCC report, what processes have you put in place to ensure that no member of parliament, whoever they may be, takes potential principals to come and see you or to influence senior departmental officers contrary to the usual recruitment process?

Ms GRACE: I think we are well aware of the outcome of the CCC report. I have had numerous meetings with my director-general and he has had them with his team to ensure that any recommendations, any findings and any suggestions of the CCC are implemented. Members of parliament from both sides often talk to me about principals in their schools. Sometimes they are unhappy that they are temporary. Sometimes they would like not to have them moved. Sometimes they would like to have a different principal. This comes from all sides of the House. My answer to them is always the same: this is an operational matter; if you have issues, you should talk with your regional officers; you should raise your concerns. They have a right to do so. These are operational matters. We have had one incident in hundreds and hundreds of principals who have been appointed to schools which have gone without any—

Ms SIMPSON: Apparently it is not one incident, according to the CCC report—

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for Maroochydore. Cease with your interjections. The minister is being responsive to the question. Let her answer the question.

Ms GRACE: I am sorry, member for Maroochydore, but that—

Ms SIMPSON: How do we know it is only one?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore!

Ms GRACE:—CCC report investigated one situation—

Ms SIMPSON: And it is flagged there is another MP.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore!

Ms GRACE:—and that is the point that I am making. As I say, these are operational issues. I always refer them back to the department. Members are free to raise them, of course.

Ms SIMPSON: You never asked who the mystery MP was?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, cease your interjections.

Ms GRACE: Members are always free to raise those questions. Of course, we have had meetings on our processes and programs. I think every public servant has looked at that report to ensure that transparency is always there.

Ms SIMPSON: And the minister never asked the question?

CHAIR: Cease your interjections, member for Maroochydore.

Ms GRACE: I do not really need guidance from the member for Maroochydore about what questions I do and do not ask.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for your response.

Ms SIMPSON: Apparently, you think it is laughable—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, we are shifting to government questions.

Ms SIMPSON:—whereas integrity is not a laughing matter.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, do not make me give you a second warning.

Ms GRACE: The only laughing matter here is your performance.

Mr LISTER: Chair, I ask—

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, cease. Can we have order, please! I am moving to government questions now. My question is of the minister. With reference to page 2-27 of the SDS, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government is supporting students and families through the introduction of homework centres in Queensland schools?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair, and it is a great job that you are doing. The Palaszczuk government's homework centres are an exciting new initiative outlined in last week's state budget to support students and ease the burden on parents. As we know, not too many students like doing homework. When I talk to students about politics and debating, I say, 'If you can make a law in this school, what law would you like?' Inevitably, two answers come up: no homework and no school uniforms. Those are the two things that they often talk about wanting to go. It is amazing that there are some students who say, 'No, I think homework is very important'—although very few, I might add. It is one of those necessary parts of a child's education, but not everybody likes doing it. When I was at school I was most at fault for not necessarily always doing my homework and I have truly learnt my lesson as I have gotten older. To help children do homework, this is a really good initiative. After-school homework centres will provide an alternative for busy families by making good use of our fabulous teacher aides, who do a wonderful job every day, as we know. The centres will provide a supportive supervised environment for kids to do homework before they go home for the day.

In line with our election commitment we will invest \$8 million over four years for the initiative to establish homework centres at up to 120 state primary and secondary schools across the state. Homework sessions will be available for a maximum of three hours, for 30 weeks per year, supervised by up to three teacher aides on site. They will provide a suitable supervised learning environment that will support good study habits for students, boost student engagement and achievement, and provide help that parents may not have the skills or time to provide. The commitment also gives back to the community after the efforts of parents in supporting remote learning for the five weeks during term 2 of 2020. Schools will be invited to apply to host a homework centre and will be selected through a process that identifies schools where there is the greatest need and where this program will be most beneficial. A key feature of the initiative is that they will be provided free of charge to students and families.

With initiatives such as the homework centres we will continue to back our students with all of the support they need to reach their full potential. It is an exciting prospect. It gives extra hours to the teacher aides. It will give kids an environment in which they can do their homework and can get help. Obviously it is not teaching; it is support and assistance. Teacher aides are eminently qualified to do that. For \$8 million over four years, it is an exciting program where we can fund the centres at up to 120 most-needy schools throughout the state. We will see how they go and hopefully we will be able to grow this into the future as well.

CHAIR: It is fantastic for parents. That is great news.

Mr SULLIVAN: In relation to page 2-27 of the Department of Education SDS, can the minister advise how the government's Cooler Cleaner Schools Program is delivering air conditioning to Queensland state schools?

Ms GRACE: I know that the director-general just answered some questions in relation to that program. We have done an amazing job in relation to this issue. Four-hundred and twenty schools that did not have full air conditioning operational less than 12 months ago now have air-conditioning units, fully installed and fully operational, out of 649 schools. That is an incredible feat. It is an incredible achievement over the period. As you know, we did the audit at the end of November last year. We have had COVID-19 this year, which was very disruptive. In February of this year, following that audit report, we reset and enhanced the program. This is also linked with the solar panel on school roofs program. We are well and truly into phase 2 with that program.

We have committed six years above the LNP's commitment to air-condition every classroom. In the reset and the enhancement we did in February, we also added libraries, which often are some of the biggest areas in all schools, and school staffrooms as well. We did not want the staff to miss out. In that reset and enhancement there are over 10,000 spaces that require air conditioning. P&Cs have done a wonderful job, there is no doubt about that. As the DG said, I do not think there were too many schools that did not have at least one unit or something like that in their school. The beauty of this is

that P&Cs will never have to put their hands in their pockets again because we will maintain, replace and see to all of the air-conditioning needs of schools throughout Queensland—not only the old Cooler School Zones, but now this new one.

We are on target to air-condition all classrooms by June 2022, which is our commitment. I will give you a bit of a comparison. In New South Wales—and I know the LNP always talk about their wonderful budget—the Cooler Classrooms Program was launched in November 2018. That was 12 months before the Queensland audit and our February reset. As at 30 June 2020, out of 900 New South Wales schools that applied, 112 had been completed. In two years, there are 112 schools in New South Wales compared to 427 in Queensland. I can tell you that figure goes up every single day. I think at the beginning of the week, when I did the radio interview, it was at about 401 and in that week we had scheduled a number of upgrades and installations and it jumped to 427.

Over the school period major upgrades in electrical work have been happening, which was always built into the audit. The audit looked at which schools were air-conditioned and which were not, and what spaces required it. As I said, we looked at libraries and staffrooms, not just classrooms. We looked at the internal and external upgrades of electrical systems that would be required. Sometimes older schools in particular, where we are putting in quite substantial systems, are in the lower socioeconomic areas that did not have the air conditioning that my electorate had, for example. In some schools in some of our electorates there are not many units, so they are getting substantial numbers of air conditioners. Often the electrical upgrade is more expensive than installing the units. Those were all part of the audit. It is all part of the staged process. We are on target. It is so exciting that 427 schools have fully operational air conditioning out of the 649 schools. We are working through the rest. Some are partially done. Some require external and internal work. In fact, I was talking to Energex last night at the cabinet reception. They are really switched on to this. They want to do what they can to get it done early as well.

Mind you, a little bit of arm-bending did not hurt, either. I am only joking, of course—they are doing a wonderful job. These are big infrastructure spends in these schools. In some of these schools, it is a bit of a disruption. After what we have been through with COVID-19, I do not think we want to disrupt these schools any more than what they have already been. Now school is out for summer. We are on target. We will deliver this in June 2022. There will be 649 schools fully air-conditioned, fully installed, six years ahead of the LNP promise which was only to do classrooms. I commend the department. It is a great news story and we look forward to delivering this by June 2022.

Mr SULLIVAN: With reference to page 25 of the SDS, can the minister outline the government's support for remote kindergarten in schools, ensuring Queensland kids have access to a quality kindy program regardless of where they live in this state?

Ms GRACE: Those early years are so important in giving kids a great start. I thank the member for the question and I know he has a particular interest in this area as well, in his electorate, making sure those kids get to a kindy program. We want to ensure they have access to a quality kindergarten program in the year before school. We know the benefits.

The sheer size of Queensland presents its own sets of challenges in ensuring equitable access to kindy across the state. To address this challenge, in 2016 the Palaszczuk government established the remote kindergarten in schools program. Since then, this initiative has been a great success, enabling over 640 children to access face-to-face kindy at school in those parts of the state where the market is not delivering and there was no other kindergarten service within 50 kilometres.

In 2018 we expanded the program and there are now 69 state schools able to deliver kindy on site, including at Chillagoe, Thargomindah, Laura, Coppabella, Jericho. There are a number of these regional centres that did not have any kindergarten at all that are now school based and offering that service to those families. This is on top of the state delivered kindergartens in 31 discreet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well—so 69 plus the 31. These are in areas where there just was not any kindergarten service if it had not been for us.

We want to reach even more children. That is why we have committed to expanding the remote kindy program under this commitment delivered in last week's state budget. We will invest \$12 million over four years to expand the program to include school locations where there is no kindy service within a 40 kilometre radius, which is probably, in the bush, about a 25-30 minute drive, down from the 50 kilometre radius at the moment. This means the program will be expanded to an extra 20 state schools located between 40 and 50 kilometres of the nearest kindergarten. Thallon, Mount Garnet, Prairie state schools are just some of the ones where we will be looking at installing this program.

This is wonderful news for regional and remote families who currently do not have kindy close to where they live. We are investing in their future. We are investing in the services to support families and build communities no matter where they are, and I look forward to rolling out this expanded program of \$12 million.

Mr SULLIVAN: I am excited to ask this next question, minister. In relation to page 27 of the SDS and its reference to the Great Schools Great Future policy, can the minister outline how the government's \$235 million halls program will benefit students in Queensland?

Ms GRACE: I know that Dr Anthony Lynham left a legacy in relation to Wilston State School. It is a growing school in the area. We look at the schools on a needs basis and them not having an appropriate hall. I think there is a little timber one at the front of the Wilston State School that was built back in the day when the school was built about 100 years ago which may fit, at a pinch, 50 people of a school attended by well over 1,000 students. He worked hard for the hall, and also on a needs basis, the community can benefit from that as well. It is great to see that we will be delivering that hall under this program, as well as 36 others spread throughout Queensland.

At the outset, I would note with interest the comments of the member for Moggill in his budget reply speech last week questioning the criteria. One of the criteria for schools is the fact that they do not have a hall. As a priority, we will put a hall in the schools that do not have one. About 18 halls out of the 37 will be built in non-government held seats, so it is very evenly spread on a needs basis. It is really good news that will be investing in those schools.

When you talk about how processes work in determining this, I notice with interest that the member for Moggill mentioned during the election campaign a promise of \$4 million as an election commitment for a new hall or an expansion or something at the Kenmore State High School. It would be interesting to know what criteria he used for that commitment during the election campaign. The member for Oodgeroo committed \$1 million to upgrade the Wellington Point State High School. It would be interesting to know what criteria was used for that election commitment, or the member for Caloundra committing \$600,000 to upgrade the Caloundra State School hall, as an example.

Members advocate for their schools and I commend you all for doing it. Since being reappointed as Minister for Education, I do not think there were too many members on either side in the last week of parliament that did not come to me with something in relation to their schools. I know that there were a couple of opposition members waiting outside my office who cornered me about a couple of things that they wanted. Members from the Katter's Australian Party, rightly so, wanted information about their schools as well. We are all strong advocates for our schools, but the department has a wonderful program on how they do all of this. It is based on needs; it is based on looking at the growth in the area. There is a number of criteria to be met. These are operational matters. Wherever I visit, there is not one school that does not want an upgrade, a new hall or something done to their school. They are very passionate. We are getting on with the job. This is a great program. We are looking forward to working with those local communities.

Congratulations, member for Stafford. When I had Wilston in my area, they were talking about a new school hall back when I was first elected in 2007, so it is desperately needed. We are looking forward to providing that, as we do with all of the halls that are being built. The member for Southern Downs is getting one at one of the schools in his electorate, and most of the others are as well. It is a great program. I am looking forward to rolling it out. I thank the member for the question and we look forward to cutting the ribbon on the Wilston State School hall.

CHAIR: I do not doubt that the queue is long of members to your doorstep.

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to page 27 of the SDS, it references the Local Schools Local Jobs policy. Can the minister advise how the government will assist local high schools, particularly in our regions, to improve facilities so that students have the skills needed for a career in emerging growth industries such as hydrogen, aviation, aerospace, defence maintenance and manufacturing?

Ms GRACE: I know that the honourable member is welcoming the investment in Rockhampton High where students will be interested in the emerging aquaculture industry. We both visited the school and have seen what they are doing already, and it is really quite amazing. Skilling young Queenslanders is essential in preparing our youngest and brightest minds for the jobs of tomorrow. Our \$45 million Local Schools Local Jobs plan will support Queensland's economic recovery by investing in new infrastructure for secondary students to access skills development and training. Training facilities and trade training centres will be upgraded at 26 schools across Queensland, with a major focus on our regions.

I welcome today the member for Keppel, the Assistant Minister for Education. She will be working specifically with the regions with this program to oversee how they are rolled out in the regions, linking with TAFEs as well, so working with Minister Farmer's department in those areas. It is an exciting project for the Assistant Minister for Education. I know it is one that she is very much looking forward to taking on. It is about how we roll it out so as to get the best result. We work together: we work with industry, we work with TAFE, to roll out these upgrades to these facilities, looking at the specific areas where we need to invest to make sure that they obtain the skill sets of those industries that are in their areas like aquaculture in Rockhampton.

They will complement the local emerging growth industries, such as hydrogen and, as I mentioned, aquaculture, aviation and aerospace, and in traditional industries like agriculture and manufacturing. The government is determined to ensure that young people have the skills that they need which is why it is great to have the assistant minister on board who can have a look at this particularly in the regions around how we develop this.

As I mentioned, member for Rockhampton, we are providing \$2.5 million to upgrade facilities at Rockhampton State High School to complement the region's growing aquaculture industry. Tassal is already investing in this area. We need to have the workers ready to go. It is a similar situation in Bowen where we will be providing Bowen State High School with \$1.4 million to upgrade its aquaculture facility. Chinchilla State High School and Tara Shire State College will receive \$4.8 million to support training opportunities in the local mining, gas and electrical industries. Gladstone State High School will receive \$2 million to upgrade facilities to prepare students for jobs in the emerging hydrogen industry.

These are just some examples. Gladstone received the first grant from the Queensland government's \$15 million Hydrogen Industry Development Fund. It is fitting that we have Gladstone State High School developing those skills in students. I could go on. There are so many schools that are getting some great work done around aviation and manufacturing.

I am very pleased that we will provide Glenala State High School with \$2.25 million for their trade skills centre to help prepare students for jobs in the defence vehicle manufacturing industry, which is very big in that area with Rheinmetall. This will complement the government's investment in Rheinmetall's Military Vehicle Centre of Excellence at Redbank. This is a project that will create so many opportunities for young people growing up in the Ipswich region.


We want to play to the strengths of each region. That is why we are focusing on skills and training. We will support regions to grow and diversify. I welcome the assistance of my assistant minister for education, the member for Keppel, in making sure this is done in exactly the way we see it being done for the benefit of students.

CHAIR: That is fantastic news. As a hydrogen champion for Queensland, I am very excited to see it deploying out through our education system.

Ms GRACE: Congratulations on that role, member for Redlands.

CHAIR: Thank you. The committee will now take a break. The hearing will resume at 10.45 am with the continued examination of the estimates for the education portfolio.

Proceedings suspended from 10.31 am to 10.44 am.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing is resumed. Welcome back, Minister, and officials. The committee will continue its examination of the estimates for the education portfolio. I welcome the member for Maiwar, Michael Berkman, to the committee. We will move to non-government questions.

Mr LISTER: Until 11 o'clock I will defer to the member for Moggill

Dr ROWAN: I come back to questions of the director-general. Director-General, because of the Jackie Trad principal affair, by my calculations suspended Deputy Director-General Jeff Hunt has received approximately \$207,000 of taxpayer funds while suspended. Is this correct?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. I have been provided with some information during the break. The allocation that we have is a net figure of \$99,000.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, is it acceptable that \$99,000 has been paid?

CHAIR: Member, you are asking for an opinion. Can you please either rephrase your question or take a new line of questioning.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair. I was going to say the same thing.

Dr ROWAN: How many other Queenslanders under investigation and suspended are being paid \$207,000 to watch Netflix at home?

CHAIR: Member, consider carefully your line of questioning.

Ms GRACE: There are directives, industrial instruments and ways in which the Public Service conducts its business. This is a public servant. There are directives about what these people are entitled to if they are under investigation, remembering that some of these things can take a while and that everyone is deemed innocent until proven guilty. It is no different whatever government is in power. It would have been the same when the LNP was in government. There has been no change in relation to that. I do not intend to express an opinion in relation to the entitlements of public servants. They are what they are and we always meet those entitlements.

Dr ROWAN: Director-general, what is the anticipated time line for the finalisation of this matter?

Mr Cook: That would be a question for the Public Service Commission. They are undertaking the investigation and not the Department of Education.

Dr ROWAN: I would like to come back to the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. It was mentioned before in relation to the rooftop solar panels program that is in phase 2 at the moment, I think the minister mentioned. How many phases are there and is there an estimated date of completion for the project?

Mr Cook: The ACES program, which is the Advancing Clean Energy Schools program, will deliver installations at more than 800 schools. Some 384 of those schools have already received solar or energy efficiency installations. That is made up of 70,000 solar panels with the capacity of almost 24,000 kilowatts. In relation to your question about how many phases there are, there are actually three phases. Phase 1 is basically complete. In phase 2 and phase 3 another 584 schools will realise the Advancing Clean Energy Schools program, with those installations to be done by June 2022.

The program is a combined investment because, as you probably understand and appreciate, it was actually in two parts. There was the first part that was announced in 2018 with the second part then announced as part of the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. A total of \$168.1 million is being invested in the ACES program. As I indicated, it would involve over 800 state schools with the installation of solar systems on the roofs of those schools. All of our new schools are also having solar panels installed. I think you can see photographs of many of those schools on the department's infrastructure website. We were in Cairns visiting some of the schools that were very interested in the installations that were happening. They were talking about the reduction in their power bill as a result of that installation.

The ACES program is progressing very, very well. As of 7 December, a total of 384 schools, as I indicated earlier, had received installations. We are about halfway there. The final installation date will be June 2022.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, have there been any problems associated thus far with the installation of solar panels in any of the schools?

Mr Cook: In relation to any installation there are always issues that we are aware of around safety. Any safety issues that come up we deal in terms of the requirement for contractors to respond and to provide that information. I think there might have been some scaffolding where there might have been an issue in one school. To the best of my knowledge, there are limited issues in relation to the program. Where there are issues, just to be clear, we document those and, where necessary, we have Workplace Health and Safety involvement.

Dr ROWAN: Specifically, Director-General, in relation to either installation of air conditioning or the solar panels program, has there been any asbestos exposure or other serious safety issues?

Mr Cook: We are aware of issues in relation to asbestos. We are working with Workplace Health and Safety in relation to those particular issues. We have a very comprehensive asbestos program. For each school there is a log which outlines asbestos material. That is made available to any contractors who might be involved in the program. We also have a comprehensive program both around the removal of asbestos and audits for asbestos across our schools. In this financial year, 2020-21, \$11 million has been allocated by the department for the removal of asbestos-containing material and \$2.7 million has been allocated for asbestos audits for us to be proactive in relation to asbestos. We have legislative obligations in relation to safety of children, as you would appreciate.

In relation to the ACES and the air-conditioning program, I understand that there has been a very small number of schools where a contractor has drilled into a wall which has been identified as potential asbestos. We work very closely with Workplace Health and Safety in relation to that. If there is an improvement notice for the contractor issued by Workplace Health and Safety, we ensure that that is

addressed immediately. Not only do we now have a map of asbestos material in the school; we have gone a step further and put visible stickers on walls or ceilings that may have asbestos in them to ensure that contractors are aware of it and they take all the necessary procedures.

If there is an issue in relation to asbestos, we communicate that issue to the community and to parents that day, where possible. If it is not that day, it would certainly be the next morning, if it happens after school. We also ensure that we engage a hygienist to go in and comprehensively measure the cleaning that has happened in those schools to ensure that any risk in relation to asbestos material has been dealt with. We only then open up a particular section of a school once we have a hygienist certificate proving that that cleaning has been undertaken appropriately in relation to all legislation.

Ms GRACE: I wish to add to the answer for the member for Moggill because I think he has a genuine interest in this area. In terms of electrical upgrades, some of these schools are very old and they do have asbestos in them. Even in doing audits of all of the work that is going to be required, we do it now in the summer break. That is also part of making sure that we do it as safely as possible. Staff and students' welfare and their health and safety is paramount. I commend the DG in making sure that everything is always looked at in this area. Thank you for the question. I think you have a genuine interest in this as a doctor as well.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Minister and DG. Further to that in relation to the auditing processes, I would like to get an understanding of the extent of the process—in other words, the extent of the issue—that relates to the department's finding as to how much asbestos is there. When you are retrofitting air-conditioning units and solar panels, is it particular geographical areas or particular schools or is it systemically across the entire system?

Ms GRACE: It is all of the above.

Mr Cook: It is fair to say that almost every school in Queensland has some level of asbestos because of the build at the time where asbestos-containing material was the predominant material that was being used in our schools. That is why we have done comprehensive audits in schools and mapped in relation to asbestos. The data I have available to me is that, since 2019, there have been fewer than 10 instances which involved departmental schools. In each of those instances, we undertook a very thorough process in relation to identifying the extent of it, bringing in the hygienist, ensuring that any sites were immediately closed off. Workplace health and safety, particularly the safety of children and staff, is vitally important for us in cases where there might be any asbestos. Overall, I have to say that there is a level of asbestos in most Queensland state schools, as there is in all Queensland schools, because of the build at the time they were built.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, given that this is a specific legacy infrastructure problem—and it is a significant safety and welfare issue for both students and staff—how is the government specifically allocating funding to rectify these problems in particular schools and how is it prioritising schools?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, member for Moggill. That is a good question. Obviously depending on the audit and what they find, we allocate the budget in order to remove the asbestos-containing material when it is safe—and that is the best way to do it—or allocate money for audits to take place as well. If you look at the different budgets, there was nearly \$12 million in last year's budget for asbestos removal and \$2 million for audits. That was \$14 million in the last budget. The amount we actually spent was more than that. It was close to \$13 million. That is obviously dependent upon what we come across where it is safe to remove it, and that is the best way to go. The audit provides that. We take expert advice. There are licensed removalists who do this work. We abide by all of the codes of practice and all of the regulations in relation to asbestos removal.

This budget contains about \$14 million, if you add audits and removals together. That has been around the amount that we need to ensure that we do it in a healthy and safe manner. I commend the department. They do an excellent job. The contractors undertake this work in line with all of the requirements under the regulations and the codes of practice. If they do not, the department is also there to regulate to make sure that the contractors properly meet their responsibilities under all of the laws that we have in relation to asbestos.

It is one of those materials, as you know, member for Moggill, you cannot muck around with it. Do not muck around with it. We always allocate enough budget, and spend more if we need to, to ensure that it is done in the proper manner, meeting all legislative and regulation requirements. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It is a specialised area.

Dr ROWAN: I have one final question on this. Director-General, in relation to staff, students and contractors, does the department keep a register of those who have been exposed to asbestos as a result of installation of either air conditioning or solar panels?

Mr Cook: We would have a register of all contractors and all staff and all students who would be at any school at any time where something like this would happen as part of our normal database of information. We are able to access that information and match it against where a particular occurrence might have happened. As you know, all people who come into a school are required to sign in. I have to as well. There are the iPads in schools when you walk in. No-one is immune to it. All of that information is kept at the school level.

The other area that is important to us is up-to-date training—training of school business managers who are often the frontline people dealing with contractors who come into schools, as well as principals. We have been updating our training and putting new training in place. We are also working with Workplace Health and Safety Queensland around that. The Executive Management Board, which is the most senior decision-making body of the department that I chair with the deputy director-generals, also received a briefing around asbestos—it was only recently as part of our regular activity—to ensure that we know what our responsibilities are in relation to asbestos and making sure we have a safe workplace.

At every school then there is what is known as a register. The register is linked where personnel are recorded. The work that happens is all logged so we can quickly get that information if it is required.

Dr ROWAN: I want to move on. I refer to the SDS volume 2 page 24. I want to reference COVID-19. Director-General, how are all schools in Queensland being orientated in the appropriate protocols and mechanisms for managing any COVID-19 outbreaks?

Mr Cook: It has been a long year. As you would appreciate, we take advice from the Health department, particularly the Chief Health Officer, in relation to COVID. I think my first message to schools about COVID went out on 29 January, which was a special message about the emergence of—I think it was called coronavirus back then as opposed to COVID-19.

Ms GRACE: I think we met with Dr Jeanette Young on the 25th.

Mr Cook: That is correct. Back then I think it was called the novel coronavirus or 2019-nCoV. We have comprehensively undertaken a series of information sessions not just for all of our stakeholders but also working with our schools about the protocols to put in place. We have documented protocols. If there is a known instance in a school or if there is a suspected instance in a school, that is all documented. There is a flowchart that has been made available to every school in Queensland. Information was also provided to schools to provide to their parents, and all of this information is available online as well.

I had a daily teleconference—I think we had 47 or something teleconferences in a row—with every education and university stakeholder, from rural and remote parents through to other parents' associations, unions and principal associations, to very clearly go through all of this information. Any questions that were asked at any point in time were responded to within 24 hours. We developed school operating guidelines, and those operating guidelines were used by other states and territories—because there was a lot of sharing at the time—to inform our schools and our school principals about the things they were required to do.

We appointed a COVID officer in every region to ensure that that COVID officer could work with their regional health service because, as you understand, it was under the local level in terms of any notifications. If a notification came through, effectively it came through from Health to us. We then worked with the school. If it went through via the school we worked with Health to confirm that, and things were put in place immediately. Where necessary, we put deep cleans into our school. I think we had 11 schools in total where we had to have some level of deep clean, so that was done immediately within 24 hours to enable schools to be reopened.

I will say that schools have done an incredible job. They have just been outstanding. Principals have worked with their school community; they have provided information. Often the school is the point of information for many parents, and school communities have done an outstanding job to ensure that kids kept learning in relation to the work that was happening. In Queensland we were lucky and basically it was only five weeks, no more than that—it was not luck; it was good planning. In Victoria, as you are aware, it was over one term. I think it may have even been 1½ or possibly two terms where students actually were not in school. All of that information is available publicly, and all of that information is available online as to what schools would do in relation to COVID-19 if there was an incidence in their school.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is for the director-general. Regarding the Schooling Resources Standard, the relevant bilateral agreement shows funding to government schools is flat at 69.26 per cent until 2023, the third-last in the Commonwealth, with the transition pathway to achieve 75 per cent funding by 2032. Can you confirm there will be no improvement in Queensland's funding against that benchmark until 2023?

Mr Cook: In relation to the national school resourcing agreement the percentage is outlined publicly, and that is available in the document I think you may have read from, 69.26 per cent. The actual amount of funding that schools will receive grows every year because it is indexed. It is also based on a range of things, including the number of students that you have in your system as well as the demographics of those particular students. If there were more students with disability, for example, that funding would grow because there are literally more students with disability. That is how that agreement works.

The agreement between the state government and the federal government is a matter for the government. That agreement as it stands is the agreement that is in place until 2023, so in relation to any change to that, that is a matter for government and it is not a matter for me.

CHAIR: Shifting to government questions now, my question is the minister. With reference to page 25 of the SDS, can the minister advise on investments the Palaszczuk government is making to increase capacity for outside of school hours care to support Queensland working families?

Ms GRACE: Thank you for the question, Chair. I know that you have a passion for this too, because many families do use outside of school hours care. I know that I was one. If I had not had it at my school, it would have been difficult for me at the time my child was at school to balance work, home and family commitments.

We know that providing before school, after school and vacation care that families can rely on to care for their school-age children while they are at work is very important. In fact, OSCH was one of the first issues that came across my desk when I became minister back in 2017. It was one of the first things that we embarked upon. When I started in 2018, after being sworn in I established the ministerial outside school hours care working group with all key stakeholders to address the waitlist issues and capacity constraints that face this important sector.

Since the working group commenced its work we have increased the capacity by over 4,000 extra places, and that is because we have worked with infrastructure, stakeholders and schools to ascertain what we needed to increase our capacity and we have continued with that. We have improved the school procurement process to meet the growth in demand for OSCH and ensured that school halls—which are often used by OSCH—are considered in the stage 1 design. We are designing the halls in such a way that they can easily be converted to an outside school hours care facility. I have been to many schools where I have seen the outside school hours care in a certain section of the hall at the back which has been specifically built for them. There are kitchen and toilet facilities and areas they can lock up and use when the time comes, plus they have the use of the facility when it is not being used by the community or the school.

The department has also continued to work with schools and service providers—there are a lot of service providers—to implement local solutions, including exploring alternate sites and new facilities and encouraging parents to use nearby OSCH services. Building on the progress made so far, at the recent election we announced a nearly \$18 million package of local infrastructure solutions to increase OSCH capacity, and our budget delivers on those commitments. This includes, for example: \$1 million for the Indooroopilly State School to allow them to replace the existing demountables that are currently being used. They are going to get a double-storey demountable because they are very well built. They have them at New Farm State School at the moment until we increase capacity there. There will be a double-storey demountable, and they really are beautifully done. They really are very good. Actually, 'demountable' is probably not the word we use these days. They do not look like they are demountables at all. That will be used to cater for the increased demand and address some of the issues as well. A total of 48 schools will benefit from this funding support, with assistance for projects ranging from \$80,000—some just need a modern update—to \$1 million to upgrade and improve existing OSCH facilities and increase capacity. With this local project we are obviously hoping that we can assist those schools and grow this area. Over 4,000 extra places has been a great investment in the area.

I am also pleased that my assistant minister for education, the member for Keppel, will include this under her area as well. She will now work with the ministerial advisory committee, the working group. She will work with them and work with stakeholders to see what more we can do. She can work with the department about local solutions, particularly in the regions. As a regional member, she has a

great understanding and knowledge of the area that she covers plus other regional centres. It is going to be great to get the assistance of the assistant minister to drive this to see what more can be done and how we can improve facilities for families and students. I welcome the assistant minister and member for Keppel looking at this and working with the working group of stakeholders.

CHAIR: That is fantastic news; thank you, Minister.

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to page 27 of the SDS and its reference to Catholic and independent schools, can the minister outline how the government is supporting the non-state school sector to provide additional capital assistance to cater for Queensland's growing student population?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, member for Rockhampton. I know that you have a very good relationship with the non-state schools in your electorate as well. We are unique in Queensland in that we work so cooperatively with the non-government sector. I thank Dr Lee-Anne Perry and Mr David Robertson, who work so well with us. We are unique and we are the envy of every other state in Australia because of the relationship that we have. I guess it is because we know that families should be free to choose which school sector suits them best, and we respect that choice.

Regardless of which they choose, in the end we are talking about the education of Queensland children, and every sector deserves its fair share of support. We have that as our core values when we meet with the sector. The Palaszczuk government works in partnership with the non state school sector to ensure that the education facilities are there to cater for their growth. We are proud to partner with the Catholic and independent schooling sector to deliver quality infrastructure across the state.

I had the great pleasure of visiting the site of the new Catherine McAuley College in Mackay earlier this year. This is a new school opening in 2022 which the Palaszczuk government contributed \$12 million towards. The new school will be a key project for the region, breathing new life into the landmark Sugar Research Institute building—a building which is almost 70 years old. I had a bit of a joke about this, in that 70 years ago they were able to use marble on the stairs of some of these buildings, which is absolutely beautiful, and I jokingly said, 'Trust the Catholic sector to find a building that had the relevant marble they required as an entrance to their school.' It is going to be fantastic once they do it up. We are very happy to partner through the Block Grant Authority. They bid for that money and it comes out of that. It is independently assessed and it is great that we are able to offer the \$12 million for them to get this project off the ground. This is very greatly received in the Mackay area. We also provide capital funding to 526 accredited non state schools, and they have roughly 278,000 students throughout the state.

The Palaszczuk government currently provides a baseline capital funding of \$56 million. We have increased this through an additional \$45 million over the next three years. This was what they requested and the additional money that they required. The government committed this and is now delivering it in the budget fully—the \$15 million extra that they required. They are very happy with the outcome and I am delighted to confirm that that \$60 million is provided over the next three years—the additional \$15 million that was requested by the Catholic and independent sector.

It is great to see their students. I am a product of the Catholic sector. Having an Italian background, it was deemed that that is where I would go to school, and I am a great product of them. We welcome working cooperatively with the non-government sector. We are unique in the country in that it is very respectful and very valued. Their input is always received very well. Thank you for the question.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, I know the director-general made some comments just previously about this, but with reference to page 27 of the SDS, can the minister inform the committee of measures taken by the Palaszczuk government to ensure Queensland children and families continued to receive a world-class education during COVID-19, including the period of learning from home?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for Stafford for the question. I know you have a particular interest in this. It really was a year like no other. I recall that before school started the director-general and I were talking about COVID in relation to boarding school students and what was required in those boarding facilities. We met with Dr Jeanette Young—and it may have been on the Australia Day long weekend—before school started the next day.

As you know, back then there were lots of questions: what is this virus, how does it impact, how is it spread? We got our head around it very, very quickly. I am pleased with the way we steered this, including with the pupil free days and the ability for teachers to use the Easter break as a time of preparation. We had a team of people—and some of them are behind me—that led hundreds of staff

and teachers who did curriculum and developed some fantastic learning-from-home facilities. We had all of the network available. It was really an incredible feat of everybody working together on this issue of learning from home and handling COVID-19.

It is interesting that no school acted independently; they all took the advice. We all worked together and I think everyone in Queensland did a great job. The way that we scaled our return to school was picked up by every state and territory. We started with the preps and year 1 and years 11 and 12—and I recall that nearly every state followed that—with then a two-week period. We did minimise the impact because of our outstanding health response by the Premier, the schools, the staff and the community at large. A commendation goes to everybody.

We provided: an extra 5,254 laptops to families in need; 5,000 sim cards to provide internet access; new and repurposed laptops, iPads and internet devices from the resources sector through a partnership with the Queensland Minerals and Energy Academy, and we welcomed their contribution; and a dedicated hotline number for information and support. A range of teaching resources were made available through the department's The Learning Place and the learning @ home website, in addition to the educational TV programs that were shown on channels 7, 9 and 10, which I believe were incredibly well received. I think we actually got a bit of an award and recognition for one of those as well.

I know that the DG was also recognised by one of the national bodies for his extraordinary work in having that many meetings with stakeholders in a row during this. I think we were the only department that did this. The director-general held those every single morning with all of those stakeholders online. I would come into those when there was something of significance that changed or modified that I wanted to get to the stakeholders quickly and get their views on and their valuable input into, and then we progressively extended them out as well.

It was a massive effort supported by stringent methods. This included the strict hygiene practices, the increased cleaning of classrooms and play equipment, and obviously making sure that everyone who came onto the school sites was properly documented. We put in drop off and pick up zone areas. There were a multitude of things and we have asked that schools continually review these as restrictions are eased. It has been a difficult year for everyone. Congratulations go to all of them. I am so glad that school is out for summer after today, which is a couple of days earlier than anticipated. It is well deserved; they did an outstanding effort.

I think Queensland and everyone involved in our school system deserve a gold star. A gold star goes to the department which really pulled together and did a great job. We minimised the amount of face-to-face learning that children missed out on. Obviously, there were various degrees of success with remote learning. Every family is different, every school is different, but on the whole I think we are where we wanted to be and that is a great effort by all involved. Thank you for the question.

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you for that contribution, Minister. Can I just associate myself with your thanks to teachers, school leadership teams and of course your department's staff for their work. Further to that, can the minister please add in relation to page 25 of the SDS the contribution the Palaszczuk government made to ensuring Queensland children and families continued to receive quality early childhood education throughout that period?

Ms GRACE: This was a tricky one as we all know because we wanted those younger children to feel as normal as possible during this. The effort that they undertook was extraordinary. We have met with them on this, and they put in place some very good things to have children feel normal through this. I commend them on that.

Long day services in Queensland were able to remain open during the pandemic, while the community kindergarten sector successfully provided alternative online programs for their children and families for the first five weeks of term 2 during the height of the COVID crisis. We recognise and thank the early childhood teachers and educators for their amazing contribution throughout the year, particularly during the period from March to May, which was a very difficult time. They all played an incredibly important role supporting Queensland families.

In recognition of the exceptional circumstances during the height of the COVID crisis earlier this year, the Palaszczuk government acted decisively with a \$17 million support package for the community kindergarten sector. They probably would not have been able to continue without that money. It was money that we found and reprioritised from other things that were not happening and we were able to do this.

The funding boost allowed families to access a community kindergarten free of charge for term 2 for 15 hours per week so they were able to continue. In total the package assisted 22,000-plus children to continue to access a quality education program during the COVID-19 pandemic and it helped nearly 3,000 early childhood teachers and educators keep their jobs. It also ensured 465 community kindergartens across the length and breadth of the state could remain open and viable. It includes 128 community kindergartens in regional and remote Queensland in places such as Wujal Wujal, Mount Isa, Barcaldine, Biloela, Charters Towers, Weipa and Miles. Nearly 70 per cent of community kindergartens are in low socioeconomic areas.

With the package, the government listened to the concerns of the community kindergarten sector and they very much welcomed and responded very favourably to the injection of the funds. Had we not done that, like I said, many would have closed their doors. Some of these community kindergartens had operated for over 100 years never having faced a COVID-19 crisis, and they were very grateful.

In addition to the community kindergarten package, the Palaszczuk government provided a further \$2 million in support for 18 local councils which operated early childhood services and which were denied access to assistance under the Morrison government's JobKeeper package. I think local governments were exempt. Had we not provided that \$2 million to those 18 centres, they would not have been able to keep on their staff, either. We provided that top-up for them. Fees were also waived to the tune of about \$300,000. Personally, they did a great job. The department provided a dedicated webpage and a hotline for these services. We injected the funds we needed to keep them going. They did a great job during COVID-19. I also take off my hat to those early childhood teachers and educators for a job well done as well as the centres for the innovative ways in which—what some of them did was amazing—they continued kindergarten services to their students.

CHAIR: They did an extraordinary job. Thank you, Minister. Shifting back to non-government questions, I call the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, given the director-general's earlier response around COVID management—I just want to return to that—can you advise the committee how much COVID management is costing Queensland schools?

Ms GRACE: That is a good question but, obviously it depends on which specific area the member is asking about. Obviously there were costs in relation to the additional cleaning that we had to do. There were probably costs in relation to ensuring that we provided relieving staff for teachers who were not able to come to school because they were in that vulnerable category due to their age, health or whatever. I do not know whether there is necessarily breakdowns of all of this, but the uplift in cleaning hours allocated was calculated on a 10 per cent increase, so there was a 10 per cent increase in our cleaning costs. The uplift was about \$640,000 I think. Did we say that?

Mr Cook: That is per week.

Ms GRACE: That was per week as at 12 November 2020. There was an additional cost of all of those elements, member for Moggill. The department included that additional funding to schools so that they did not have to bear such costs. The weekly additional school cleaning allocation was 16.5 hours—I have a series of different amounts that are being passed to me. Total funding for just the additional school cleaning allocation from 2 March 2020 to the end of term 4 was around \$22.3 million. The weekly amount, which includes our outdoor and environment education centre, brings a total cleaning cost to about \$640,000 per week. A 20 per cent increase was allocated to special schools as well; they had particular needs. We made sure that they were well and truly compensated. They received nearly double the amount that other schools required. There was a 20 per cent increase in other areas as well.

Other areas additional expenditure was \$52.1 million in 2019-20, \$26 million of which was mostly for the materials. I do not know how much we spent on hand sanitiser, member for Moggill, but I think a lot of that budget went to hand sanitiser, soap and liquid soap for the children to wash their hands more often than what they normally would have done. I think that was a good thing and a good lesson during COVID for us all. There was almost \$7 million for information technology-related costs, including \$3 million for laptop purchases for students.

There were so many different things that we had to do to ensure that learning continued and that we accommodated our staff and our students. Remember, the edict was out that if you did not feel well you stayed at home. These students were supported when at home. We met all the costs from the department's budget and I commend them for not holding back. It was necessary expenditure that I think every single department of education around the country would have had to incur. If there are specific ones and if we have the figures, we are happy to provide them, member for Moggill. These figures I have provided were some of the more broader ones. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: Thank you very much, chair. To the minister—if there is additional information, that would be appreciated. Just to clarify, those additional costs were covered by the Department of Education as opposed to individual schools at—

Ms GRACE: Yes.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you. None of those costs were passed on to parents, P&Cs or other people in the school? None of those costs were required to be paid by individual schools?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, member for Moggill; it is a good question. It is an operational matter. From the finance person sitting at the desk, the answer is no; none of them were passed on. They were fully met by the department.

Dr ROWAN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: Chair, we all hope to get to a place where a COVID-19 clinically efficacious vaccine is available with respect to vaccinations. Can I come to the director-general? What is the department's plan for students, teachers and/or staff who opt not to be vaccinated against COVID-19?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. It is bit of a hypothetical for us. Once the vaccine is available, if there are issues in relation to that, it is something the department will have a look at. Part of that is: is the vaccine available next year? Is the vaccine available in whatever particular period? But that is a matter we would look into if that is an issue that arises at the time.

Ms GRACE: Member for Moggill, if I could just quickly add, I am sure this is an issue that would come to the national cabinet. It would have to be very much under the federal government auspices as well. Obviously, we as a government will address that when we come to it. I think the director-general is right; it would be a policy decision of governments around the country about how we do this. I am sure the department will enact whatever decision is made. I think the national cabinet will probably drive a lot of that decision-making about vaccination and compulsion to do so.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Chair. Just a follow-up to that, Minister: is the government giving any consideration to making a COVID-19 vaccine mandatory for teachers or students in Queensland schools?

Ms GRACE: I just thought I had answered that in saying that we would look at what is available and what the national cabinet would do in line with the federal government. We will work cooperatively with them. Everything is on the table.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: Chair, I would like to come back to the director-general. Director-general, given the looming teacher shortage, particularly in regional areas, how many teachers were recruited as a result of the campaign launched in September this year?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. The campaign concerning the recruitment of teachers was particularly in relation to those students going into teaching. There is no recruitment as such because it is for those young students who are going in. I do not have the data available to me about the number of students who applied for teaching. Having said that, I do have a little bit of information on the campaign that I can share with the committee.

As the member indicated, it was earlier this year—it was from September to October this year. We know that we had 47,000 views on the Teach Queensland website, which we attributed to that campaign, and 24.6 million digital impressions, which is the number of times the ad was displayed either on television or through social media as well. We will not know the direct data in relation to that. Of course, there is also a causal issue about how do you say, 'It was because of that campaign I decided to become a teacher'? When the data is available through QTAC, we will be interested in the number of students who have applied for teaching as their first preference, because that will give us a better sense to answer that question.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you. Chair, I would like to come to the director-general again. Returning to air conditioning and the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program, what is the budget for the electrical upgrades for air conditioning? Is this being funded out of the existing budget?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the budget—I will just get the data here in front of me—the estimate for 2020-21 is \$166.005 million. In 2019-20, the budget was \$42 million; the actual expenditure was \$88.8 million because we fast-tracked a lot of those

installations. The electrical upgrade component of that is included in the actual installation costs. There is no separate line as such. I can tell the committee that, as at 30 June 2020, capital expenditure was \$65.3 million in relation to the financial year 2019-20.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS volume 2 page 24, I would now like to ask some other questions regarding non-COVID vaccine preventable diseases and the Queensland School Immunisation Program. Director-General, can you advise the number of Queensland state school children whose immunisation status is either unknown or not up to date?

Mr Cook: I understand that might be information from Health but, if not, I am happy to get that information. I do not have that information available to me. The immunisation program is not run out of the Department of Education.

CHAIR: Is the minister happy to take that on notice or seek advice?

Ms GRACE: I really do not know whether it is relevant to the Department of Education. I am not sure, operationally, whether that is a question that we ask. We will try to get the answer before the end of the session.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair. My next question may give a bit of clarity. From 1 January 2016 amendments to the Public Health Act commenced whereby early childhood education and care services in Queensland had the option to deny enrolment to or exclude unvaccinated children. Director-General, can you advise how many licensed Queensland centres have been exercising this exclusion option?

Mr Cook: I do not have that information available to me. We will try to get that information, as best we can, before the end of the session.

Ms GRACE: We will try to get that information to you. I am aware that in the early childhood education area that is the case. The regulator is in the room and if we collect that we will certainly make that available towards the end of the session.

Dr ROWAN: Again, for the benefit of the committee and the Director-General, I just want to clarify what processes are in place for gathering a child's vaccination status by the department when they are enrolled in prep and primary and secondary school—the internal process of how that information is collected, monitored and evaluated.

Mr Cook: Obviously when a child enrolls into a school there is the enrolment form that a parent has to fill out. Information is collected through that. In relation to the specific information about vaccines, I am happy to get that information and come back to the committee by the end of the session.

Ms GRACE: Member for Moggill, we are always updating our enrolment forms. Hopefully we can get that information to the member for Moggill by the end of the session.

Dr ROWAN: I just want to come to SDS volume 2, page 55. I know the Remote Kindergarten program was mentioned earlier. Minister, what proportion of the funding that has been allocated there is specifically quarantined or allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

Ms GRACE: There is an amount of money that is quarantined for that. I do not know whether the information I have separates it all. I think the budget estimates have given a new figure. I did report on some figures earlier. Whether they were separated I do not know. I do have some figures here. We are expanding the Remote Kindergarten program by \$12 million over four years. This will include schools within 40 kilometres. It provides \$55.7 million over two years to support the early childhood workforce and universal access.

Since 2016 the department has invested \$3 million in the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health's Deadly Kindies program—this is a fantastic program; every time I go to see one I am amazed at the work they do—to improve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kindergarten. In the January-June 2020 reporting period a total of 131 children had engaged in the Deadly Kindies program. We are looking at \$55.7 million over two years to support the childhood workforce and universal access. The Palaszczuk government will continue to invest in the Deadly Kindies program in 2021.

In 2019-20 a total of \$162.1 million across 2,077 services was invested through the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme for 55,000 children. I think I am getting some figures that might break this up. There is \$67.5 million for long day care, \$84.9 million to approved centres, \$2.8 million to cover central governing bodies and \$6.6 million to support the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Scheme.

There is \$12.5 million for universal access, jointly funded by the state and Australian governments. There is \$20 million in funding to further support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is \$23.6 million in school based salaries relating to Indigenous programs in schools. These are all part of what makes up the fabric of early kindergarten in those distinct communities. Thank you for the question.

Dr ROWAN: I just want to come to student wellbeing and mental health. Director-General, there is obviously an established ratio of school psychologists or school counsellors to students. That is benchmarked between Queensland as a jurisdiction and other jurisdictions. What is the projected ratio over the forward estimates for psychologists or counsellors to students in Queensland?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. Currently the ratio of school psychologists or equivalent—guidance counsellors, mental health workers—to students is one to 1,060. As the minister indicated earlier, as a result of the government's election commitment of \$100 million over the next three years for about 464 additional wellbeing professionals, that ratio of one to 1,060 will come down closer to one to 500, which is the Australian Psychological Society's recommended ratio. Over the next three years, starting in the financial year 2021-22—June next year—through the employment of those additional wellbeing professionals, the ratios in Queensland state schools will almost halve from the current ratio.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I refer to the emerging data around particular issues that are being seen with students, both COVID-19 and pre-existing COVID-19, as far as mental health and suicidal ideation are concerned. What sort of information or data is coming through those services that are being provided in the schools? How is that being evaluated and what is being planned for the future?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. As you would anticipate, this information is very important to us as an education system. There is the anecdotal information which comes through to the department every day in relation to, unfortunately, those young people who have chosen to take their life. There is also broader information available to us from schools in relation to behaviour management, school disciplinary absences and the issues in relation to that. We also work with the Queensland Mental Health Commission council in relation to further information that may assist us with young people in terms of mental health issues. We have not just the student wellbeing program that currently exists but also, particularly in terms of mental health, regionally based personnel who operate out of each region who provide training, support and coaching to our staff in relation to mental health. They also provide services more broadly for the more complex needs in relation to mental health.

The question, I guess, is: have we seen a significant increase? The data is still relatively new and we are working with that data, but we are obviously aware. The information that we provide to government, to inform government around policy decisions, has certainly over the last 12 months highlighted the importance of mental health and the fact that mental health should be addressed in all of our schools. The other data we are finding is that some of these mental health issues are now starting younger than they might have in the past. We are seeing great programs in our schools. With GPs in secondary schools we have some great things happening in some of our schools—Mabel Park for example, which has an excellent program operating. We will be learning from those schools as part of that GP program over the next three or four years.

We are quite excited about the possibilities to provide some of those services at the school level, particularly for those families for whom the school is the place that has the regular contact and some of those other services they might find more difficult or more challenging to access.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, will the Independent Public Schools program be continued throughout the term of this government?

Ms GRACE: I think I mentioned this. In terms of independent public schools, there is a committee that is being looked at. I think I went through some pretty comprehensive reporting in relation to that. There are some issues that we need to have a look at. I know that recently the director-general was made aware of some concerns around governance. That is something that I definitely need to have a look at with the committee. I do not want to necessarily marry independent public schools with funding. One can survive without the other, as the federal government walked away and we picked it up. Also, we have expanded some of this to other schools. They are also setting up school councils and governance structures and receiving no assistance in relation to the implementation of that. It is a hefty amount of money—\$12.5 million—and during fiscally responsible spending I think it is always prudent for governments to have a good look at how we spend our money and whether it is value for money. As I said, we will continue the funding as we have committed to for this financial year and we also want to have a look at how these schools are spending this money. I will indicate that we will be asking

schools specifically, particularly those that have been around since 2013 or 2014 that are well established, exactly what they are using their \$50,000 for. A new school in a lower socio-economic area that is now setting up a school council that is trying to get its governance structures in place and trying to educate its staff might be missing out on this funding.

Without being tricky or anything like that, member for Moggill, it really is about how we can spread this amount of money. Are we spending it in the right area? I am sure that every school would love an additional \$50,000 just put into their account without acquittal or any accountability of how they are spending it. We will look at that. We will honour what we said we will do. We are working very cooperatively with the committee working through that report and we will be working through how best to do that going forward. In terms of a policy position the government has not landed either way. I am sure that I will work with cabinet to come out with a good response. I know the department is also doing a great job with that committee in going forward with it.

I noticed that in New South Wales they are really putting the axe through it. They are really talking about reversing a lot of what they have done down there. They have found issues. I would like to learn from that as well. I would like to speak with Minister Sarah Mitchell about what they are finding and what they are looking at doing. We often talk about these issues when we are at Education Council. I get on very well with Minister Mitchell. They have made very strong statements in relation to what they are doing in New South Wales with their similar program. I would like to learn some of the issues there and also address some of the governance issues that have been brought to light.

Mr BERKMAN: I want to quickly acknowledge the \$65 million of funding for the new school in the inner west and just note that I am very much looking forward to working with the minister and the department on that. I also welcome the extra detail this morning about the consultation plans for the new year, so thank you, Minister. In relation to that funding, I want to clarify this with the director-general: does the \$65 million cover the cost of land acquisition or would that cost be met from the separate land acquisition line item of \$146 million on page 47 of Budget Paper No. 3?

Ms GRACE: Yes, good question.

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. As is the case for many schools, land acquisition is actually funded through the land acquisition program.

Mr BERKMAN: Wonderful; thank you. Going now to the election commitment that is in the budget for 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 new teacher aides over the next four years, I am just trying to understand the details of this. In particular, how many of those positions will be replacing staff who are retiring or resigning? I put that question to the director-general.

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the teachers, the 6,190 or so number that you were talking about—is that correct?

Mr BERKMAN: That is right.

Mr Cook: Some 4,000 of those are replacing teachers who might be retiring or taking leave. Some 2,190 of those are what we call parameters growth, so that is additional teachers in classrooms. The total cost of that is \$2.05 billion.

CHAIR: Thanks, Director-General. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr BERKMAN: Sorry, but in relation to teacher aides?

CHAIR: No, member; the call is with the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: I am happy for him to go forward but—

CHAIR: Sorry? You do not have a question?

Ms GRACE: We can do the teacher aides quickly.

CHAIR: Okay; thank you, Minister.

Mr Cook: In relation to teacher aides, there are 800 of what we call replenishment for teacher aides who might be retiring. Some 340 would be what we call the parameters growth. The total cost of that is \$219.3 million.

Ms GRACE: Member for Maiwar, obviously these are based on recent history in terms of what we have had to do. That could fluctuate depending on what it is, but we are sure that we will get to those numbers based on historical data.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The committee will now adjourn for a break.

Mr Cook: Chair, if I could just give the answer to a question, if that is okay.

CHAIR: Certainly. Please, Director-General.


Mr Cook: Very quickly, it was the question from the member for Moggill about the number of principals who might be suspended. There are five principals currently suspended in Queensland state schools which represents 0.005 per cent of all staff.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 12.30 pm to consider the estimates for the racing portfolio. Thank you.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair.

Proceedings suspended from 11.45 am to 12.30 pm.

 **CHAIR:** Welcome back, minister and officials. The committee will now examine the estimates for the racing portfolio until 1 pm and the estimates for the industrial relations portfolio from 1 pm to 2 pm. For this segment of the hearing I welcome the directors-general and officers from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. I also welcome the member for Everton, Mr Tim Mander. Member for Everton?

Mr MANDER: I thought we were going to get a bit of an intro from you, Grace. I was looking forward to that.

Ms GRACE: I did one before, member for Everton.

Mr MANDER: Sorry. I missed it. My first question is to the CEO of Racing Queensland, Mr Parnell. Mr Parnell, can you advise why Racing Queensland's expenditure on communication consultancies increased from \$44,000 to \$342,000, an increase of nearly eight times in the 2019-20 financial year?

Mr Parnell: I thank the member for the question. Racing Queensland has made a number of strategic marketing investments over the last 12 months to develop the profile and advocacy for the sport. The growth in employment which racing has delivered, an additional 1,000 jobs, part of that has been additional marketing support to do that. We are in the process of bringing those resources in-house so we can save some more money.

Mr MANDER: Could you provide a breakdown of those different consultancies that make up the \$342,000?

Mr Parnell: It is a combination of videography services, creative services such as branding and other marketing collateral. It is a combination of those three. As I mentioned, we are bringing those services all in-house to reduce costs.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister. Referring to the SDS, what will be the financial contribution to this financial year's 2021 Magic Millions event and are you able to quantify the economic benefit of this contribution to the Gold Coast region?

Ms GRACE: Thank you for the question. As we know, the Magic Millions has become one of the must-go-to calendar events when it comes to racing here in Queensland. I am looking forward to the race occurring on 16 January next year. I believe that even though it has been cut back a bit, the activities that are going to be held prior to that race are also substantial as well. It is really a significant race and one that I know that I am looking forward to going to on 16 January next year.

With regard to the direct financial input, I think that it is maybe a combination of Racing Queensland and Tourism. I can offer the Racing Queensland amount of money through the CEO of Racing Queensland. He may have that figure. He may have the figure from Tourism as well as Racing Queensland. Can I say though that it is money well spent. It promotes the Gold Coast. It promotes the sport of racing. It is a significant event on the summer calendar for racing plus all the activities that lead up to it. If you would not mind, through the chair, I could refer the question to the CEO of Racing Queensland to see if he has figures available to him about the amount of money involved.

Mr Parnell: In reference to your question, the contribution from the state is via Tourism and Events Queensland as marketing support. That is a confidential amount. Tourism and Events Queensland has an arrangement. That would be best directed to the tourism minister. I am not aware of the specifics of that. It is a multiyear agreement.

Likewise, Racing Queensland's support of this iconic tourism event, which has brought tens of thousands of bed night visitors to Queensland, is subject to a commercial-in-confidence multiyear agreement, but it does deliver bed night visits and a significant economic contribution which we think is a very wise return on investment for the state.

Mr DAMETTO: We cannot quantify today exactly how much the state is contributing to the Magic Millions because of commercial-in-confidence?

CHAIR: I believe the CEO answered that: that it is commercial-in-confidence.

Ms GRACE: Member for Hinchinbrook, obviously this is a significant event. They enter multiyear agreements. They were entered into previously by the previous government and by Racing Queensland this time round. I knew that there was one of these multiyear agreements and it is difficult to give details of that because obviously it is a very competitive area with racing right around the country. These are usual commercial arrangements in the racing industry, but thank you for the question.

Mr MANDER: I have a further question to Mr Parnell. Mr Parnell, why did Racing Queensland's expenditure on professional consultants double over the last financial year from \$352,000 to \$737,000?

Mr Parnell: Through you, Chair, I thank the member for the question. There has been a significant move to insourcing consultancy in recent times and restructuring parts of the organisation, some which required project management skills, and part of that cost increase was in the construction space. I am pleased to say that we have now insourced that function. The second area was in procurement where we had outsourced procurement experts who supported the business. That has now been fully insourced and the recruitment has been completed and that has been put in place. You will see in the next year a significant reduction in the use of consultants.

Mr MANDER: With regard to that, what is the budget for this financial year in both communication consultants and professional consultants?

Mr Parnell: I will take that question on notice, if I can through you, Chair.

CHAIR: That needs to go through the minister.

Ms GRACE: We will try to get the figure before the end of the session. If we can get that we will provide that to the member for Everton.

Mr LISTER: Can I ask if the minister is taking it on notice under standing order 183?

Ms GRACE: I said we will try to get back with the answer before the end of the session. The answer to your question is no. We will try to answer the question.

Mr LISTER: I am interested in the compulsion of 183, because we are able to disclose in the report whether or not that question was actually answered.

CHAIR: The minister has said she will come back in this session with advice of that so we will revisit that later in the session.

Mr MANDER: Further to that, that is not only the figures for those two areas this financial year but also the increased costs that are taking into account the insourcing in both those areas as well.

Ms GRACE: That is a whole different question. We will get back to you with figures for this budget in relation to those consultancy issues. If the member wants to ask another question he is more than welcome to.

Mr MANDER: I am asking that question: what are the increased costs for Racing Queensland taking into account the insourcing of both those tasks that you have mentioned?

Mr Parnell: In a range of areas they are taking place. The government has supported our country racing package through regional Queensland which has delivered more than 250 projects. To accelerate our project delivery we recruited some external project management assistance which has now been insourced and that has helped us accelerate quite dramatically the country racing package program of works which is now 78 per cent complete—344 projects finalised. Likewise, to complete the projects which were approved as business cases by the government in the last 12 months—the Gold Coast Turf Club tracks and lights, the Greater Brisbane Greyhound Centre, the Sunshine Coast synthetic track—until we had the resources internally we used some contract resource during that last financial year.

Mr MANDER: I appreciate that. I would like the monetary value though for this financial year for those increased costs for the insourcing, thank you. I have another question to the CEO of Racing Queensland: how much did Racing Queensland spend on hospitality expenses last financial year?

Mr Parnell: That was a small amount, but again, through the minister, we will come back and confirm that if we can.

Mr LISTER: Is the minister happy to take that under 183?

CHAIR: No, she said—

Mr LISTER: That is a no?

CHAIR: It is not a no. It is that they will go and seek advice and we will revisit this towards the end of the session based on the advice that they have been able to respond to the question.

Mr LISTER: I am asking the question. It is not out of order for us to seek from the minister—

Ms GRACE: No. We will come back.

Mr LISTER: The answer is no. Okay.

Ms GRACE: Let us not waste more time. We want your questions. Let us ask questions.

Mr MANDER: My question is to the Racing Integrity Commissioner. Page 58 of the commission's annual report details that at 30 June 2020 there were 56 cases filed with the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, up from 38 in the preceding year. Why has QRIC litigation increased by nearly 50 per cent in one year?

Mr Barnett: As followers of the racing industry and those who know about the Racing Integrity Act would be aware, the act contains provisions that allow participants the right to a free internal review and if they are not satisfied with the outcome of that internal review they then have the option of taking the matter forward to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. In the 2019-20 year, the commission staff made 1,725 original decisions. All of those decisions are capable of being internally reviewed. Of those 1,725, only 141 applications for internal review were made. In the 2019-20 year 129 internal reviews were finalised and of those, 57 applications were made to QCAT for an external review. In the 2019-20 year, 37 matters were actually finalised by QCAT. Of those 37, QCAT found in favour of the applicant in three matters, QCAT found in favour of the commission in four matters, 11 matters were settled between the commission and the applicant and the review application was withdrawn. Of the balance of the finalised matters, that being 19, the applicant withdraw the application and accepted the original decision of the commission. As an overall picture, only seven matters were actually required to be determined by QCAT and of those, it was a three-four split in favour of the commission.

Mr MANDER: Commissioner, what was the average time for QCAT cases to be resolved?

Mr Barnett: I do not have any hard data in front of me, but I think I can assist the honourable member by saying that on average matters do not get heard at QCAT inside about 12 months from the time that they are lodged. Generally there is then delay for a decision to be written up and, depending on the complexity of the matter, that decision can take between three and nine months to be delivered by the member at QCAT. After that, of course, both sides have appeal rights and sometimes those are exercised, which can again extend the time frames before a matter is actually finalised to the satisfaction of both parties.

Mr MANDER: Commissioner, could you advise of all litigation related costs incurred by QRIC in the last financial year and the budgeted litigation costs for this financial year?

Mr Barnett: I would like to assist the committee, so could I get some clarity around the figure that you are seeking?

Mr MANDER: Can you advise the litigation costs incurred by QRIC in the last financial year and the budgeted costs for the same category for this financial year?

Mr Barnett: The majority of the work that is done in QCAT is done and handled by our principal legal officers who are an in-house cost. On occasions we do brief senior counsel. If I can take that question on notice we will endeavour to get the accurate figure before the end of the session?

CHAIR: That question needs to go through the minister.

Ms GRACE: Hopefully we can get that before the end of the session and we will give the figure. I am not sure whether it is budgeted exactly the way you have asked, member for Everton, so there may be a little bit of extracting. I do not know if there is a line item for litigation per se. Because there is staff involved, there are externals, it may be combining some figures. But we will endeavour to get that by the end of the session.

Mr MANDER: I have a further question to the Racing Integrity Commissioner on a different issue. In relation to the Martin inquiry, last month you stated that an audit was underway to address the number of horses in the high-risk category. Has that audit been completed?

Mr Barnett: Yes. During the Martin inquiry we conducted an amnesty period that allowed owners and trainers to update their records about the retirement of racehorses without penalty. That was extremely successful. We have now conducted an audit on information supplied to us by Racing Australia about horses that were in the at-risk category as determined by the Martin inquiry, which is horses that have been inactive for 12 months and have not raced for more than 12 months.

On the results of that audit, there were 820-odd horses in Queensland identified as being in that at-risk category. The two new investigative stewards we have employed specifically and only to look at this matter are now working their way through that list of 820 horses, contacting the owners and trainers concerned and establishing the whereabouts and the general wellbeing of those animals. Where it is found that those animals have been retired but the appropriate retirement notifications have not been complied with under the Australian Rules of Racing, we will work with the participants. We are keen to establish an environment of voluntary compliance with the rules rather than harsh enforcement. We are working our way through that list and we will continue that auditing process as we go.

Mr MANDER: Can you tell me how many horse trainers were identified as failing to comply with their obligations through that audit?

Mr Barnett: I do not have the exact figure but, from memory, for the honourable member, the number of trainers involved I think was 126.

CHAIR: Member for Rockhampton?

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to page 2-32 of the SDS and its reference to the Country Racing Program, can the minister outline how important the program is to the social fabric of rural and regional Queensland?

Ms GRACE: I know how supportive the member for Rockhampton is of country racing. The Rockhampton turf club is a great club. I have visited it. It holds fantastic race meets when they do have them. There is nothing better than seeing a crowd at those country meets. It is interesting that the CEO of Star Entertainment, last night, said that they enjoyed country racing with some of their clients. They went to a country racing meet, I think at Gatton. There was a bus and they had clients with them. He said it was one of the most memorable events that they had had in recent times and they want to repeat it with country racing right around Queensland.

They can do that because we have already invested \$70.4 million in our country racing package. During our election campaign we committed to a further two years to 2023 for the Country Racing Program. It is worth \$35.2 million and it is in this budget. It will guarantee that the program can run to July 2023. That extension sees prize money, infrastructure and operations of non-TAB clubs—and we have the most, with 50 per cent or something like that, of all non-TAB country racing meets happening in Queensland. It is the fabric of a lot of country towns. It is one thing that a lot of country folk enjoy. I know the member for Hinchinbrook as a country member and the member for Southern Downs enjoy a little bit of country racing as well.

Mr LISTER: Don't we all?

Ms GRACE: We all do. We know that some of those meets are terrific and this package allows them to continue. It was well received three years ago. We have now extended it for a further two years. We are looking forward to making sure that happens. With around 2,000 jobs in rural and regional Queensland dependent on racing, the Palaszczuk government is proud to back country racing. I am looking forward to going to some of those meets. Hopefully the member for Rockhampton and I can be in Rocky to enjoy one fairly soon. Maybe, member for Southern Downs, you and I can catch up at some of the race meets in your area as well.

Mr LISTER: We will have some good Stanthorpe wine.

Ms GRACE: Made by the Italians, of course.

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to page 2-32 of the SDS and its reference to the Country Racing Program, can the minister provide details of some of the infrastructure projects that have been funded in rural and regional Queensland and what it has meant for those small clubs?

Ms GRACE: It is vitally important to the racing clubs. I first became racing minister back in the day and I am very happy to have it back in my portfolio. At that time one of the issues was country racing's inability to raise funds for infrastructure spend. It has been great that, through Racing Queensland, we have been steadily providing a great amount of money for infrastructure and they have been very happy to receive it. We have allocated \$2.6 million per year for infrastructure in the non-TAB clubs and we have funded more than 400 projects. At an earlier time some of those clubs were screaming out for money for little maintenance jobs that they were not able to do. We have been able to give them the funding and they have been able to direct that and employ local chippies, tradies and other people to do the work.

There is a further round expected to be announced fairly soon by Racing Queensland. I know it is very well received. I see the CEO nodding his head because it is money that helps them. Projects large and small have been funded to assist clubs right across the state to run their meetings, for stewards to do their work and for horses and jockeys to perform safely. That is an important part.

Not every club needs to look like Flemington or Eagle Farm. In fact, if you make them all look the same, there is no interest in going out to some of these beautiful country meets. Whether it is Brisbane or Barcaldine—and I remember being at Barcaldine at one stage and I look forward to going again—safety is paramount. Much of the funding of the project is with regards to safety barriers and all those matters. For example, new or improved running rails have been installed at places like Thangool, Ilfracombe, Augathella, Surat, Atherton, Moranbah and Richmond, just to name a few. Tie-up stalls, swab stalls, barriers, stewards' towers, track remedial works, improvements to jockey rooms—all of that has been done. In the two rounds, we have invested well over \$7.3 million. We look forward to the next round which will mean that by July 2023 around \$18 million would have been invested into country racing infrastructure. This is just more proof of how the Palaszczuk government is backing country racing. I look forward to visiting them during the next four years.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, I know that regional Queensland, particularly rural towns, appreciate the infrastructure investment into these towns.

Mr SULLIVAN: In addition to the regional infrastructure, minister, I note the specific reference in the SDS to the Racing Infrastructure Fund. Can the minister please advise on the approved projects and how they will support the racing industry and jobs?

Ms GRACE: This is a really important question, member for Stafford, thank you very much. We understand how important the racing industry is for the Queensland economy. We know it supports more than 11,500 full-time jobs and puts nearly a billion dollars into the pockets of workers and the tills of the local shops. We also know that for the industry to continue to grow and support even more jobs, new and improved facilities must be delivered for both racing and training more horses. Unfortunately, when the previous government gave us the deal that goes for 30 years, they left us pretty poor. One of my biggest complaints when I was the racing minister earlier on was about the lack of money that was coming in to infrastructure during that 30-year deal. I do not know who enters a 30-year deal, but obviously the previous government thought that they would do that. It is a deal that really has not held us in good stead.

Having said that, prior to the recent election, the Palaszczuk government announced the long awaited Gold Coast Turf Club revitalisation project would be delivered. It is a \$38 million project. Member for Hinchinbrook, this would be great for the Magic Millions as well. This is much upgraded infrastructure that they will enjoy in the years to come. We will not only see an improved racing surface but also new synthetic training tracks, in-field access via a tunnel and lights for night racing. Once we put a tunnel in one turf club, it looks like another major turf club wants one, too. The one at Eagle Farm is working very well. This project was applauded by leading trainers, and I am advised that the Gold Coast Turf Club is embarking on a campaign to lure more trainers north to take advantage of what would be a world-class facility.

This project will support more than 300 jobs during construction, and the increased training activity will add to more than 1,000 jobs the precinct already supports. It is great to see reports last week that the local Gold Coast City Council has approved the upgrades of the track, so more good news ahead for the Magic Millions carnival.

I can advise the committee that work is also progressing on the Greater Brisbane Greyhound Centre. This three-track facility will be designed and built with the latest research into animal welfare at its core. Consultation and thorough design work is now underway with construction likely to commence over the next year or so. The large size of this facility will allow for greater opportunities to diversify income streams and provide community infrastructure on the side.

For example, I was talking to the chair of the Ipswich Turf Club who was saying they now have the biggest function centre in Ipswich at that turf club which they use for their meets and which now can be used by the community. That is an example of the infrastructure we are putting in which can be used to create jobs and create business. It is really is an excellent facility.

Racing Queensland is working with the Ipswich City Council to explore what needs there are locally. When we build this, we can look at their needs and how we can link together. I think it is opportune that we do that.

I know how important these facilities are to the thoroughbred and greyhound codes, and I look forward to working with Racing Queensland to ensure they are delivered so that racing can continue to grow. Infrastructure is an important part of our plans and I look forward to working with Racing Queensland to deliver that infrastructure. Thank you, member for Rockhampton.

Mr MANDER: My question is to the Racing Integrity Commissioner. Following on from the last question, I think you said approximately 126 trainers, you believe, have been identified. Can you tell me, please, how many compliance actions have been taken against those trainers and/or penalties that have been issued?

Mr Barnett: I thank the honourable member for the question. Our operating philosophy at the commission follows a philosophy of engagement, education and enforcement, in that order. We always, where we can, try to work with the industry and get their voluntary compliance with the rules. Whilst this is a specific recommendation of the Martin Inquiry, which we have been funded to implement and we will, we are now in the process of engaging with industry, putting out articles in the racing journals and reminding people of their responsibilities under the rules of racing. On many occasions, it is simply an ignorance of the rule, rather than any attempt to necessarily flout the rule. Nonetheless, now that we have done our audit and we have established the cohort of horses and trainers that may have breached the rule, we are now in the process of engaging with those people. To answer your question, we have not yet commenced any formal enforcement action, but that certainly is the last resort if we do not get some immediate uptake of voluntary compliance with the rules.

Mr MANDER: Commissioner, has a retraining/rehoming program for thoroughbreds and standard horses been established as per recommendation 4.1?

Mr Barnett: I thank the honourable member for the question. If I may, through the minister, that is a matter that is being handled by Racing Queensland.

Ms GRACE: I think the question should be directed to the CEO.

Mr Parnell: The Queensland Off The Track program has been appointed and the first board meeting will take place next week. Along with QRIC, the RSPCA, the Australian Veterinary Association and other representative groups from breeding and owning are all participating in that advisory board. Their commencement board meeting is next week.

Ms GRACE: Member for Everton, while the CEO has a microphone, he has answers to your questions on those amounts of money.

Mr Parnell: First of all, I will provide some clarity around the responses earlier to the member for Hinchinbrook on Magic Millions. The economic contribution to the state in 2020 is \$38.7 million and it generated 31,500 bed-night visitation which is significantly more by many multiples to the Racing Queensland contribution. As the racing fans of the estimates panel may be aware, we extended the Magic Millions property across a further weekend this year to leverage its importance and role and to drive bed-night visitation.

To the member for Everton, in answer to two of your questions, specifically the increase in consultant costs during the last financial year were for two very significant one-off projects. One was the renewal of our media rights; our broadcast rights tender extended for most of the financial year. We engaged through a broad procurement process a media adviser to assist on that process and they brought a doubling of the value that the Queensland race clubs earned from their media rights. That was a one-off.

The second one was a one-off review of our asset management framework. That was done by a large consultancy. We had a lot of work to do around the asset condition at our 118 venues around the state. That was a one-off piece of work which then framed an asset management framework and shaped our board's deliberation on the investment in asset replenishment right throughout regional Queensland. The combination of those two consultancies is circa \$1.2 million. They were both one-offs.

The third question you asked relates to hospitality. Unfortunately, we did not have a winter carnival this year so our hospitality costs in the financial year 2020 were down. They were \$38,000. Our budget this year is \$85,000. Hospitality is largely associated with our TAB sponsorship. That is the total amount in the budget this year.

Ms GRACE: The commissioner has a quick answer to a question as well.

Mr Barnett: In response to an earlier question from the member for Everton, I can advise that the amount the commission spent on representing itself at QCAT, including counsel and appearance fees, in 2019-20 was \$180,350.

CHAIR: That concludes the committee's examination of the estimates for the racing portfolio area. The committee will now examine the estimates for the industrial relations portfolio area. I welcome the member for Kawana, Mr Jarrod Bleijie. Would you like to ask the first question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Director-general, you would be aware that I wrote to you with respect to an interpretation of a change of policy in terms of the Tower Crane Code of Practice 2017. With respect to the policy change to the Tower Crane Code of Practice 2017 and the interpretation of it, why were prohibition notices issued the first day into government caretaker mode? I would have thought an interpretation of a serious policy like that would have had to have consultation with both industry and the opposition in caretaker mode?

Mr Cook: As the member would be aware, falls are a significant contributor to the numbers of work related injuries and fatalities in Australia. Under the Work Health and Safety Regulations, a person conducting a business must manage those risks to ensure health and safety associated with a fall. That is section 78 of the regulation. The Queensland Tower Crane Code of Practice 2017 outlined the requirement for a fall arrest system if a continuous vertical ladder is in place for accessing the total length of a crane tower. This requirement has been in the code for more than a decade. During the 2017 review of the code, the steering group, made up of industry and union representatives, did not raise this area of the code for revision.

In October 2020, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors undertook a campaign to inspect the use of continuous vertical ladders in tower cranes, with 112 work sites being visited. There was not any particular issue that I am aware of, although Mr Allen may wish to inform you further, about the timing of that other than, as the inspectorate often does, they look at issues that are within the industry and respond to those issues.

The inspectors found high numbers of operators were not meeting the minimum requirements set out in the code. Prohibition and improvement notices were issued where noncompliance was identified—29 prohibition notices and 53 improvement notices. Our safety alert followed in October outlining the specific requirements of the code. There were particular interim solutions as well. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland had worked with industry to develop an interim solution.

In relation to your question about the particular date, I have no reason to believe that, short of the concerns that inspectors had around this particular area of safety, the date was identified for a particular reason.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-general, the code, as you indicate, has been in since 2017. It was reviewed and this issue had not come up. The code states one particular thing, but it does allow what has been occurring in Queensland for over 30 years with these particular cranes. Overnight on that one day, because of the prohibition notice issued by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, 50 cranes across South-East Queensland were shut down. The concern I have is that there was no consultation and no education. The only thing that I can see is that the CFMEU had a campaign against a particular type of crane and, as I understand it, all of the 50 cranes that were closed down were non-CFMEU EBA sites. The question is this: how can—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, can you put your question more directly. That was quite a lengthy preamble and there was inference within the question. Can I please ask you to take caution and care in how you word your questions.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is quite a serious issue that requires context around it. Director-general, how many fatalities or falls on this particular crane led to Workplace Health and Safety overnight shutting down 50 cranes in South-East Queensland?

Mr Cook: I have information in relation to Australia. I do not have information available to me at the moment in relation to Queensland. I do not know whether Mr Allen has any further information. Some 122 workers were killed following a fall from a height over the period January 2015 to December 2019 across Australia. In Queensland, according to Safe Work Australia, 15 workers were killed due to a fall from a height—13 per cent of all workers killed over this period. Half of these falls involved falling three metres or less. The construction industry accounted for 53 per cent of fall related fatalities. That is the information I have available to share with the committee.

Mr BLEIJIE: I understand falls, but how many of those were crane related falls? How many crane operators fell from these type of cranes that now have the prohibition order issue against them?

Mr Cook: I do not have that information available to me at the moment. We can endeavour to see whether that information is available before the end of the hearing.

Mr BLEIJIE: If it helps the director-general, when I met with crane operators who had been severely impacted by this, they told me that their understanding is that there are none.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, can you put your next question, please.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am assisting the director-general and his department in answering the question.

CHAIR: I am not sure why you are asking a question if you already know the answer. Member for Kawana, please put your next question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, the Master Builders Queensland noted in a media event when this was issued—

Given the absence of any evidence of an incident to date, we don't understand why there was a need for a safety blitz and why this couldn't be handled via a guidance note in the first instance advising the industry of other issues and working with them to find a solution. We just think it could have been handled a whole lot better.

Can you advise the committee whether this matter could have been handled better and why—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you are asking for an opinion. Could you please rephrase your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Why did the director-general not issue a guidance note instead of shutting a whole industry down overnight?

Mr Cook: I do not make decisions in relation to those particular inspections. We have an inspectorate that makes those decisions based on information available to them. I do not make those decisions, as I do not make decisions about blitzes on amusement devices. It is an independent regulator inspectorate that makes those decisions.

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes. Through the independent regulator—maybe someone else can answer the question for me, Director-General, but you are responsible for the department. Perhaps someone else in the room will be able to answer it with respect to why—

CHAIR: Member, I believe the director-general answered your question. You might not like the answer, but he was responsive to your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: I did like the answer, but I have a follow-up question—that is, can someone else, Director-General—often directors-general refer to the deputy directors-general—tell this committee why a guidance note and consultation with industry was not undertaken before the prohibition notices were issued overnight?

Ms GRACE: I will endeavour to answer the question, Chair.

Mr BLEIJIE: I raise a point of order. I did not ask you, with respect, Minister. I asked the director-general.

Ms GRACE: You asked if someone else could answer the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: No. I asked the director-general—

CHAIR: You did. Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: Excuse me, Madam Chair, I said—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I said the director-general or the deputy director-general, who is sitting there, for the Office of Industrial Relations.

CHAIR: No. Member for Kawana, you said there could be somebody else at the table or in the room that might be able to assist in answering the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: From the department.

Ms GRACE: You did not say that.

CHAIR: The minister is offering to answer your question. I call the minister.

Mr LISTER: I raise a point of order, Chair. There is no provision for an official to pass the answering of a question up to the minister. That is quite clear.

CHAIR: The member asked a follow-up question.

Mr BLEIJIE: No. I asked the director-general a follow-up question. If I wanted to ask the minister a question I will ask the minister directly, but I did not.

CHAIR: The member asked the director-general a follow-up question that said maybe there is somebody else in this room that can answer the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: From the department of industrial relations.

CHAIR: No.

Mr LISTER: Madam Chair, I think that is unhelpful. The intention of the member for—

CHAIR: I think if the minister is able to provide advice that assists in answering the question—and the member wanted to receive an answer—

Mr LISTER: The question came from the member for Kawana. The member for Kawana determined who should answer the question—and it is not the minister.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, the minister has said that she can assist in providing the answer.

Mr LISTER: The question was not to the minister.

Ms GRACE: Chair, maybe I can assist you. There is lot of time wasting going on with the questions from those opposite. In order to allow them to ask the questions that they should be asking the government, I am happy for the deputy director-general to answer about why guidance notes were not issued and why there was a blitz instead.

Mr BLEIJIE: That is all we wanted. Thank you.

Ms GRACE: If the member wishes, because they do not want to hear from the minister, I am more than happy for the deputy director-general to do so.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. That is all we wanted.

Mr Allen: The matter was brought to my attention. Since 2016 and the compliance monitoring and enforcement policy, the regulator has had a fairly strong approach to incidents in workplaces. We went through the unfortunate deaths at Eagle Farm and at Dreamworld. We certainly do err on an enforcement approach. The matter was brought to my attention. I read through the concerns. I looked at the code and I believed that, if there were breaches of the code, if the inspectorate believed it was necessary to undertake that enforcement action in relation to those tower cranes then they would.

In undertaking that enforcement action, the inspectorate did work with industry. There were media reports about things being shut down. There were lots of opportunities where the inspectorate did work with the PCBUs to ensure that activity could continue. There was guidance issued after that. It did raise a very serious matter about continuous ladders on tower cranes.

I think you will find that—and I am prepared to give an answer to the question you asked previously, member for Kawana—there has not been a death from a tower crane in Queensland that I am aware of for some time, but there had not been a death at Dreamworld for some time either. I think it is really important when these matters are brought to our attention that as an inspectorate we respond accordingly. With that bit of information, God forbid, if there had been a death, we would have known about that information and not acted on it.

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Allen, who brought it to your attention?

Mr Allen: I understand it was a stakeholder, but we do not often—

CHAIR: Member, you cannot direct the question to Mr Allen. It needs to go through the DG or the minister.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, who brought it to Mr Allen's attention? Was it the CFMEU of Queensland?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of that information.

Mr BLEIJIE: Would you be able to ask Mr Allen to answer that for me please?

Mr Cook: I am happy for Mr Allen to answer the question.

Mr Allen: In Workplace Health and Safety Queensland we have a lot of matters that are brought to our attention. In order to encourage people to bring those matters to our attention, we keep that information private. I believe the media indicated that the CFMEU had done it, but I am not 100 per cent sure about that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Through the director-general, Mr Allen indicated to this committee that it was brought to his attention. If Mr Allen is now saying he cannot recall who brought it to his attention, I will ask the director-general: who brought it to Mr Allen's attention and was it the CFMEU that brought it to the attention of the Office of Industrial Relations?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, can you please explain the relevance of your question to the budget estimates process for the benefit of the committee?

Mr BLEIJIE: Seriously?

CHAIR: Yes, seriously.

Mr BLEIJIE: Really?

CHAIR: Yes, really.

Mr BLEIJIE: Okay. Being a former minister for industrial relations and shadow minister for about 10 years, I can advise the honourable Madam Chair that the minister and the director-general are responsible for Workplace Health and Safety, the Office of Industrial Relations, the Electrical Safety Office, the Workplace Health and Safety Board of Queensland and the operation including the Tower Crane Code of Practice relevant to the Workplace Health and Safety office. They implement it. They issue guidance notices. They issue prohibition notices. There would be nothing more relevant to the budget of the Office of Industrial Relations than workplace health and safety, Madam Chair. It is pretty much all contained in the budget of Workplace Health and Safety.

CHAIR: I will allow some latitude in the response by the director-general.

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes, fairly big latitude considering it is the only thing relevant to this issue.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, have some respect please.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, can you advise why the Office of Industrial Relations has allowed the registration of the CFMEUQ?

Mr Cook: Is that the end of the question, honourable member?

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes.

Mr Cook: 'Allowed the registration'?

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, we have the CFMEU, which is registered under the federal workplace legislation. This is with respect to the union's right of entry on construction sites in Queensland. There were, in the media, three union officials who went to one construction site. They were denied access. One had in fact been found under a Federal Court case to have his permit taken away. The CFMEU have now registered CFMEUQ, which is a loophole in the legislation which gets them around the right-of-entry provisions. How many union officials have accessed workplace sites in Queensland under the CFMEUQ banner?

Mr Cook: It is not my understanding the department registers anyone. It is not a role that we play. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, I understand, registers rather than this department. In relation to your second question about the number of CFMEUQ members, I do not have that information available. I am happy to see whether we do keep that information.

Ms GRACE: Could we clarify the question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Absolutely I will clarify, Minister.

Ms GRACE: They enter into private workplaces. They are not required to let anybody know of a right of entry.

CHAIR: Could you clarify?

Mr BLEIJIE: I will clarify. Under the federal legislation, with a right-of-entry permit they are registered. The federal laws, particularly section 81 of the Work Health and Safety Act, say who is permitted to enter construction sites on safety issues. My understanding is that there have been lots of federal cases where CFMEU members have had their permits taken away from them. Now they have set up a Queensland registered body, which is the CFMEUQ, which gets them around the federal legislation and they can actually enter sites. I have seen an email from one of your directors, Ms Helen Burgess, to a company in Queensland which says that they do not have to abide by the right-to-entry permit laws now because they are a registered Queensland body. That is the basis for the question. How are they allowed now to enter work sites in Queensland when federally they have had their right-of-entry permit taken away from them?

Mr Cook: I might ask Mr Allen to respond to that particular issue. I know there has been an issue in the Federal Court in relation to this. I think that has now been resolved.

Mr Allen: The member would be aware that a decision came out last week federally. That made it quite clear that, under the various sections of the Work Health and Safety Act, people who are members of a registered organisation need to have a permit to enter a work site. I think that was outstandingly clear in that decision that was handed down by the full bench of the Federal Court.

The issue that you are raising is, I understand, around the CFMEUQ, which I understand is not a registered organisation under the Fair Work Act. I understand that access is being achieved through giving assistance to an employee under section 81(3) of the act that does not relate to people who are members of a registered organisation.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is a loophole, isn't it, Director-General?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you are asking for an opinion. We are moving to government questions. Page 30 of the SDS makes reference to the implementation of initiatives responding to recommendations from the *Best practice review of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland—final report* in 2017. Minister, can you provide an update on the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, including significant prosecutions.

Ms GRACE: It is a great question. We commissioned the best practice review of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland following the tragic fatalities at Dreamworld and an Eagle Farm construction site in 2016. We have just heard the line of questioning about high-risk areas the department may decide to go into and have a look at, but there were no fatalities at that ride operator. Dreamworld went 30 years without one, but then had one of the biggest tragedies in Australia. With all the investigations, the department was held to account in relation to their actions. I would have hated to have seen a situation where, because there are no fatalities, you do not take proactive action in relation to a risk that is identified. This is what happens with occupational health and safety. Because they ignored regulations and did not enforce them, the first people they will probably blame is the department.

In answer to some of the questions—and thank you for your question—from the member for Kawana, things can happen in health and safety and you are required to be forever vigilant in this space. One death at a workplace is one death too many as far as this government is concerned. Once again I express my sincere condolences to those families who have experienced the traumatic loss of a loved one through a workplace incident. We must do all we can to ensure that such tragedies are never repeated.

The best practice review included recommendations concerning the establishment of a new independent statutory Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor. It is an independent office, and I know that the now member for Stafford assisted us greatly in his previous role in making sure that we get this right. I thank the member for Stafford for his involvement in that as well. We delivered on these recommendations by appointing Mr Aaron Guilfoyle as Queensland's first independent Work Health and Safety Prosecutor in March 2019, and I commend him on a job well done.

Since being appointed, the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor has been involved in a number of significant matters, including the first industrial manslaughter conviction in Australia—in Australia—in which Brisbane Auto Recycling Pty Ltd pleaded guilty and was convicted and fined \$3 million in June this year. The company's two directors also pleaded guilty to reckless conduct offences and were given suspended periods of imprisonment.

The prosecution of the Thunder River Rapids Ride incident in which four people lost their lives was also recently finalised in October. Dreamworld's owners, Ardent Leisure Limited, pleaded guilty and were convicted and fined \$3.6 million, which I believe is one of the highest fines ever given in this area. Also following the tragic death of a 14-year-old boy who was killed by a large tree trunk as he took part in tree-logging activities as a church member, the defendant was found guilty and convicted and fined \$450,000 late last year.

In the past financial year alone the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor brought 108 complaints before the courts, many of which sadly relate to workplace deaths and serious injury. This includes the Eagle Farm construction site double fatality in which two workers were tragically killed in 2016, and obviously my heart goes out to their families and friends as well. The prosecutor is also pursuing the death of a foreign worker which occurred in October 2017, where it is alleged the worker was exposed to prolonged heat without adequate access to shade. Charges have also been laid against a stone benchtop installation company and its director for failing to ensure the safety of workers who were fitting and installing engineered stone benchtops from exposure to silica dust. In May this year the prosecutor laid Australia's first industrial manslaughter charges against an individual in relation to the death of a worker at a Gympie business. This charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment.

I am pleased to say that in its 2019-20 annual report the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor reported that more than 95 per cent of prosecutions commenced resulted in a conviction. In addition to undertaking all prosecutions under the act—Electrical Safety Act, recreational water activities—on 1 July 2020 the office gained responsibility for the prosecution of serious offences under Queensland resources legislation, so the area has now grown. I commend the work of the prosecutor and his office. They have put in great training for professional investigations to get the right information at the appropriate time. Everyone is being trained up. He is an exceptional prosecutor and it sends out

the message that we are serious about this. It is amazing how many people sharpen their pencils once they hear that prosecutions are successful. It certainly is a deterrent factor when it comes to enforcement and employers making sure they have proper health and safety procedures in their workplaces. It is an excellent centre that is doing great work.

Mr SULLIVAN: In relation to page 24 of the Department of Education SDS and its reference to 'improving the wellbeing of all Queenslanders by making Queensland safer and supporting fair and productive workplaces', can the minister update the committee on developments under the government's labour hire licensing scheme?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government, and myself as Minister for Industrial Relations, are proud to have led the way by introducing Australia's first labour hire licensing scheme. With these new laws—which the LNP voted against and fought tooth and nail—the Palaszczuk government finally regulated a sector that was left unregulated for far too long. Before the new laws came in you had to have a licence to sell a car and you had to have a licence to sell a house but not to sell labour. This was an untenable situation.

The issues encountered by some workers in the labour hire industry have been well documented—cases of wage theft, sexual harassment, substandard housing and serious workplace health and safety risks. These cases had been happening too much, for too often and for too long. That is why we were determined to take strong action through a rigorous licensing scheme to establish basic minimum obligations that all labour hire providers have to meet before they can operate in Queensland. That is precisely what we did.

Now, more than two years on since the new laws started on 16 April 2018, I am glad to report that the new laws continue to be a great success, lifting the standard of the industry and protecting vulnerable workers from exploitation. As at 1 December 2020 there are 3,297 licensed labour hire providers in Queensland. The Labour Hire Licensing Compliance Unit has taken compliance action against nearly 600 providers who have not met the required standard, including: 181 applications that have been withdrawn; 46 licences that have been refused; 52 licences that have been granted with conditions; 80 labour hire providers that have had their licences cancelled; 240 labour hire providers that have been suspended; and six that are currently suspended. We will pursue any labour hire provider who is found not to be doing the right thing. It is only fair to those who are doing the right thing.

The biggest complaint I received when I did stakeholder consultation on this piece of legislation was from those labour hire companies that were doing the right thing and had to compete against those who were not. Not too many of them came out publically, but they patted me on the back and said they were very happy that a level playing field was finally established. One user of labour hire has been convicted under the act for entering into an arrangement with an unlicensed provider and was fined \$50,000. Five labour hire providers and two directors have been convicted for unlicensed provision under the act, with fines totalling \$450,000. We are serious about this. If you do not have a licence—you cannot sell a car and you cannot sell a house without one—you are not going to sell labour. You need to be licensed, and if you are not then you are going to be fined and pursued.

I am happy to say that in this budget we are committing an extra \$6.1 million over four years to boost the Labour Hire Licensing Compliance Unit by employing an additional eight frontline staff. These inspectors will focus on other areas, mainly in the construction, security and contract cleaning industry as well as regional Queensland. We know that a lot of these incidents happen in regional Queensland. I see the member for Rockhampton nodding. I look forward to fantastic results for 2020-21 and onwards. As late as last week there were media reports about backpackers picking blueberries in the Coffs Harbour region of New South Wales being paid as little as \$3 an hour. That simply cannot continue.

I also say that one of the side things that has happened with this, which is incredible, is the work that our unit is doing with their federal counterparts—those in the Australian Taxation Office and Border Force—to expose some of these unscrupulous and exploitative matters that have been happening. They are absolutely loving our laws, and they are working to clean up an area that was unregulated for far too long. Taxation issues were being hidden, and Border Force issues were involved. That has been a great partnership with the federal departments and our labour hire licensing unit. It is great work all around and congratulations to all.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister in regards to the federal government's proposed industrial relations reform that would allow employers to offer part-time workers covered by 12 awards extra hours without paying them any more than their regular rates. In relation to the SDS, what will the government's response be to this proposal and what will this mean for Queensland workers and businesses?

Ms GRACE: That is a great question. I thank the member for Hinchinbrook for the question. I think you may have heard a statement that I made in the House last week where I said that the federal minister for education has not given the courtesy of speaking to the states about these changes. To date, I have had no formal contact from him. I wrote to the minister on 3 December asking him to immediately consult us. It is part of the deal we have when they did a hostile takeover of these laws. They have become a mess. You do not make a hostile takeover of IR laws in this country and go federal and then ignore everything. That has allowed all of these things to happen—wage theft, casualisation, part-time exploitation, labour hire exploitation. What has happened is a disgrace.

There is a bill coming before the House this week, but the minister has not shown the courtesy of contacting me directly about any of its contents at all. To be honest with you, I am only getting what I am reading in the paper, and I think the director-general and the department are in the same boat. We are only getting what is in the paper. I think they should be meeting the requirements under the agreement—that they consult fully with states and territories. Like I said, I have written detailing my concerns and the inadequate consultation. We support any initiatives that obviously support jobs. Any changes to the IR laws, however, must not be at the expense of the pay rights and entitlements of workers. We expect this bill will be subject to a full Senate inquiry and it will be interesting to see what comes out of that.

In specific answer to your question, I know they are talking about part-time workers, which I think is what you inquired about. At the moment, when you are engaged part time, you may be engaged for 20 hours a week. Some agreements and awards say that some part-time workers live their lives around maybe eight-hour days for two days a week, so 16 hours a week in total. If the employer requires them for any longer but they have got responsibilities, it is not that easy to drop everything and do it. You are not casual; it is permanent part-time work. In some of these awards and agreements, if they work over those hours, they are paid at an overtime rate.

I think one of the changes is that, if there is an agreement that people can do it—and I hope this is what it is because, to be honest with you, member for Hinchinbrook, I have not been briefed—what they are saying is that if you work over, it will not be at overtime rates; it will be at normal pay. I do not know all of the safeguards around that. I would hate to be working two days a week and then be told, ‘I need you now for another three hours,’ but I have to pick up my child or something like that and I cannot do that, but I am made to do it because somehow I have to be paid ordinary rates and take up that position.

The safeguards have to be around it. I think the devil is in the detail. As I said, we have not been fully briefed on this. I think there will be adequate time, but once again through this process I ask the federal minister to respond to my letter and do the right thing and start consulting. Before he includes a bill in the House about the impact on Queensland workers, I think I have a right to that consultation under our agreement and as the Minister for Industrial Relations in this great state.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, with respect to the labour hire registration scheme now in Queensland, can you advise the committee whether the department has given a list of contact details of the registered labour hire companies or any of their contractors’ employees to any unions in Queensland?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. I am not aware that that has occurred.

Mr BLEIJIE: Is anyone else? Is Mr Allen aware, through you, Director-General?

CHAIR: Is that the answer, Director-General?

Mr Cook: That was my answer. You asked me whether I was aware. I am not aware of that happening, no.

Mr BLEIJIE: I said has the department given any of the details out so I would be—

Mr Cook: I am not aware of the department giving out the details.

Mr BLEIJIE: Perhaps, Director-General, you can ask Mr Allen sitting next to you if he is aware of any of those details being given out to unions.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, the director-general has answered the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the point—

Ms GRACE: I can answer the question, Chair. They are registered publicly. You go to the website and every labour hire company is on the public register.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, I did not ask you the question.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister and member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: I asked—

Ms GRACE: It is a public document.

Mr BLEIJIE: The contact details are not publicly available, Minister.

CHAIR: Order. Member for Kawana!

Mr BLEIJIE: And it was set up to give the unions the details of—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Kawana, I will not ask you again. I will warn you. Member for Kawana, please ask your next question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, you will know through other matters that were debated today in the education section that I have become known as a whistleblower advocate in terms of anonymous emails and so forth, which led to Jackie Trad resigning, but that is another story—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, if you have a question, please put your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have another three hours of questions in my next 15 minutes.

CHAIR: Please put your question without—

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, I have received a public interest disclosure from inspectors within your department. I have to ask my question but I have to read this paragraph to you. It says, 'Writing this letter to you and others has not been taken lightly due to the retribution'—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, we are here for a very specific reason and that is to examine the budget estimates. I would suggest to you that anything in relation to a public interest disclosure is better managed and handled not within this forum. I please ask that you consider your next question carefully as you put it.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will. Madam Chair, respectfully, I refer you to clause 35 of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010 where it says—

This Act does not limit the immunities, powers, privileges or rights of the Legislative Assembly or its members—

I am a member of the Legislative Assembly and it is my right to talk about the public interest disclosure that has been made to me within the estimates process, considering it is—

CHAIR: Member, this is not relevant to the estimates process—

Mr BLEIJIE: A workplace health and safety officer, an inspector, is relevant. They are employed by this department, paid for by this department.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am being very clear. This is not relevant to the appropriations process. Please put—

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, if it is the case that a member is not able to ask questions about workplace health and safety inspectors within the Office of Industrial Relations, then what is the point of this estimates hearing? If you are ruling that I am not allowed to ask questions about inspectors employed by this department and this minister, what is the point of this estimates hearing? It is a cover-up. Minister, you do not want the details released.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I have ruled on the public interest disclosure aspect and I ask you to come back to the appropriations process in your next question.

Mr LISTER: Chair, can I just suggest that your ruling is contrary to the act under which the PIDs are made and that you are not in a position to do so, respectfully. Can I suggest respectfully that we have already said on a number of occasions that everything that is funded out of the appropriation that we are examining today is fair game. The persistent use of relevance to stymie this inquiry invites the inference that the government is being protected by government members on this committee. I ask please that you allow the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Further to that point of order, my rights as a member shall not be impugned by an estimates process when I am directly asking questions with respect to the estimates process. My question is to the director-general.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am going to take some advice on this in the next break and allow that line of questioning once I have taken some advice. Could you please move to your next question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order, Madam Chair—

Mr LISTER: Can I just say that that is too late then. This questioning will not be available to the member. It is quite clear that the act states that members of the Legislative Assembly have immunity. This is a matter of privilege. It is not something that can be decided after the member has lost his opportunity to ask the question. Please would you rule that the question can be put.

CHAIR: I will take some advice. I am going to rule that question out of order, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is disappointing that we are not able to discuss these matters. Director-general, how many complaints has the CFMEU made about workplace inspectors in your department?

CHAIR: Director-general?

Mr Cook: I thank the member, through you, Chair, for that question. I do not have that data available. We can see if that data is available before the end of the session.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Director-general, how many of your staff within the Office of Industrial Relations are away on sick leave or stress leave?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. I am just seeing if I have that information available to me.

Ms GRACE: Sick leave varies from day to day.

Mr Cook: Just to clarify on sick leave, member for Kawana, today could be different to tomorrow. I am just trying to clarify the question for you.

Mr BLEIJIE: For clarification purposes, I am after the number of inspectors on leave with respect to stress.

Mr Cook: Okay.

Mr BLEIJIE: Do not worry about the sick leave. It is the stress leave.

Mr Cook: Stress leave. We will take that and, again, try to get that information back to you by the end of the session. If not—

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, how many complaints have been made by your staff in the department with respect to bullying or intimidation by CFMEU officials on sites in Queensland?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for question. Again, I do not have that information available to me. Again, we can see whether that information can be provided before the end of the session.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Director-General. I have met with inspectors from your department. It has been put to me that they believe now that over the year there has been a constant but carefully planned scheme of manipulation, including Workplace Health and Safety Queensland smear and blame campaigns, degrading the competency of the inspectorate, suspect coronial—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE:—appointments—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana!

Mr BLEIJIE:—senior management—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana!

Mr BLEIJIE:—union accommodated review boards—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana! Order! Member for Kawana! Could you please rephrase your question without imputation?

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I could finish my question first?

CHAIR: I am asking you to rephrase it without the imputations it contained in the preamble that you gave.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, can you tell me which member of parliament I have impugned?

CHAIR: Please rephrase your question without the inference.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, under the standing orders the imputation has to be of a member, and I have not mentioned any member of parliament. I am saying that it has been put to me in meetings by the Workplace Health and Safety Inspectorate that they believe now that, in Workplace Health and Safety, things go unchallenged and CFMEU legal interpretations result in an enforcement regime that now is totally out of balance and out of control.

Ms GRACE: Oh, here we go!

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-general?

Ms GRACE: That is an imputation.

CHAIR: That is an imputation.

Mr BLEIJIE: To whom?

Ms GRACE: That is an imputation in the question—

Mr BLEIJIE: To whom personally?

Ms GRACE:—under the standing orders.

Mr BLEIJIE: To whom personally?

Ms GRACE: It does not have to be personal or to a person; it is an imputation to a question under the standing orders.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection from the minister, who seems—

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have hit a nerve, Minister, haven't I? I have hit a nerve.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Kawana, please put your question without imputation. Sorry, I just want to go back to my previous ruling in terms of the question that I ruled out of order. Member for Kawana, I will allow you to ask your question. I offer guidance and caution about how you frame that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess it goes to the issues I have already asked about with respect to the inspectorate. Director-General, have you completed a staff survey in terms of the happiness of your workplace health and safety inspectors? Do you have available the contents of that survey, the questions asked and its outcomes, in particular, regarding the Workplace Health and Safety inspectorate, who feel they are being bullied on work sites across Queensland by the CFMEU which is protected by the minister?

CHAIR: Point of order. Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: That is an imputation. I will withdraw.

CHAIR:—please withdraw.

Ms GRACE: There is an imputation in that and I ask that it be withdrawn immediately.

Mr BLEIJIE: To you, there was, yes. I withdraw the imputation to you. That was a deliberate imputation. I apologise. I withdraw.

Ms GRACE: Yes, I know. You should apologise.

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw.

Ms GRACE: Good!

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you very well understand the rules and the behaviours expected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have withdrawn.

CHAIR: Please ensure as you go forward—

Ms GRACE: You talk about bullying and intimidation!

Mr BLEIJIE: By the CFMEU, Minister, yes. The CFMEU are bullying your employees.

Ms GRACE: You talk about taking liberties!

CHAIR: Order! Member for Kawana, Minister, order!

Mr BLEIJIE: Your employees.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, Minister, order!

Ms GRACE: Where is your proof?

Mr BLEIJIE: Proof? Here.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: Fifty-seven pages of intimidation and bullying by the union movement.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Kawana!

Ms GRACE: Table it.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will. I seek leave to table the public interest disclosure made to me, Madam Chair. There is the proof, and I have seven copies available for the committee, Minister. There is the proof of the bullying by the CFMEU of your department officials. Stand up for your workplace inspectors.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana! Order! Member for Kawana, order! Member for Maiwar, you have a question?

Mr BLEIJIE: I sought leave to table a document, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: I am going to review it. It is a quite lengthy document. I will review it in the break and advise whether we are tabling after that break; thank you, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: On a point of order, Madam Chair. The minister asked for evidence. I provided it and the—

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Kawana, I am well with—

Ms GRACE: It is up to the committee to take it in.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am within my rights to review the documentation before granting leave to table it. The member for Maiwar, you have the call.

Ms GRACE: That's right.

Mr BLEIJIE: You do not like it.

Mr BERKMAN: Minister, this pandemic has underlined for us how the rise of insecure work can not only produce unfair outcomes but be dangerous given that those workers do not have sick leave. Will the government consider following the Victorian government's example by creating a right to sick leave for casuals funded by an industry levy on big employers such as Coles and Woolworths?

Ms GRACE: Thank you, member for Maiwar, for the question. Obviously we control public servant workers in the Public Service. The private sector is under the federal jurisdiction. Each employer can obviously take whatever means they wish to ensure that their workers can take their sick leave or whatever they wish to do. Under the state system, as you know, late last year I think there were two bills about security of employment for public sector workers converting to permanent. Following reviews into this, we brought in legislation which I administered on behalf of the Premier who brought the bills to the House. They were two very significant bills with regards to creating greater permanency within the public sector. We will be looking at that but, of course, it is a different environment in the public sector to some of the private sector where sometimes these people have to have more than one job, and often it is truly on an as and when required basis. We believe that permanency should be the basis of employment from the start. The legislation now brings that in, and we are looking forward to implementing this during this term of government. Thank you for the question.

Mr BERKMAN: In relation, though, to the Victorian approach, these moves being made in Victoria in relation to casual private sector employees, where they are setting up a novel and very worthwhile scheme to ensure that sick leave entitlements are made available to some of those private sector casuals—just to be clear, is that something you are not considering?

Ms GRACE: I not sure exactly. I think this is about liaising with those employers. We know there is a bill before the house at the moment that deals with casual workers. COVID-19 has really had a focus on that. It can be very dangerous not only for those particular workers but for the community at large when people have to work in more than one location just to put food on the table. We need to have a look at the bill and what it is proposing. As I said, I have not been formally consulted in relation to that. We have just been through an election. We have been in caretaker mode for quite some time. This is very new. It only just happened. Let us look at the bill and at what is happening. If employers want to give sick leave to casuals, nothing is stopping them doing anything above the award. I would welcome any private sector employer doing that at any point in time. They do not need me to let them do it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Member for Stafford?

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, in relation to page 24 of the SDS, can the minister advise the committee how the government is responding to the ongoing issue of wage theft?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. The Palaszczuk government is committed to protecting the rights of workers right across Queensland. When workers head off to work each day, they deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Wage theft has been happening for far too long. As the member knows, it affects one in four workers. I think the committee found that it takes about \$2.2 billion out of Queensland workers' pockets each year in unpaid wages and superannuation.

At the estimates hearing in 2019, I spoke about the high-profile examples. As members know, we legislated in relation to this recently. We have had large employers such as Coles, Target, Bunnings and Woolworths, just to mention a few, large-scale restaurants, jewellers—and the list goes on and on. Behind these figures are hardworking people who really just want to make ends meet, put food on the table and get paid what their entitlements say they should be paid.

We took decisive action. In September this year the Criminal Code and Other Legislation (Wage Theft) Amendment Bill was passed. These new laws were born out of the parliamentary inquiry. I am proud that we are the first state in Australia to have occupational wage theft laws. I understand that a

bill before the federal parliament now also includes wage theft provisions and heavy fines. I will be interested to see how the two acts interrelate. It would be lovely to be consulted and briefed on that so we can work through that.

Under the new laws there are maximum penalties. They are balanced against the penalties for workers found to be embarking on theft from their employer. They face the Criminal Code. Employers could steal from workers deliberately. I think this is the terminology. It is not a mistake; it is not an inadvertent, wrong calculation. This is deliberate, systemic wage theft proven under the Criminal Code, which is a high bar. That is the case here in Queensland now and I believe soon it will be in the federal jurisdiction as well. We recognised that something needed to be done.

We have also included an easier way for workers to recoup lost wages from underpayments. We are putting that in very soon. We are working with the tribunals to make sure it is clean, smooth, easy and user friendly. I extend my gratitude to all those brave workers who came forward during the committee inquiry to give us their stories about wage theft and underpayment of wages. Our new laws send a clear message that wage theft is not okay and will not be tolerated. If it is a crime for employees to steal from their employer then the deliberate withholding of wages and underpayments by employers should be also.

This government was the first to criminalise wage theft. We are proud of our record. As I said, I am sure the department will do some work in relation to how the federal bill may interact with our Criminal Code and whether there is anything further we need to do. I am very proud of our record in relation to this matter. Thank you for the question.

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to page 22 of the SDS, can you advise what measures have been taken to address pay equity in the public sector?

Ms GRACE: That is a very important question, member for Rockhampton. I know that you have a particular interest in this. I really welcome the question from you. We are leading the way. It includes Queensland's public sector, of course. We have recently implemented two important changes. All new parents, irrespective of their gender, should now have access to paid parental leave as long as they are the primary caregiver. That has now been implemented through the directive. Whoever is the primary caregiver—a family can choose who becomes the primary caregiver—is entitled to paid parental leave under the directive. That revised directive came into effect on 18 September 2020. It also provides for long spousal leave, so a parent can share birth related leave as the primary caregiver up to the child's first birthday. It is an opportunity for families to choose, and I think it is a great step forward.

The second recent change relates to the removal of hours based barriers to increment pay progression for part-time employees. If you were working part-time, say two days a week—you may be an administration clerk, a teacher, a teacher aide, a business services manager or whatever—you had to work the equivalent of the full-time hours before you incremented your pay. That has now been reversed. The pay and career progression barriers did disproportionately affect women. That was the main group, gender wise, that had these part-time working arrangements, with many women obviously taking career breaks and working part-time due to family responsibility.

In early September this year the QIRC granted the application to remove the hours based increment barriers. The decision amended 17 public sector awards and operates from 2 September 2020. This means that now you progress based on your years of service, not on the full-time-equivalent hours worked.

These very important reforms were developed in consultation with the public sector unions and workers. I thank all those who played a role in developing and implementing these important measures. They have made quite a difference. We have funded any changes to this. Now it means that if you are a very experienced administration officer and you are working part-time, two days a week, your increments go up every two hours on a proportionate basis based on the hours you work, rather than having to do the FTE.

It is a great step forward. I am very happy to see that the directive has been amended with regard to paid parental leave. That is a great question. I know that you have a passion for this sort of thing, so thank you, member for Rockhampton.

Mr O'ROURKE: Also on page 24 of the SDS, can the minister advise of the implementation of the new portable long service leave scheme for community services workers?

Ms GRACE: This is a great scheme and one that I know the ASU in particular had been pushing for for many years. The community services sector is 75 per cent female and is very contract driven. Providers are often limited by the contracts that are awarded them. The ability for these workers to

accrue long service leave is very restricted. We changed legislation to create a portable long service leave scheme. We have appointed the board. I welcome the appointment of ex-commissioner Glenys Fisher as chair of the portable long service leave board. It comes under the auspice of QLeave. QLeave is putting everything in place for this occur.

Just yesterday I got a report from an officer of my department that employers are already starting to register so that workers will, over a period of time, be able to qualify for long service leave. This scheme was a long time in the making and I am very happy. These workers provide so many worthwhile services in the community—alcohol and drug services, child safety and support services, family and domestic violence services, disability services, and mental health and homelessness support, to name a few.

Unfortunately, this industry is often driven by contracts. You can work under one and it then evaporates. You then have to go to another service and break your continuity of service. This scheme will now enable these workers to follow the work, to work in the industry and do their job knowing that if they have been in it for 10 years and they qualify for long service leave they will be able to have their entitlements under the portable long service leave scheme. It is the same for cleaners and construction workers. It allows people to accumulate their service across the sector. There are an estimated 45,000 workers in this sector, and it is estimated that 70 per cent to 75 per cent of them are women. It is a very high percentage.

The scheme will commence on 1 January 2021 and will be administered by QLeave. We are putting everything in place so that employers are registered and everything commences on 1 January 2021. The scheme's board was appointed on 3 September 2020, so they have had the opportunity to get everything right. Since the appointment of its members the board has met twice and is due to meet again in the new year. Already they are putting things in place. In preparation for the commencement of the scheme QLeave has undertaken a broad range of engagement activities, including meeting the peak industry bodies and major employers, and has published a range of targeted communication material. The message is getting out there. It is pleasing that as at 26 November 2020 QLeave had received 176 employer preregistrations, indicating registrations for 21,108 workers. Already it has been very successful. We have 21,000-odd workers being covered where they may not have been covered before.

The building and construction industry portable long service leave scheme was introduced in 1991, followed in 2005 by the cleaning workers scheme. I am very happy to have been the minister to introduce portable long service leave for community services workers. It will be effective on 1 January 2021. I thank the Services Union, who campaigned tirelessly for their members and were integral in the establishment of this important scheme for community services workers here in Queensland.

CHAIR: The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of proposed expenditure for the education, industrial relations and racing portfolios has expired. There was advice being sought from earlier sessions today. Do you have responses to those questions?

Ms GRACE: The director-general will be able to provide those, thank you, Chair.

Mr Cook: I do have some responses in relation to the questions from the member for Moggill about immunisation. There were two components to the question: early childhood and schools. In terms of early childhood, it is a decision for the early childhood education and care provider whether to deny enrolment on the basis of immunisation. The Child Care Subsidy, which is paid by the federal government, is not paid to families whose children are not immunised. Most early childhood education and care services have a policy regarding immunisation. The Department of Education does not collect data on immunisation from early childhood education and care providers. Nor does Queensland Health collect this information. That was the question around child care.

There was also a question around state schools. Queensland state schools do not require children to be vaccinated prior to enrolment. A student's immunisation status is not collected by the department at the time of enrolment. They are the two questions that I think the member for Moggill asked about vaccination and immunisation.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms GRACE: Before we close, I want to place on record my sincere thanks to staff within the Department of Education, the Office of Industrial Relations, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, including QRIC, and Racing Queensland for their assistance in preparing for today. I know it has been a tremendous amount of work and I really am grateful to you all. Also thank you to my ministerial staff for their constant and loyal support, especially my chief of staff, Sharon Durham, who shares the table

here today. Thank you to the chair and members of the committee. What a whirlwind for all of us. It has been a long year and I think we have all done extremely well, so thank you very much for your cooperation. Chair, you have done a marvellous job.

I have always said that it really is a privilege to take part in the estimates process, and I really mean that, even if it was supercompressed this year. What a year it has been. We feel like none of us have had a rest and there is still the rest of the year to go. Thank you all. Have a wonderful festive season and a great break and thank you to everyone for their involvement in the estimates today, spectacularly chaired by you, Chair. Thank you very much for your professionalism in chairing this estimates hearing. Thank you.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I raise a point of order. There were some issues the director-general was going to inquire to find out about before the end of this hearing. I am keen to know whether that has happened. I have two points of order. That is the first one. Do you want to hear my second one or do you want the director to answer that first?

CHAIR: We will let the director-general answer that first, then.

Mr Cook: Thank you, Chair. We do not have that data available, so I am not sure if the minister wishes to take it on notice.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

Ms GRACE: I am not sure what that means—we do not have the data available.

Mr Cook: In the time period.

Ms GRACE: Okay. Just for clarity, exactly what is it that is required?

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. I think there were four or five issues that the director-general said he would try to get back to the committee on before the end of the hearing—with respect to bullying complaints, leave for workplace inspectors and CFMEU complaints. The transcript will record that there were four or five, so the minister could take those on notice and the officers, after they read the transcript, can then come back to the committee—as the Treasurer did in the finance section with me on Monday.

Ms GRACE: I guess the answer from the director-general is that some of those are actually not captured by the department, so I will take them on notice.

Mr BLEIJIE: I do not think he said that.

CHAIR: The minister is being responsive.

Ms GRACE: I think some of it was. Some of these are not broken down the way that the member wants them to be broken down, so we will have a look at the transcript.

CHAIR: The data sets that are available.

Ms GRACE: Those that are available. I will take them on notice and we will provide them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr BLEIJIE: My second point of order, Madam Chair, is with respect to standing order 184, 'Availability of transcripts and tabled documents'. I refer the chair to 184(2), which states—

A Minister or any witness may only table a document at a portfolio committee's estimates hearing with the leave of the committee. I am a visitor to this committee, Madam Chair, but I did seek leave to table a document. You have indicated that the committee will look at that in the break, which you are now about to have.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr BLEIJIE: Through the advice and through the standing order, I understand now that the deputy chair, who is a member of this committee, seeks to table those documents without leave pursuant to the standing orders.

Mr LISTER: And I so table.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you.

CHAIR: I will take advice. Member, I have just received advice that you can table without leave while we take some advice on this. Thank you.

Mr BLEIJIE: The copies are available. They are the same; thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for your wrap-up and thank you for taking the data set questions on notice. The committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice must be provided to the committee secretariat by noon on Monday, 14 December 2020. Minister, on behalf of

the committee, I thank you, the directors-general and all of the officials who have been in attendance today. The committee will now adjourn for a break and the hearing will resume at 2.30 for the examination of the estimates for the portfolios of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development. I wish everyone a very merry Christmas.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair.

Proceedings suspended from 2.04 pm to 2.30 pm.

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


Hon. DE Farmer, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development

Ms E Taylor, Chief of Staff

Department of Employment, Small Business and Training

Mr W Agnew, Director-General

Ms R Howell, Head of Corporate

 **CHAIR:** Just following on from the previous session with regard to the document tabled by the member for Southern Downs, it currently does not comply with standing orders and is being reviewed and we will come back to that later. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the appropriation bill 2020 for the portfolios of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development until 5.15 pm. Non-committee members have sought and been granted leave to participate in the hearing in accordance with standing orders, and I note that we have the shadow minister the member for Buderim, Mr Brent Mickelberg, with us. There may be other members who come in and out of the session. I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in the Legislative Assembly also apply in this hearing, and I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard.

Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, arguments or opinions. I intend to guide proceedings today so that relevant issues can be fully and respectfully explored and to ensure there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members of the committee. I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at my discretion as chair or by order of the committee. I ask that mobile phones now be switched off or set to silent mode. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of employment, small business, training and skills development open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Ms FARMER: Thank you very much, Chair. I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I grew up on Bayali country. I thank members for the great privilege of being here to answer your questions today. There has never been a more important time for employment, small business and training in Queensland. The COVID-19 pandemic has made 2020 a year like no other in Queensland's history. The Premier's strong stance on borders has kept Queenslanders safe. Now, the Premier's plan for recovery will restore the health of our economy, and my portfolio areas will play an important part in that recovery. They comprise critical elements of the sixth Queensland economic recovery plan and they are clearly identified as priorities in the Queensland government's objectives for the community, which the Premier tabled in parliament last week.

The Palaszczuk government's economic recovery plan is already bearing fruit. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that has more people in jobs now than before the pandemic. In the last two months 61,000 jobs have been created, which is more than 1,000 jobs a day. That is a trajectory we want to continue, and this year's budget's investment of \$1.4 billion for this year alone in employment, small business and training will make sure that we stay on track. Small business represents 97 per cent of businesses statewide. They employ around 44 per cent of Queensland's workforce, which is nearly

one million people. If small business is going well, Queensland is going well. But we know that small business was very hard hit when the pandemic was declared, which is why this government responded very quickly with a package of initiatives including grants, no interest loans and relief on matters such as payroll and land tax and electricity charges and provided a 24/7 system of advice and support, including access to a small business commissioner.

In this year's budget we have reiterated our support for small business with our \$140 million Big Plans for Small Business package, a combination of grants, mentoring, targeted investment and practical support aimed at helping small businesses get bigger, reach new markets and employ more Queenslanders. But we also must make sure that we have the right people with the right skills going into the right jobs, and how do we do that? We invest a record billion dollars this year alone into training. This is an unprecedented investment in our workforce, but we see it as an investment in the state's future. Our \$200 million for future skills initiatives will get our workforce ready for the jobs of tomorrow. We are focused on training in the industries where there will be jobs—industries with the greatest potential for growth like defence, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, aquaculture, renewables and health.

We are investing across the state so everyone gets their chance, especially those who often miss out. We are investing in infrastructure and making sure our TAFEs get the resources they need to deliver for Queenslanders no matter who they are or where they are across the state. We are offering pre-apprenticeship support, creating a social enterprise jobs fund and creating a First Nations training strategy. I am very proud to say that we are expanding our free TAFE and graduates initiatives to anyone under 25. Some 26,000 young people have already benefited from those great programs which we made available to Queenslanders under 21 and we expect another 37,000 will reap the rewards of extending it to those under 25.

Before I close, I want to reiterate the priority this government places on the integrity of our training system. It is absolutely critical that Queenslanders can have confidence in the sector, which is why this government has taken recent claims about bait advertising in the training industry so seriously. Members may recall that in August of this year my predecessor, the member for Waterford, tasked the Queensland Training Ombudsman—and I welcome him today in the chamber—with investigating claims made by the *Courier-Mail* that unscrupulous companies were advertising vacant positions when in fact they were actually recruiting for people to sign up to training courses. The ombudsman delivered his report to me last week, and I thank him for his work. I now table the government's response to that report, accepting five of the recommendations and the sixth in principle while we canvass with stakeholders. There is a copy for all members. I am happy to go into further detail later, but let me be clear: this government will not stand for fraudsters or scammers in the training industry and someone who is looking for a job should not have to worry about being scammed by a dodgy training provider. We simply will not put up with it. Chair, I table the report as well.

This budget focuses on core Labor values, helping create jobs and giving Queenslanders the skills to fill those jobs. It is a budget that will deliver for many years to come, and this is because giving people training and skills changes lives. I welcome your questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Minister, are you seeking leave to table both documents?

Ms FARMER: I do seek leave; thank you.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted. The committee will consider the examination of estimates for the employment and small business portfolio areas and start with non-government questions. I go to the member for Southern Downs.

Mr LISTER: I refer the first question and all subsequent questions in this first block to the member for Buderim.

CHAIR: Certainly. Member for Buderim, you have the call.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. My first question is to the minister. With reference to your answer to question on notice 12, I want to clarify: is the purpose of the department's Just Transition Group to develop and oversee a pooled redundancy scheme for workers in coal-fired power stations and associated mines?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. The Just Transition Group, as the member will know, was established in 2018 to develop policies to ensure workers in communities have economic security and employment outcomes. We know that the energy industry is facing enormous change and opportunity, including around emerging technologies and renewable energy sources. We have one of

the youngest fleets of coal-powered generators in the country which means we have time to plan ahead for job-creating opportunities like hydrogen. The government, as you know, has a really strong track record when it comes to achieving our renewable energy target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030. Over the last five years we have developed 42 large-scale renewable energy projects across the state representing more than \$8 billion in investment and more than 6,500 construction jobs, and we are on track to increase our renewable energy generation in Queensland to 20 per cent this year. The opportunities that these present for Queensland are a clear priority for the Queensland government as reflected in the appointment of a dedicated minister for hydrogen, and I congratulate the members for Rockhampton and Redlands who have been appointed champions for hydrogen. I do not know if the member for Stafford has been similarly appointed, but clearly we have a priority in that area.

Identifying and planning for the skills that we are going to need in an industry like that is going to be critical for the hydrogen industry. It is important that we position Queensland for a successful economic recovery. That means capitalising on emerging technologies and new opportunities to create jobs. That group is going to work really closely with the new hydrogen portfolio and with other relevant agencies and stakeholders. The member might know that it consists of four public sector employees with specialist expertise pertinent to the group's objectives, including diverse stakeholder engagement with Australian state and local governments, industries and peak bodies; economic modelling and impact assessment across a range of sectors, including rail, port, water, energy and other infrastructure; consultancy and policy experience, including renewable energy and regional economic development; and financial and business analysis, including strategic and legislative reviews and utility pricing.

The team's ED position has been vacant since March 2020 and the department has elected not to fill this position as part of its short-term response to the savings and debt plan. The group currently reports directly to the deputy director-general, which I think is an indication of the importance of the work that it is carrying out.

Since its inception it has undertaken really extensive research and community engagement, consulting with over 100 stakeholders, including business and industry groups and workers and energy generators and academics, including regional community engagement projects covering Cairns, Gladstone, Rockhampton and Townsville. It has supported the establishment of work on the Energy Skills Advisory Committee. Input from the committee and from stakeholders is going to be absolutely critical to inform how government delivers on our commitment for a renewable energy future in Queensland with a focus on skills and training opportunities. Part of the work that is really key in this portfolio is that we are identifying what the industries are for the future and that we are doing the planning and the implementation of the training and skills that are going to be required to meet those industries.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. Will the director-general advise whether the Just Transition group advisory committee has been established?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. The Energy Skills Advisory Committee was formed in August of 2019. That was formed initially for a 12-month period and was chaired by the previous director-general.

Mr MICKELBERG: Who are the appointed members and how many meetings have been held for the Just Transition group advisory committee?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. That was chaired by the previous director-general. I believe I have the information here. The Energy Skills Advisory Committee members is quite an extensive list of members. If you would like me to run through that I am happy to do so. I have the University of Queensland Centre for Policy Futures, Lynette Molyneux; Mr Peter Ong, state secretary of the Electrical Trades Union; Matt Burnett, mayor of Gladstone Regional Council; Michael Clifford, assistant general secretary of the Queensland Council of Unions; Stephen Smyth, district president of the CFMEU Queensland; Jennifer Thomas, branch secretary of the Services Union; Katherine Drew, senior people and culture manager from CleanCo; Kim Best, head of human resources from CS Energy; John Grimes, chief executive officer of Smart Energy Council, the previous director-general as chair, Stephanie Jolly, Executive Director, Strategic Energy Policy, Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, the former department; Ms Michelle Bower, deputy director-general of State Development; Dr Karen Hussey, deputy director-general of the then environment, policy and programs from the environment and science department; Ms Lisa Wilkinson, principal consultant from industrial relations, public sector, Office of Industrial Relations; Mr Dennis Molloy, Assistant Under Treasurer from Queensland Treasury; and Mr Joshua Rayner, executive director from Jobs Queensland.

In relation to the number of meetings, I understand they met four times during the 12 months, its final meeting in August of 2020.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. In relation to question on notice 15-10 from 2019 the former minister stated that the executive director role was needed for ‘the appropriate leadership, stakeholder management and technical capabilities required to effectively lead the government’s commitment to a just transition.’ Why are these requirements no longer needed?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I do not have a copy of that particular question on notice with me, but the history I have been advised of with that particular executive director position was it became vacant in March of this year. That obviously was at the time we were also entering or were already into the pandemic. There was consideration of resources in the department. The core resources of that team remained, and remained engaged in the work of that group and as part of our consideration for the savings and debt plan and other considerations in relation to how the government was managing its responses to COVID-19, that position was considered not to be filled at the time. But as the minister mentioned, we have that group reporting to our deputy director-general in the department given the prominence of the work that it does.

Mr MICKELBERG: A follow-up: just to be clear, the executive director’s role was considered to be redundant to capacity. There was no requirement to continue it; is that a fair assessment?

Mr Agnew: I was not present in the department at that point in time so I can really only just relay to you my understanding of the situation at the time. I understand that it was a consideration of the priorities of the day and that there was a diversification of all levels of leadership in departments, as I was a director-general in a previous department at that point in time.

Ms FARMER: I understand the question from the member for Buderim was directly to the director-general, but if I could actually add to that response.

CHAIR: Are you comfortable with that?

Mr MICKELBERG: With some latitude I am happy with that.

Ms FARMER: Thank you so much. Obviously neither the director-general nor I were there at the time, but my understanding is that that was a short-term response—and the director-general may correct me—to the savings and debt plan. I cannot reiterate enough that this is a really, really important team working in a really, really important industry and I was very pleased to hear that this team is reporting directly to a deputy director-general. I think that signifies the importance of this work.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a follow-up along the same line. Will the director-general advise the total amount of termination payments paid to the former executive director and now member for Bundamba, Mr Lance McCallum?

Mr Agnew: I have been advised there was a resignation, there was no severance payment.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, I have a follow-up a question in relation to the executive director role given your comments we have just heard: is it your intention to fill that role now that that short-term need has presumably lapsed?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. It is not appropriate for me to make decisions about operational matters, nor to direct the director-general in that way, but in my discussions with the director-general we have both agreed that that is an incredibly important team and it will be given all the support that it needs to function appropriately.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a separate question in relation to question on notice 16. My question is to the minister. With reference to your answer to question on notice 16, of the almost 500 individuals placed in work, how many are currently employed?

Ms FARMER: I do not even know if I am able to answer that question. I will have to take advice on that and get back to you as soon as we possibly can, hopefully before this hearing is over.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear, are you taking that on notice?

Ms FARMER: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you taking it on notice or are you going to seek advice and advise if you are taking that on notice?

Ms FARMER: We will seek advice first, but we will endeavour to get it back to you before the end of the session. As I said, I am not sure if we are actually able to answer that question.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a question to the Director-General. How many jobs are currently advertised on the Jobs Finder portal?

Mr Agnew: That is a point of detail I am not sure that I could get to quickly. I would also seek the ability to take advice and try to get back to you before the end of the hearing.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how much has been paid to recruitment companies in relation to the Jobs Finder portal?

Mr Agnew: I have been advised that in relation to that portal we do not pay recruitment agencies. We do pay RCSA, the Recruitment, Consulting and Staffing Association Limited.

Mr MICKELBERG: How much has been paid to RCSA?

Mr Agnew: The amount paid is \$431,760.23.

Mr MICKELBERG: According to the department's contract register, a payment of \$8½ million was made on 12 May 2020 to RCSA. What was that payment for?

Mr Agnew: I might take advice on that and get back to you before the end of the session, if I may.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Mr MICKELBERG: To clarify, where the minister is going to get back to us subsequently and if she does not, I ask that under standing order 183(4) if we do not receive a response that it is considered that the minister is declining to answer that question.

Ms FARMER: Chair, if I could clarify. I think I have already stated quite clearly that I do not know whether I am able to answer that question. I will endeavour to inform the committee if I am able to answer it. If I am, I will answer it. If not, I will provide a response to the committee which is that I am unable to provide that information.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for clarifying.

Ms FARMER: I hope it is clear that I will have responded to the committee; I will not have declined to respond.

CHAIR: It is indeed clear. Thank you, Minister.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how much has been spent on advertising the Jobs Finder portal?

Mr Agnew: I have been advised that \$200,000 has been spent on advertising that portal.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what were the total IT expenses associated with developing the Jobs Finder portal?

Mr Agnew: The IT costs associated with the portal were \$205,860.23.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, will you advise how many complaints were received in the last financial year regarding departmental staff or contractors in relation to complex conduct and performance matters, fraud and other misconduct?

Mr Agnew: I will take that under advice and try to get back to you by the end of the session, if that is okay, Chair?

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MICKELBERG: Along the same line of questioning, Director-General, can you advise how many fraud related offences have been investigated regarding recipients of grant programs, employment programs or any other subsidies provided by the department over the past financial year?

Mr Agnew: In relation to the past financial year, 2019-20, the department identified suspected fraud to the amount of approximately \$3.29 million. This amount represents approximately 0.38 per cent of the program funding of the department for that period. The breakdown in terms of referrals to the QPS, the police force, in terms of any suspected fraud—and, of course, it is our policy to do so—on Skills Assure there were three referrals, for small business adaptation grants there was one referral and on Back to Work there were five referrals.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how many of the offences that were identified and subsequently referred were successfully prosecuted?

Mr Agnew: I do not believe I have that information to hand. I might also seek to get advice.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how much of that \$3.29 million was recouped by the Queensland government?

Mr Agnew: Again, we will have to take that on advice and seek to get back to you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Mr MICKELBERG: Along the same lines, Director-General, can you please provide—and I suspect you will need to take this on notice as well—a breakdown by amount and program of all the fraud related offences.

CHAIR: I am sorry, but could you restate the question?

Mr MICKELBERG: Could the director-general provide a breakdown by amount and by the nature of the program for all of the fraud related offences you have provided detail of with respect to the number of referrals, that is, the quantum of those instances of fraud and what they relate to?

Mr Agnew: I have the aggregate amount for each program available to me right now. For the three referrals that we made in reference to the Skills Assure program, it was \$3.21 million. For the small business adaptation grant program, the one referral was—I will check the numbers, I am sorry, and get back to you.

Mr MICKELBERG: No worries.

Mr SULLIVAN: Can I raise an issue, Chair? I took it from what you said, Director-General, that some of these cases are ongoing prosecutions. Can I warn against giving detail—

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, Chair. Does the member have a point of order, because he has not raised a point of order?

Mr SULLIVAN: On sub judice, if there are ongoing matters I wonder about the level of detail that we go into with individual matters, that is, the small number of matters that I heard the Director-General say that are, by definition, ongoing prosecutions, which is what the member asked for. I am seeking guidance from the chair about that issue.

CHAIR: I provide guidance to the member for Buderim, the minister and the director-general in answering any questions that may be impacted by sub judice and caution you in the response that you provide.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Madam Chair. Can I clarify that under the sub judice principles in standing orders it is only those persons who are currently under a charge who are protected by the sub judice principle and, therefore, other investigations, such as those referred to by the Clerk on Monday when he gave evidence, are fair game?

CHAIR: I have provided guidance and everybody should be very well aware of the sub judice principle.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you for your guidance, Chair. I note the minister's opening comments with respect to ensuring the integrity of the training system, hence the line of questioning. My question is to the minister. With reference to question on notice 11, Minister, of the \$1.748 million that has been paid out to fraudulent Back to Work applicants, how much was lost in the past financial year?

Ms FARMER: During the life of the Back to Work program, \$1.748 million of grant funding has been referred to law enforcement agencies due to suspected fraudulent activity, which represents 0.45 per cent of total program funding, which was \$383 million. That is less than one per cent. Suspected fraudulent activity has decreased each year of the Back to Work program's life due to the very proactive forward prevention and control strategies already in place but which I have flagged very clearly we intend to make increasingly robust. Our strategies have prevented almost \$7 million being paid on suspected fraudulent applications. I can talk about some of the controls that we have put in place if the member is interested. Clearly, we do have a very strong interest in that.

Mr MICKELBERG: I would just like an answer to the question which was how much was lost in the past financial year.

Ms FARMER: I have given you the cost since 2016. I will take that on notice. We may have that information with us right now, but I will endeavour to get it back to you before the end of the hearing.

CHAIR: We will shift to government questions now. Minister, COVID-19 has been such a serious and huge event this year for everybody, especially small business. What has the government done to help and what will it do in the future as part of the government's economic recovery plan?

Ms FARMER: The Palaszczuk government has led the nation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We were the first jurisdiction to declare a health emergency and we backed that with assistance for those worst affected by the health and economic crisis. Because we got the health response right, it meant we could get on with delivering on our own plan for economic recovery. That included moving quickly to assist small business because the Palaszczuk government backs small business. We know small business is what drives our economy. We know it represents 97 per cent of businesses across this state. They employ almost one million Queenslanders, as I said earlier, which is almost three out of every five private sector workers. Small businesses are the heart and hub of local communities. They are our neighbours, our friends and our family members. They create jobs and they make our communities stronger.

When they were hurting when COVID-19 first hit, we helped them. This included \$196 million in grants supporting almost 20,000 businesses, \$1 billion no-interest loan scheme supporting 7,000 businesses and 86,000 Queensland jobs and \$950 million in payroll tax relief.

To give some context to that assistance, 28,600 businesses are registered for payroll tax in Queensland. More than 16,700 have been approved for the payroll tax holiday refund, which is about 58 per cent and, in addition, almost 11,000 businesses have deferrals in place meaning they will not have to pay any payroll tax payments this calendar year. Most eligible businesses received money into their accounts quickly within 24 to 48 hours of applying for those refunds and holidays.

On top of payroll tax relief, there was also land tax relief, a tax exemption for JobKeeper payments and we also established a Small Business Commissioner who has fielded thousands of requests for help and navigated tenants and landlords through very tricky leasing disputes. It has been such a successful initiative that we are now making that position permanent.

These were all vital measures, especially during the restrictions caused by the pandemic. They helped tens of thousands of small businesses when they needed it most. The help we provide small business during their recovery will be just as important now as it was then. We must target potential growth areas and job generators. That is exactly what we have done with the \$140 million Big Plans for Small Business package that we announced during the election, which is about supporting private investment. It is about helping businesses reach their potential. If they have a good idea, we will back them. If they are looking at tapping into new markets, we will help them. If they want to employ more people, we will make it easier for them to do so.

Our strategy will include an initial \$100 million business investment fund from the \$500 million Backing Queensland Business Investment Fund. It will allow businesses to expand into new markets, including export markets. It will give those Queenslanders who want to upsize their business the opportunity to do just that.

We are also investing \$30 million to increase skills and capability, focusing on priority industry sectors and those small businesses which look set to grow quickly and can employ as many people as possible. We will target our regions—we have a number of regional members on this panel, so I am sure they would be very pleased to hear that—as well as our young Queenslanders, women, social enterprises, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. These grants will turn great ideas into action which means growth in jobs. Business owners who may have been thinking about expanding will have confidence to do so from this package.

As I mentioned, the Small Business Commissioner will become permanent. I acknowledge the chair's very close interest in this role. Hundreds of businesses and landlords have already been helped during the pandemic, saving them time, money and stress. I want to acknowledge the role that the commissioner, Maree Adshead, and her team have played. We receive excellent feedback on a constant basis about the help she has been able to provide.

We are going to reinvigorate the Small Business Advisory Council. We will develop a business-ready website, continue Small Business Month and the Mentoring for Growth programs. We will undertake a study to link government procurement of new fibre networks with increased access for small businesses to high speed broadband in the regions. Certainly as I travelled around the state, as many of these members will attest, this is a critical issue which is raised very regularly. We will establish a summertime task force to identify ways we can make best use of Queensland's great weather, facilitate usage of outdoor areas, on-street dining and revitalise our CBDs. We are going to turn the big ideas of our small businesses into reality which means jobs and a strong economy.

CHAIR: I also congratulate the Small Business Commissioner on her reappointment. I think it is a very important role in our community.

Mr SULLIVAN: Can the minister please update the committee on the government's work with stakeholders like CCIQ and how it is benefiting small businesses?

Ms FARMER: This is a really critical question. I want to thank CCIQ, Australian Industry Group and the many, many other stakeholders who are part of working together to make the improvements to Queensland's economy that we very much need. In fact, I thank the Small Business Commissioner for allowing me to sit in on her small business industry roundtable the other day where the likes of the Master Grocers Australia Limited, National Retail Association, Queensland Hotels Association—30 or 40 of some of these peak bodies that have played such a strong role.

I particularly give a shout-out to CCIQ. Stephen Tait, the CEO of CCIQ, was one of the first people I phoned when I became minister, and I thank him for inviting me to sit on one of his weekly Zoom meetings, a couple of weeks ago, I think it was, where we talked to 30 or 40 of the chambers of commerce from across the state—from rural and remote Queensland, regional Queensland and from SEQ—and it was fantastic to hear their questions and to hear of their experiences. We must link in with them very closely as we go forward so we know how their communities are experiencing the COVID and post COVID economy.

I know that CCIQ, along with the Australian Industry Group, was a member of the Premier's Queensland Industry Recovery Alliance, which was established to assist government business and industry to implement response actions to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. The Premier announced last night that she would be reconvening that alliance.

I also want to thank CCIQ for the work that they have done with this department—certainly with me since I have become minister—to put to government what some of the suggestions and proposals are for their members, as I have mentioned.

We are all about everybody needs to come up with solutions. Everybody needs to be responsive. I acknowledge that some of the ideas in their proposed recovery plan included things which we have actually delivered on, including grants and no-interest loans, mentoring and tailored support through the Mentoring for Growth program, free micro-credentials training for small business available through TAFE, 25 per cent small and medium enterprise procurement target, and we have also committed to expediting payment of all valid invoices for suppliers and service providers impacted by COVID-19. Some of these were matters that we were already working on, but it is fantastic to do those things together.

The Director-General and I, very early next year, will be working with CCIQ to go around the state and talk to businesses. We did fund CCIQ to establish a regional network of eight regional stakeholder managers in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton—I know that the member for Rockhampton is very happy about that—Wide Bay, the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Redlands and the Gold Coast. I know the great work of the chair with the Regional Jobs Committee in Redlands. I was speaking to Stephen Tait the other day about how successful these have been, particularly in response to the 25 per cent SME procurement targets. I look forward to working with CCIQ—I thank them for their frank input—the Australian Industry Group and all of the stakeholders who are so keenly part of what we need to do over the next four years.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, can you please update the committee on the government's Big Plans for Small Business budget announcement, specifically measures including the reinvigoration of the Small Business Advisory Council and any plans for a new small business strategy?

Ms FARMER: I have known the member for Stafford for a very long time. I know that way before you became a member this is something that is very close to your heart. You are a very active member of your local community. There is no more compelling proof of the \$140 million of the Big Plans for Small Business strategy which is being developed than the feedback we have had from stakeholders. This plan has been put together on the basis of what stakeholders have told us that they need and what individual businesses need.

The COVID-19 pandemic required us to shift our priority to immediate responses to support small businesses. I have detailed the significant response that we made. We are now turning our focus to a long-term plan to get small business humming. That is why we need to fine-tune and tweak the approach we actually started in November 2019 to develop a small business strategy. The member might recall our Advancing Small Business Queensland Strategy which finishes at the end of this year. We now need to move into our next phase. The small business strategy will be part of the Big Plans for Small Business, which is the funding of \$100 million, the grants program and those other aspects.

I spoke before about the director-general and me travelling around the state to talk to small businesses. We know the landscape is changing all the time. I think it is absolutely imperative that we are in touch. COVID-19 delivers surprises all the time. We need to be closely attuned to the needs of small business. That is why I again thank stakeholders for keeping in touch so closely with their own networks.

We have had the Small Business Advisory Council for quite some years now. I have had the great pleasure—I think I knew half of them before I became minister—of speaking to a number of those on the advisory council. I know that they are very anxious that their role is finely attuned to what the COVID and post-COVID economy requires of them. That is a subject that the director-general and I will be investigating when we go around the state.

I have mentioned that the position of Small Business Commissioner is going to be permanent. The current commissioner has done an outstanding job. Last week we passed the COVID-19 bill which allowed us to extend her appointment so she can still operate during the time it takes to make the significant appointment to that permanent position. We are very much looking forward to her continuing in that role now and for her appointment perhaps being extended.

We know that our Business Queensland website was incredibly helpful to businesses throughout COVID. It has had 32,000 hits since the beginning of COVID. We want to update that so we are finely attuned to the needs of businesses and people who want to start businesses during this period we are in. Our Mentoring for Growth program has been incredibly helpful. We think that we should be telling businesses how incredibly helpful they are. I would love to see every business access our Mentoring for Growth program. We will be very much promoting that. That is part of our big \$140 million strategy.

CHAIR: The program comes highly recommended by our Redlands QYAC team.

Ms FARMER: Excellent to hear.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, can you please update the committee on the rollout of the Small Business COVID-19 Adaptation grants and the impact they have had on small business during COVID-19?

Ms FARMER: The government has positioned Queensland well ahead of other states in response to COVID-19. We were the first to declare a public health emergency. We acted really quickly to keep Queenslanders safe. Our foresight and rapid action meant we were best positioned to begin the economic recovery. A key feature of our economic recovery plan was and continues to be the Small Business COVID-19 Adaptation Grant Program.

This \$196 million grants program supports small businesses that have been forced into hibernation or have had to significantly restructure or change their business operations. The grants were between \$2,000 and \$10,000. I know that the member knows about this because I have seen the number of Facebook posts he has done with small businesses that have actually benefitted from these grants. All members would have been delighted when they knew that their small businesses were able to avail themselves of these grants. The grants were not only about the money but were all about encouraging and supporting small businesses to turn their minds to how they could adapt very quickly to a new environment and the fact that they just could not keep going as they were. As a local member, I have heard many of those stories.

The grants have been used for things like business operational costs such as utilities, council rates and rent, telecommunications charges, insurance fees and licensing or franchise fees. Round 1 was published in May of this year. The response was so enormous that we had to close that round within five days. It was very much oversubscribed—so much so that we funded a second round. It has totalled almost \$200 million in funding.

We had 11,700 applications in just five days when round 1 opened. We ended up approving 9,163 applications. In the second round we specifically allocated 50 per cent to regional small businesses. As at 30 November 2020, the regional round has supported 10,747 businesses. We have 6,875 grants in South-East Queensland. These are very important grants. I have certainly had many small businesses say to me that they literally could not have survived without us.

I gave a big shout-out last week to Chris Jones from Three Restaurant Bar and Grill. He was the very first small business I went to visit with my minister hat on. I have spent much of my time as a local MP looking at the needs of local small businesses. He was my first one as the minister. He is in Caloundra so the member for Caloundra was very happy to hear that. He told me great stories about how he had completely changed the way he operates and that his business is doing the best it ever has. He was absolutely delighted and could not praise the grants program enough.

CHAIR: We will move to the member for South Brisbane.

Dr MacMAHON: Director-general, last estimates the member for Maiwar clarified with Minister Fentiman that the Just Transition Group was focused only on workers in the coal and gas power sectors who might lose their jobs. Has the focus expanded to consider those workers in the resources sector, and particularly export industries like CSG, thermal coal and metallurgical coal, who face uncertain futures in the face of climate change, or does it remain focused only on the domestic energy sector?

Mr Agnew: I refer also to some of the statements made previously by the minister around the broad focus of that group. The skill sets that they have are quite broad in order for them to be able to do the work they are doing, which is a broad focus on economic transition in Queensland. What that group has done since 2018 is very extensive research and community engagement with a lot of stakeholders and business industry groups, workers, energy generators, academics and regional engagement projects throughout Queensland, including in Cairns, Gladstone, Rockhampton and Townsville. There was a committee broadly established and supported by that group as well.

Dr MacMAHON: Just to clarify, so only focused still on those workers in the energy sector rather than the export and resources sector.

CHAIR: I think the minister has been responsive and has answered that question.

Ms FARMER: Member for Buderim, I have an answer to one of your earlier questions, if you would like to hear it.

Mr MICKELBERG: Fire away.

Ms FARMER: This was about suspected fraud for 2019-20 for Back to Work which was \$34,000. Five cases were referred to the Queensland Police Service. Zero funding was paid to those applicants because they were caught early by the systems we put in place.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, you just mentioned \$34,000. In your answer to the question on notice, you mentioned \$1,748 million. What is the discrepancy? Does \$34,000 relate to the amount that was referred? Is that what you are saying?

Ms FARMER: The figure that I gave you before was since 2016, from memory. I think you asked specifically about the last financial year. I might have mentioned earlier that the amount has been decreasing since the inception of the program because we have put an increasing number of checkpoints in place.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a question to the director-general also on Back to Work and the fraud related issues in that program. Can the director-general provide a geographic breakdown of where the fraudulent incidents occurred and how much was lost expressed as SA4 regions?

Mr Agnew: Just for clarity, you are referring to last financial year?

Mr MICKELBERG: No, the incidents that constitute the \$1.784 million referred to in response to the question on notice.

Mr Agnew: I do not believe I have that information to hand and would need to seek advice from officials from the department and seek to get back to you before the end of the session.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a follow-up question with respect to the Just Transition Group. Director-General, you mentioned earlier that the last meeting of the Just Transition Group Advisory Committee occurred in August 2020? Is that correct?

Mr Agnew: That is my understanding.

Mr MICKELBERG: When will the next meeting be?

Mr Agnew: That committee, as I have been advised, was established for a 12-month period, so there is not currently a meeting planned at this point in time. That is my understanding.

Mr MICKELBERG: Does the committee then cease to exist given it has been a 12-month period?

Mr Agnew: Its initial remit—as I say, its original term—was to exist and operate for a 12-month period.

Mr MICKELBERG: For clarity, it no longer exists?

Mr Agnew: There is not currently another scheduled meeting of that group.

Mr MICKELBERG: That is a yes. I have a question to the minister, with respect. Minister, can you tell me which SA4 regions have the highest and second highest youth unemployment rates in Queensland?

Ms FARMER: I do not have those matters to hand with me, but we will get back to you before the end of this hearing.

Mr MICKELBERG: Surely that is a fairly important area to be across.

CHAIR: Member for Buderim—

Ms FARMER: I raise a point of order, Madam Chair. I resent the—

CHAIR: I was just about to address your point of order. There is no need for that sort of commentary.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, the region with the second worst youth unemployment rate in Queensland at 25.2 per cent is Toowoomba. Why is Toowoomba precluded from both the regional and South-East Queensland Back to Work programs?

Ms FARMER: The Back to Work program is an incredibly important program. I will just get my notes here. It has supported more than 23,800 Queenslanders to find jobs, supporting over 11,200 Queensland businesses, most of them being small businesses. It has been absolutely invaluable in getting people back to work. As the member will know, we provided an extension to the program which has given businesses \$20,000 if they hire an eligible apprentice or trainee. Since the start of the program, there has been a 69.2 per cent retention rate of employees for the 26-week payment and a 42 per cent retention rate for the 52-week payment.

Mr MICKELBERG: I raise a point of order, Chair, on relevance. My question was quite specific with respect to Toowoomba and why Toowoomba was not included in either the regional or the SEQ Back to Work program.

CHAIR: Member, the minister is being responsive to the question in terms of Back to Work and is coming to a conclusion.

Ms FARMER: I am getting to that. This is a really important program. It is providing jobs and opportunities for jobs right across Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: Just not in Toowoomba.

Ms FARMER: As the member will know, it was available to eligible employees in regional Queensland and in some local government areas of SEQ that continued to experience significant labour market challenges including Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Moreton Bay, Scenic Rim and Somerset.

The existing program boundaries were retained as part of the program extension. The department is closely monitoring the economic conditions as well as any federal incentives including JobKeeper and JobMaker for any impacts they might have on the Back to Work program. This has been a very fluid work environment. This monitoring will continue as a number of these federal incentives cease their support.

We received a \$70 million extension to the Back to Work program. As I said, we will be closely monitoring what is happening over the next six months. I referred in parliament last week to my concern about JobKeeper ceasing in March. As the member would know, this is one of the really important initiatives in this whole sector. I note that the Leader of the Opposition has expressed some concern about JobKeeper ceasing in March.

Mr MICKELBERG: I raise a point of order again under standing order 118 on relevance. My question was very specific with respect to Back to Work in Toowoomba. Nowhere in that question was JobKeeper whatsoever.

CHAIR: The minister has been talking about the regions as they apply to Back to Work, and I will allow the minister to continue.

Mr MICKELBERG: And she has now well and truly deviated.

Ms FARMER: I think it is very difficult to speak about the labour force market without talking about the significant initiatives which are operating in that sector. Perhaps the member is not across all of those things. Back to Work, JobKeeper, JobMaker, JobSeeker and Skilling Queenslanders for Work are all really important initiatives. If any one of them were to cease, it would completely change the dynamics of the labour force market.

I have made very clear that Back to Work is a significant investment in this marketplace. We have helped thousands and thousands of Queenslanders get back to work and have training opportunities. We will be monitoring those conditions over the next six months. Anyone who thinks that the labour force is not going to change when JobKeeper ceases literally has no idea what this all about. I am asking the member for Buderim, since he is on the same team as Scott Morrison, the Prime Minister, who is the person who will be making decisions about JobKeeper, to pick up the phone and speak to his mate and make sure that he is aware—

Mr MICKELBERG: I am sure the Premier has a voice in national cabinet. Is she incapable of exercising her voice?

CHAIR: Cease your interjections.

Ms FARMER: I urge the member to become aware of the influence that JobKeeper is going to have on the labour market.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what constitutes a significant labour market problem? Is 25 per cent youth unemployment considered a significant labour market problem?

Mr SULLIVAN: Chair, that is literally asking for an opinion.

Mr MICKELBERG: Does the department have a definition of a significant labour market problem?

Mr Agnew: The department does not have a definition like that that I am aware of.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a follow-up question. Director-General, with one in four youth unemployed in Toowoomba—which is one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation—has the department considered expanding the Back to Work program to alleviate Toowoomba's youth unemployment crisis?

Mr Agnew: The department has an ongoing role to monitor labour force data and to provide advice to the government. Meanwhile our responsibility is to administer the programs as they are put to us and approved by government.

Mr MICKELBERG: Has the department considered including Toowoomba in the Back to Work program?

Mr Agnew: As the minister outlined, the department is monitoring all of the labour force regional data when it becomes available right across the state and obviously in the south-east corner as well.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is to the minister. The former employment minister Grace Grace stated, 'Youth unemployment is always difficult to address. I don't know that there's much you can change structurally.' Is this still a position of the Palaszczuk Labor government?

Ms FARMER: I find it almost astonishing that a member of the LNP should ask this question.

Mr MICKELBERG: Is it the position of the Palaszczuk Labor government?

CHAIR: Member for Buderim, I will give the minister latitude in responding to this question.

Ms FARMER: There was no investment by the LNP whatsoever in skilling and training going to the last election, no recognition whatsoever of the importance of skills and training to ensure that young people have jobs. That someone from that side of politics should ask this question is absolutely astounding to me.

Mr MICKELBERG: The previous minister had given up on youth unemployment. Is it the position of the Palaszczuk Labor government?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Buderim, cease your interjections. The minister is being responsive to your question.

Ms FARMER: This government has a strong track record in creating jobs. It has a strong track record in skills and training—

Mr MICKELBERG: Why, then, does Queensland have the highest youth unemployment rate in Australia?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Buderim, I do not want to have to warn you. You must cease your interjections or I will warn you under the standing orders. Please cease.

Ms FARMER: This government has an absolutely astounding record on investment in providing jobs for Queenslanders right across the board.

Mr MICKELBERG: Youth unemployment is at 15 per cent.

CHAIR: Member, you are warned under the standing orders. I asked you to cease your interjections. Please cease.

Ms FARMER: This government has invested \$8 billion since the beginning of this year into Queensland's economic recovery. In the last two months we have restored all of the jobs that were lost during the pandemic and then some. That is 1,000 jobs a day over the last two months. When the LNP was in government their unemployment rate in that period was only 0.1 of a per cent lower than it is now, and we are in the middle of a global pandemic. It was the highest rate under them in 11 years.

I want to talk about some of the things that we have put in place to address youth unemployment in particular. We are seeing encouraging signs that youth unemployment prospects in Queensland are improving based on ATO payroll data. Can I just say that any percentage is not acceptable, but we need to see that rate going down. According to Single Touch Payroll data from the ATO, the number of Queensland employees aged under 20 increased 18.3 per cent from the middle of March 2020 to mid-November 2020, which is above the national average of 16.5 per cent.

Our economic recovery plan is unashamedly focused on job creation. This includes over \$7 billion in measures to support Queenslanders. In order to get young people into decent jobs we need to provide them with the skills and training they need to secure these opportunities. I note that the LNP opposed pretty much every single one of our major initiatives. They wanted to close down Back to Work. When they came into government they closed down Skilling Queenslanders for Work. There was no plan for either of those programs in their election policy. In fact, they barely mentioned skills and training. It is astounding that there is this false outrage from the member for Buderim over here.

We have free TAFE for year 12 graduates and free apprenticeships for under 25s. That assisted over 26,000 young Queenslanders. We have just extended that to over 25s, which we believe will assist another 37,000 young Queenslanders. More than 18,600 young people have secured jobs as a result of participating in Skilling Queenslanders for Work—a program that their side of the House opposed. I bet it did not stop the member for Buderim from going to all of the graduations from his Skilling Queenslanders for Work projects. I hope he did go along to them. I bet he loved every single one of them, because it is impossible not to go to one of those graduations and hear stories about how they have changed people's lives with high prospects of employment. I think there is a 73 per cent likelihood that you will get employment after a Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative, and they opposed it.

Back to Work has supported more than 15,700 young people into jobs in partnership with over 8,800 Queensland businesses—again the LNP opposed it—and over 35 per cent of young people in Back to Work are not just starting a job: they are also signing up as an apprentice or trainee and getting skills for the jobs of the future. We want to get them into that training in the first place, but we want to make sure that they are getting training in courses where there will be jobs in the future. We do not want to destroy their hopes and dreams. We want them to be part of the future and make sure that if they put that investment into doing that training, then there is going to be a job at the end of it. That is the entire focus of our strategy.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, you touched on this during your opening statement, but I will persist in asking my question. Not all registered training organisations in Queensland are operating in the best interests of their students. Some have been found to be providing substandard training and signing off and certifying students before they have been deemed to be competent. Will the minister outline what the department is doing to audit and proactively weed out these RTOs? What safeguards will be put in place to ensure that new RTOs established can deliver the training they are charging Queenslanders for?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I acknowledge the conversation that we had about this and I congratulate the member on his interest. I know that you have some very specific local issues there and you have had those conversations that sometimes really break members' hearts about how people have been taken advantage of. If the member would allow me, I would like to tell you about a couple of initiatives we are putting in place. I think I described earlier the systems we have put in place so that we are increasingly aware of any fraudulent activity and we are able to catch it, in particular with regard to projects such as Back to Work. Today I spoke about our response to the Training Ombudsman's bait advertising investigation, and if you would just bear with me I want to talk to you about a few other matters as well.

We have always believed in a strong vocational education and training sector. They just provide such valuable opportunities. They change people's lives, as we know. Queensland has the highest number of private RTOs anywhere in Australia. While we know that many operate and play by the roles—and we all know ones that do an excellent job—we unfortunately see others who have not. That

is why we have introduced tough new measures for our public investments so that Queenslanders can place their trust in RTOs. You and I have discussed the fact that it is not only that the RTOs are trustworthy but that the consumer also knows that and is able to be a wise consumer when making those choices.

After quite widespread reports of RTOs and recruitment agencies taking advantage of desperate jobseekers looking for much needed work—and that is what we called bait advertising—we acted quickly to stamp it out. This year it has probably been worse than at any other time because there have been so many people who are really desperate for work. These people were preying on people's desperation. Jobseekers would find ads through a recruitment agency promising jobs without training or experience required, and the jobseekers' details would be given or shared with a training organisation that then proceeded to enrol them in a very short subsidised certificate III course, usually completed within two or three weeks. As you and I have discussed, that means they use up their entitlement to a subsidised course. Those sorts of courses did not end up with a job guarantee, and some people ended up stranded with a qualification they did not need and, as I said, forfeiting the government subsidy.

In August of this year the previous minister released a five-point plan to tackle bait advertising, and that included the independent investigation by the Training Ombudsman. I am happy to take any further questions from you today or in the future as well about that report. We also instituted a dedicated online compliance unit that is directly responsible for identifying scammers and referring them to the Australian Skills Quality Authority, the Office of Fair Trading and police; a dedicated training scammer hotline—we want to increase awareness of that hotline—a review of penalties for scammers who are found to unlawfully trick jobseekers; and a review of every registered training organisation that receives a Queensland government subsidy with a commitment to cut support if they are found to have tricked jobseekers.

We are really determined to stamp this out and we want to send a very, very clear message to Queenslanders that we will not tolerate this. That is what this announcement is about today. As I said, the report was provided to me earlier and I have just tabled this. In July this year, we introduced the Skills Assure initiative which replaces our old prequalified supply system. I do not know if the member was aware of that. That puts new criteria on for new training provider applications and it strengthens our compliance measures.

If you are an RTO that wants to receive government funding, then you must go through this process. There are a number of criteria which you have to answer to so as to be given what is called Skills Assure. There is a symbol which actually indicates whether you are an SAS, as we call it. It does not mean that once you are then you are for good. We will check compliance on a monthly basis and make sure those SASs are conducting themselves in an appropriate manner. If they are not, they will be penalised and taken off the register. They are just a few things we are wanting to do.

One other thing I would say is that we are also more closely monitoring oversupply and undersupply because we do not want young people or any people to be applying for training in an area where there are simply not going to be jobs. If we are going to be granting SAS status, we will be looking at undersupply and oversupply to make sure the courses that are being sought are ones that provide real opportunities for the future. I could not state more clearly that this is a very, very big priority for this government. As the new minister, this was one of the first projects that I looked at. I will be throwing my personal support right behind it.

CHAIR: Minister, that supply issue is very important.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for the response, Minister.

CHAIR: We will have one final question from the non-government side before shifting to government questions.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is to the director-general. Will the director-general advise the overall compliance rate across the Queensland government with respect to the On-time Payment Policy?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the On-time Payment Policy, in terms of the reporting, we have a total of 17 departments which have reported, and they are reporting an average of 89.2 per cent of payments made on time to small business.

Mr MICKELBERG: I have a follow-up question to the director-general. What steps has the department taken to enforce the policy in relation to departments like Queensland Health, which has had over \$540 million worth of late invoices?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I have been advised that the previous director-general wrote to all heads of departments in relation to the policy in the first place, bringing it to their attention. In relation to the time frame for reporting, I am also advised that there is not an exact due date in terms of that reporting just yet. We are tracking, as I said, at 17 departments and we are continuing to liaise with departments with respect to the importance of reporting to that particular policy.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. We move to government questions now and I might follow on from that. My question is to the minister. Does the minister wish to furnish any more information about the On-time Payment Policy that was introduced in July and how that is progressing?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to talk a bit more about this because it was one of the significant responses that we made to small business. We announced last year that we would be instituting this measure. We know that at any time cash flow is really critical for small businesses, but during times like this it is absolutely critical for financial viability. Keeping their doors open is something we have been absolutely supporting business to do in every possible way.

The first reporting measure of the On-time Payment Policy was to happen on our open data system in the quarter ending September this year. I want to give a big shout-out to DESBT, my department, which had 98.5 per cent of invoices paid on time, with a total value of \$7.4 million. As the member will know, we were aiming at reducing payment of invoices from 30 calendar days to 20 calendar days. As a champion of small business, we considered that it was absolutely imperative that we as a vendor were being good role models for other businesses.

As the director-general said, a total of 17 departments have reported. The Premier and I as minister have made it very clear that this is a really important policy of this government. I note that a number of departments have gone through MoG changes so there are some reporting challenges while those MoG changes are instituted. Departments are required to publish all of this information on the open data portal. We will be actively engaging with all of those departments to identify any barriers they might have to showing that information or being able to adhere to that policy. We will be working with them to identify those and see if we can help them with any solutions. We need to do the right thing by businesses. For the very first quarter, we are pretty happy with achieving a nearly 90 per cent success rate, but we want to improve on that as well.

CHAIR: That is great to hear about that continual improvement. Minister, I turn to an area I am extraordinarily passionate about—the Regional Jobs Committees. Could you provide an update on the rollout and how they are contributing to employment outcomes?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for her question and I did refer before to the members. I am very aware of the member's interest in the Regional Jobs Committees. I acknowledge the very enthusiastic conversation we had only a couple of weeks ago about the Regional Jobs Committee that is based out of Redlands. I am very much looking forward to going down there very soon to meet the people on that committee. I know, Chair, you were absolutely glowing about some of the achievements of that committee.

We established those Regional Jobs Committees out of the Queensland Skills Strategy, which identified just how important it was to work within communities to grow local industry. If you provide training which is responsive to local needs and the local workforce, then people are more likely to get employment. I acknowledge the conversation that the member for Southern Downs and I had about the wine industry college that is in Stanthorpe.

Mr LISTER: I was just texting the vice-chancellor now.

Ms FARMER: That is very good. I was already very well aware of that college in Stanthorpe. I was saying to the member for Southern Downs what a great example it was of that very thing about being responsive to the industry that is going on in that area. I understand that training was set up as a result of all of the stakeholders getting together and asking where the jobs were in their region. That is a classic example. The Queensland government is very happy to provide that support. I was just saying to the member before that I am looking forward to going down there and speaking to them about it. These have been tough times for Stanthorpe particularly.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, Minister.

Ms FARMER: I will just go to these in particular. We are home to such a diverse range of existing and emerging industries. We want to make sure that, wherever you are in Queensland, you have access to the skills that are going to support your future employment. These Regional Jobs Committees get

together local industry groups, training providers, local and major employers, employee representatives and councils. They are different in each area. They help plan local training investment so it matches local skills needs, and we have just talked about the Stanthorpe one.

They have some specific criteria: one, to monitor and identify local industry trends and identification of skilling opportunities to be addressed through training to ensure a skilled workforce; two, to advocate for investment in training and skills that aligns to local jobs and employment growth; three, to identify gaps in local service delivery and provision of recommendations to help inform local training investment aligned to local skills and workforce needs; and, four, to foster collaboration and local partnerships among local industry representatives, employers and small business. We also want to leverage local resources and build workforce resilience and agility and also to provide reporting in line with reporting requirements to give DESBT, my department, intelligence on where the trends are and where we need to be putting our resources.

The location of those six regional job committees took into account a number of factors including: local labour markets, potential gaps in skills and the extent of local collaboration. Really, that is just absolutely critical. If people are not working together, regardless of the need, it makes it very difficult to apply solutions. We are looking at existing committee structures that were in place. First, we funded \$745,000 to support the operation of five of the committees. The Townsville committee was supported by the North Queensland region of DESBT. I know in chairing your own electorate, Chair, you have a flagship project called Championing Redland Coast to attract new businesses, initiatives and projects. I am sure you can tell us what is going on there, because you sound incredibly involved as you are in everything.

CHAIR: I could talk till the cows come home.

Ms FARMER: The idea of that was to attract more investment, new residents and employment opportunities and help to generally improve lifestyles within the region.

The Mackay RJC has been instrumental in analysing future skills needs and gaps for the region. The committee brought in consultants to complete an analysis of the workforce impacts of automation and augmentation on industries within the Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday region. We can see that everyone has really different needs. The Fraser Coast one hosted its first hospitality, education and training networking evening in August this year to better connect business owners with the education and training industry. In collaboration with the Fraser Coast Regional Council, they also hosted the Fraser Coast Jobs Expo in Maryborough on 23 October. That saw industry presentations from current and upcoming major employers like Forest Wind and Rheinmetall.

In Toowoomba, the committee has engaged really widely and established a collaborative group comprising all Jobactive providers, Transition to Work, ParentsNext, disability providers as well as state departments and training organisations. They also hosted a virtual jobs fair last month so that Jobseekers could see the jobs currently on offer and interact with potential employers. By targeting investment in the right training for the right jobs, local families will have a better opportunity to live and work locally.

This is something that was raised with me quite strongly. I referred earlier to the Zoom meeting I had at CCIQ with the chambers of commerce from around the state. A number of the regional people said, 'We need these sorts of really localised responses.' We talked about those job committees and how valuable they are for that sort of outcome. In recognition of how successful those committees have been, as part of our Big Plans for Small Business initiative we announced that we would put an extra just over \$4 million into more of those committees. It means we will have them operating for three years, but we are looking at another at least three locations. Some recommendations have been made to me, but I want to do a bit more work on that, talk to stakeholders and look at what is happening across the state. We look forward to announcing those locations early in the new year, because we want to get them up and running as they have been so successful.

CHAIR: That is excellent, minister. I think that tailored approach is what makes it such a success. Thank you for your investment in our Redlands Coast on that. Member for Rockhampton, you have a question?

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, you mentioned the government's commitment to make the Small Business Commissioner permanent. Can you please advise why that is important and how that will assist Queensland's small businesses?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. Again, I have to acknowledge that one cannot look at the member's Facebook page without knowing what a really strong supporter of small business is the member for Rockhampton. I quite like hearing those stories. When I go to Rockhampton early in

the new year, there is a coffee shop the member has been promoting that I really want to see with him. The temporary Queensland Small Business Commissioner was established, as I said earlier, as part of Queensland's response to the pandemic. The position was introduced temporarily to provide really specific and immediate support for small business impacted by the pandemic, including expanded advocacy for small business and dispute resolution for commercial leasing disputes. The commissioner has played such a critical role in supporting businesses so that they can avoid really lengthy, costly and, frankly, stressful commercial leasing disputes with early information, advice and mediation services.

Since commencing in late May, the commissioner has assisted with over 2,600 business inquiries and has received over 570 commercial leasing disputes and 75 advocacy requests to stand up for small business. I want to repeat my congratulations to her and her team on the critical role they have played in supporting small business. Since inception, they have successfully mediated 60 per cent of leasing disputes put to them formally and 76 per cent informally to the satisfaction of both parties. I know that times have been tough for landlords who often are small business owners themselves. I want to really acknowledge the efforts of many landlords in trying to support the people leasing their businesses. We have had such fantastic feedback from small business tenants who have been helped by the Small Business Commissioner. I want to read out a few of those quotes, and I know she will be really gratified to hear these. One states—

I am very grateful for your help with the rental dispute due to COVID-19 and the very successful outcome.

Another one—

I would just like to send a note to say thank you for your assistance in the past six months. Like everyone, it was a harrowing time for me & I did not know how to tackle the issue of rental negotiations.

Another one—

We greatly appreciate this and hope that the Queensland government will go ahead to make the QSBC a permanent body ...

As announced in the recent budget, we are making it a permanent position that will continue to advocate for, support and provide information to small businesses and empower them to drive economic growth across Queensland. The commissioner will also work with the newly established Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction to continue to deliver small business regulatory reform to assist in their recovery. Having a permanent Small Business Commissioner really brings us into line with every other state in Australia. I note that when in government, the LNP actually closed down the position. We are very pleased to now know that Queensland will be permanently in line with the other states. The position will be a single point of service entry to access information and support, the dispute system, regulatory issues and general inquiries.

Earlier, I referred to the fact that last week the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill was passed in parliament which allows us to continue the commissioner in a temporary role until we can get legislation in place, until we really bed down what the scope of the position will be. That will certainly be a big priority for us going into the new year.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are not far off the four o'clock break. I thought I might see if you had any responses in terms of advice on the questions posed.

Ms FARMER: I will see if the director-general has any information?

Mr Agnew: I am able to provide some additional information.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Agnew: In relation to the questions on Jobs Finder, our agreement with the RCSA, the key provider, does not require destination reporting. In relation to the question of how many remain in employment, we do not collect that information.

CHAIR: Thank you.


Mr Agnew: With respect to how many jobs are currently advertised on the Jobs Finder website, the portal does not advertise vacancies; however, the portal enables Queenslanders whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19 and who are now looking for work to register their details to be matched with a suitable job opportunity by professional recruitment agencies. That is how that portal works.

In relation to the contract register for that \$8.5 million for the Jobs Finder Queensland agreement with that entity, RCSA, that includes the monthly management fee disclosure and the initial promotional costs and technology funding within that fee. As for the IT costs associated with the particular initiative,

Queensland Treasury actually developed the portal and is responsible for the ongoing portal funding. Our department has provided \$34,110 for technology costs to upgrade the staff-match platform as part of that.

CHAIR: The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 4.15 pm with the estimates for the training and skills development portfolio area.

Proceedings suspended from 4.00 pm to 4.15 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now examine estimates for the training and skills development portfolio area.

Ms FARMER: Chair, do you mind if I make a correction to something I said in response to a previous question?

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms FARMER: In answering a previous question I stated that the number of hits on the Business Queensland website was over 32,000. In my enthusiasm for the Business Queensland website and the 24/7 hotline that we set up in response to COVID, I got my numbers wrong. The figure of 32,000 is actually the number of Queenslanders we have supported on the small business hotline since its establishment at the beginning of the pandemic. That has been absolutely astonishing. The Business Queensland website actually served 6.3 million customers in the last financial year, including a 44 per cent increase in Queensland visitors. I am very pleased to be able to report those really fantastic figures on both of those initiatives.

CHAIR: That is extraordinary, Minister. Thank you for the clarification.

Mr LISTER: With respect to the document I tabled earlier, I have a redacted version. I thank the Table Office and the First Clerk Assistant, Erin Pasley, for their assistance in preparing that. I would like to table that now.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? That is tabled.

Mr MICKELBERG: Just closing out a question from the last block with respect to the small business payment policy, can the director-general advise the dollar value of payments—

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair. I understand that this part of the hearing is about skills and training.

Mr MICKELBERG: On the point of order, the Clerk has made it clear that the entirety of the department is able to be questioned as a part of the estimates hearings today, not just the areas broken up by the timetable. I would have thought the minister would want to talk about the small business payment policy.

Ms FARMER: Yes, in fact I have spoken glowingly of that policy, as you might have heard in the last session. I equally would like to speak about skills and training, particularly when the LNP knows so little about it.

CHAIR: I have just received advice. The question is in order but I will provide latitude to the minister, given that her advisers may not be here for that question and she may seek to take that on notice.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it. My question is to the director-general. What was the dollar value of payments considered late under the small business payment policy for the last financial year?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I do not believe I have that figure readily available to me, so that is one I would seek to take on advice and get back to you by the end of the session.

Mr MICKELBERG: With reference to question on notice 5, will the director-general advise in relation to the \$8.529 million in contractual training breaches how many students were impacted?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I do not believe we have that information readily available either. I would seek to take that on advice.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, did any students fail to gain qualifications as a consequence of these contractual breaches?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I would seek to also take that on advice.

Mr MICKELBERG: If you would like, Chair, I can rattle off a few in the same vein because the answer might be similar. I am happy for the director-general to answer if he can. Can the director-general advise what the breach of contract categories were for each of those breaches? Will the director-general provide a geographic breakdown by SA4 region as to where the 109 RTOs were located and the combined contractual breach amount? Finally, is the department expecting the outstanding \$5 million plus will be recovered in the future?

CHAIR: Director-General, did you want to answer that one?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to that last question, we do have recovery processes as part of our contractual arrangements with our SAS providers and we would be seeking to recover amounts.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. Director-General, I refer to the SDS at page 3-27. Can the director-general outline the reasons why the government failed to meet its training service standard by 2,700 apprenticeships, 800 traineeships and 1,100 school based apprenticeships and traineeships?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the variance in particular on the number of apprenticeships for the financial year, I do note that the variance between the actual of 8,800 and the estimate of the target which was 11,500 is consistent with national results impacted by COVID-19 affecting employers and their ability to retain apprentices and provide work. Also for traineeships, the variance between the actual of 12,700 and the target for 13,500 is largely due to lower numbers of trainees completing their traineeship in the retail, food processing and mining industries compared to the previous year and is also reflective of the national trend. I believe the note in the SDS also mentions the impact of COVID-19. I would also mention that I have been advised that the department carried out support for employers throughout that term as well to seek to support employers to retain their apprenticeships and trainees and that there were very positive results, as I have been advised, from the efforts of the department in that regard.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you. As a follow-up, Director-General, can you explain why in 2018-19 the department also failed to meet its service standards for the number of apprenticeships and school based apprenticeships? Noting that you said that COVID was one of the reasons this year, what was the reason in 2018-19?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I have not analysed the 2018-19 numbers and our performance against those particular targets. I would seek advice as to whether 2018-19 is subject to investigation, but I will take advice on that from you, Chair.

CHAIR: That was the 2018-19 budget. I think we can move forward. Your next question, member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is to the minister. Will the minister advise how much the government has paid to the 13 Skills Assure suppliers that are under investigation?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I reiterate the importance of the Skills Assure process which, as the member knows, was in place from 1 July this year. That includes a number of very important changes to the way we identify fraudulent behaviour, including a new supplier agreement, new logo for easier identification, approval of third-party providers and revised entry criteria for new RTOs. In terms of new entry criteria, we have made two new enhancements. Firstly, an RTO's head office must be located in Queensland and the department will assess if there has been a need for additional SAS in the industry area the RTO is applying for. We do have some of this information, but I am going to have to get back to you about that, but we will be able to do that this session.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, how much has the government recovered from the one Skills Assure supplier agreement that was terminated?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. My apologies, but we do not have that particular piece of detail with us here. I will seek to get back to you as well.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will shift to government questions now.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, getting more people into training, which we know can lead to jobs, is critical for our state's economic recovery. Can the minister provide an update on the rollout of jobs training in Queensland?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question. I am very excited about this initiative and am so pleased that you have asked. The member will know that this is a federal-state government initiative that is going to support young people and jobseekers affected by the pandemic with free training—yet another initiative involving the Palaszczuk Labor government to support young people getting into jobs.

The committee will know that this is something that the Palaszczuk government has been doing for some years now. We have had our free TAFE and apprenticeships for under 21s in place for some time which has meant that 26,000 young Queenslanders have had access to training for the right qualifications. We are matching the federal government's JobTrainer funding on a fifty-fifty basis which means a \$200 million injection to increase free and low-fee training here in Queensland. Today I am announcing that enrolments will open this afternoon through TAFE Queensland and CQUniversity. This is all about giving young Queenslanders a chance to get qualifications that lead to jobs that help drive our economic recovery. I cannot stress enough that it is about the priority jobs and the jobs for the future. The training opportunities mean that it is most likely that these young people are going to end up with a job at the end of it.

I note some of the questions from the opposition about our support for young Queenslanders, and there could not be a better example of the strength of the government's commitment to young people not only getting training but getting the right jobs. The fund will support young people who are launching or developing a career and jobseekers affected by the pandemic who want to pursue new opportunities with better employment prospects. It is going to fund thousands of extra training places and covers a range of short courses and certificate and diploma qualifications. There will be jobs in health, plumbing, manufacturing, electrotechnology, cybersecurity and more. It is going to target specific industries, as I said, which need more workers now and into the future. We are going to utilise Queensland approved training provider Skills Assure suppliers to support the delivery of additional JobTrainer places and RTOs will be able to apply to deliver JobTrainer courses from today as well. That is going to be, as I said, in addition to the free TAFE and apprenticeship program that we have in place for those under 21 and, as announced in the budget, will now be available to those under 25. This is just going to be an absolute injection of opportunity for young people. By focusing our investment through public providers like TAFE and CQU, we are able to ensure equitable access to those JobTrainer courses no matter where people live in Queensland. They will deliver over 70 fee-free, fully subsidised certificate III and below qualifications and short courses and will limit a student's contribution for certificate IV and above qualifications to \$400.

To qualify students must enrol before September 2021 and complete their training by 30 June 2022. The biggest areas in demand we expect are going to be in health, age and disability care, manufacturing, logistics, primary industries and tourism, with courses in fields like the certificate II in health support services, certificate III in individual support for age and disability care, certificate II in engineering pathways, certificate III in rural operations—that is farm labourer—and more priorities are going to be made available from the end of the year and progressively through 2021 just as we see what the skill needs are of the labour market.

I do not know if many young people seeking jobs are going to be glued to this estimates hearing this afternoon—perhaps not, but you never know—so we are going to roll out a communication strategy across the state. I know the federal government is going to be doing that. TAFE has that. We are going to complement those communication strategies because we want to make sure that every young person, wherever they are and whoever they are and whatever their ability is across this state, that they actually know about these opportunities and they can take them up. With over \$1 billion invested in training and skills this year alone by this government, we know we are really going to make a difference to young people in Queensland.

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you for that update. That is great news. Can you update the committee on what the government is doing to tackle fraud in the training and skills portfolio, whether risky RTOs or other training and skills programs?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. As I said at the outset, vocational education training is just so critical. It is life changing and it means a future for Queenslanders, not only young Queenslanders but also vulnerable Queenslanders as well. We say unequivocally that we will not tolerate fraudsters or scammers in this system. We want to offer protection. We know that government grant programs can be susceptible to external fraud through things like applicants or third parties providing false or misleading information through the application, applicants submitting incorrect or doctored evidence and applicants not spending funding for its intended purpose. I have spoken earlier in these hearings about, for instance, the work we have done on the Back to Work program reducing fraud quite considerably in successive years and, in fact, saving \$7.5 million in payments over that period of time. We apply that same measure of scrutiny no matter what.

We talked before about the Skills Assure suppliers, the SAS. They not only have to go through a rigorous process in order to become SAS, but we monitor them every single month. We watch their activity and if we notice any inappropriate activity then they are on the line. We just simply will not

tolerate it. The Training Ombudsman's report, when the member gets a chance to read it, on bait advertising did actually make the suggestion that we make our lack of tolerance for this even clearer. Our activities are certainly reaping the outcomes, but we want to send that message loud and clear.

I can say to the member that my statements in the hearings this afternoon are very much about the beginning of that much, much clearer and stronger message that we will not tolerate this. In the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, for instance, we manage processes with the DESBT fraud and corruption control framework, including applications have to be submitted under a secure cloud based online portal, applications are assessed independently by Skilling Queenslanders for Work advisory committees in each of the DESBT regions, program and administration and management is carried out via a robust grants management system that contains inbuilt controls and has established security procedures and payments under the initiative are made directly to verified organisations, no payments are made to individuals.

Due to the nature of Skilling Queenslanders for Work, the risk of fraud is actually very low and during the life of the initiative no fraudulent activity has been identified. However, that will not stop us from continuing to monitor that very important initiative. The Small Business Covid-19 Adaptation Grant, we had a program-specific fraud and risk policy for that program and used eligibility checks with ABN checks and submission of evidentiary documentation such as financial records. We verified businesses had been impacted by COVID-19 shutdowns via publicly available information and a range of other measures and escalation processes if suspected fraud was identified during the application assessment.

Member, I referred earlier to the amount by which we have prevented fraudulent payments being made under Back to Work and that was \$7 million, but can I just say—and I want to reiterate this—that during the life of the Back to Work program, because of the measures that we put in place, \$1.748 million of grant funding has been referred to law enforcement agencies and this represents 0.45 per cent of the total program funding.

Can I just say too that the role of the Queensland Training Ombudsman is absolutely critical to assist students and other stakeholders with issues they may have regarding training, including these matters, and the ombudsman also provides advice to me as the minister on any issues and ways to improve the system. I want to again thank the ombudsman for his really outstanding work on the bait advertising report. As I said earlier, of the six recommendations we have accepted five and the last one in principle, which is only because we need to actually talk to other stakeholders in order to guarantee the implementation of that recommendation.

The ombudsman states in his report that it is unacceptable for any organisation to make a false or misleading claim to induce a prospective student to undertake training with a specific RTO and that more needs to be done to assist students to make informed choices, and we intend to make sure, as I said earlier to the member for Hinchinbrook, that we not only have a system which really clamps down on fraudsters and scammers, but also that consumers are actually aware that those checks and balances are there so that they can really trust the system's integrity.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, apprenticeships are vital for the long-term viability of many industries right across Queensland. What is the Palaszczuk government doing to encourage young Queenslanders to take up a trade?

Ms FARMER: That is such a good question. I thank the member for Rockhampton for his question. We know that COVID-19 has had a huge impact on young people. It has had a huge impact on everybody, but young people already faced employment challenges before COVID hit and the economic conditions that have resulted from COVID have just exacerbated that issue. Labour force conditions began to deteriorate in March 2020 and the associated health restrictions that followed. However, as I mentioned before, we are seeing encouraging signs that youth unemployment prospects in Queensland, based on ATO payroll data, are actually improving. We are positioning the state for economic recovery from COVID-19 with a focus on job creation.

It is somewhat perverse when we talk about promising signs when, in fact, we know there is still so far to go, there is still so much to do. As I said earlier, it is not acceptable to see any young person unemployed, but we need to know that things are heading in the right direction.

Our efforts for the economic recovery plan include more than \$7 billion to support Queenslanders, including up to \$500 million to help workers who have lost their job or income as a result of COVID-19. Our budget has really built on that. We have our free TAFE for under 25s initiative that is going to support 37,000 young Queenslanders into training and apprenticeships, on top of the

26,000 who are already assisted by our under 21s free TAFE policy. Again, that is going into the key industries where we know there are going to be jobs: aged care, child care, hospitality, manufacturing, lab operations and more.

The Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative supports Queenslanders into training and employment, and three of its programs are focused on young Queenslanders. We know this program returns \$2.55 for every dollar that we invest in it. That means benefit to young people. Get Set for Work provides intensive employment and training help over a 12-month period to young disengaged Queenslanders aged 15 to 19. Ready for Work assists young jobseekers aged 15 to 25 to find employment through a six- to eight-week course that is focused on job search assistance and training, as well as improving their employability skills.

Many of us have gone to those fantastic Skilling Queenslanders for Work graduations and spoken to young people who say that they have not only gained skills, they actually know how to be a working citizen. Sometimes they tell you that they have learnt things such as the need to get to work on time, knowing that they cannot skip work and have a sickie, knowing that they have to dress appropriately for work and the way they need to relate to their work colleagues. Those are things that probably no-one in this chamber has ever had to learn and we take them for granted, but those are the things that will sustain young people in jobs.

The other program in Skilling Queenslanders for Work for young people is the Youth Skills, which transitions young offenders aged 15 to 24 years. I know that is a subject very close to the member's heart. Over 32,000 young Queenslanders have been helped by the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative, with over 19,000 of them—that is, over 60 per cent—achieving a positive outcome of employment, further training, a combination of both or a return to school. That is 19,000 young people from that initiative alone.

We have the Back to Work program, obviously, and we have supported nearly 24,000 Queenslanders, including over 16,000 young people. That is a subsidy towards the training costs for eligible individuals. You can see that there is so much that we are doing in this space. We continue to monitor what is happening in the labour force so that we can ensure that all of our programs are as responsive as possible.

CHAIR: I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, two industries that go hand in hand in regional Queensland are agriculture and aviation. With reference to the SDS, can the minister advise the committee what investment will be made into those two very important industries for regional Queensland?

Ms FARMER: The member is absolutely correct. I have been talking for most of this hearing about the fact that we want to ensure that where we invest is where we know there will be jobs for the future. We simply cannot afford to be putting our investment towards other areas and for people to think that they are going to train and get a job at the end of it. Since 2017 we have injected \$150 million into infrastructure for TAFE right across Queensland. In the budget we announced an investment of a further \$100 million into rolling TAFE infrastructure across the state. I believe you asked about aquaculture and aviation?

Mr DAMETTO: Agriculture and aviation.

Ms FARMER: For instance, in Bowen we are investing \$3.4 million into an agricultural centre of excellence. On the off-chance that the member includes aquaculture in agriculture—

Mr DAMETTO: I am happy to put the two together.

Ms FARMER:—there is \$2 million for an aquaculture training centre in Cannonvale, in the Whitsundays. As I said, the range of infrastructure that is happening for facilities across the state is really exciting.

I also want to talk a little about the skills of the future, including aerospace, hydrogen and renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing. As you might know, TAFE Queensland has, I believe it is called, Aviation Australia. I acknowledge that from the CEO of TAFE; after four weeks in this portfolio I hope I am getting all the titles right. That is a key part of TAFE Queensland and works very closely with the aviation and aerospace industries. I acknowledge that industry. Despite the fact that arguably it has been one of the industry sectors hardest hit by COVID, their commitment to training has not wavered, knowing that people have to come out the other end with skills. I do have some other information that I can give the member about aviation, but I cannot quickly put my hands on it. I promise to get back to the member.

Mr DAMETTO: That is fine, Minister. I am happy to continue that conversation offline.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, do you operate a private email account for government business?

Ms FARMER: No.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, do you exert control over any other email accounts that are used for government business?

Ms FARMER: No. You mean private emails, obviously?

Mr MICKELBERG: Private emails, yes.

Ms FARMER: No.

Mr MICKELBERG: Have you ever sent an email to stacia1 @ bigpond.com?

Ms FARMER: No.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Minister. Director-General, with respect to the Skills Assure suppliers, how many state government subsidised students have been trained by the 13 Skills Assure suppliers under investigation?

Mr Agnew: We do not have readily available with us the student number information. I will seek to take that on advice.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, will you advise the total investigative costs and any legal costs incurred by the department in association with the 13 Skills Assure suppliers under investigation?

Mr Agnew: We will have to take that on advice as well and get back to you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, will you advise how many disused former TAFE sites are currently owned by the department?

Mr Agnew: I will get back to you with that number.

Mr MICKELBERG: No worries. Director-General, while you are getting back to me on that I would also like to know the locations of the disused sites. Will the Director-General advise the annual maintenance and security costs for each of those sites?

Mr Agnew: I will seek to get back to you on both of those additional items as well.

Mr MICKELBERG: With reference to the answer to question on notice 17, Director-General, can you advise how many COVID-19 adaptation grant applications were received by the department in total?

Mr Agnew: I believe I have the information at hand. I am just looking for it. While we are finding the total number of applications, the total number of paid adaptation grants is 19,910. That is under both rounds 1 and 2.

Mr MICKELBERG: While you are looking for it, you might find this as well, Director-General: How many days was the non-regional grant funding opened for before it was fully subscribed?

Mr Agnew: If I could just clarify with the member, through the chair, did you say the non-regional, so for South-East Queensland?

Mr MICKELBERG: Correct.

Mr Agnew: Round 1 for that particular program was five days it was opened for.

Mr MICKELBERG: Do you have an answer to the first question?

Mr Agnew: Round 1, we had 11,702 applications in total. I will get back to you as soon as I can with the round 2 number as well. In round 2, we had 3,872 in the regional Queensland component. We will put that information together for you.

Mr MICKELBERG: Both regional and non-regional. Director-General, how many times has the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council met over the past year?

Mr Agnew: We should have that information reasonably readily available. I will seek to get back to you before the end of the hearing.

Mr MICKELBERG: I understand that the Better Regulation Taskforce has not produced a report for over two years. Can the director-general advise why that is the case?

Mr Agnew: I would need to seek advice in relation to that as well. Having been in my chair for three weeks, I need to take advice on that one.

Mr MICKELBERG: I understand, thank you.

Ms FARMER: I wonder, chair, if I could have some latitude to also assist with that?

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms FARMER: In terms of detail, as the member will appreciate, both the director-general and I have been in these positions for only a matter of weeks, but certainly my understanding is that the Better Regulation Taskforce also made some quite specific recommendations regarding assisting with regulatory reform for those businesses that were affected by COVID. They related to issues like licensing for food, cafe outlets to be able to sell alcohol—I think they made some recommendations and I do not want to be misleading the parliament, but they also made some recommendations about businesses not needing to pay duties if they were transferring to become a different entity, and that is something that the Small Business Commissioner has said to us has been a really major issue. I think they were part of the discussions around waiving a range of regulatory fees and charges—

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, chair. I provided some latitude for the minister to give the answer, albeit noting that she is not permitted to ordinarily under the standing orders, but my question was quite specific which is why has the Better Regulation Taskforce not produced a report for two years. If the minister can answer that question, I would appreciate it.

Ms FARMER: I am assuming that the member would like to know whether the Better Regulation Taskforce has actually continued to make a contribution—

Mr MICKELBERG: I would like to know if they have handed down a report.

Ms FARMER: The things that I am describing are the really important contributions of the Better Regulation Taskforce in what have been unprecedented times this year and I know they have been of great assistance to businesses.

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, chair. I think we have established that the minister is not going to answer that question, as I have asked. Can I ask a follow-up question then, please? Director-General, how many times has the Better Regulation Taskforce met over the past year?

Mr Agnew: I will take that on advice and get back to you.

Mr MICKELBERG: In relation to the artisanal producers regulation review, will the director-general advise when the task force will publish the regulation review?

Mr Agnew: In relation to the plans for that particular review to be tabled, I will need to get back to the member, I am sorry.

CHAIR: Minister, noting that we are at 4.56 pm and there have been a number of advices being sought by the director-general, I want to confirm that we will be able to get some responses to those questions or taken on notice by 5.15 pm?

Ms FARMER: Clearly the member for Buderim has asked an extraordinary number of quite detailed questions.

CHAIR: Detailed and technical questions, I appreciate that.

Ms FARMER: There was never going to be any possibility that we were going to have the answers to all of those questions available to us. We will certainly endeavour to get the answers to those questions, if they are available, back to this hearing. As the member will know, that is what questions on notice are for. If he really wanted the answers to these questions, he would have asked them during the normal process of questions on notice through parliament and also through RTI and through annual reports where much of that information is available. I honour that this is the process that the member has chosen to use, but I think his commitment to making this a useful hearing where we could talk about major themes—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, chair. I think that reflection on the member is not appropriate.

CHAIR: The minister was responsive to my question in regards to timing.

Mr LISTER: I would say that the minister's reflection on the member for Buderim was inappropriate and I would suggest that it would be meet and proper for her to withdraw that reflection.

Ms FARMER: I withdraw.

CHAIR: Moving to government questions—

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order, chair. We have just established that the questions are not going to be answered in this session.

Ms FARMER: Point of order, chair.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am speaking, minister, thank you.

Ms FARMER: I have a point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am in the middle of a point of order, chair, and the minister is—

CHAIR: Member for Buderim, I am being responsive. I am allowing you to finish your point of order.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, chair. I would like to establish if the minister intends to take the multitude of questions which the department—

Ms FARMER: Point of order. What is the member's point of order?

CHAIR: There is no point of order, member for Buderim. I have asked that—

Mr MICKELBERG: I have not even finished my point of order, chair, so I am not sure how you can establish—

CHAIR: You certainly paused.

Mr MICKELBERG: I paused because I was interrupted by the minister who cannot take a point of order.

CHAIR: I remind you that you under warning and, please, be respectful to the chair.

Mr MICKELBERG: My point of order is very simple: will the minister be taking the multitude of questions which have been taken on notice but not on notice, under the standing order 183(1)?

CHAIR: That is not a point of order; that is a question. I remind all on the committee that it is 5.00 pm. It is time for questions from the government side. We will come back to those advices being sought—

Mr LISTER: Chair, a point of order takes precedence on all other business before the committee.

CHAIR: I just said that there is no point of order.

Mr LISTER: Well, I am making a point of order, and the point of order is that—

Ms FARMER: Chair, I actually made a point of order.

Mr LISTER: The minister may not make a point of order; she is a witness.

CHAIR: She did call a point of order post the member for Buderim. Your point of order, minister?

Ms FARMER: I have noted that there are multiple, very detailed questions. We will be doing our best to ensure that we get responses to all of those questions. Given that this hearing is to end in 15 minutes, I understand, we may not be able to get all of the questions back within 15 minutes as some of them have only just been asked. However, I believe we have until tomorrow—I need to confirm that—to get responses to those questions. We are absolutely intent on doing that.

CHAIR: It is Monday.

Ms FARMER: Until Monday, thank you.

Mr LISTER: Chair, may I just clarify for the benefit of the committee—

CHAIR: I think the points of order have been addressed, member.

Mr LISTER: You do not know what I am about to say. For clarity and to be absolutely certain, is the minister taking the questions on notice under standing order 183, because that is the one under which she is required to reply to us within the given time frame?

Ms FARMER: I believe I have made clear our intent. We will be—

CHAIR:—to provide responses to the questions.

Mr LISTER: Under standing order 183, Chair?

Ms FARMER: What I have said is that, given that this hearing is to finish in 15 minutes and some of these very detailed questions have only just been asked and we already have a number of other questions for which we are providing responses, we will do our best to get as many of those responses back before the end of this hearing, but if we are not able to do so then we will get them back by Monday which is when the chair said they are due back. They will be provided as soon as they are available.

CHAIR: We will move to government questions.

Mr O'ROURKE: Under the future skills fund budget initiative there is \$100 million for equipping TAFE for the future. Can you provide an update on how those funds will help support jobs and prepare the next generation of students for the jobs of the future?

Ms FARMER: This is a key part of our budget announcements. I know, as a member of a Labor government, the member's commitment to supporting a public provider of vocational education and education in general. We need to know in a state that is as vast and decentralised as Queensland that no matter who you are, no matter where you are and no matter what your ability is that you have the same opportunity to access good quality vocational education opportunities as the next person. It is why since 2017 we have committed \$150 million into developing facilities across the state.

As part of our budget announcements we confirmed an additional \$100 million for the future skills strategy. As I read out the locations for these facilities and tell you what sort of facilities are going to be provided at each of these locations you will see how we are linking in not only to make sure they provide training courses for the jobs of the future but also to very much respond to local community needs. We were talking about Stanthorpe and the wine industry before and we were talking about what was happening in the Redlands, Mackay and other places. Our investment in skills infrastructure and TAFE infrastructure is very much about that.

Since I have been minister I have been delighted to visit some of the TAFE facilities that were part of the previous program. I visited a new trades training building at Ashmore. At Coomera we were looking at a new marine services training facility. Just before the election campaign I visited the Pimlico TAFE, which is a fantastic facility particularly for nursing and health. There are some wonderful opportunities for students.

I want to read out some of the fantastic opportunities. I will read out first what is happening in Rockhampton, which I know the member really wants to hear about. The member will know that we allocated \$400,000 for a business case for a TAFE centre of excellence at the Central Queensland University and a further \$8 million for stage 1 of the campus consolidation. That will bring the TAFE facilities into that campus in Rockhampton.

Let me tell you about some of these other locations. You will see why they are so important. For Cairns there is \$2 million for cybersecurity training and \$3.6 million for an advanced manufacturing hub. For Bohle in Townsville there is \$10.6 million for renewable energy training and \$3.6 million for an advanced manufacturing skills lab. For Mackay there is \$7.5 million for a trade training centre at Ooralea—and I apologise to the good people of that community if I have pronounced that incorrectly. In Bowen there is funding for an agricultural centre of excellence. We talked about that and the aquaculture training centre at Cannonvale. In Bundaberg there will be a new agriculture and horticulture centre—member for Hinchinbrook, that is the other one I was thinking about—and a new space centre.

At Hervey Bay there will be nursing and allied health upgrades. At Toowoomba there will be a \$1 million rural centre of excellence. At Yarrabilba there will be a community TAFE learning centre. In the electorate of the member for Buderim at Mooloolaba we have funding for a \$2 million cybersecurity training operation centre. I am happy to brief the member on that if he would like to do that after this hearing. In Robina there is a new TAFE campus fit-out. At Eagle Farm there will be new robotics training. The size and breadth of this investment is absolutely huge and totally responsive to where we are heading in the future. It delivers exciting prospects for Queenslanders.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, Skilling Queenslanders for Work has well and truly exceeded its targets for getting people into work. How has this happened and what role does it have in Queensland's long-term economic recovery?

Ms FARMER: This is equally such an important initiative. We know that prior to 2012 the Labor government instituted the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program. It was incredibly successful in that form. Anyone going through that program had a 70 to 80 and sometimes up to 90 per cent chance, depending on the course, of gaining employment. Unfortunately, as we know, the LNP abolished that initiative. As soon as we were elected in 2015 we instituted it because we know that it is one of the most successful training programs in Australia in terms of delivering outcomes.

Our original target was to help 32,000 people by June 2018. We did that 10 months early. We set a new target to help 54½ thousand people by June 2021 and we have already met that target eight months early. To be exact, 54,533 people have been helped to date under that Skilling Queenslanders for Work program. More telling, 33,000 people have actually gained jobs from that program. What we want to hear is that there are outcomes for these training courses.

I know the member is very keen and has already been asking about this. Some \$5 million has been invested in your own electorate of Stafford. With his previous hat on—before he became a member—I know he was delighted to attend a number of Skilling Queenslanders for Work graduations and see the life-changing results.

I know the member is really proud of this, so I want to talk about a couple of Skilling Queenslanders for Work programs that have been operating in the electorate of Stafford. I think they illustrate the range of people we can help. In the Stafford electorate, 830 Queenslanders have been assisted, with 510 of them getting a job as a direct result of the program. Organisations like the Multicultural Community Centre were able to employ 12 local unemployed migrants and refugees as work skills trainees for 18 weeks. They were able to deliver a Community Work Skills project that assisted 50 migrant and refugee seekers. They were able to complete either a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care or a Certificate III in Individual Support and gained the skills and experience they needed to get jobs in those sectors. Thirty-seven participants were able to get jobs as a result of those programs. These are the real-life stories of people who have gone through that program. We are making sure that the programs we run are most likely to guarantee jobs for those people.

CHAIR: It being 5.10 pm, I will now provide an opportunity for the director-general to provide some responses.

Mr Agnew: In relation to the question earlier in the session around complaints or fraud in relation to employees or contractors of the department, I can confirm there were two fraud complaints and one misconduct complaint with no prosecutions.

In relation to the question on the Back to Work program and recoveries there, all matters remain ongoing. There are nil recoveries to date particularly in relation to that question.

There was a specific question taken for advice in relation to unemployment data. I can advise that, based on the 12-month average data, Wide Bay has the highest youth unemployment rate at 27.8 per cent, followed by Toowoomba at 25.2 per cent.

In relation to your question on on-time payment, the new on-time payment policy, which provides for small business suppliers to the Queensland government to be paid within 20 calendar days, commenced on 1 July 2020. The policy that existed prior to that—the late payment policy—had different reporting parameters. Open data reporting under this policy did not require agencies to report the dollar value of late payments. Agencies were required to report on a quarterly basis the total amount of interest penalty paid to small business and the total percentage of late payments made.

In relation to the small business adaption grant, the attempted fraud in the program relates to 47 applications, which I think I mentioned earlier, totalling \$470,000. Of this claim, \$46,900 was paid. The matters have been referred to QPS and are ongoing.

In relation to the Small Business Advisory Council, it met five times in the financial year 2019-20. The Better Regulation Taskforce met six times in the same financial year, 2019-20.

In relation to your question on the one terminated SAS contract, I am advised that there are still ongoing matters that continue to be investigated. No specific details can be provided on that as it is an ongoing matter.

In relation to your questions on vacant TAFE sites and their location and their maintenance costs in relation to keeping those sites, there is a site in Maryborough, with a maintenance cost of \$339,873; a site in Ridgeway, with a maintenance cost of \$550,000; and a site in Tewantin, with a maintenance cost of \$150,000.

In relation to the information that you sought broken down to an SA4 level, the department collects its information generally on a local government area basis. We would be seeking to provide any follow-up information on the basis on which we collect it.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy for it to be reported on a local government basis if that is the manner in which the department collects the information.

CHAIR: I think that covers those questions.

Mr MICKELBERG: I raise a point of order, Chair. To be clear, there were a number of questions that were not covered, but the minister made a statement earlier that they will come back with that information, and I am comfortable with that.

CHAIR: I note that a number of questions were taken on notice during the session. The committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice must be provided to the committee secretariat by noon on Monday, 14 December 2020. The time allocated for consideration of the proposed estimates of expenditure for the Employment and Small Business and Training and Skills Development portfolios has expired.

I would like to thank the minister, the directors-general, the officials and the visiting members who attended the hearing today. On behalf of the committee, I also thank the Hansard staff, the secretariat and the attendants for their assistance today. Minister, would you like to make any closing comments?

Ms FARMER: I would, Chair, and it is to say thank you. I want to thank you and all committee members. This is a really important process for democracy, so I very much appreciate the opportunity to take part today.

I want to thank a few people who have worked incredibly hard to support our appearance today. I want to acknowledge Warwick Agnew, the Director-General. I thank Mary Campbell, CEO of TAFE Queensland, for coming here today. I thank Mr Geoff Favell, the Queensland Training Ombudsman. I thank Steven Koch, Maryanne Kelly and Rebecca Atkinson, who are our three deputy directors-general. I thank Rhiannan Howell, who is the head of corporate. I want to thank all of the staff of DESBT—and that is many hundreds of them—who contributed to the briefs that were prepared for today.

I acknowledge my shadow, the member for Buderim, a visiting member of the committee. I want to thank the parliamentary staff, Hansard and the attendants. I especially acknowledge my Chief of Staff, Emily Taylor, and in fact all of my advisers. This has been a very busy first few weeks for us. I think every single person in this room is really going to deserve the Christmas holiday that is coming up very soon. Many thanks to everyone.

CHAIR: I certainly agree with you. Thank you to everybody who has participated in today's estimates process. I thank my committee members and all of the visiting members who have participated today. I particularly thank my secretariat, Rob Hansen and Rhyll, for all of the work that they do. I now declare the hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.17 pm.