

THURSDAY, 29 JULY 2021

ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE— EDUCATION; INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS; 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
Ms FS Simpson
Mr SSJ Andrew
Dr A MacMahon
Mr TL Mander
Mr JP Bleijie
Mr MC Berkman
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, Acting Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure Services

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Mr R Gee, Director-General

Racing Queensland

Mr B Parnell, Chief Executive Officer

Queensland Racing Integrity Commission

Mr P Brown, Acting Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner

Office of Industrial Relations

Mr C Allen, Deputy Director-General

The committee met at 9.00 am.



CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this hearing of the estimates for the Education, Employment and Training Committee open. I would like to begin today by acknowledging that we are meeting on custodial land of the oldest living civilisation in the world. I pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging of the Jagera people and the Turrbal people. We are very fortunate in this country to live with two of the world's oldest living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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. The committee has granted leave for a number of non-committee members to attend and ask questions at the hearing today. Other members may also seek leave to appear over the course of the proceedings.

Today the committee will consider the Appropriation Bill 2021 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 its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. While mobile phone use is not permitted in the public gallery, an exception has been made for staff who are assisting witnesses here today and who have been permitted the use of their devices for this purpose. I do ask all present, however, to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode if they are not turned off. I also remind everyone that food and drink is not permitted in this chamber.

In line with the COVID-Safe Estimates Hearings guideline issued by the Chief Health Officer, I remind everyone to maintain social distancing while in the chamber. Face masks are to be worn at all times and removed only to speak during the proceedings. The COVID-Safe Estimates Hearings guideline is available from the secretariat.

This year the House has determined the program for the committee's estimates hearing. The committee will examine the portfolio areas in the following order: 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 Bill 2021 for the portfolios of the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing until 2 pm. As was determined by the House, the committee will examine areas within the minister's portfolios as follows: education from 9 am until 10.30 am and 10.45 am until 11.45 am; racing from 12.30 pm to 1 pm; and industrial relations from 1 pm until 2 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the times specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. The committee will suspend proceedings for breaks from 10.30 am until 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 leave and been granted leave to participate in the hearing in accordance with standing orders: the members for Broadwater, Buderim, Chatsworth, Everton, Kawana, Maiwar, Maroochydore, Mirani, Moggill, Scenic Rim, South Brisbane and Toowoomba South. I note that we have with us the member for Moggill, Dr Christian Rowan, and the member for South Brisbane, Dr Amy MacMahon.

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 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, argument or opinion. I intend to guide these proceedings today respectfully so that relevant issues can be explored fully 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: Good morning, everyone. I 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, Acting Deputy Director-General; and my Chief of Staff, Sharon Durham. I am very pleased to be continuing my role as Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing.

During my time as education minister I have had the privilege of visiting hundreds of schools across the length and breadth of the state including 38 school visits so far this year, despite COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns. Every day our Queensland teachers and staff are providing our students with a world-class education. Queensland has done a remarkable job in stopping the spread of COVID, including our school communities. I particularly want to thank students, staff, parents and carers throughout Queensland for their ongoing cooperation and patience during this pandemic. We know it has not been easy, but I am so proud of the way our school communities have responded and adapted to our changing world. We are not out of the woods yet, and I encourage everyone to continue doing the right thing and obviously follow the health advice.

The 2021-22 state budget continues our proud record of giving children a great start and engaging young people in learning no matter where they live in Queensland. The Palaszczuk government is again delivering a record education budget, with a \$15.3 billion investment in schools and early childhood education to continue to deliver for Queensland children and students from Far North Queensland to the Gold Coast and beyond. In this budget we will also see almost \$1.9 billion in school infrastructure spending to maintain, renew and build new facilities including 10 new schools, supporting more than 4,100 jobs across the state. These new schools add to the 18 we have delivered since 2015—all on time and on budget, I might add—and four others either underway or in the planning stages at Caloundra South, Coomera, North Maclean and in Brisbane's inner west.

The budget features our fantastic \$235 million halls program, which will deliver new or upgraded halls, supporting 775 jobs. Also included is funding of \$202.9 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 and \$64 million per year ongoing after that to support the continued provision of universal access to early childhood education in the year before school. In 2021-22 this will result in a total investment of \$187 million to ensure Queensland families can access affordable, quality kindy programs no matter their life circumstance. We know it makes a big difference to children going to school when they have been to kindy beforehand. We are also investing an additional \$180 million over three years for new school infrastructure in Catholic and independent schools.

The Palaszczuk government is not just investing in schools infrastructure; this year's budget is about investing in Queensland's people and our 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 have committed to employing 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 new teacher aides over the next four years. We are investing almost \$20 million in our Turn to Teaching program to provide 300 aspiring teachers with financial support, mentoring and paid teaching internships to complete their teaching qualifications and take up a guaranteed teaching position—a program I am really looking forward to.

The 2021-22 education budget will also provide \$40 million towards our \$100 million three-year Student Wellbeing Package to provide every Queensland state school with access to a wellbeing professional and to pilot GPs in 20 state secondary schools; homework centres at 120 primary and high schools across this state—and I had the privilege of visiting Darra State School yesterday, but more on that later; and funding to build and upgrade training facilities at 26 schools as part of our \$45 million Local Schools Local Jobs election commitment.

In the industrial relations portfolio, the budget funds our \$6 million four-year election commitment to boost the labour hire licensing compliance unit with eight additional frontline audit and inspector positions. These frontline positions will build on the success of Australia's first labour hire licensing scheme, which we established three years ago. I am proud that this scheme is lifting the standard of the industry and protecting vulnerable workers from exploitation.

In addition to protecting vulnerable workers from exploitation, my department is continuing its focus on worker safety through a comprehensive review of the Electrical Safety Act, a five-year review of the Industrial Relations Act and by developing codes of practice in the areas of sexual harassment, psychological health and silica in the construction industry. The budget also funds our four-year commitment of \$5 million for medical research into the terrible affliction that is dust lung diseases, particularly silicosis and coal workers' pneumoconiosis. The successful researchers will be announced soon.

In the racing portfolio, the Queensland racing industry provides more than \$1.6 billion to the state's economy, supporting more than 12,600 jobs. The Palaszczuk government is backing this 'winner'. In this budget we announced a new funding model, guaranteeing the racing industry receives 35 per cent of revenue from the state's point of consumption tax on wagering. This will deliver around \$41.3 million for the Queensland racing industry over the next two years, backing this important industry as part of Queensland's COVID-19 economic recovery plan. Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. I am now happy to questions from the committee. I have combined all my portfolios in this one opening statement.

CHAIR: Thank you for that opening statement. I call the member for Southern Downs and Deputy Chair.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Welcome to you, Minister, as well as your departmental staff and representatives. I first come to the director-general to clarify some information about the department's rollout of air conditioning under the government's \$477 million Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. I reference the Capital Statement, at page 49. Director-General, how many asbestos exposure incidents have been identified and/or reported which are directly related to air-conditioning installation under the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. Since the program began in 2019 there have been 19 cases, 12 of which have been notifiable.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, can you outline the specific schools where those asbestos exposure incidents have occurred under the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In 2019, it was Norville State School; in 2020, Sunnybank State High School, Mount Gravatt State High School, MacGregor State High School, Palm Beach Currumbin State High School, Clontarf Beach State High School, Miami State School, Woodridge North State School, Gympie State High School, Corinda State High School, Rosedale State School, Ipswich State High School; in 2021, MacGregor State High School—which is a second mention for that school—Victoria Point State School and Sunnybank State High School. In some cases there were more than one incident in a single school. That makes up the 19 schools and the 12 of which, as I mentioned before, were notifiable.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, can you confirm in relation to those asbestos incidents in those schools that they are always immediately reported and action is taken in accordance with the department's management policies?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In relation to asbestos, obviously there is significant investment that the government is putting in in regard to asbestos management. This year alone, it is \$36 million looking at both asbestos replacement, and identification and maintenance of asbestos as well. We have a range of guidelines in place for schools and school principals in relation to providing advice around asbestos disturbance. We also have done some recent work looking at our approach to asbestos in the department, and the significant work that we are doing in that at the moment. In the cases that I have outlined this morning, my understanding is that, where those cases required notification, particularly to workplace health and safety, they were done. In some cases they were not required to be notified, because they were discovery rather than disturbance.

We continue to provide support and additional support to our principals in relation to the work that needs to be done around onsite asbestos management but, to the best of my knowledge, where each of the asbestos instances that have occurred staff at the school level have done everything in their best endeavours to ensure that issue is notified. They are either dealing with that at the school level with the individual contractor or notifying it directly to the department as well.

CHAIR: I thank the department for their work. Member for Moggill, do you have a further question?

Dr ROWAN: Yes, I do. I will come to the minister. Given the response of the director-general who referenced Sunnybank State High School in his earlier response, the minister will recall that there was a serious incident of asbestos exposure at Sunnybank State High School. The minister has previously indicated that it was immediately actioned in line with departmental procedures. That was on 10 March this year in response to a question without notice. Does the minister remember that incident?

Ms GRACE: Yes, I do.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, given the minister's response and the information that is contained within RTI documents—and I will reference RTI application 211170, file B, page 1, which shows there was an asbestos incident at Sunnybank State High School at 6.35 am on 9 November 2020, a school

day—why was it not until 26 November, some 17 days later, that certificates of asbestos analysis were commissioned and a professional clean-up crew and hygienist despatched both for testing and overnight cleaning of more than 30 rooms?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. As you are aware, Sunnybank State High School was receiving air conditioning as part of that particular program where that incidence of asbestos disturbance occurred. In terms of the 46 spaces being air-conditioned in Sunnybank State High School, QBuild was engaged by the department in relation to this particular work and a principal contractor was engaged as the principal contractor for Sunnybank State High School. They commenced work in October 2020.

To come to your particular point and question, member, the principal contractor was responsible for supply and installing of the units and was advised by school admin to clean dust and debris identified by a staff member in early November. As you have identified, there was a report by a staff member in early November. The contractor provided assurances to the principal of the school that that work was done within the requirements in relation to asbestos contracting and management. The school was satisfied that safe work practices had been undertaken.

Later that month, as you have indicated, there was a further report. Once that report was advised to the department, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland undertook a range of tests at Sunnybank State High School in terms of work that occurred in October and November. On 26 November, the school restricted access to blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 after asbestos material was identified in a small number of samples taken by workplace health and safety. The crux of the issue is that at a school level the school was assured by the contractor that the appropriate activity was undertaken to address the asbestos disturbance; therefore, the school did not report it any further. When a further report was made, that incident was escalated to the department. The work then was immediately referred to workplace health and safety.

A clean-up crew and a hygienist were despatched within an hour of that notification coming to the department to commence the decontamination process in accordance with the Queensland government asbestos management plan. As you are aware, caregivers were notified of the letter on 27 November 2020. The contractor was issued a show cause notice. The contractor was suspended and is no longer working on the air-conditioning program.

Dr ROWAN: The crux of this, Director-General, is that on 9 November a clear incident was reported but a professional crew was not despatched from the department for some 17 days later. The work commences following a period of holidays, so into term 3, where there is work starting to be put into those various blocks after a period of holidays. It is 17 days later. This is a serious public health issue and it is not until 17 days later that a professional hygienist is despatched to the school. Does that disturb you in any way?

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, the director-general has answered this question quite thoroughly in your previous question. Director-General, I will allow you some latitude in how you might respond, but I think you have given a very detailed response as to the process for remediation.

Mr Cook: Thank you, Chair; and thank you, member, for the question. As I clearly outlined, we are aware that at a school level a report was made in early November but, as I indicated, the contractor assured the principal that all the required steps were undertaken. The principal was satisfied with that response in relation to the matter. The principal then later I understand, or another member of staff, reported further in relation to that later in the month. Once the department was officially notified through the school, that work was undertaken within an hour.

Dr ROWAN: But why was—

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, the question has been answered. You might not like the response, but the question has been answered. Would you like to move on to your next question, please.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, it seems extraordinary that an incident is known at the school but the department does not know about it. There is a serious safety issue around asbestos in the school—risk to children, to staff, to the community—yet the department centrally does not know about that, despite a teacher aide reporting it at the school.

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, the question has been very clearly answered. This is repetitious. If you could move on to the next question, please.

Dr ROWAN: There seems to be inconsistency between the RTI-ed documents and what has been said by the minister in the parliament. Minister, has your response been misleading in the parliament, given what is contained within the RTI-ed documents?

Ms GRACE: No.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, have you been misled by the department in relation to the circumstances?

Ms GRACE: We take all asbestos incidence extremely seriously. I take umbrage with the suggestion that action is not being taken for the protection of all of the school community. I believe that as soon as this became apparent the necessary action was taken and all of the notifications were made.

You have to understand that any school built before 1990 will have asbestos-containing material. That is a large number of our 1,254 schools. In many of those schools that the director-general pointed to, we found buried asbestos from years gone by. Myriad identification happens in those 19 schools, too. We have invested tens of millions of dollars to ensure that all schools built before 1990 are kept safe in situ.

I take the matter of asbestos extremely seriously. You may want to split hairs about when things were done and when they were not, but I am satisfied that, as soon as we became aware of the disturbance of asbestos-containing material, the department did all that it could to ensure the safety of everyone in that community. I expect no less.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, to clarify, are you satisfied that everything was done in accordance with the department's policies from 9 November, when this incident was known about in the school?

Ms GRACE: As far as I have been made aware and as far as I understand, yes. No-one takes this matter lightly. Trust me, member for Moggill. No-one wants to put any student at risk of asbestos. This government has worked extremely hard to ensure that any asbestos-containing material is handled under the regulations. We have put in place steps and processes to ensure safety of everyone.

I am the industrial relations minister. I worked in the area of asbestos for many years during my union career. I understand that it is hard. My understanding is that we will do whatever we can to maintain the safety of all of the school community. Unfortunately, most of our schools built before 1990 contain asbestos. We do what we can to ensure safety, but as soon as it becomes apparent and it is known—within an hour action was taken. As the director-general said, that contractor is no longer working with us.

Dr ROWAN: As a doctor, I take this matter very seriously. This is about the safety of students.

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, that is not a question.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, have you read the RTI-ed documents and have you asked for a briefing on this matter?

Ms GRACE: Yes. I am well aware of all of the issues in relation to this. I have briefings in front of me. The materials I think were made available in May. There is ongoing information and ongoing investigation. We do not want to expose anyone to asbestos. That is not in any way, shape or form something we want to do. I welcome your concern. We have spoken about this before. I have responded to questions without notice in the House. I do welcome your concern in relation to this, because it is equal to the concern felt by me and the director-general.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, can you advise whether any asbestos incident sample testing has been undertaken in 2021 for department owned facilities?

Mr Cook: I am advised that we actually do undertake asbestos testing. I do not have a list with me. We might be able to come back to that question if we need to later this morning.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, can you please advise why the department's reporting incident sample testing website has zero entries recorded for the year 2021 to date—in other words, from January to July 2021?

Mr Cook: QBuild provides that information to us. My understanding is that we are yet to receive the information from QBuild. QBuild undertakes that and provides us with periodic updates. I am happy to look into that and the timing around that to help the member.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, I appreciate you taking the time to address the committee today. I also acknowledge the departmental staff beside you and behind you today. We appreciate you being here for the proceedings. I would like to acknowledge the department's good work in delivering the North Shore State primary school in the Northern Beaches of Townsville or, as I like to call it, 'Southern Hinchinbrook'. Minister, with reference to the SDS, can you give an update on any plans for the expansion of Northern Beaches State High School or any plans to acquire land, plan and design and build a new state high school in the Northern Beaches of Townsville?

Ms GRACE: Yes, we are always looking to see where we need to accommodate growth. We have a substantial growth fund in relation to additional buildings, upgrades and land purchase. There are funds to purchase land in all areas of the state and they will be available. I know that the department

continues to analyse needs right across the state. We have seven regional offices that analyse statistics, look at where growth is going to occur and look at new housing developments right across the state. They work with the department to identify particular areas.

The school that we opened together is absolutely fantastic. It is accommodating the population at the moment. It is a large parcel of land. We are looking at different designs for buildings that may be a bit larger than what we are currently building. The great thing about this budget is that we have been accommodated with funding right through to 2024, so we can do that planning with regard to how we build schools. Do we make them a little bit more vertical than they are at the moment so that a lot of the green space is not being taken up?

We are constantly looking at the areas of Townsville and 'South Hinchinbrook'. I think we have adequate supply there at the moment to meet the growth, but should that change I will certainly keep you informed about any additional buildings, new schools or land that we may require to accommodate the students in that area.

CHAIR: It is good to see our land assets being maximised with clever design thinking.

Dr ROWAN: I want to come back to the asbestos exposure incident at Sunnybank State High School. Director-General, given the timeline of events and what seems to be a delay of notification to the department from 9 November to 26 November—some 17 days before the department is aware—has a quality assurance review been undertaken by the department centrally in relation to that specific matter?

Mr Cook: As you would be aware, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is undertaking an investigation in relation to that matter. The department is assisting Workplace Health and Safety in relation to that incident. To assist the committee, I would like to outline to the committee areas where we believe we need to strengthen some of our practice around asbestos management.

You may be aware that we have done a review into the asbestos management processes of the department. That review indicated that the asbestos management plans for the department were sound and satisfactory. However, particularly in relation to the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program, I think it is important for the committee to be aware of the things that we have introduced. In relation to our knowledge of the number of instances, and as we indicated, it was 19 or 12 notifiable instances, which I think is less than three per cent of all schools that have been involved in the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. Some of the additional safety measures we are now putting in place are the development of pre and post work—what is called returnable schedules—to record a contractor's acknowledgement that they have reviewed the asbestos register, because, as you know and as everyone knows, we have the BEMIR, which is the Built Environment Materials Information Register, which lists where there is asbestos or assumed asbestos in every school in Queensland. This ensures that those contractors have reviewed that register and also their obligations and responsibilities in relation to training. That has been implemented across the entire Cooler Cleaner Schools Program and also the ACES program, which is the solar panels program in schools.

We have improved oversight of the completion of the asbestos management team training in schools to ensure relevant personnel have completed training prior to the deployment of major infrastructure programs. We have encouraged the uptake of asbestos awareness sessions by boards, by parents and citizens associations and school based staff because, as you would also appreciate, P&Cs in schools employ contractors sometimes to do actual work in schools which involves drilling into school facilities. We have strengthened a health work and safety spot check audit regime, which is very important. Every month we do at least 15 spot checks per month by an independent safety auditor for sites under the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. That is work that we have undertaken to look at the instances that may be occurring across the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program.

We have deployed asbestos warning labels for air-conditioning installations across the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program to identify products with ACM, so we physically put stickers on walls where there might be air conditioners to be installed to advise the contractors that there is potentially asbestos-containing material in those walls. All schools containing asbestos materials have been identified within the Cooler Cleaner Schools database. We have also reinforced the responsibility of principals, business managers and regional directors in relation to their role around asbestos management and we have provided updates to the Department of Education's asbestos management policy and procedure as well. So there is work happening around workplace health and safety around that particular incident, and from that incident and a small number of other incidents that have occurred we have brought in a significant range of additional measures to ensure the protection of our staff and our students.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, you referenced the asbestos management plan review which is dated July 2020, some six months before the incident at Sunnybank State High School, and some of the recommendations from that. Could you please inform the committee as to the cost of the external review and can you confirm that all of the recommendations from that review have been implemented?

Mr Cook: The information I have before me is that the cost for the review of the asbestos management plan was \$20,000, excluding GST. We did a broader piece of work as well around our total safety framework which includes all safety issues in relation to schools—asbestos was a subpart of that—but in relation to the management plan itself it is \$20,000 excluding GST. My understanding is that there was a range of recommendations. Some of those recommendations we have already, I believe, achieved, but some of them are long-term recommendations and so we continue to work through those recommendations currently.

Dr ROWAN: Following on from the spot checks and the incident sample test which I asked about earlier and with the department's website not having the current information there—I understand it needs to come from another department—has the Department of Education requested that information given there has not been any update to that information publicly available over the last six months? This is about openness and transparency of what is happening in terms of a serious public health issue.

Mr Cook: The broad source of information in relation to asbestos in schools is the BEMIR and the BEMIR is available publicly—thousands and thousands and thousands of pages of information about where asbestos either is or where asbestos is assumed to be. We also have millions of dollars every year that the government invests in relation to asbestos management, including asbestos audits, and so those audits continue to occur throughout the year. For example, you would be aware that earlier this year there were a number of schools that were identified for asbestos removal. Just to outline what has happened in the last 12 months in 2020-21, removal of asbestos has taken place in 133 state schools, with 196 buildings within those schools. There are another 55 schools where work is scheduled to remove in the near future. There was also, I understand, a story publicly about a number of schools where there was asbestos that met the criteria that were identified in the BEMIR—13 schools for asbestos removal. Eleven of those schools have now had their work completed. One school is ongoing—it is 90 per cent complete—and it is related to a school oval and there is one school that has requested the work to be undertaken later in the year during holidays because it will require a substantial removal and students should not be there when that actually happens. In relation to the information, I know we are in contact with QBuild in terms of that and we will continue to do that to ensure that the most up-to-date information is available.

Dr ROWAN: I just want to clarify something, Director-General, because you said then it is important that air conditioning is installed in school holidays wherever possible. At Sunnybank State High School with this serious incident, air conditioning was being installed within term time rather than holidays. Why did that happen at Sunnybank State High School when best practice would be to install it during the holidays?

Mr Cook: That is actually not what I said. In relation to this school, it did not relate to the air-conditioning program. The school that I am talking about is a school that has substantial asbestos in the building of the school—it is not related to air conditioning at all—and the school, which is a small school, has requested that the work not be undertaken until the holidays because it would require the entire school effectively to close down if it happened during school. A number of classrooms would have to be closed, so that was not related to the air-conditioning program, just to be clear.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General, for such detailed, clear and open responses. We will move to government questions now.

Mr O'ROURKE: Good morning, Minister. I want to put on record my thanks to all of the education staff, particularly those in the Rockhampton electorate. They do an absolutely wonderful job. With reference to page 5 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? I know in my electorate Port Curtis school was one of those and the school community has welcomed that program.

Ms GRACE: With regard to the Palaszczuk government's homework centres, I am very excited about these. It is a new initiative to support students and ease the burden on families. Often as a child I remember that if I ever suffered from a stress or an anxiety it was generally because I had not done my homework or I was not able to complete my homework, believe it or not. As we know, homework is

an important and necessary part of every child's education. Any parent will tell you about the difficulty that they can find themselves in helping their children to get their homework done. I remember seeing some schools that had this and I thought it was a very good idea. After-school homework centres are designed to provide that alternative for busy families by making good use of our fabulous teacher aides.

Yesterday I visited the Darra State School, and thank you to principal Gayle Healey and her team and the three teacher aides who were supervising 24 children who were enrolled in their second day of the homework centre. They received a healthy snack—we handed out some lovely fruit for them beforehand—and I was just amazed. There is a lovely room set aside. The three teacher aides were there and those children went in and started to do their homework. I also had the chance to speak to many family members who were there as well and they were saying that so far—and it is only the second day at Darra—how well it had been working. They really appreciated it and we now have this in 120 schools, including yours in Rockhampton and others.

We have had an expression of interest process for schools and obviously we have targeted highly diverse areas where we feel there is a need. It was just wonderful seeing those students going in and being ready to do their homework. It was a pleasure to see it in place. I want to commend Darra State School on a fabulous job. It was absolutely wonderful. As I said, it had three very qualified teacher aides helping the students with their homework. One of the parents, Hong, was saying to me that one of the biggest disputes they have at home is often that tension of trying to get the kids to sit down and do their homework, but after the hour in the homework centre they go home and all of that tension has dissipated—gone—and they are then able to do whatever they want around the home and that it was really great.

In line with the commitment we took to the last election, we are investing \$8 million over four years for 120 sites. The first \$2 million is allocated in this budget. We have had great interest in the initiative. We had quite a few applications in excess of the 120 that were required. The sites are across the length and breadth of the state. There is a good mix: I think over 50 per cent are in regional Queensland. Do not quote me on that. When I saw the numbers I think the majority were in regional Queensland.

The homework centres are already getting enrolments. It was interesting that one of the young students said to me, 'I have never been a part of a club before and it is just great to be part of the homework club.' As Hong said, the stress reliever for her is the fact that she can now go home and not have to pester her four children. The four of them go to the homework centre. They are for three hours a week for 30 weeks of the year. They are managed by the school. As I said, we have paid teacher aides who supervise. Yesterday one of the teachers came in voluntarily to assist where possible. He was out on a bike ride and decided to pass by to see if he could lend a hand. It is greatly supported. It forms good habits. We hope that it can make a difference. We hope this trial is very successful, because I would love to roll it out based on its success. I am sure some schools will come and go, but so far in the early days I think it is a great initiative. I would love to hear how the Rockhampton school goes.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It is a very cool club indeed. I am sure we have relieved parents. In relation to page 5 of the SDS, with reference to our new schools to be built in 2023 and 2024, can you advise the locations of these new schools in some of our fastest growing communities?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government, as the member for Hinchinbrook just asked, always has its eye on growth areas where we need to build new schools. It is not just new schools; it is also the significant infilling of buildings. I do not think there is a school that has missed out on our extensive infrastructure budget. We are building new schools in growth areas across the state, delivering world-class learning environments in Queensland.

We are expecting about 84,000 people to move to Queensland over the next four years. That means economic growth, but it also means that we have to cater for that growing population with essential services like education, and that is exactly what we are doing. The government is investing \$913 million—nearly \$1 billion—over seven years for 10 new schools to open in 2023 and 2024. These new schools add to the 18 we have delivered since 2015 and four others under construction or planned.

Across 2023 and 2024 there will be six primary schools built: at Ripley, where we opened a new primary and high school in 2020—that area is growing exponentially; at Bellbird Park; in the Augustine Heights area; in Yarrabilba, where we opened a new primary school in 2018 and a new high school in 2020; Logan Reserve in Logan; and Redland Bay to accommodate for the massive Shoreline development, a project that I know is close to your heart, Chair.

Four high schools will also be built: at Palmview on the Sunshine Coast, where we opened a new primary and special school in 2021—beautiful schools, beautifully designed; at Springfield; in the Logan Reserve, Park Ridge area; and in the Collingwood Park, Redbank Plains area. These are very fast growing areas of our state. We will also deliver a new primary school in Brisbane's inner west in 2024, with site identification and extensive community consultation work still underway.

Let us not forget that three primary schools will be opening in 2022. Caloundra South, which I have visited a couple of times, is an incredible site. The views from that school site over the Glass House Mountains are quite amazing. The new school at North Maclean is under construction and there is a new special school at Coomera. I have visited all three of those sites. We visited North Maclean with the Premier.

Our \$20 million planning for growth policy, part of our Great Schools, Great Future policy—this is in addition to the question from the member for Hinchinbrook—is the strategic planning that we do to look at where we need to accommodate for growth in students, where young families move in. We have identified the need for schools in a number of other areas as well: Bahrs Scrub, Burpengary East, Toowoomba and Flagstone. We are doing the preliminary work under those available funds to have a look at what we need to do. The department conducts ongoing analysis to plan for enrolment growth and new schools across Queensland, which includes work like assessing population trends, proposed residential developments and school capacity to help guide future planning. The great thing about this budget is that we are in early. We hope we can get in early and do great planning, make great purchases of land and move forward at an earlier stage.

CHAIR: Queensland is definitely the place to be.

Mr SULLIVAN: With reference to page 5 of the SDS, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government is supporting student mental health and wellbeing?

Ms GRACE: Thank you for the question. I know this is an issue very close to the heart of the member for Stafford. As we know, school can be a wonderful time in children's lives, but this is not always the case. As minister, I am 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 in our new COVID-19 world. I am very pleased that during the campaign leading up to the last election the Palaszczuk government was very forthright in announcing a game-changing \$100 million Student Wellbeing Package. Our commitment is to directly employ an additional 464 frontline health and wellbeing professionals over the next three years so that every student in every primary and secondary state school will have access to a professional to support their mental health and wellbeing.

In addition, the wellbeing package includes a pilot of GPs working in 20 selected state secondary schools one day a week to provide students in locations of greatest need with access to free confidential health support and services. In this budget we provide the first down payment on this \$100 million commitment, with \$14 million for up to 109 new wellbeing professionals, predominantly hopefully psychologists—I have put the call out that if you are a psychologist and you are looking for a career in education we have a job for you—as well as the establishment of the 20 GP school sites and supporting staff and infrastructure.

The first tranche of funding for the wellbeing professionals became available on 1 July. The regions are currently working with schools to ensure an equitable allocation of resources across the state. We expect to see new positions coming on board in the final term of this year and the first half of 2022. We will also be making use of our existing centres for learning and wellbeing, which have been very successful in the regions of Mount Isa, Emerald, Roma and Atherton and the satellite offices—in Longreach, for example—of these four centres. They will provide a cluster type of arrangement in relation to these mental health and wellbeing professionals. We also expect the first GPs in schools later in the year, with an expression of interest process currently underway for interested schools to nominate to host a GP under the pilot program.

I believe this \$100 million package will be a game changer. We hope to reduce the one professional to 1,060 students to one professional to 500 students. That is the recommendation from the Australian Psychological Society. Obviously they may not all be psychologists but will be health professionals. I am very much looking forward to how they will assist. The stigma over coming forward when you have a mental health or wellbeing problem has gone. We want to provide early intervention in the form of expert and professional assistance to students for their health and wellbeing. I look forward to rolling this out over the next four years. I think it is \$100 million very well spent.

CHAIR: That is good news for our students and school communities.

Mr O'ROURKE: Yes, it is absolutely wonderful for the wellbeing of our students and it is very much needed. With reference to page 3 of the SDS, can you advise of the investments the Palaszczuk government is making to increase capacity for outside school hours care and support for Queensland working families?

Ms GRACE: I think this was probably one of the first issues that came to me as Minister for Education. I know in my working life if it had not been for outside school hours care I would have struggled greatly. Most with young children would struggle to maintain full-time work—

Mr SULLIVAN: Yes.

Ms GRACE: You are still struggling, member for Stafford, I know. I would not have been able to continue working without it. We know that it is something that many members of the community welcome. We have been on a program of expanding that. I welcome that the Assistant Minister for Education, Brittany Lauga, the member for Keppel, is overseeing this program and ensuring that it is rolled out so that we can increase not only the numbers of outside school hours care places available but also roll out our 2021-22 budget of more than \$11 million that has been allocated to expand or refurbish OSHC facilities, with a further \$7 million to be rolled out over the next three years. A total of 48 schools will benefit from this investment.

We have done a rethink on outside school hours care and I thank the director-general and the department. When we build new schools we always make sure, for example, that there is adequate facility for outside school hours care. From Parramatta State School in Cairns to Currumbin State School on the Gold Coast, our investment will increase OSHC capacity right across the state, providing more Queensland families with after-school care options. The department has been working directly with schools and providers to explore what local infrastructure solutions are required to meet the needs of communities. For instance, an \$1 million investment at Indooroopilly State School will allow them to replace their existing relocatable building currently being used for OSHC with a double-storey building to help cater for increased demand and address their OSHC waitlist success. It is really good news that we are investing in this to make sure that if a school advertises that they have outside school hours care then we have the facilities. I am very grateful that our infrastructure department now sees this as one of the priorities.

Work is progressing well. I am pleased to report that the department has completed site visits at the other 48 schools, has approved the scope of projects at 37 schools and construction has started already at two schools. In relation to Townsville and Machans Beach State School in Barron River, I am looking forward to seeing the projects delivered to the school communities. A group came up to me in Townsville where we are building a new building for that school. With these local projects not only are we supporting schools to provide this critical service for their school communities but we are also supporting up to 50 local construction jobs, which is great as we unite to recover from COVID.

As I said, outside school hours care was one of the issues that came forward to me. I am pleased to say that since that issue landed in my lap we have seen more than 6,114 extra places created. That is quite an expansion. We have changed the state school procurement process to meet growing demand for OSHC as well. I really welcome my assistant minister who is doing an absolutely fantastic job in overseeing the delivery of an important \$18 million infrastructure total investment in this area and making sure that our policies and stakeholder engagement are out there addressing the needs of families.

I thank you for the question. It is an important part of schooling. Not every child who leaves school at the end of the day can go straight home and OSHC provides very vital care. I give a shout-out to all the OSHC providers for the great job that they do.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It was remiss of me to not acknowledge the assistant minister who is here with us today. I also acknowledge that the member for Maroochydore has joined us.

Mr LISTER: Chair, may I put it to you that your chairing of these proceedings does not require you to be a cheerleader for the government.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, it is over to you. It is your question time. If you prefer to use your time in that way, I wish you well.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, 19 schools have been impacted by the government's air-conditioning rollout program. Isn't this a bungle?

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, there is an imputation contained within that. Could you recast your question, please?

Mr LISTER: What was the imputation?

CHAIR: 'Bungle'. Please recast that question.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, 19 schools have been impacted by the government's air-conditioning rollout program. Thousands of students have potentially been exposed to asbestos. Why hasn't the department managed this better?

Mr Cook: As the minister indicated, safety is our No. 1 priority in relation to the work that we do. In relation to these 19 asbestos issues, I was very clear that 12 of those were notifiable. That is around two per cent of schools in which the air-conditioning program has been rolled out. In a number of those cases the asbestos instances were discovering buried material from past instances away from school classrooms and with no exposure occurring outside school hours time as well, so I do not agree with the premise of your question.

However, as the director-general I will say that we are always open to improving our practices. I think I outlined to you quite clearly what some of those improvements were that we were looking at. As the minister indicated, asbestos is in every single one of our 1,254 schools, I am sure, or many of them—maybe not our new schools. We are aware of that and we are open about the fact that we publish where asbestos or assumed asbestos materials are in each of our schools, down to the level effectively of the location in the school that asbestos actually occurs. I think we are one of the more transparent departments in relation to that, particularly in terms of other states and territories, having worked in other states and territories involved in this particular work.

I will say to you that we can absolutely improve our practices because we always should and we will. We will look at that work. We continue to improve it. We are doing the things that I have said that we need to do, including in relation to the Cooler Cleaner Schools program, which is probably the biggest infrastructure program involving over 600 schools that we have embarked on in recent years. However, we will continue to examine those practices, which includes training and also holding contractors to account for the work that they are required to do; holding contractors to account for the fact that they are actually not following the guidelines that they have signed off and said they will follow and, where necessary, suspending those contractors and not including them or engaging them in our work in the future.

Dr ROWAN: I will move on. With reference to SDS page 2 and staffing, Director-General, what has been the total cost of backfilling the position of the deputy director-general, Jeff Hunt, while he has been suspended on pay?

Mr Cook: I am happy to get that information and provide that information later this morning.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Dr ROWAN: Chair, can I ask the minister to take that on notice and provide the information back?

Ms GRACE: We will try to provide it within the time frame.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, by my calculations the deputy director-general has been suspended for 14 months and that would be about \$428,000. Has a second position been paid for to undertake his work while he has been suspended and how much would that person be paid?

Mr Cook: The work of that particular role has been dispersed over a number of divisions as a result of restructures that I have undertaken in recent times. The work that Mr Hunt may have been doing 12 months or so ago no longer would be his work even if he was still in the department. That work has been distributed across other places. For example, where Mr Hunt might have had responsibility for HR, HR no longer sits in that particular position. I have also recently appointed a deputy director-general for infrastructure, which would have also been work for Mr Hunt that no longer exists. I would not be able to give a figure of replication in relation to that. You indicated \$400,000 or did I mishear that?

Dr ROWAN: I indicated that the time he has been suspended for is about 14½ months and, looking at a base salary of a deputy director-general, by my calculations it seems to be about \$428,000 roughly. I know you have undertaken to give a figure for the committee.

Mr Cook: I have Mr Hunt's proposed salary in that time, if that assists, which might be slightly different to the question you asked earlier. In relation to that, the information that I have is the net payment that Mr Hunt has received in that time is \$279,000—as I did at last estimates, I provided you with a net figure as well.

Dr ROWAN: Just to confirm, Deputy Director-General Jeff Hunt is still suspended?

Mr Cook: That is correct.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, do you have any time frame as to when these matters will be finalised—any communication from the Public Service Commission?

Mr Cook: No, I am completely outside this process. It is totally driven by the Public Service Commission. It has not provided me any information in relation to the process.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, for the people of Queensland, is there any time frame as to when these matters will be concluded?

Ms GRACE: I would love a time frame, but obviously it is an independent process and we are in the hands of the Public Service Commission. People have rights and they are going through a process.

Dr ROWAN: When you are provided that information by the Public Service Commission, Minister, will you make all of those findings public?

Ms GRACE: I do not anticipate that I am going to possibly be provided with a time line or anything like that, but it is up to the Public Service Commission. It is not in my domain. It really is inappropriate for me to comment on an independent process that is currently being undertaken.

Dr ROWAN: To clarify, Minister, we are talking about once there has been communication from the Public Service Commission in relation to their findings and recommendations. Will they be made public by the government?

Ms GRACE: I think that is hypothetical. It is in the hands of the Public Service Commission.

CHAIR: It is hypothetical and it is in the hands of the Public Service Commission.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to SDS page 2 and staffing, Director-General, how many of the new teachers that have been employed by the Department of Education over the last 12 months received a permanent position as opposed to being placed on contract?

Mr Cook: In relation to that particular question and particularly in relation to the election commitment, there have been 1,214 full-time-equivalent new teachers employed since the start of this year. I would have to get the breakdown from my HR department to answer your full question in terms of how many of those are full-time and how many of those are contract. We will endeavour to do that as best we can in the next hour or so.

Dr ROWAN: Thank you. The minister is happy to provide that information?

Ms GRACE: Yes, we are happy to get that to you, member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, with regard to those staff that are engaged on contract, are there any anticipated additional cost implications for the budget, given these people are on staff as opposed to being employed permanently?

Mr Cook: My answer to that would be no.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, does that mean that for staff who are on contracts there is less of a cost implication for the budget as opposed to those being on permanent status?

Mr Cook: It is a difficult question to answer, member, because it depends on the terms of that particular contract and its length. Is it over the school holidays? Is it before the school holidays? I would not have that information available to me at the present time. I know that the government's commitment and the department's commitment is to employ as many staff permanently as we possibly can. We have done some recent work converting people on contracts and temporary positions to permanent, and that is the very strong view of our department. Through the conversations I have had with principals who might use some of their school budget to employ teachers, teacher aides or other staff through Investing for Success, for example, our very strong message and expectation is that, wherever possible, those staff are employed permanently.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, has the department identified any correlation between teachers being on contracts and the resignation rates of those staff when compared with permanent employment status? This is around retention.

Mr Cook: I do not believe we have any breakdown in relation to the differences between permanent staff and contract staff. What I can say to you, however, is that our retention rate is very high. I will get some data about retention rates.

Ms GRACE: I just add, Chair, for the benefit of the member for Moggill, while the director-general is searching, that we have a policy. It is one of the things we are working towards, and we are converting many of these. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, some teachers take leave. It is a big staff; we have over 95,000 staff in the department. With COVID, we have vulnerable teachers who we have had to accommodate as well. We have converted many staff over to permanency. I moved the legislation

in the House, you may remember, in the last parliament about permanency being the first choice and not the second choice. As a government policy—I wanted to assist in answer of the question—we are well aware of this. Obviously with a large staff, you always have someone on leave—parental leave, sick leave, sabbatical, whatever it might be—and we do what we can to ensure—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair: we are most grateful for the minister's contribution, I am sure, but the question was to the director-general.

CHAIR: Certainly. Director-General?

Mr Cook: I have some additional information for the member. I have some data here about retention or separation rates for permanent teachers, and 2020 had the lowest rate over the last five years. Separation of permanent teachers in 2015 was four per cent, for example; in 2020 it was 3.5 per cent. The average rate of separation across Australian organisations was 17.8 per cent in 2018. Our retention of our teachers is very high. There are very low numbers obviously in terms of retirement and things like that, of course. In the future we will look at that, because some of our workforce is ageing, but our retention rate is high and our separation rate is quite low.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, with that conversion, as you termed it, of people from casual contracting, for want of a better term, I want assurance for the committee that there have not been any risks to entitlements and award conditions for teachers who have been on contracts as opposed to permanent status.

Ms GRACE: No, there is not. We meet all of our industrial relations obligations.

Mr Cook: Member, I have been advised that there is no financial impact difference between a permanent and a temporary teacher. It is only in relation to temporary contracts around school holidays; that is the issue.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to page 1 of the SDS, safeguarding student health, Director-General, can you please update the committee as to the status of the trial program to place general practitioners in 20 state secondary schools?

Mr Cook: I thought you might ask this one; I have come prepared. This is a very important initiative from our perspective. You would be very aware that it is not just physical health; it is also mental health, and those issues are impacting on our students in our schools more and more. It is rare for a day to go by where there is not some issue in relation to students' health, and more often than not now it is about mental health that is impacting on young people.

I will talk about the GPs, but there is also the wellbeing work—the 494 professionals that we are implementing, 109 of those in the next 12 months. In relation to the GP in Schools pilot, we are currently in the process of putting out expressions of interest. We put out an expression of interest to all of our secondary schools. Those expressions of interests close in August. I have asked schools to undertake a range of things. If you have time, I can quickly go through those things.

CHAIR: Thank you. That would benefit the committee.

Mr Cook: We are looking at how we best identify those schools in relation to the make-up of that school community. Some of the criteria we are looking at includes the NCCD data, which is the disability data, particularly as it impacts on mental health. We are looking at communities where, as a result of perhaps their own circumstances—with low SES communities, for example, access to doctors might be more challenging for them—we can assist them at a school level.

We are asking schools to respond to us in six different ways. We want them to effectively talk about the students at their school community and the make up of their school community and how a GP would assist with the work of their school. We want them to tell us how students have barriers to accessing health care in their own homes. What does that look like and how can we provide additional support in their school? We want them to tell us how the school is managing student health, wellbeing and mental health.

We want them to ensure they have a program lead in the school so the school has a whole school approach to how this might be addressed if a GP is allocated to the school. There are some physical aspects of that, as the member would be aware. Where exactly would we locate a clinic, for want of a better word, in a school? We will be providing \$20,000 to each school selected to enable them to implement some infrastructure changes. That might be issues to do with sound, putting in basins and things like that in the clinic. We are also providing additional financial support to have a coordinator in the school, particularly around things like appointments. The last one is the school liaising with a GP who is willing to offer a service one day a week in the school.

We have looked at Mabel Park State High School to see what they have done. They have a very good program, as you would be aware. We have modelled our work on some of those things. We anticipate that we will have selected those schools towards the end of this term, with, hopefully, implementation towards term 4.

Mr DAMETTO: With reference to staffing in Queensland schools, can the minister provide a gender breakdown of school teachers employed by Education Queensland as of 30 June 2021?

Ms GRACE: I do not have specific numbers. If you are after specific numbers, that is probably more a question we should take on notice, but we will try to get those for you. We have a general breakdown of gender. I think it is well established that it is around 70 or 75 per cent female versus 30 or 25 per cent male. I do not have an up-to-date figure on that. I think that is changing a little. Historically, you would probably find that that is the gender breakdown when it comes to teachers. In terms of other school professionals, I know that the figure is similar for teacher aides, for example.

I am not sure whether we have up-to-date figures. I am advised that we can get that information. Member for Hinchinbrook, I think it is changing a little and getting slightly better. We are obviously out there with our Turn to Teaching internship program. We are advertising. We are trying to get as many highly qualified teachers as we can. We want the best in front of our students. Broadly, those are the percentages, but we will get a more definitive figure for you.

Mr DAMETTO: Could you further outline what efforts the state government is making—are there specific programs or recruitment drives—to ensure better gender equality when it comes to school teachers in Queensland?

Ms GRACE: That is a really good point. You are someone after my own heart in relation to that. We would love to see that occur. Obviously, our recruitment processes are non-gender specific. We make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity. We want to be the employer of choice when it comes to that. We want to make sure that all staff have access to benefits under their enterprise bargaining agreement. We obviously want to make sure that we employ the best teachers and that we encourage as many students to enter university to become teachers. That is where it starts.

We have programs where we assist students become teachers in schools. That is done across the gender divide. It is determined by who enrolls in university to become teachers. Unfortunately, it is a very female dominated occupation, and it has been many years. It is a fantastic occupation for women and men. I encourage anyone who wants to turn to teaching to do so. Every time I speak to a student and ask them what their plans are, I say, 'Become a teacher because I will employ you in four years time.'

We also have the great Turn to Teaching internship program announced in the budget. With that we want to encourage people who are not in teaching to do a two-year masters degree, identify their specific skills and get them into teaching. They will be given a \$20,000 scholarship. They will be part of our internship program. They will be guaranteed a job afterwards. It is a fairly significant program that we are putting in place for 300 teachers. I would love to see gender diversity and cultural diversity there.

I am always speaking with the DG about what we can do to attract more First Nations people into teaching, particularly in Far North Queensland. What can we do to convert some of our teacher aides into teachers? What can we do to encourage as many students to take up the wonderful occupation that is teaching?

Thank you for the question. We have a lot of programs. We are trying to do what we can, but, unfortunately, it is a stubborn figure. It takes a lot to shift. We are hopefully getting there. Thank you for the question, member for Hinchinbrook.

Dr ROWAN: I want to come back to the SDS at page 2 and staffing. Director-General, in terms of the deputy director-general position that was filled by Jeff Hunt, you mentioned that the responsibilities have been distributed to others. Has this position been permanently abolished?

Mr Cook: Mr Hunt maintains employment with the department. The position has not been abolished per se. Once the outcome of the process that is happening through the Public Service Commission is complete, I will make decisions in relation to Mr Hunt's ongoing role.

CHAIR: We will now move to government questions.

Mr SULLIVAN: In relation to page 3 of the Department of Education SDS, can the minister advise how the government's Cooler Cleaner Schools Program will deliver air conditioning to classrooms, libraries and staffrooms in our schools across the state?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government is investing in world-class facilities and that includes the air conditioning of every classroom, library and staffroom in every state school by June next year. I am pleased to advise that we are well on track to achieving this significant milestone. No other education minister or department in history has been able to achieve this outcome. It is a very proud moment for our \$477 million Cooler Cleaner Schools Program. It will see an additional 10,000 classrooms—that does not include all the new schools that we are fully air conditioning now that were not fully air conditioned previously—libraries and staffrooms air-conditioned to make them cooler and more comfortable. Importantly, this investment has and will support a total of more than 1,500 jobs.

When you consider that during the COVID-19 pandemic we wanted to disrupt teaching and learning as little as possible, we have, as at 27 July, out of the 649 schools identified to be air-conditioned 570 schools where air conditioning has been installed and fully operational. Of the remaining, we have 13 schools that are operational with electrical upgrades. Obviously you want to avoid, as much as possible, interruptions to schooling so these things are often staged. I am pleased to announce today that contracts have now been awarded for the remaining 66 schools. They are at various stages of installation, electrical works, assessment and making sure the design is compatible with the contracts. That is very good news. We have 66 to go and 13 are at various stages. As we know, electrical upgrades are an important part of this. We were well aware that many schools would need these upgrades. In many cases, the electrical upgrades probably costs more than air-conditioning units. Sometimes you need significant electrical upgrades when you load the school with a significant number of air-conditioning units.

I note that in the member for Moggill's electorate seven out of his eight schools are now done, including 82 units installed. In the Theodore electorate, seven of the eight schools are included, with the same number of units. In the Stafford electorate, 24 units have been installed at Wavell Heights State School. In the chair's electorate of Redlands, five of the seven schools are done, with 33 units installed at Bay View State School.

It is no secret, as I said, that electrical upgrades can sometimes delay this. We have to stage this. It has to be done in a sensible manner. Our contractors are very aware that this is required to be done. I also wish to address the issue in relation to asbestos. As I said, any school built before 1990 you have to assume has asbestos in it. We do what we can to ensure we have a safe system of work. Where asbestos is found, those contractors generally no longer work in the schools. There has also been a change in the regulations in relation to asbestos. In 2013 the LNP government changed the classification of low-density board from friable to non-friable. This meant that less stringent removal and working measures applied to LDB. There is a lot of LDB in our schools.

In response to the ongoing industry and union concerns, my department undertook a review of this classification. From 1 May 2021 I am very proud to say that LDB again is classified as friable. This means that more stringent removal and working conditions apply. LDB can now only be removed by a class A licensed asbestos removalist. We are ensuring that where this is required in our schools the new regulation takes effect.

It is interesting that, on the one hand, they have a great concern for asbestos, but the first thing they do when they are elected is reduce the regulations around the handling of asbestos. Many schools, as part of our air-conditioning program, have LDB in them. I am happy to say that we have changed the regulation. We have changed the classification back to friable, as it should be. This will change the work patterns in schools.

Asbestos in schools has been an issue for all governments, not just our government. I have quotes here from education ministers from both sides of the House in relation to asbestos. It is a sad fact that buildings, schools and homes in our community built before 1990, when we were importing asbestos, have asbestos. There are safe systems of work. We want to ensure those, but it does not help when you reduce the regulations around the removal of asbestos. We have now corrected that.

We are very proud of what we have done. It is an incredible effort. It is outstanding that we have been able to achieve this when we have wanted to disrupt learning as little as possible. We have 76. Of those, 13 are well and truly in process. There are 63 to go. We are on target to meet our commitment by June 2022—six years ahead of any alternative policies that we are aware of in the state.

Mr SULLIVAN: Thank you for your and your department's hard work in this area. I know that it can be challenging, particularly for smaller schools.

Ms GRACE: Thank you.

CHAIR: I have a question in relation to page 5 of the SDS. Can the minister provide an update on the review of respectful relationships education in our Queensland state schools?

Ms GRACE: Thank you for the question, Chair. We have spoken about this and I know that this is close to your interests. Like many, I have been extremely troubled to hear the many personal stories in recent months from students across Australia about their experience of sexual harassment, assault and rape during and after school years.

At the same time, I was also very proud earlier this year to stand with the Premier and other ministers just outside this House to support thousands of brave women who marched through the streets of Brisbane to say 'enough is enough' to sexism, sexual violence and misogyny. These are clearly matters for society as a whole to address. I know that schooling cannot do it alone. Families have a role. Society has a role. They have the primary responsibility. We do know that schools are not the only answer but they play an important role.

That is why in March I asked my department, after we received some very troubling reports about what was happening federally and on websites—I spoke to many of the people involved—to examine existing materials in the Australian Curriculum and the department's respectful relationships education program to assess if they adequately address the issues of sexual consent, education and reporting.

Unlike the federal government, which hurried some marketing materials, we want to take a very sensible stakeholder full engagement approach. We do not want the matters to be confusing. We do not want them to be slapped together. Students, particularly those on my Ministerial Student Advisory Council, were very firm in saying that they do not want any euphemisms, they do not want any gimmicks, they do not want milkshakes, they do not want tacos and they do not want teas. They want a sensible information program given to them so that they understand exactly this very important issue in undergoing respectful relationships education.

Since then, the department has consulted with over 70 stakeholders. Recently I opened a panel discussion at the Queensland University of Technology, where this was debated in the community. We have included state and non-government schools, teachers, students, principal representatives, unions, parent bodies, sexual assault support services, Our Watch and other experts in the field. Like I said, it was great to talk to my Ministerial Student Advisory Council, from whom I think I got the best feedback of all about what they need.

They think what we are doing in schools is not adequate. They want genuine information. They believe that it should start earlier and that there should be mechanisms for them to obtain that information in a very non-confrontational way so that if someone wants information they are not seen by others to be doing that so they are not automatically targeted. That is what we are working on. The department did a deep dive with my ministerial council. We obviously want to put that out.

We had 10 schools trial Our Watch in the primary schools area. That is a great program. Ten schools nominated. A lot of the work that the 10 schools did with our very young children through that program will probably formulate the age appropriateness in primary schools for respectful relationships and how we roll that out. Parents were engaged with that. I have not had any complaint about the manner in which that program was delivered.

I have some very good staff. I thank my department, and Hayley Stevenson in particular, for all the work they are doing in relation to this. She and her team are working very hard to make sure that we land with all stakeholders on the best that we can do to ensure that under the Australian Curriculum we give the tools necessary to our students in relation to this very important area.

We are hoping to have this rolling out in schools by 2022, but we want to make sure we cross our t's and dot our i's. We want to get it right and use all of the tools we have at our disposal so that we do it in a very respectful and age-appropriate way. I know that the department is doing great work and stakeholders are very engaged across all areas in relation to this matter.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It is such important work.

Dr MacMAHON: Director-General, what modelling has the government conducted with respect to how the Queensland teacher shortage would be improved by increasing the government's share of the Schooling Resource Standard to 80 per cent, thus fully funding Queensland public education?

Mr Cook: Based on the data we have available to us, there is no statewide teacher shortage. In relation to your question about teacher shortages, there is no statewide teacher shortage. In fact, interestingly, enrolment in teacher education courses has increased by 16 per cent in the last 12 months in Queensland, unlike other states and territories.

We have not done specific modelling around linking teacher numbers to the Schooling Resource Standard, as you have asked. As you are aware, the Queensland budget increases in terms of education every year. That is driven through a range of things but also included through the bilateral agreement with the federal government, where the minimum increase to the Schooling Resource Standard is at least three per cent.

We have a parameters model in the Queensland government in relation to teacher numbers. That parameter model is based on the number of enrolments that we have in our schools. That parameter model broadly drives the number of teachers and the provision of teachers for our state schools.

Dr MacMAHON: What are the government's plans to reach the full 80 per cent of the SRS funding?

Mr Cook: I think we may have had a conversation about this at the last estimates as well. As you are aware, the Queensland government has an agreement in place with the Australian government. That agreement is in place until 2023, and you are aware of the percentage rate of the SRS, 69.26 per cent, that the Queensland government has committed to. The Queensland government has also made a commitment to increase its share to 75 per cent of the SRS by 2032.

Chair, if I may make one quick correction, when I was answering the member for Moggill's question around GPs I was also talking about the wellbeing professional. I think I mentioned the number 494. My wonderful staff have been listening. That number of additional wellbeing professionals is 464, not 494, so my apologies for that.

CHAIR: Thank you for that clarification, Director-General.

Dr ROWAN: Can I just clarify something with the director-general in relation to another matter? In terms of the dollar figure paid to the suspended deputy director-general that was going to be taken and provided back, what was the gross figure net of tax? Is it possible to get that specific figure?

Mr Cook: We should be able to get that figure for you before the end of the hearing.

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General. We will break now for 15 minutes and we will see everybody back here at 10.45.

Proceedings suspended from 10.30 am to 10.45 am.

 **Ms GRACE:** Can I just give a response to the member for Hinchinbrook. I was not far off, member for Hinchinbrook. As at 30 June the latest number of female versus male teachers is 76 and 24, around those two figures. I was not far off, but it is a wonderfully predominantly female occupation. We will do what we can to attract the best teachers right across the board.

CHAIR: The committee will continue its examination of the estimates for the education portfolio. I call the deputy chair.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Moggill.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to page 1 of the SDS, 'Overview-Safeguarding our health', and page 2, 'Staffing', Minister, can you advise the committee of the total number of recorded assaults against teachers over the last 12 months?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I know there was a report in the media today in relation to that. Obviously, one assault of a teacher is one too many. Can I just put on the record that teachers do a wonderful job. We want to do what we can to ensure that teachers are not assaulted in schools. We do a lot of training in the area. We have done a number of extensive program reviews about behaviour. The schools in this state are second to none in the country in relation to bullying in schools, with a number of programs to address this and hundreds of millions of dollars being spent in relation to that education. It is an absolute priority of this government. There is no excuse for abuse or violent behaviour towards teachers. Queensland state schools should be safe, supportive environments for students, staff and local communities, so when there is an incident or accident in the school, staff should have access to make a claim through WorkCover and receive their full entitlements.

I am very proud to say that this government has ensured that any of the barriers to common law—that were put in by the previous LNP government—to access workers compensation have been removed so that when there are incidents, accidents or the like at work, workers have access to their full workers compensation entitlements. It is a very important part of looking after injured workers. The department also provides free individualised counselling and support to all staff and their immediate family members. Promoting a respectful school community is in the best interests of both students and staff. I think in the question on notice we gave some figures about accepted WorkCover claims. For 2020-21 there were 288 accepted claims—I think it was reported as well—and that represents 0.5 of a per cent of all of the teachers in our schools.

As I said, one case is one case too many. Can I assure the member for Moggill that—and I know he would join me—we make sure that we look after our teachers. We are reviewing programs. We are reviewing operational entitlements. We are reviewing the manner in which we assist and support our

teachers. I do not want to see any of this happening. That figure has been pretty constant over a number of years. It has recently gone down, but obviously it does fluctuate—I would be correct in saying that—and it obviously depends on the incident at any point in time. As I said, we are deeply concerned to ensure a safe workplace and we work right across the board. The unions are professional organisations. The P&Cs have a role in relation to students and adults entering school premises. We want to ensure the safety of all of our teachers. We will continue to review and improve. We want them to be the safest workplaces in Australia.

Dr ROWAN: The minister has referenced today's article, which is shocking, because one assault is too many, and she also referenced question on notice No. 14 from the pre-hearing questions on notice. I would like to come to the director-general. Director-General, why isn't data being recorded outlining those instances occasioned by students or by visitors, as alluded to at the end of question on notice No. 14? Would recording such data and information help drive some of the strategies to eliminate assaults of our teachers in schools and have a zero tolerance approach to them?

Mr Cook: The department has been very clear that we have a zero tolerance approach to occupational violence. I take your point about the breakdown; however, I do not believe that breakdown will necessarily provide any further policy direction for us. We are at the moment in a very comprehensive consultation phase of a new occupational violence and aggression prevention strategy. I actually communicated to all staff in the department on 29 April seeking them to consider some of the work we will be doing going forward.

You mentioned strategies so I might talk about some of those strategies. We had over 1,000 staff respond to that particular call. We went out to 17 different organisations—unions, professional associations, principals associations—seeking their views on some of those things as well. We have held a number of roundtable discussions in relation to what we can do to address some of those issues.

As you would appreciate, this is a societal issue as much as it is a Department of Education issue in that things are coming into the school grounds. I mentioned to you earlier this morning the school alerts I get every single day that come across my email that outline the things that are happening in our schools. That could be a lockdown because someone happens to be running through a school trying to escape something they might have done. We also have instances where families are bringing domestic violence issues into school car parks, so we are responding and dealing with some of those things.

In relation to strategies, which you did mention, I will outline very quickly some of the things we are looking at going forward. We are looking at student behaviour and refreshing our work around student behaviour more broadly. There is work we have done around a student code of conduct, which was implemented this year. We are looking at piloting a specialist immediate response and support team to support school leadership and staff before and after incidences. I know that when there is an incidence of occupational violence which comes across my desk, someone from my HR team contacts that school immediately. We do not wait until someone has reported it; we contact them immediately and seek any guidance or offer any assistance we can give in relation to the incident that might have happened at that particular school.

We are also looking at additional training and the provision of psychological first aid. We have been having discussions with the minister about particularly hostile persons and the impact of hostile persons coming onto school sites as well. One of the issues we think we probably need to refresh, which I know the minister is in full agreement around, is the issue around social media and how social media is being used by both students—and members would be aware of some of the things that are being reported now about fight clubs and some of the issues that go with that—and adults who actually use social media to intimidate, I would suggest, some of my staff, which is totally unacceptable. We are looking at some of those issues as well.

We also have a public campaign that we ran several years ago. We are looking to refresh that public campaign. It will be launched sometime later this term or early next term around safe and respectable schools and it will talk about the behaviour we expect of anyone who comes onto a school site—whether they be a student, a staff member or an adult from the external community—and our expectations around that to support the broader implementation of our occupational violence and prevention strategy and action plan.

CHAIR: I am so pleased to hear about the social media component.

Dr ROWAN: Are those instances of occupational violence within our state school system always reported to the Queensland Police Service?

Mr Cook: That is really very contextual. Why a teacher chooses to make a WorkCover claim could be anything from a four-year-old student in a classroom through to an adult. It really is contextual. Where the school or we think there is a requirement for it to be reported, that would be done.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, following up on your response around the changes to the student code of conduct, are we seeing more or fewer assaults where students are the perpetrators of occupational violence offences?

Mr Cook: I do not have that data available to me. I think we said in the question on notice that we were unable to break it down by student or adult. We do know that there has been a decrease in the last 12 months around student disciplinary absence rates. Obviously SDAs would be a consequence of any sort of assault. We accept that some of that obviously is in relation to COVID and the fact that schools were closed for a maximum of five weeks in Queensland, luckily, but I do not have any data that would indicate particularly around the assault issues. I have some data which would indicate that there are fewer SDAs than there have been previously.

Dr ROWAN: Director-General, I am trying to understand, I guess, the evaluation framework of these strategies that are being put in place—whether it is changes to the code of conduct for students or tracking that. How is the department able to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in real time to eliminate occupational violence in our state school system?

Mr Cook: Obviously that is work that we will continue to implement as part of the implementation of our strategies. At the moment we have evaluated our current strategy through having a range of workshops. I have been involved in two of them. They have been full-day workshops with teachers. We have brought in practitioners and we have brought in teachers who unfortunately had been impacted by occupational violence in our schools. We have actually asked them what we should do going forward. We have brought in specialists from Victoria and the ACT who have done significant work in their state school systems around occupational violence. We have learnt from that work but we have also tailored that to meet the Queensland context. I do not have to tell you how different Queensland is to Victoria in relation to the spread of our schools across the state and some of the issues that brings around occupational violence—for example, when you are a one-teacher school in the far west.

We are constantly engaged with our profession. We are constantly engaged with unions and also the principals associations around what we can do better and how we can evaluate our strategies. We have evaluated our campaign, for example. We believed it was successful at the time, but we believe a new campaign is needed for the new times. Part of those new times is what is happening in society but also what is happening around social media. We need to update that, modernise that, contemporise that particular campaign, which we have learnt through looking at the evaluation of how successful that was several years ago.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, given the number of instances at the moment and the volume of money for WorkCover claims, do you anticipate that that will increase or decrease over the next 12 months based on the strategies being implemented?

Ms GRACE: It is a hypothetical question but we will do all we can to decrease it. Obviously that is our aim. There is a zero tolerance to this. As I said, the numbers fluctuate. They have been fairly steady. They are down this year and we just hope to continue the trend. We will do everything we can to update, review, support and look at policies, procedures and actions to ensure our zero tolerance is implemented and that we support the staff and reduce this as much as possible. No-one wants to see this in our schools. I, for one, want to make sure that one case is one case too many.

Dr ROWAN: We will move on. I refer to SDS page 1 and the aim of every student succeeding and page 3, titled 'Capital program'. What funding has been allocated to ensure the geographically isolated students undertaking distance education through the Longreach School of Distance Education and the Emerald campus of the Capricornia School of Distance Education and their families can afford to attend minischools for face-to-face learning with their peers and teachers?

Ms GRACE: Obviously there are issues in relation to distance education and minischools. We always want to ensure that they are a very supportive and wonderful experience for the students. The member is obviously referring to some of the facilities that have been used in the past. COVID shone a light on the suitability and safety of these facilities for use by students as the minischool accommodation. I met with the P&C and the member for Gregory in February in relation to this issue and we have been working through the reports. I have a couple of the reports from QFES and QBuild in relation to some of these buildings that the member is referring to. We are working through them to ensure we make this a safe place for the wellbeing of the students.

I am well aware of the issues. There are no concerns on my part about my understanding of the issues; I am well aware of them. When it comes to my attention that there are concerns about the safety of these premises and whether they are fit for purpose and I do not take action and something happens, I know it will come back to me.

I have spoken to the Isolated Children's Parents' Association in relation this. We provide allowances to Distance Ed students to attend minischools. They receive allowances to attend that and there are CPI increases. In fact, last year the CPI reduced but we did not reduce that allowance; we kept it as it was. When facilities are being used to house students and a light is shone about their safety and wellbeing, we take action. I know that operationally, I have spoken to the DG. If the member for Moggill would like, I am more than happy to defer to the director-general, who has been working to address all of the concerns. We want to ensure that these premises are safe and fit for purpose and that we can ensure the safety of everybody. It is not just a matter of putting up a building and using it for this purpose.

We will work through that. I want to ensure we resolve the issues if we can. I am more than happy for these facilities to meet all the requirements so that our children are safe when they visit. I am more than happy to do so. I will defer to the director-general if the member for Moggill is happy for me to do so, who will give some operational updates on the meetings.

Mr Cook: As the minister said in response to the member for Moggill's question in terms of funding, the Living Away from Home Allowances Scheme, LAFHAS, is the program that operates in the Queensland government. As you know, there are also living away from home allowances that the federal government provides for students, particularly those students who might attend boarding schools. The 2020 rates for tuition are: up to a maximum of \$3,873 per calendar year for students in years 1 to 6 and up to a maximum of \$5,576 per calendar year for students in years 7 to 10. For travel there is a rate of \$146 to \$1,786 per student. There is also a remote area allowance of \$2,435 per student per calendar year. This is particularly for agricultural studies in year 11 and 12. Then there is also a remote area disability supplement of up to \$7,921 per student per calendar year.

As the minister indicated, normally our LAFHAS rates increase by current CPI rates. CPI rates went down last year, but we did not implement that reduction. We kept those rates as they were last year to make sure there was no loss to our rural communities. As the member would also be aware, because I think he might have asked a question on notice, there are also IT allowances that we provide some of these students.

If I go back to the subject of accommodation very quickly, the minister referred to the accommodation facilities that I know some of the P&Cs in Emerald and Longreach had helped fund quite a few years ago. The member would be aware there was work; the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services conducted a formal safety inspection of the Emerald campus in February this year. I have seen that report. It clearly says that the accommodation at Emerald should not be used unless upgrades are made to make buildings safe; they had concerns about fire safety in those locations.

This month we have had the Department of Energy and Public Works visit both the Emerald and the Longreach campuses to provide us with a report about those facilities and making them compliant with the Building Code of Australia and the National Construction Code. A range of things need to be done. I will go through very quickly some of the things relating to Emerald. It is about smoke alarms, detection systems that need to be installed, exit lighting, emergency lighting, parking and there are some issues about some of the doors. There is a broader issue about ensuring that the number of people who sleep in that facility meet the National Construction Code. At the moment that number is probably less under the code than might have been sleeping in that facility in the past. We need to have some conversations with the school and the P&C in relation to that.

We are finalising some of that work at the moment. There is a draft report and we are waiting for the final report to come in. I have spoken to my department. We will work with the P&C and the school to look at what the costs might be around some of those upgrades and look at, as the minister said, a way forward to see how we can best meet the needs of that particular group of students.

Dr ROWAN: To clarify, based on the minister's response and the director-general's response—and I thank you for that—in relation to the QFES assessment, the compliance elements, I want to understand the time line for a suitable resolution and also whether there is any capital infrastructure funding to upgrade those buildings in this budget or that may be anticipated in the future.

Mr Cook: The minister's response to me would be, 'Get on with it, DG,' in the nicest possible way, which is what we are doing. We did need some time to really unpack the issues. QFES could not do the work required because a certifier needs to do it and QFES are not the people to do that. They

did the safety component. They do not carry out the work around meeting codes and things like that. I do not want to go through the technicalities, but effectively we are talking about a class 3 building now. Generally, schools are rated a class 9b. Accommodation which looks at dormitory accommodation and residential facilities in a school are called class 3. As you would appreciate, a range of additional requirements apply to class 3, particularly in relation to fire separation, about other buildings et cetera.

I know my department is working on this closely. We are waiting for the final report to come through the Department of Energy and Public Works. I expect that will be in the next several weeks. We will then be engaging with the school in relation to this. All schools have capital funding, so there might be some contribution that the school provides in relation to that. We also have capital for refurbishments and things like that. I will make those decisions once the final data is made available to me.

Ms GRACE: I confirm for the member for Moggill's benefit that it is my direction to get on with it and work with the community. If we can resolve these issues, by all means we will do so. We will make sure that the funding is available. We want to work with the community to provide the best for them. However, I will not—and neither will the department—compromise health and safety while I am the minister.

CHAIR: I welcome to the table the member for Mirani.

Mr ANDREW: I would like to thank the minister for the sports hall in Sarina for the surrounding communities.

Ms GRACE: I cannot wait to open it.

Mr ANDREW: I also say thank you to the department. I have a quick question on safety and health. I have spoken to Sarina State High School. We talked about an overpass due to the campus being on two sides of the rail line and the level crossing on Anzac Street. SDS page 3 talks about allowing opportunity for infrastructure. Is there a possibility there will be funding available for the upgrade of the Anzac Street level crossing and perhaps a forecast of what will happen for the overpass that will join these two campuses?

Ms GRACE: It is a good question. I remember when we were there we looked at that. Unfortunately, it is not my department that would provide that overpass; it sits with TMR because it involves rail. We have had some preliminary discussions about the possibility of putting this in place. It sounds easy to just put in an overpass, but obviously all kinds of considerations are needed regarding the height of trains, constructing it in a safe way to allow students' access and ensuring it does not become a safety hazard. I do not want to expand on that. We want to ensure that whatever is done there, it is very safe when used at all times, whether during school or outside of school.

We are conversing and looking at this. It is not that easy, member for Mirani, as you can probably accept. We walked around and went to the other area; it is not all that far. I found it quite an easy walk to do. I know that an overpass sounds great, but we have had discussions with TMR. I know that we have done some great work at the schools in your electorate. I cannot wait to see the multipurpose court. It looks pretty amazing from what I have heard. We will continue to have those discussions. I am happy to talk with the member about what TMR is saying in relation to the feasibility of an overpass over the rail line. It is a lot of money. Obviously, we need to make sure that whatever we do is right.

Mr ANDREW: The level crossing may be good.

Ms GRACE: A level crossing might even be the alternative, I agree.

Mr ANDREW: I appreciate that.

Dr ROWAN: Following on from the member for Mirani's question, with reference to the capital statement and the \$61.2 million for school halls, can the director-general advise where funding for a new school hall at Kenmore State High School is at within the budget?

Ms GRACE: Everybody wants a hall in their electorate!

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. My understanding is that school halls are part of election commitments provided by the government. Those school halls were made publicly available at that time. As always, as the member would be aware, schools develop their infrastructure plans every year and provide those infrastructure plans for us as part of that process going forward. We then, through a quite detailed assessment process, make decisions at a regional level and then a state level in relation to the capital funding that the government has made available to us. That requires obviously prioritisation around the range of requests that come through our 1,254 schools. As I indicated, the 36 new performing arts and school halls for which we have funding in the budget going forward were announced as part of the government's election commitments last year.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister. In relation to the government strategy towards gender inclusivity in Queensland schools, has there been any budget allocation to support installation of gender-neutral toilets in Queensland state schools and, if so, how much has been spent and in which locations?

Ms GRACE: That is a fairly detailed question. Obviously, we make sure that our facilities are updated and kept up-to-date. Obviously there is a program of maintenance and refurbishment that happens. In fact, recently I was at a school on the Gold Coast at Palm Beach where some of the facilities have been upgraded. It was an amazing design that came about in that old facilities were upgraded, ventilated and made modern. It was an incredibly well-thought-out design where the facilities were completely refurbished and made modern. I know that in most maintenance, there would be an allocation. This is an operational issue. The DG may have a figure specifically on toilets, but schools are given their maintenance budget. They spend it according to their priority list. We do not want schools to over report that part of that money spent on toilets in terms of reporting every single thing they do. We want them to get on with teaching rather than reporting. I do not know if there is one figure. Are you asking in relation to toilet facilities?

Mr DAMETTO: Yes.

Ms GRACE: At the moment we have an allocation—I am surprised that we have this—of about \$15 million in works for this year to deliver a number of renewal projects in schools. This concerns the refurbishing of amenities blocks. Recently, I actually inspected the Longreach State School facilities block that has been upgraded, a major facility upgrade. Further, I refer to Bluewater, Boyne Island and Cairns. I am having a look to see if there is anything here regarding Townsville. At Townsville South State School, there is \$500,000 in terms of replacements. There is about \$15 million. Remember, member for Hinchinbrook, schools also get a maintenance budget. There could be money from the maintenance budget that is also used on upgrading facilities and toilets to keep them up to standard.

Mr DAMETTO: That is specifically for gender-neutral toilets?

Ms GRACE: I do not think we do it specifically.

Mr DAMETTO: There is not a breakdown on that?

Ms GRACE: No, they are toilets.

Mr DAMETTO: Fair enough.

Ms GRACE: Generally, gender-neutral toilets are for those students with a disability. Obviously, usually they are gender-neutral toilets. Some schools do have a gender-neutral toilet for some students but, no, we do not break it down—toilet facilities are toilet facilities. I know most schools are adequately providing those facilities. When they need upgrades, we have a quite extensive program of maintenance and works occurring. I urge every principal and every building services manager who has money in their maintenance budget to spend that money and to make sure their facilities are up-to-date, because if they do not we will spend it on schools that want to update their toilet facilities.

Mr DAMETTO: Duly noted, minister.

CHAIR: I can say that in our Thornlands State School upgrade the gender-neutral facility was for students with a disability.

Ms GRACE: Usually it is for students with a disability, yes.

CHAIR: Over to government questions now.

Mr SULLIVAN: With reference to page 2 of the SDS in relation to staffing, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government is continuing to invest in quality teachers across Queensland, setting our kids up for a great future?

Ms GRACE: We were very happy, member for Stafford, to go to the election with 6,190 additional teachers over the next four years and the 1,139 teacher aides that we require. We have already employed 1,214 new teachers and 400 new teacher aides since the start of this year. Obviously, we want to employ the best and become an employer of choice. We want to make sure that they work in a safe environment, as we spoke about earlier today. The investment in our teaching workforce means local communities get the teachers and teacher aides that they need. We are always looking at ways that we can improve the employability of teachers and get local teachers in their communities. I am always discussing with the DG programs and initiatives such as: Turn to Teaching; First Nations people; remote areas; encouraging teacher aides to become teachers; and giving them support.

I have already raised with universities questions about education programs we can use to bridge teacher aide qualifications with that of teachers in terms of how we can support them. What programs can we introduce, such as Turn to Teaching, to give them scholarships, mentoring, internship pay and a job at the end to improve the quality and access to specialised teachers as well? We inherited a student-to-teacher ratio of 14 students I think, but we now have the best student-to-teacher ratio in the country. We have a very expansive state. To achieve that in a state such as Queensland is actually quite remarkable. We always are looking for new ways that we can do that. We have not ceased employing teachers. In one year under the previous government the growth of students was at its highest. The previous government did not employ the additional 500 teachers required just to meet demand. What happened when you do not do that? Class sizes and teacher-to-student ratios went up. We have addressed that and ensured that we have the teachers we need. We have a fantastic program going over the four years.

I am happy to say that we have also embarked upon—I know the question was asked previously about permanency of employment. I do not want to see contract employment unless it is necessary, for example, for the relief of someone on parental leave, for someone on long-term sick leave or for other reasons where a person takes leave. Even in those cases, we need the teachers. I want a conversion. We are working with all our stakeholders to ensure that we do that. I also once again relate to the legislation introduced by the Premier for permanency in employment of our public servants. It was addressed through the last sitting of the previous parliament such that permanency is the default option for staff. We are working operationally to ensure that we put that in place. My officers behind me are well aware of the government policy. We welcome all of our teachers, teacher aides and staff in our schools. We will work with them to make sure we have the best teachers for students. They do a wonderful job. I take this opportunity to thank the member for Stafford—and I know he joins me, the chair and all panel members—in terms of thanking every one of our hardworking school staff, in particular our teachers and teacher aides.

CHAIR: We give our thanks for all the work that they do. With reference to the Building Future Schools Fund on page 3 of the SDS, can the minister advise how much the fund will be boosted by and how this will continue to deliver for Queensland students and families?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government is planning for Queensland's future delivery of schools. I take into account the member for Hinchinbrook's question about how important it is for our growing communities that we keep an eye on that.

Ultimately, the department does a pretty good job in keeping an eye on what we need. Enrolments are a good indicator. Our Building Futures Schools Fund is delivering the facilities that we need. We have a \$1.9 billion infrastructure spend this year and we have rolled out a number of wonderful programs to do with meeting the needs.

We know that over the next 10 years there will be about an additional 8,000 students per year. It is a bit uncertain at the moment, with our international borders—we are in a world health pandemic—but we are keeping a close eye on that. As the Treasurer has reported, we have had a net gain of people moving to this wonderful state of 30,000 while we have seen other states go backwards. We have to keep an eye that as well as our international borders and the environment of a world health pandemic.

We know that to keep pace with future growth we need to invest. We have ample funds going forward. In fact, these are game-changing programs. We have invested \$2.6 billion since 2017 in new schools. There is \$913 million in this budget alone for 10 schools. We have delivered 18 new high schools. In the inner city for example, Fortitude Valley opened up and is meeting the need there to ease the pressure on other schools. It is the first inner-city school built in 50 years.

The Brisbane South State Secondary College welcomed its first students this year. That building is amazing. I know that the director-general lives in that area and walks past it regularly. They are world-class facilities. Fortitude Valley State Secondary College is linked with QUT and Brisbane South State Secondary College is linked with the University of Queensland. They are providing an unbelievable education. I know that a journalist who was there recently could not stop saying what a wonderful facility Brisbane South State Secondary College is.

At West End State School stage 1 has been delivered and stage 2 is to be completed by mid-2022. It is an incredible expansion. There are West End State School students in the gallery. I give a big shout-out to the students of West End State School, who have fantastic facilities in their school. It is an incredible growing school in West End.

We have expanded QASMT. We have also delivered a new world-class dance facility. The Queensland Ballet can speak to the facilities at Kelvin Grove State College. The world is looking at what we have done at Kelvin Grove. It is an outstanding world-class ballet facility, which is internationally recognised. The member for Moggill was with me when we officially opened that building. What we have delivered there for the arts in this state is a credit to the designers.

There is master planning for 35 schools within a five-kilometre radius of the city. This includes West End State School. We are also delivering eight new state schools in 2020—one of the highest numbers that we have delivered—in growing areas such as Palmview, Coomera and the Redlands. We have schools coming everywhere.

I like very much that the Palaszczuk government is now planning for future years. I thank the Treasurer. The Treasurer has done an excellent job in making sure that we lock in the schools earlier to enable better planning and the purchase of land. Then we can, of course, look at designs. A challenge to the director-general is how we do this better to ensure we have the best facilities in Queensland. I know that with your background in architecture, member for Redlands, you appreciate great design. We have won many awards for our schools. They have been recognised as examples of great design—particularly Fortitude Valley. We want to continue on that course with the planning going forward. I thank the Treasurer, the Premier and all of my colleagues on the CBRC who have locked in so that we can deliver for all of those areas that we said we were going to. I cannot wait to come to West End State School to open their new facilities.

CHAIR: It is lovely to have students from West End State School here for the estimates on education. Have a good day, students! As a lover of architecture, I think the current facilities show that we are doing well in the design of new schools.

Mr O'ROURKE: With reference to page 4 of the SDS, can you outline the government's support for remote kindergartens in schools, ensuring Queensland kids have access to quality kindergarten programs regardless of where they live in the state?

Ms GRACE: I know that it is important that we deliver everywhere. As you know, cabinet recently went to Longreach and I visited Muttaborra, where one of the first rural kindergartens was established. The principal has done an excellent job. They spoke to me of this fantastic program, which ensures children are able to access kindergarten before they start school, and what a difference it makes when children start prep having had that pre-school kindy experience. We have been rolling this out. The government is committed to ensuring that all children get a great start in life, no matter where they live in Queensland.

Muttaborra also has a great program for distance education students. Every Friday that school doubles in size, from nine students to 18, when the distance education students on properties come in. It is a great model. I have spoken to the director-general about whether we can do that with not only remote kindy but also other distance education modules. I really like the benefits that program was bringing to those students.

We know the benefits. We want to give our kids a great experience; however, the sheer size of Queensland presents its own set 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. It is actually remote kindergarten attached to our schools. We have expanded this, enabling over 800 children who never were able to access face-to-face kindergarten at schools in those parts of the state to experience it.

In 2018 we expanded the program. There are now 69 state schools able to deliver kindy where the market cannot. There is not enough for the market to do it, so we have stepped in. They are in places such as Bedourie, Camooweal, Dingo, Laura, Muttaborra, Thargomindah, Urandangi—and the list goes on. These very remote schools now have access to kindergarten programs. When I was in Jericho it was great to see those. We want to reach out to children in these remote areas as much as we can.

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. It used to be 50 kilometres; we have reduced that to 40. In your area, Chair, and other areas such as the islands, we are making sure that rule does not apply. If we need one of these facilities on Russell Island and there is something on Macleay Island, we can still have it even though the radius may not be that far. That is also a great expansion.

We are expanding into an extra 20 state schools like Mount Garnett and Prairie State School. This is a great program. It is close to my heart. I know that Harriet's mum, whom I met with, Carroll Abel, is a big supporter of remote kindy given the difference that the Tambo State School remote kindy

has made to her child Harriet. They often talk about it. I know that parents very much welcome this, but this is also to support those 800 kids who were not previously able to access this who now can access it. I have the director-general looking at further expansions that we can make and I want to look at further budgets in relation to this very important issue. When you talk to teachers, it makes a big difference to preppies starting if they have had a good kindergarten program and we want to make sure that those regional and remote areas do not miss out. Thank you for the question. It is one very dear to my heart.

CHAIR: Thank you also, Minister, for the KindyLinQ program that is running across the islands in my electorate. With reference to page 1 of the SDS, Minister, can you update the committee on the government's partnership with Share the Dignity to provide free sanitary products in schools?

Ms GRACE: This is another one that I very much welcome. Share the Dignity does a wonderful job in terms of free sanitary products in schools. We have linked with it and have provided funding in this budget to ensure that they are available in schools. We are rolling out this program. I met one of the staff who works at Share the Dignity who was very happy that we are linking with this. That is why we are investing \$2.5 million over three years to partner with Share the Dignity in order to provide vending machines with free supplies to 120 schools right across the state. In addition, our investment also means that there is the ability for students to access these free of charge and there are obviously great benefits in students being able to do this in schools.

In the 2021-22 state budget we have allocated for this year alone \$450,000 towards delivery of the first round of the vending machines and all of the moneys will be spent by 30 June 2024. I know this has been welcomed by a lot of schools and we have targeted those schools in most need. Obviously it is benefiting not only the schools but those students and there is great value in doing this. I thank Share the Dignity for partnering with the Department of Education in delivering this vital service. Thank you for the question.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, I have a question that is close to my heart in relation to page 3 of the department's SDS and reference to replacing and enhancing facilities at existing schools. Can the minister advise how schools will benefit from programs such as the School Infrastructure Enhancement fund and the school subsidy scheme which will deliver projects like the outdoor learning area at Kedron State School?

Ms GRACE: I know it is close to your heart, and Kedron is going to benefit from a new outdoor learning area. There is \$250,000. I think the best part of some of the delivery of education in our schools is the different way that teachers these days deliver it. I remember that I used to have to sit behind a desk nearly all day and we very rarely moved from that desk. These days the way we deliver it is so different. We go outdoors, we sit on carpets, we group together. We have beautiful furniture to complement that and children feel very relaxed in the various environments under which they can do that more focused work. For Kedron State School's new outdoor learning space—in the centre of the school—that \$250,000 will be a great advantage to that, but it is across everywhere. In Redlands at Victoria Point State School we will refurbish Block D and there is \$300,000 in relation to that. These grants are fantastic. They are smaller grants but, as we know, sometimes these smaller grants often have great benefits for the school.

In Rockhampton Allenstown State School will install shade cloth over the playgrounds with \$80,000, at Glenmore State School there is \$250,000 to refurbish covered areas and at Gracemere State School we will combine the netball and tennis courts with shade with \$295,000. In Moggill at Brookfield State School there is the refurbishment of Block D worth \$700,000 and at Kenmore State School there will be a refurbishment of the manual arts block worth half a million dollars to provide some great VET services for that area. In Theodore the Highland Reserve State School will refurbish a flexible learning area into a library with a \$275,000 investment. In Southern Downs Stanthorpe State School will refurbish learning spaces and staffroom spaces with \$650,000.

We will invest \$84 million into the SIE funding in total to refurbish classrooms and libraries, for wonderful outdoors, the refurbishment of tennis courts and the repair of paths and walkways. It is all part of our COVID-19 economic recovery plan. It creates great local jobs. Often it is these small programs that members come to me about right across the parliament. Everyone was informed of the amount of moneys that will be spent in their schools and we are looking forward to delivering them over the next 12 months. Thank you for the question and I look forward to the member for Stafford and I joining together to open the new Kedron outdoor learning space. I also look forward to joining all members on the committee to hopefully open the refurbished facilities in their schools, if I can get around to all of them.

CHAIR: Very exciting.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, in relation to page 3 of the Department of Education SDS and its reference to Local Schools Local Jobs policy, can the minister update the committee on how this program will link industry and local high schools to provide students with pathways into rewarding careers, especially in regional Queensland?

Ms GRACE: I am working very closely with the assistant minister, the member for Keppel, in relation to this. She will be driving this program and is doing some great work in making sure that we rollout our \$45 million Local Schools Local Jobs election commitment to start delivering for local businesses and students. This innovative, future focused plan will build and upgrade existing industry linked training facilities at 26 schools across Queensland to provide students with pathways into rewarding careers. We know that not everyone is going to go to university and when we are building our schools I meet many apprentices who are doing plumbing, carpentry, formwork and electrical. It is wonderful to see them all being locally employed and some of them have remarkable careers in that area. The upgraded training facilities and trade training centres will complement local emerging growth industries like hydrogen, aquaculture, defence maintenance and manufacturing, aviation and aerospace, and automotive technologies. It is beautiful to see the various areas that have these industries in them bringing that into the schools and giving students the opportunity to get those local jobs in those industries. It will prepare them for those future jobs.

I am pleased to advise that construction is underway at Mabel Park State High in Waterford on the automotive training facilities in that area. Mabel Park already has an existing engineering workshop and this funding will provide classrooms for theoretical learning to complement the proposed automotive training curriculum. The extra classrooms will enhance the STEM capacity at this school and there is a clear vision of using technology such as new electric and battery technologies, such as electronic scooters and solar powered vehicles, as the future jobs for these students, so it is very exciting. This project is really delivering for those local school communities.

As I said, the program is being overseen by the member for Keppel. She is in the room today and she is very excited about the program as well and we meet regularly to discuss how it is rolling out. I know that the member for Rockhampton is very much looking forward to the aquaculture research facility upgrade at Rocky High to assist students studying aquatic practices or agriculture science. Other programs and projects include a \$3 million design and technology facility at Sunnybank High, \$4 million for a new manual arts facility at Lowood State High in Lockyer and \$600,000 to establish an on-site medical training room at Bentley Park College in Mulgrave. It is right across the state, particularly in regional Queensland, that we are delivering the skills for the future. I had heard so much about the big, red truck that is a hospitality training facility at Longreach, so I was very excited to see it, and it is incredible. We have now provided funds to secure that training facility for the next 10 years, but it has to be seen to be believed.

It is probably the best catering facility in the outback and it is staffed by students. It is run by fantastic teachers who train these students in hospitality. There is not a gig in town, from Barcy to Longreach to all other outback towns, that does not want the Big Red Truck hospitality facility delivering food for them at their big events. It was wonderful to see those students. I got the best coffee in the outback made by the students in the Big Red Truck. I know the director-general has seen it as well. These are the types of things that we are delivering in regional Queensland to build on skill sets. Hospitality jobs in the outback are very much in demand, and these students are getting the skills they need for those jobs. We are very pleased with this program,

CHAIR: That is a huge recommendation on coffee.

Mr SULLIVAN: With reference to page 6 of the SDS, can the minister advise how the Palaszczuk government is working to strengthen transitions for young people into further training or employment?

Ms GRACE: This is such an important program. Education and employment are two pillars of the Palaszczuk government. Labor governments like ours believe that one of the best things we can do to support our young people is provide them with the skills, training and confidence to get a good job. The Premier often talks about the dignity of work. She focuses on that all of the time. All of our ministers concentrate on how we can get jobs for young people. That is exactly what we are doing with our \$8 million Link and Launch program. This is really an important step. Link and Launch supports school leavers who are not in education, employment or training and provides navigational options for them to help them transition into study, training or work.

We know that not every young person has a clear plan for life after school, and this program is giving them a helping hand to make that jump. Our specialist support officers based at schools work with young persons to help them figure out their goals, interests and strengths and support them to take

up opportunities. This involves linking the young person to free TAFE, work experience, alternative entry to university or full-time employment. The program has proven to be a huge success. We are reviewing this for expansion, based on what we are seeing already in the four pilot schools. The 23 schools now operating across the state are delivering. In fact, this year we launched new Link and Launch sites at Beenleigh, Lowood, Morayfield, Wilsonton, Woree, Proserpine, Nanango, Palm Beach Currumbin, Toolooa and Urangan. By 2022 we expect to see 30 schools involved in this program.

Early this year I visited Kirwan State High School with my colleague the member for Thuringowa to see what a difference this program is making. It was wonderful to meet Banabake Benjamin, who always wanted to be a nurse but needed some help getting started. Link and Launch worked with her to get credit for the training she did at school and enrol in a Diploma of Nursing at TAFE. I have never seen a bigger smile on a student's face to be benefiting from the dream they had.

I also had a chance to speak with Gary Kyle. Gary was feeling a bit lost when he finished school until he met Link and Launch officer Sheree Horwood, who is doing a wonderful job, who helped him get his driver's licence—a simple thing—complete a certificate III and find a job in conservation and land management. He is a very proud Aboriginal man. Gary is now pleased to report that in February he found a full-time job and his employer is now training him up to become a project manager. He was so proud that he was in land management and care. It was wonderful to see the smile on his face as well.

There are many examples of the success of this program. More than 675 young people right across Queensland have been assisted by this program. As I said, we will be rolling out another 30 sites soon. The program will help our young people build resilience and confidence and get the skills they need to transition from school to the world of work. It has been very successful. I love visiting these sites because the good news stories keep on rolling in.

CHAIR: We have time for one quick question from the member for South Brisbane before we go to closing statements from the director-general in regard to education.

Dr MacMAHON: Director-General, what were the rates of parental withdrawal from NAPLAN this year and how does this compare with past years?

Mr Cook: That data is not available to us until it is processed through both the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority and ACARA. We normally get that data at the end of every year. That data traditionally comes out in December. We do not collect that data. It does not come back into the department. It goes through the QCAA and is then sent to ACARA, it is verified and then the data comes in a national report in December.

Dr MacMAHON: How does the government intend to respond to concerns from teachers and unions—

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane, you do not have the call. Director-General, thank you for that response. The time being 11.45, are there any closing remarks in regard to education?

Ms GRACE: The \$15 million for amenities—I think we were talking about facilities, toilets and the like—was over two years, because we are planning ahead and we have earmarked that. It was not just for 2021-22; it is to 30 June 2022. I wanted to clarify that. Obviously we want to plan and get the work done.

Mr Cook: There was a range of questions from the member for Moggill. I am still finalising responses to those. I will be able to give a lot of those answers before the two o'clock closure.

CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes the committee's consideration of estimates for the education portfolio area. The committee will now adjourn for a break and the hearing will resume at 12.30 to consider the estimates for the racing portfolio area.

Proceedings suspended from 11.46 am to 12.30 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing is resumed. Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the estimates for the racing portfolio area until 1 pm. For this segment of the hearing I welcome the director-general and officers from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Ms GRACE: Chair, we also have Mr Bob Gee, the Director-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; Mr Brendan Parnell, the CEO of Racing Queensland; and Mr Paul Brown, the Acting Commissioner of the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission.

CHAIR: Thank you so much, Minister. Deputy Chair, the first question?

Mr LISTER: Thank you, Chair. I defer to the member for Everton.

Mr MANDER: Minister, in the past seven years Queensland taxpayers have paid around \$13.7 million for the upgrade of the track at Eagle Farm. Despite this massive investment, recent media reports suggest that Queensland trainers are reluctant to have their horses race on the track for fear of injury. How much more money needs to be spent to make the track safe?

Ms GRACE: The member is right: the Queensland government has provided two funding grants to RQ, under the previous government and our government, of about \$13.7 million. Since January 2021, RQ has held regular meetings with stakeholders, including trainers and jockeys, to discuss concerns about the track. Recently the Brisbane Racing Club hosted a very successful Stradbroke season, six weeks of world-class racing for the winter carnival. My understanding is that the track during most of that time—and I have the CEO of Racing Queensland here, as well as the acting commissioner of QRIC—was graded as a good 4 for most of the races at Eagle Farm. I receive nothing but positive feedback in relation to that from trainers and I spoke directly to some jockeys and owners on conditions of the track over that period.

However, I am aware of recent discussions regarding the track surface and the management of the track moving forward. Trust me, member, and I know you will join me in saying, that no-one wants to see anything but the best facilities at Eagle Farm and certainly we have not held back, as you quoted, with \$13.7 million to ensure we have a world-class track. I have met with other club members. I know that Townsville went through a similar situation as this and after three years their track is now very good. I have met with the chair of the Townsville track. Eagle Farm has a very similar track to the Townsville track. The Monteith report did say that it required about a three-year period in relation to that. The RQ Board—and I am happy to go to Brendan Parnell, the CEO of RQ—met yesterday and this is a No. 1 priority for not only myself but also the RQ Board. I know they received a good response about the track from the thoroughbred representative, Mr Graham Quirk, who is doing an excellent job on that committee.

We will continue our stakeholder engagement. I want to be updated very regularly on where we are heading with Eagle Farm and we want to ensure that we will work with trainers and jockeys to ensure that the track is fit for purpose. We have not held back in providing whatever is necessary with some of the best minds in the country in relation to Eagle Farm. The board determined—and I do not want to put words in the mouth of the CEO because I was not there yesterday—that it will be a while before we really know the true benefits of the track. I am happy, if the member is happy, to allow the CEO, Brendan Parnell, to expand on that, particularly in relation to the meeting yesterday. I know there is a meeting with stakeholders happening next week.

Mr MANDER: I will ask a question directly of the Chief Executive Officer of Racing Queensland. Mr Parnell, have you met with trainers recently to talk about their concerns about track safety?

Ms GRACE: I would add very quickly, I did visit Eagle Farm before the Stradbroke carnival and walked over the track. That is just to let you know that I have taken a very keen interest.

Mr MANDER: How did you find the track? I am joking!

Ms GRACE: It is a good question. The thing about it is that it looked fine to me and I think it did very well, but we want to make it world class.

Mr MANDER: Thank you, Minister.

Ms GRACE: If you ask a question you will get an answer.

Mr MANDER: Yes, I know. That was a silly mistake.

Mr Parnell: I speak to participants, including trainers, almost every day in this job. I travel the state quite regularly, as the member for Rockhampton and several other regional members know. Amongst that are discussions with owners, trainers and jockeys around the track. The minister referred to the Townsville racetrack, which is a very similar construction: a sand profile with the same couch grass. It took five years until that fully matured. We are into the third year of the Monteith report recommended staged return to racing. We meet as a maintenance control group with Racing Queensland and the Brisbane Racing Club each fortnight. To every alternate meeting we invite trainers and jockeys to listen to the progress. The next meeting is due next week to discuss the performance.

I will extend on the minister's comments. Eagle Farm delivered record wagering outcomes during winter. The strongest ever winter days were Derby Day and Stradbroke Day. One must remember that it is a seven-hectare organism that is still quite young and we are only halfway through the third year of its return to racing. The track is safe. The root system is the healthiest it has been and we continue to work on improving the cushion in that surface.

Mr MANDER: Mr Parnell, are the concerns that were reported in the media inaccurate with regards to trainers being concerned about the safety of the track and the safety for their horses?

Mr Parnell: The concerns were around the firmness of the track, not the safety of the track. The track is safe. The best horses won, the best jockeys won and the best trainers during the carnival. The focus with young turf root strength or maturity has been getting more maturity into it so that it softens the surface, but it is certainly not an unsafe track.

Mr MANDER: Minister, I refer to page 9 of the SDS, where service standards are listed for racing. There is only one effectiveness measure listed. It is the percentage of country race meetings in the approved schedule that are conducted. Minister, is this the lamest effectiveness measure in the state government's budget papers?

CHAIR: Member for Everton, could you recast that question? There is an imputation within it.

Mr MANDER: Minister, is this the weakest effectiveness measure in the state government's budget papers?

Ms GRACE: No. I think it is actually adequate. These are the service standards that we have. They are listed here in relation to country racing, which is a very important part of racing. This government has invested significantly in country racing. We understand its significance in the racing calendar year. We continue to invest heavily in country racing. We have been the best supporters of country racing by a country mile when it comes to our investment in and support of country racing. Country racing people—God bless them all—are excellent dedicated workers who work in the country racing area and they have never been so happy, particularly following some of the confirmation of prize money that they will be getting under this budget that I will be doing very soon.

Mr MANDER: Minister, the Queensland government invests hundreds of millions of dollars into the racing industry. Don't Queenslanders deserve more effectiveness measures so that they can have comfort that their taxes are being well spent?

Ms GRACE: I think Queenslanders want a high-integrity, well-run, growing racing industry that prevents integrity measures not being there. As we have done with QRIC, they want to see that our investment produces a very fine product. Queensland has gone from strength to strength when it comes to racing in the state. We have had one of the most successful periods. I want to congratulate RQ, QRIC and the clubs. It was an incredible feat that racing continued and grew during COVID. We want to make sure that we have high integrity and make all of that available to the racing community. I do not think there are too many people who would say that we are not transparent. Annual reports show that the performance of the racing industry is advancing. There are many ways that the racing community and the broader community can get information on racing. We are very proud of what we have done and very proud of racing in this state. I will continue to work with the industry to go from strength to strength, right around the country. The member for Rockhampton is here, and I know that he is very close to the Rockhampton club.

Mr MANDER: Following on from your comment about Queenslanders being very concerned about the integrity of the racing system, I refer to the QRIC performance statements. One of their effectiveness measures is the percentage of community members surveyed who are confident in the integrity of the Queensland racing industry. For 2021 that was 59 per cent. Does that meet your standard of people being confident in the integrity of the racing industry, only 59 per cent of people surveyed?

Ms GRACE: That has improved since we took over racing following the MacSparran report. We always aim to make sure integrity is of high standard in this state. I know that QRIC has done an excellent job in the harness, greyhound and thoroughbred industry when it comes to maintaining integrity. Greyhound racing is going from strength to strength. We have maintained integrity in that area. We want to increase that. We make no apologies for those people who are caught out. When it comes to the integrity part that QRIC undertakes, we test 100 per cent of race winners. We have a wonderful science centre that we are investing in to make sure we have up-to-date technology in relation to that. We always want to see better results. Integrity is something that we hold very dear. We have an act in relation to that. We always want to make sure that act works very well. Member, thank you for the question. It is a very important part that we work very hard to maintain. I congratulate QRIC on the work they do. It is all in one place and it is presenting and doing a very good job in the area of integrity. We will always strive to do better.

Mr DAMETTO: Welcome to everybody here. It is great to have everyone from Racing Queensland and the department of agriculture here today to help out the minister. Minister, referring to the revenue expected to be drawn from the state's point-of-consumption tax in the 2021-22 financial year, can you tell us the amount of income that is expected to be raised and where that money will be spent across Queensland?

Ms GRACE: This is really good news for the racing industry. I fought very hard for this through the CBRC. I thank Treasury, the Treasurer, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and my CBRC colleagues. They will now be getting 35 per cent of the point-of-consumption tax. It means that if you place a bet in Queensland then part of that money will be going to maintaining racing in this state. We are anticipating that that 35 per cent will bring in an extra \$41.3 million.

This additional money will be going back into the industry for areas like improving racetracks—I can get more information later on—upgrading facilities for racegoers, boosting prize money—there was an article in the paper today; I can go into more detail in relation to that as well—supporting animal care, a very important part of integrity in the racing industry, and creating more jobs in and around racing.

As the CEO of Racing Queensland said, the three codes benefit almost 40,000 Queensland participants. We also announced the renewal of the Country Racing Program, which will be maintained for a further two years; they will receive an additional \$35.2 million. That is of great benefit to country racing. I know it is dear to your heart and dear to some of our regional members. We will continue to support them because we know that is the biggest event in a lot of those regional and remote country areas. We are investing in their infrastructure, in their facilities and in the training of their jockeys.

It was great to see the races out at Longreach recently. I think every jockey who won was a female jockey, which was very good to see. Thank you for the question. We hope to raise additional funds for racing in this state so we can promote and expand. We had the most successful Winter Racing Carnival on record and we have gone from strength to strength in this state with racing.

Mr MANDER: Minister, it has been reported that Minister Hinchliffe wants to get back into the racing ministry saddle. Does that mean that you are about to be put out to pasture?

CHAIR: Member for Everton—

Ms GRACE: Don't believe everything you read in the *Courier-Mail*, member for Everton. I am sure that is a question probably better asked of Minister Hinchliffe than me. I am very happy in the portfolio and I am pretty sure he is happy with sport.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, in relation to page 9 of the SDS, can you advise how the 35 per cent of revenue from the state's point-of-consumption tax on wagering will be spent?

Ms GRACE: I gave a broad outline of where the additional funds will go to. I know that the industry is very happy in relation to the certainty and security this now brings to the industry. As they grow, that money will grow. It is a great incentive for the industry, for Racing Queensland, for QRIC and for all of the clubs to ensure we make racing a great part of the racing calendar here in Queensland. In addition, we will distribute around \$29 million over the next two years. The investment is made possible by this 35 per cent.

I am very happy to confirm that, from 1 September, along with infrastructure grants and improved club funding, the increase in prize money is across all three racing codes—\$4 million. Grassroots thoroughbred racing will see a rise of \$2,000 for every maiden race at TAB meetings and a rise in minimum prize money to \$8,500 for all non-TAB thoroughbred racing, an increase from the current \$7,400. I know that the country racing representatives, Graham and his team, will be very happy with that announcement. It is a very good increase for country racing and a very big support for that industry. There will be \$1.7 million in grassroots greyhound prize money and nearly a million dollars for harness racing.

The investment plan also supports the infrastructure requirements for the industry, with \$5 million across the next two years going towards replacing critical racing assets and a more than \$3 million per annum increase in club operation, so everyone will benefit from this substantial increase.

I am proud that every time someone places a bet in Queensland a guaranteed portion now—35 per cent of the point-of-consumption tax money—will go back into improving tracks, upgrading facilities for racegoers, boosting prize money, supporting animal care and creating more jobs in and around racing.

From 1 September, almost 40,000 Queensland participants will start to see the benefits from the increased prize money. The additional funding will support new and improved infrastructure grants and improved club funding. This is fantastic news for the racing industry. It is an investment in a growth plan. It can be found on our website. I know that Racing Queensland already is working towards rolling this out. I look forward to welcoming it on 1 September and am very happy to confirm the reports about these increases.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, I refer to page 9 of the department's SDS. I know you touched on this in questioning from opposition members, but as an interested northsider I ask about Eagle Farm. Do you have a further update about the track following the winter carnival?

Mr MANDER: Point of order, Madam Chair: that is exactly the same question that has already been responded to. The member needs to be more nimble and not just follow the script but ask different questions. We do not need to go through the same five-minute response again.

Mr SULLIVAN: Chair, I specifically asked for an update post the winter carnival.

CHAIR: There is no point of order, member for Everton. He is asking for an update.

Ms GRACE: I am sure the member for Everton will be happy to hear this response as well. It is the No. 1 priority. We want to make sure that Eagle Farm gets back to its glory days. As the CEO and I have said previously, the winter carnival was very successful. Post that, we want to make sure we get that track to exactly where it needs to be.

We are working with trainers, jockeys and stakeholders and we meet regularly. I know RQ had this on the agenda. I understand that the performance of the track continues to be the subject of discussions within the industry. My understanding is that base for improvement is very good. The root structure is not like it was when it was done prior to us coming to government and which we had to rip up. There is not the thatching that was there before and which required a complete upheaval.

We understand that it is similar to Townsville. I have met with the Townsville people who said, 'Minister, it does take a while longer.' We are nearly to the point post the Stradbroke season where we are looking to see this grass firm up. I know everyone is looking at it. We have some of the best experts from around Australia looking at this track.

Since 2015 we have supported RQ. This is not a matter of money. This is about making sure we get this right. As the CEO said, it is about the firmness of the grass not so much the grass that is there. We will work with everyone on this. We want to make this a premier spot. It is the No. 1 priority not only for me but also for Racing Queensland. They are well aware of the government's views.

I am pleased that RQ and the BRC—I have met with Nev Bell—are on board. I have been out and seen the track. I was there during the Stradbroke season. We continue to engage with trainers and jockeys who are part of the broader group of representatives on the Eagle Farm maintenance control group. We have experts from everywhere looking at the performance of the track. I, and I am sure the member for Everton and you as a local member who is very close to that racetrack, want to see this as the premier racetrack in Australia. Hopefully we can get there.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, in relation to page 9 of the SDS can you outline how the country racing program importantly supports the social fabric of rural and regional Queensland?

Ms GRACE: As a very proud Rockhampton member and supporter of the regional track in Rockhampton, you know that the government backs the bush. Country racing is a central part of social and economic life in regional Queensland. There is nothing better than being in the outback and enjoying a day at the races with the locals. Their legendary country hospitality cannot be beaten. I experienced this firsthand in May at the Barcardine Racing Club's Tree of Knowledge race day. The atmosphere was fantastic. It was a great race day. Once again, a female jockey took out the No. 1 race in Barcardine. It is great to see our female jockeys doing so well.

The racing contribution to the Queensland economy is more than \$1.6 billion a year, with an incredible 46 per cent of that contribution occurring in regional communities. That is a big regional impact. That is why we have backed country racing for a further two years with additional funding of \$35.2 million. This is on top of the original commitment of \$70.4 million over four years, providing a total of \$106 million to country racing and the people of regional Queensland.

The CRP, the Country Racing Program, provides \$50 million a year to support prize money and bonuses. Now that we have additional money coming through the point of consumption tax we can increase prize money and make sure that we support country racing even more. Our commitment is also to provide a further \$2.6 million a year for infrastructure. It is wonderful to see the improvement and maintenance of race facilities that is occurring. The last time I was at Barcardine it was a dirt track so it was great to see a grass track this time. That came out of the infrastructure fund. Since the program began more than 220 infrastructure projects have been awarded to 85 of our smallest clubs. That is an injection of not only local jobs but also infrastructure into those areas. From Longreach in the west to Cooktown in the north, investment continues.

I thank all the volunteers and people who work in these clubs. They keep country racing alive. We would be lost without them. They do a wonderful job. They are very happy with our Country Racing Support Package. It is making sure that country racing goes from strength to strength. After two years and all this money being injected into the industry they are far better off. They certainly have benefited from the investment that we have made. As racing minister, I am more than convinced that country racing needs to be supported. I am very proud that the government has provided that support.

Mr O'ROURKE: I know that the Rockhampton Jockey Club benefited from that funding in terms of getting new stables. Could you provide an update on the Queensland Off-the-Track Program?

Ms GRACE: That is a good question. We take animal welfare very seriously. Part of this is to ensure that we have safe facilities for thoroughbreds and all codes racing around Queensland. Our government is committed to ensuring that an appropriate system is established in Queensland to support the transition of thoroughbreds and standardbreds from the racing industry to retirement.

In response to the Martin inquiry recommendation, Racing Queensland and the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission have been working together to establish the Queensland Off-the-Track Program to support the transition of horses after racing. Since 1 January, the one per cent prize money levy of Racing Queensland on thoroughbred and harness racing, raising close to \$2 million over 18 months, has been used for animal care initiatives, including the Off-the-Track Program.

The Queensland government appointed Ms Sharon Cowden as the inaugural chair, with industry stakeholders and animal welfare representatives on the board. It has had meetings. They are currently looking at a number of programs, including an off-the-track grants program which will assist existing rehomingers within the community to support retired racehorses that come into their care. There is an acknowledged retrainers program for the retraining and rehoming of thoroughbreds and standard horses. There is also a subsidised lessons program to support retired racehorses as they transition from the racing industry into the community. I am pleased to advise that enrolments for this incredible initiative opened this week.

We have taken a stand. We have this money now. We are putting the grants program together. There will be expressions of interest. We will be spending the money in those three priority areas. I am not sure if the Racing Queensland CEO would like to add anything in terms of where we are at in terms of the spending of the money that has been provided so far.

Mr Parnell: As we have eluded to, the subsidised lessons program was opened this week. We have also entered partnerships with Riding for the Disabled. That is already underway, including in regional Queensland at Emerald. In addition to that, the Queensland Off-the-Track board has now met six times and has a budget approved by the Racing Queensland board to expend on those activities, which also includes some wonderful existing programs. There are some existing retainers such as Save a Horse Australia down at Beaudesert. Toowoomba and Darling Downs trainer Michael Nolan is the president of the Glennie Equestrian Club. It is also a wonderful rehoming exercise as is Jane Gollan's in Brisbane—the director of Triequithon. A lot of these rehomingers are already in place. This funding will help them speed up and deliver better outcomes for our horses after their careers.

CHAIR: I call to the table the member for South Brisbane for the final question of this session.

Dr MacMAHON: Director-General, the 2021-22 budget gives \$41.3 million to the racing industry for new infrastructure as well as supporting animal care. How will the government ensure the industry supports animal care in the expending of these funds?

Mr Cook: We actually did respond to that part of the component a little earlier. I might ask Mr Parnell particularly to talk about some of the issues around animal care.

Mr Parnell: As we discussed earlier, the minister discussed the one per cent prize money levy which has been implemented by Racing Queensland. The entirety of that levy is being returned to after-care activities which we have just extended—subsidised lessons, grants programs, as well as partnerships with the likes of Riding for the Disabled Association and funding for existing rehoming programs. One per cent of all prize money for equine racing will be delivered back to animal care initiatives.

In addition to that, Racing Queensland has a number of other activities in the animal care space. In greyhound racing, last year we introduced a greyhound racing injury management scheme to significantly reduce the serious injuries that happen at race meetings. That has been a very effective program which has lowered euthanasia rates by 60 per cent since it was introduced.

CHAIR: That concludes the committee's examination of estimates for the racing portfolio area. The committee will now examine estimates for the industrial relations portfolio area. I welcome to the table the member for Kawana, Mr Bleijie. The committee will now examine estimates for the industrial relations portfolio area until 2 pm. Minister, do you want to welcome your additions to the table?

Ms GRACE: Yes. I welcome in addition Mr Craig Allen, Deputy Director-General, Office of Industrial Relations.

CHAIR: I call the deputy chair.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, are you aware that the Crime and Corruption Commission has ordered an investigation into the Office of Industrial Relations over alleged corrupt conduct?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. It is a very general question. I am aware that you have written to me about a particular matter. I understand that you have referred that matter to the CCC. Similarly, my office has referred that matter to the CCC.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have a letter from Mr Peter Edwards, Director, Ethical Standards, Office of Industrial Relations. He mentions you in the letter, Director-General. I am conscious not to mention the particular company. Are you aware of more investigations by the Crime and Corruption Commission? Is there more than one, Director-General, or is it the one that we are talking about? I have received confirmation from the Crime and Corruption Commission that they have referred the matter to the Office of Industrial Relations. I have now received a letter from the OIR about that matter.

Mr Cook: My understanding is that that is the same matter.

Mr BLEIJIE: Are you aware that the allegation relates to officers of the Office of Industrial Relations assisting or facilitating the CFMEU in a harassment campaign?

Mr Cook: The detail of that allegation is outlined as outlined in your letter to me. That is all I am aware of at this stage.

Mr BLEIJIE: Are you aware that there is an allegation relating to officers of the Office of Industrial Relations moving Workplace Health and Safety inspectors on if the CFMEU does not agree with them at a particular work site?

Mr Cook: No, I am not aware of that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Are you aware, Director-General, that one of the allegations relates to a Workplace Health and Safety inspector being directed to issue a prohibition notice despite the Workplace Health and Safety inspector not identifying any workplace issue?

Mr Cook: I am aware that that is the allegation that was included in your letter to me.

Mr BLEIJIE: Are you aware that one of the Office of Industrial Relations' employees subject to the complaint actually met with the complainant company yesterday—one week after an investigation was launched by the CCC?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, would it present a conflict of interest if you have an officer of the Office of Industrial Relations subject to a complaint that the CCC has now launched an investigation into—what have you put in place to ensure conflicts of interest are dealt with and that this particular person or persons is not having any association with a complainant company or complainant?

Mr Cook: Obviously, in terms of conflict of interest and appropriateness, we will do everything that we are required to do in relation to that. I am not aware of the allegation you have made in terms of the meeting. I have no details of that. I am happy to look into that further and speak to my staff about that.

Mr BLEIJIE: In the letter from the Office of Industrial Relations to me and the CCC, it states that the allegations that I have put to the CCC would amount to corruption if proved; hence why they have referred the matter to the Office of Industrial Relations for investigation. Can you advise this committee who is conducting that investigation?

Mr Cook: I have been advised that we are currently in the process, as we have done with other issues that have been referred to us by the CCC, of sourcing an external investigator to undertake that work for us.

Mr BLEIJIE: What is the time line for this investigation and the appointment of such third party to conduct the investigation?

Mr Cook: The appointment is as soon as possible. The time line and the length of the investigation I guess will be guided by the extent that the investigator needs to actually investigate the issue. We are currently in the process of finalising that. We will be having the appointment of the external investigator as soon as possible.

Mr BLEIJIE: Have staff been notified in the Office of Industrial Relations about this CCC investigation, Director-General?

Mr Cook: Have staff been notified?

Mr BLEIJIE: Notified of the investigation.

Mr Cook: All staff in the Office of Industrial Relations—is that the question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Let's split it—whether all staff in the Office of Industrial Relations have been notified or those that are complained of in the complaint?

Mr Cook: I am advised no. As we would normally do under a CCC investigation, at the moment that information is confidential. That has not occurred and will not occur I would imagine until after the investigator has been appointed.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect to conflicts of interest, are you aware whether any of your staff employed in the Office of Industrial Relations have had or are having relations with CFMEU officials? If so, how are those conflicts managed?

CHAIR: That question has imputations, member for Kawana. If you could explain to me how that is relevant to the appropriations before us, I would be pleased to hear that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Indeed. When an officer attends a work site through Workplace Health and Safety, there is a direct correlation to them talking to the CFMEU. There are potential serious conflicts of interest raised. Allegations have been raised that this is the case. I have not mentioned anyone individually. I am just simply asking—

CHAIR: No. You have not explained to me how that is relevant to the appropriations before us.

Mr LISTER: Chair, if I may say—

CHAIR: Are you raising a point of order, Deputy Chair?

Mr LISTER: I am, regarding the admissibility of that question. Anything which the government undertakes—any area it administers—costs money. The question of the member for Kawana goes directly to the administration and therefore the appropriateness of the use of the funds that have been devoted to the department. In other words, the Clerk has said that everything is on the table, and that has been accepted—

CHAIR: It is extraordinarily difficult and a very long bow to draw as to how this question relates to the budget appropriations before us. Director-General, I will provide you with an extraordinary amount of latitude in responding to this question.

Mr Cook: The department has an annual conflict of interest register that staff, particularly executive staff, are required to complete. That register asks about financial interests but any other interests that may impact on their performance. As part of a staff member's performance plan, the expectation would also be that they would be having conversations with their supervisor about any conflicts of interest.

Mr BLEIJIE: You have confirmed there is a register in the Office of Industrial Relations. Is that a public register or is that only an internal document?

Mr Cook: That would not be public. The only people whose registers or conflicts of interest registers are public are director-generals and members of parliament.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, with respect to conflict of interest registers, have any senior officers in the department registered any conflicts of interest they have with the CFMEU?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Would you be able to find out for the committee?

Mr Cook: We can certainly see if we have any information in the next hour or so.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, CFMEU permit holder Luke Gibson is on the record in the media with allegations against him of intimidation, harassment of non-union enterprise employers and employees. It is even alleged he was barking at a female safety adviser and called her an 'f'ing dog C'.

He continues to make women on sites feel uncomfortable and only weeks ago trespassed on a contractor's private property. Does Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, as the regulator for workplace health and safety, support this type of intimidation and harassment on worksites?

Mr Cook: I think you are seeking an opinion. Notwithstanding, I will certainly say that of course Workplace Health and Safety Queensland does not tolerate occupational violence, does not tolerate improper treatment. Where we believe that has occurred we will take the necessary steps.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, does Workplace Health and Safety Queensland enforce the prohibition under section 146 of the Workplace Health and Safety Act to not act in an improper way? If so, has this Gibson or any other CFMEU permit holder been found in breach of acting improperly?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, are you asking for a legal opinion? Could you clarify?

Mr BLEIJIE: No, I am not. The regulator, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, has obligations under that particular provision of the Workplace Health and Safety Act as far as it relates to permit holders. You might be correct thinking, Madam Chair, that Luke Gibson should not be a permit holder with all of his harassment and thuggery against women, but he actually is.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, there is definitely not the need to include that sort of language in your response, so if you could think deeply about how you respond and the language you use.

Mr BLEIJIE: Let me put it this way, Director-General: as the regulator, will the regulator make an application to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to have his permit revoked for the benefit of all workers in the construction industry, including, and most importantly, the women that he is alleged to have harassed?

CHAIR: Again I think you are asking for an opinion.

Mr BLEIJIE: No, Madam Chair, the regulator gives the permit.

CHAIR: That is right; the regulator gives the permit. I think you are asking for an opinion.

Mr BLEIJIE: No. Madam Chair, the regulator grants the permit and can revoke the permit. Under the particular legislation if they act in an improper way—and I would suggest barking at a woman is—this fellow has also been convicted of assault on a woman at a pub, so I am asking—

CHAIR: No, member for Kawana, I will stop you there. That is not relevant to the appropriations before us. It is out of order. I would ask you to consider how you cast your question to the director-general.

Mr BLEIJIE: Based on the allegations against Mr Gibson will the regulator revoke his permit for not being a proper person?

CHAIR: Let's keep the question at that. Director-General, I will provide you with some latitude in your response.

Mr Cook: Thank you, Chair. As you would expect us to do, if evidence is presented to us we will take appropriate action. I have no evidence before me about the claims you are making, but I am also happy for Mr Allen to add to my response.

Mr Allen: I can confirm what the director-general said if there is any complaint or evidence presented to us. I would also like to point out that the permit the person you are referring to would hold would be under the Fair Work Act as a permit holder under the registered organisations process.

Mr BLEIJIE: He actually has both permits.

Mr Allen: Thank you for the clarification.

Mr BLEIJIE: He has both permits, Madam Chair, under state and federal regulation.

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Kawana. Mr Allen is appreciative of the clarification.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, it was reported in April this year that CFMEU official Luke Gibson was convicted of common assault on a woman. He has previous convictions for obstructing police and trespass on worksites and is currently before the courts on separate matters relating to his role as a union organiser. Has any complaint been made to the Office of Industrial Relations about Mr Luke Gibson?

Mr Cook: I do not—

Mr SULLIVAN: Point of order, Chair: In relation to matters before the court, that is clearly sub judice and I would ask that the answer does not touch on those.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order, Madam Chair: The sub judice rule relates to criminal matters before the court. These are not criminal matters before the court, so the standing order that you asked for does not apply.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, member for Kawana, you were not very definitive in the statement you made. You made the statement that it was before the court, so it is a very fair point of order to suggest that there may be a question around sub judice—

Mr BLEIJIE: Correct, and he is wrong because he does not understand the standing orders.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, there really is no need to respond like that.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am just educating him.

CHAIR: It was a fair point of order based on the question you put forward and the commentary you had around that.

Ms GRACE: He made some pretty serious allegations.

CHAIR: Absolutely.

Mr BLEIJIE: Do you want me to show you all of the media articles where he has been convicted of assaulting a woman?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: This guy is a grub—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE:—he is a thug—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE:—and he has assaulted a woman—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE:—been convicted.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana! How many times would you like me to call you to order, member for Kawana? Please—

Mr BLEIJIE: I am responding to the quarrelling from the minister.

CHAIR: No. I am the chair. I am guiding these proceedings. I am asking you to conduct them in a respectful manner and be respectful to the chair. Please cast your next question.

Mr BLEIJIE: I did. I asked some time ago—

CHAIR: You confirmed that the matter before the court does not have—

Mr BLEIJIE: The matters I am referring to are not criminal matters before the court. My question to the director-general is: has any complaint been made to the Office of Industrial Relations about Mr Luke Gibson?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of any complaints that have been made.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, with all of these allegations—and I am sure you are aware that your own Office of Industrial Relations is now subject to a Crime and Corruption Commission—when will you finally put your workers in workplace health and safety first ahead of union thugs?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, there is an imputation within that question. Please recast it.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, you are now aware that the Crime and Corruption Commission has ordered an investigation with respect to the Office of Industrial Relations, a department which you oversee. There are serious allegations from the CCC—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, get to the point of your question, please.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, my question is this: when will you put workers ahead of the unions?

Ms GRACE: I reject the premise of the question. We always look after the health and safety and wellbeing of our workers, and we have a proud record of doing that on every occasion. The only reason there is an investigation that is being delegated to OIR—and the CCC deemed it not even that serious. They are investigating it themselves. They used their delegations power and delegated to OIR. We will undertake that in the independent way we always do. The only reason the CCC delegated it is because the member for Kawana referred this matter to the CCC. As it is currently being investigated by the department it is an appropriate for me to comment. Can I say quite clearly that the CCC does not see it as serious enough for them to look into and they have delegated it to the OIR—

Mr BLEIJIE: I think you are verballing the CCC.

CHAIR: There is no need for interjection.

Ms GRACE: Can I also say that of all the allegations—and every time we have estimates we wait for a bit of theatrics from the member for Kawana—not one of the allegations made by the member has been substantiated. There have been CCC complaints against officers. All of the allegations were not substantiated. There have been other areas that have been investigated by the department. Not one of them has been substantiated. They have been found to be baseless. There is not one of them that has been found to be—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Chair.

Ms GRACE: I am answering the question.

CHAIR: The minister is being responsive to the question.

Mr LISTER: Under 118A the substance of the question is not to be debated. This is not about previous questions; it is about the question that the member for Kawana asked now.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. The minister is being responsive to the question. Continue, please, Minister.

Ms GRACE: We have had these before OIR's ethical standards for assessment. The complaints were assessed. It was concluded that there was no evidence raising a reasonable suspicion of corruption, no evidence of misconduct of OIR staff. This is yet another example of baseless and unsubstantiated claims that keep coming from the member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: It came from a construction company. It is from a business in Queensland.

CHAIR: Cease your interjections.

Ms GRACE: Can I say that it is actually the businesses in this area that have been convicted of obstructing inspectors. They have been before the courts and fined \$6,000, ordered by the courts.

Mr BLEIJIE: \$6,000.

Ms GRACE: For category 2 offences by that particular business, with serious incidences, they were fined \$68,000 and ordered to pay court costs.

Mr BLEIJIE: Do you want to talk about fines before the court? \$11 million, CFMEU.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, cease your interjections.

Ms GRACE: Obviously, if the member for Kawana has any allegations that are serious, he should—

CHAIR: Minister, hold please. Member for Kawana, you understand the standing orders. You have been in this parliament long enough. Please do not use props at the table.

Ms GRACE: This is just a desperate attempt to tarnish the fantastic reputation of our health and safety inspectors in OIR who do a wonderful job every single day.

Mr BLEIJIE: They do, but they want help.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, with reference to the SDS, can you advise how many full-time-equivalent employees there are in the department across Queensland at the moment?

Ms GRACE: Do you want the staff numbers in the department of industrial relations?

Mr DAMETTO: Correct.

Ms GRACE: I think from memory it is 885, but I am sure I can confirm that. It is a figure that I kind of remember reading. Yes, I am 100 per cent correct: it is 885 full-time employees.

Mr DAMETTO: How do they compare to last year's figures?

Ms GRACE: The numbers are constant. As you know, because I have referred to this previously, we are increasing the numbers for our labour hire compliance unit. There is money in the budget. From 1 July we will be increasing that by I think eight additional staff members. That money has been allocated in the 2021-22 budget so we can continue the great work in relation to the labour hire compliance unit. That unit is responsible for licensing and compliance work. We have beefed that up and it has been very successful. Those numbers are pretty constant and they do an excellent job.

Mr DAMETTO: Will the minister be able to outline the number of employees in regional Queensland and the number in metropolitan Queensland if there is a split?

Ms GRACE: I am sure we can provide that to you. We have a great regional base for a lot of our inspectors. They do a great job. I am not sure if that breakdown is before us right now. If I am unable to give that to you right now, I am happy to take that on notice and provide that to you. If we can get it before the hour is out, I am happy to give it to you here from the table. We have a very good regional program and they do an excellent job.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Minister.

Mr SULLIVAN: Minister, in relation to page 7 of the SDS, can you outline the government's response to ensure the health and safety of workers working in the engineered stone industry?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. This is a very important one with the emergence of silicosis among engineered stone benchtop workers. It is a matter that the government has taken very seriously. I am proud to have led the nation in responding to and addressing this serious work health and safety issue. I want to thank all of the inspectors who have done a fantastic job in going out and auditing and making sure that health and safety standards are maintained in this industry.

We started by issuing urgent safety warnings and banning dry cutting. A statewide enforcement and compliance campaign was started. We are developing Australia's first code of practice for the engineered stone industry. We had Australia's first dust lung disease register and Australia's first standardised clinical guidance. We have been consistently calling for a national response to this issue which impacts on workers Australia-wide.

A key part of Queensland's response has been a robust and ongoing compliance and enforcement campaign. As I said, the inspectors have done a wonderful job. In October 2017 Workplace Health and Safety Queensland launched Australia's first compliance campaign of the engineered stone industry. The first phase involved an audit of 10 workplaces and we uncovered extremely poor work practices. The second stage of the campaign occurred in 2018 and 2019 involving audits of all 148 stone benchtop fabrication workplaces.

Between August 2020 and May 2021, stage 3 of the campaign was undertaken involving audits of all 158 known benchtop fabrication workplaces. During the third stage of these proactive audits, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland found a significant reduction in the hazardous dry cutting and improved monitoring of workers' health. Audits found that the industry still needs to improve air monitoring and ensure the proper use of protective equipment and cleaning methods. We will continue to make sure that we look after the workers.

As at June 2021, WorkCover had accepted 230 claims relating to silicosis, with 32 involving a diagnosis of progressive massive fibrosis. We are committed to making sure that workers and their families who have fallen ill receive the occupational assistance they require. That is why this budget has \$5 million for medical research. We are looking at medical research into dust lung diseases, particularly for silicosis and coal workers' pneumoconiosis. Expressions of interest closed on 14 June. The applications are currently being assessed and we welcome this much needed research into this area.

All workers who have come forward and want to be assessed have been given free WorkCover examinations and tests. We will work continuously on this. There was a report from the National Dust Disease Taskforce in 2019, and they released their final report on 12 July this year where they made a series of recommendations. We are currently considering these recommendations in line with the actions we have taken. I was very pleased that the national report recognised Queensland's approach to tackling dust lung diseases as a model example. We are very proud about that and we will continue to do what we can to protect these workers. We will look at the recommendations of that national report.

CHAIR: Minister, we have certainly had the media shine a spotlight on respect in the workplace. Can you advise how the government is responding to the *Respect@Work* national report recommendations and those that are relevant to the state industrial relations jurisdiction?

Ms GRACE: I know this is an issue that the chair is very concerned about and I know you have a passion to make sure we address it. Sexual harassment is a serious matter, and we welcome the renewed national focus on gender inequality. That is why the Palaszczuk government is committed to delivering nation-leading protections for workers subject to sexual harassment from both an industrial and work health and safety perspective. We have commenced a review into the Industrial Relations Act 2016 that will include an investigation into protections for workers subject to sexual harassment under the act. We are committed to investigating the development of a sexual harassment code of practice with the aim of preventing sexual harassment in workplaces and providing ongoing and secure funding for Working Women Queensland.

We know the importance of ensuring that vulnerable workers are not only protected by strong laws but also able to access support when they need it. *Respect@Work* recommends that the Commonwealth work with the states and territories on funding for the Working Women's Centres. Queensland has certainly stepped up for that. We are continuing to fund the Working Women's Centres. Our government and previous Labor governments have strongly supported these services. Unfortunately, the Newman government pulled support for this. We reinstated it and we have recently provided a further three years of secure funding to the Working Women's Centres worth nearly \$800,000. That is \$230,000 plus indexation per year.

The service has been funded over the years by Labor governments. We have supported them with nearly \$6 million. We ask that the Morrison government picks up the recommendation from the *Respect@Work* report and also stumps up adequate money to make sure that the Working Women's Centres can continue their good work in this area. I look forward to the review of the Industrial Relations Act. We will have a look at what has happened nationally as well and we will ensure the act provides adequate protection in this difficult area of sexual harassment and assault at work.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, can you advise on the progress of the review of the Electrical Safety Act?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. Sadly, I think he, too, is well aware that often there are no second chances when it comes to electrical safety. That is why we are committed to ensuring Queensland's electrical safety laws are of the highest standard and keep pace with new and emerging industries.

I wrote to the Commissioner for Electrical Safety in July 2019 requesting that he set up an industry round table on broad issues related to electrical safety including the emerging large-scale solar farm industry as well as the battery industry. A number of changes and updates have been made in this area. The industry round table included representatives from relevant industry bodies such as electrical contractor associations, unions and the Clean Energy Council. Following meetings of the round table, *Improving electrical safety in Queensland*, a report by the Commissioner for Electrical Safety, was provided to me by the Commissioner for Electrical Safety, Mr Greg Skyring. I thank the Commissioner for Electrical Safety for providing such a comprehensive and well-considered report. I also extend my appreciation to the members of the round table for their valuable contributions to the report and its recommendations.

The report made nine recommendations for the government to consider, which included a review of the Electrical Safety Act. In August 2020 I accepted all nine recommendations including a commitment to progressing a review as a matter of priority. The review commenced in December 2020 soon after we were re-elected as the Palaszczuk Labor government and it is being undertaken by an external reviewer, Mr Dick Williams. Mr Williams brings to the position a wealth of knowledge and expertise when it comes to electrical safety. He is well respected across all areas within the electrical industry and has a proven track record when it comes to working productively with all stakeholders.

The review has a strong focus on consultation. I understand the act has not been reviewed for about 20 years, so it is highly appropriate that we do this. It will focus on relevant and effective ways we can futureproof the act. The scope includes consideration of technological currency, given the emerging electrical generation, supply and distribution technologies such as large-scale solar, electrical vehicles, batteries, hydrogen—there are so many areas that are moving very quickly in this space. I look forward to receiving Mr Williams' report. The government will consider that and hopefully we will have legislation before the House to update the Electrical Safety Act. Thank you for the question.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, can you advise on the implementation of the new portable long service leave scheme for our community service workers?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I am very proud that the Palaszczuk government moved and implemented the portable long service scheme for the community service workers. These workers provide support for some of the most vulnerable people in our community. They provide and work in alcohol and drug services, child safety and support services, family and domestic violence services, disability support, mental health and homelessness support, just to name a few.

Due to the nature of their industry, these dedicated workers have been denied access to long service leave not because of their lack of dedicated service to the industry, but because often it was grants based. By the time grants had finished, workers had moved on within the industry and the predominantly female workforce was denied long service leave. If anyone in this very difficult area deserves it, it is the workers for whom we have delivered, and as I said, 70 per cent are women.

On 1 January this year the scheme commenced. QLeave is the body that administers this scheme. We have a board. We have delivered representation and presentations to peak bodies and employers about details of the scheme. We have distributed stakeholder communication kits to peak bodies and other interested associations. We have published guidance material including frequently asked questions, example scenarios and other explanatory material on our website to assist employers and workers to understand their eligibility and obligations under this scheme.

QLeave's communication campaign certainly worked. Even prior to the commencement of QLeave, as at November 2020, we had 176 employer preregistrations, indicating registration of around 21,000 workers. The numbers have increased substantially. I am happy to advise that from July 2021, 809 employers have registered for the scheme, which means more than 70,000 workers in this sector are now accruing portable long service leave and will have access to long service leave entitlements for the first time.

I thank QLeave, the board and the ASU who campaigned very hard for this. Most importantly, I thank the workers in this sector who will now benefit from a portable long service leave scheme.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, something that still worries Queenslanders is fraudulent WorkCover claims. My question is: how many fraudulent WorkCover claims were found in the last financial year, and how much money was recouped from those people who were fraudulent claimants?

Ms GRACE: Obviously WorkCover Queensland has a very good area that looks into those cases. No-one wants to see fraudulent cases. WorkCover is there for genuine WorkCover claims. I know that this is operational in nature, but the workers compensation regulator investigates and manages the prosecution of certain offences under the Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Act. Offences include defrauding an insurer and providing false or misleading information.

In 2021, 27 prosecutions were commenced, 23 against workers and four against employers; and 16 prosecutions were successfully finalised, 15 against workers and one against an employer. Separately, in 2019-20 WorkCover recovered \$19.7 million in relation to employers who were uninsured or underinsured. That is also part of the fraud; they would not give us the full details of their wages. We also have a program that looks into that and we recovered nearly \$20 million. For 2020-21—and these are the updated figures—we had 27 prosecutions in relation to fraudulent claims. The majority of claims are correct and in order and provide a great benefit for injured workers in this state.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is for the director-general. Having just heard about the government's work in regard to silicosis, there was a silica related Workplace Health and Safety Queensland complaint late in June at the Gabba Cross River Rail site, and workers stopped work at the site again yesterday. What measures are being put in place at the Cross River Rail site at Woolloongabba to ensure the safety of workers and nearby residents?

Mr Cook: I will go specifically to the most recent incident that you have raised in your question, and that relates particularly to dust exposure regarding the Woolloongabba site. I understand that Workplace Health and Safety attended that site yesterday to conduct a review of dust control measures implemented at the site. Workplace Health and Safety inspectors reviewed the measures that were put in place and were satisfied that air monitoring was being conducted appropriately, that dust levels were within the acceptable levels and that further controls are being implemented to minimise dust. However, the inspectors did observe and videoed the continuous water suppression system that is in place there. It creates a mist and in high winds there might have been a view that that mist was actually dust when, in fact, it was misted water. A Workplace Health and Safety inspector and hygienist will return to the site tomorrow to undertake further monitoring of that site. In terms of broader workplace health and safety issues in relation to Cross River Rail, Mr Allen may wish to add a few details.

Mr Allen: I can also confirm that the follow-up for that particular incident will look at our independent assessment of the dust-monitoring data that has been provided by Cross River Rail. At the moment we have their data. We will have a hygienist onsite again tomorrow with our compliance people looking at that site.

In terms of Cross River Rail, it is a massive undertaking. We expect that there would be some workplace health and safety matters. As at today from workplace health and safety, there have been 188 improvement notices issued on the site. We are monitoring that site particularly carefully.

Dr MacMAHON: Will that data be publicly available or accessible?

Mr Allen: In terms of the improvement notices et cetera?

Dr MacMAHON: No, from the monitoring on-site.

Mr Allen: The dust monitoring?

Dr MacMAHON: Yes.

CHAIR: Actually, member, you cannot direct the questions. Either go through the DG or the minister.

Dr MacMAHON: Sorry.

CHAIR: Did you want to recast that question to the DG?

Dr MacMAHON: For the DG, will that monitoring data on-site be made available?

Mr Cook: I am not being cute, but I am going to refer that to Mr Allen who has all the detail across that.

Mr Allen: After we undertake the investigation and the assessment, we will look at whether the data does constitute a breach. If that is the case, action will be taken around that. If it does not constitute a breach, we will make that available to those people interested in that information.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, I have seen a workplace health and safety inspector comment on the CFMEU Facebook page responding to some issue that the CFMEU put up. How many staff in the Office of Industrial Relations have previously been employed by the CFMEU, TWU or the BLF as it was before it merged with the CFMEU?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, could you give the relevance of that question to the appropriations before us?

Mr BLEIJIE: They are employees of the department. They are paid and their pay comes out of the appropriation. If they are inducting or engaging in their workplace health and safety role as an inspector, having previously worked for the CFMEU as an entry permit holder, it is fairly relevant to the budget process.

CHAIR: It could be a very difficult answer to quantify.

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. To the best of my knowledge, it is not a requirement in any workplace I have ever been that the employer would keep records such as those that you have requested. I do not believe we would have that information.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, you might not have a record, but are you aware of any Office of Industrial Relations staff having previously worked for the CFMEU, BLF or TWU?

Mr Cook: I am not aware. I have no details of that information at all.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. In terms of the conflict of interest register you spoke about before, would workplace health and safety inspectors be required to add a notation on that register that they had previous employment with CFMEU?

Ms GRACE: How is that a conflict?

CHAIR: Why would that be a conflict?

Mr BLEIJIE: Well, the conflict is this: if they were a union organiser and are now working for—

Ms GRACE: Now you are being discriminatory.

CHAIR: It is okay, Minister.

Mr BLEIJIE: I just want to get to the bottom of the bullies and thugs who now might be going to work sites.

CHAIR: That is enough. Thank you, member for Kawana. Member for Kawana and Minister, that will be enough, thank you. Member for Kawana, if you would like to recast your question in an appropriate manner.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. In a complaint written by workplace health and safety inspectors, which I tabled last estimates, they refer to the appalling state of governance within the Office of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland since the CFMEU infiltrated the agency from around 2015—their words. Did the director-general follow up that complaint at all?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the matters that the member tabled last year, they were referred to the CCC. They were investigated by the Office of Industrial Relations. In both instances the CCC indicated that there was no issue in relation to corrupt conduct, and that was also found in the investigation through the Office of Industrial Relations. I would refer the member to

the publicly available information about the culture of the Office of Industrial Relations. The member will identify or recognise that information which is available on the Public Service Commission's website. Compared to 2019, the performance of industrial relations has improved in almost every single area in relation to the views of managers, agency engagement, job empowerment, organisational fairness and organisational leadership.

I refer the member to that information which makes it very clear that the work that has been happening around behaviours expected of all employees increased by eight per cent compared to 2019. The leadership operating at a high level of integrity increased by four points compared to 2019. I have seen a significant improvement in some of that through the leadership of the Office of Industrial Relations over the past 12 months to two years.

Mr BLEIJIE: Workplace health and safety inspectors claim in their letter sent to me that the compliance, monitoring and enforcement policy, a policy of OIR, has exacerbated workplace violence among union officials, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and employers and has created a risk to their own health and safety. Workplace health and safety inspectors feel pressured into issuing fines for fear of losing their job under this policy. Has there been any investigation into this coercive behaviour by senior management of OIR?

Ms GRACE: That is hypothetical.

CHAIR: That is a hypothetical but, Director-General, if you would like to add I will provide you with latitude in how you respond.

Mr Cook: Thank you member for the question. In relation to the allegations that the member has made, that has not been brought to my attention. No inspectors have raised any of those issues directly with me. I have not seen the letter that they sent to you. They have not raised those issues directly with me.

In relation to occupational violence particularly, as I said earlier and as I said in relation to education as well, we have a zero tolerance for occupational violence. We are putting processes in place to help inspectors in relation to any risk of occupational violence. I am sure that the member would be aware of some of those things: implementing the use of body-worn cameras as part of an inspector's personal protective equipment; training for inspectors to improve everyone's skills around de-escalation; building the capability of managers through coaching and other managed training such as mental health and first-aid; providing resources and online training to help staff dealing with distressed individuals; encouraging the reporting of occupational violence incidents and providing immediate support and follow-up with staff affected; investigation of incident risk assessments; review of controls; delivering legislative inspector foundation training, which provides core inspector competencies for a modern workplace health and safety and electrical safety inspectorate; appointment of a workplace health and safety officer in the Office of Industrial Relations; and training in mental health first-aid.

In 2021, the last financial year—there might have been a question on notice on this—there were 16 cases of occupational violence incidents reported by OIR staff. Six of those related to a PCBU, five related to the business contractor or the worker, two related to the unions, two were members of the public and one was an injured worker.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, have you sought any legal advice about whether the best practice principles may in fact cause contractors and subcontractors to breach federal workplace laws?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. The best practice principles are not under my department. I cannot remember what that department is called anymore. It has changed a few times.

CHAIR: Public works.

Mr BLEIJIE: You are the lead agent for the best practice with public—

CHAIR: Public works is the lead agency, and that was confirmed yesterday.

Mr Cook: Obviously, we apply best practice principles to our infrastructure projects, but I am not responsible for the best practice principles.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, have you sought any legal advice about the best practice principles as far as they relate to your projects in the department?

Mr Cook: We have sought legal advice in relation to ensuring that contractors meet best practice principles as we would normally do as part of a due diligence activity. It is part of the procurement process that we undertake for our large projects over \$100 million.

Mr BLEIJIE: In that legal advice, have any issues come forward where the breaches have in fact been found to have breached the federal jurisdiction as opposed to the Queensland best practice principles as far as they relate to your department for infrastructure projects?

Mr Cook: I normally would not be sharing legal advice in terms of professional privilege.

Mr BLEIJIE: No-one is watching today!

CHAIR: No, he is responding to your question if you want the answer.

Mr Cook: No concerns have been raised with me.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, is it the case in Queensland that registered unions can access the data of non-union member Queensland public servants, including how many sick days the individuals may or may not have had, and other employment details?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of that being the case.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, may I ask that the director-general seek the information from Mr Allen, sitting to his right, with respect to this question?

CHAIR: I would question whether that is a matter for this portfolio. I believe that is a matter for the DPC.

Mr BLEIJIE: The Department of the Premier and Cabinet? No. Unions are registered under this department; this department is the regulator. They are not registered under the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The Industrial Relations Act is the responsibility of the department of industrial relations.

Ms GRACE: We do not register unions either; the QIRC does.

Mr BLEIJIE: The QIRC, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, is the responsibility of this department, although it is a separate commission.

Ms GRACE: It is an independent body.

CHAIR: It is an independent body.

Mr BLEIJIE: Indeed, but the registration of—there is the policies in place—

Ms GRACE: You did not ask about that.

Mr BLEIJIE: The practices and policies in place at the department are in respect of the registered unions in Queensland. Certain information is given from public servants in respect to unions. Madam Chair, you are taking the advice of the witnesses that the Office of Industrial Relations does not know whether registered unions in Queensland access the details of public servants?

CHAIR: Director-General, I will provide you with some latitude to respond.

Mr Cook: My understanding is that any policy in relation to that matter is dealt at the Public Service Commission. It is not a policy that I am aware of in terms of my own responsibilities.

CHAIR: We will move to government questions.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, can you provide an update on the developments under the labour hire licensing scheme?

Ms GRACE: I know that protecting vulnerable workers is dear to the member's heart and is a key priority for the Palaszczuk government. That is why we have led the way in introducing Australia's first labour hire licensing scheme. Before the scheme was established, you had to have a licence to sell a car or a house but not to sell labour. That 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, too often. That is why it was our government, I am proud to say, who finally regulated a sector that was left unregulated for far too long. We took strong action through a rigorous licensing scheme, establishing basic minimum obligations that all labour hire providers have to meet before they can operate in Queensland.

Despite evidence of exploitation and the need to regulate the sector, we did not get crossbench support, with the opposition voting against these fundamental, necessary changes. I am proud that our scheme has been operating for more than three years. Queensland is leading the nation in lifting the standard of the industry and protecting vulnerable workers from exploitation.

As of 5 July 2021, there were 3,464 licensed labour hire providers in Queensland. One of the main reasons we have had to beef up the numbers in this compliance unit is that the number of employers in the sector now coming forward has grown to 3,464.

The Labour Hire Licensing Compliance Unit has taken compliance action against nearly 700 providers who have not met the required standard. These actions include refusal to issue licences, cancellation of licences and suspension of licences. Any labour hire providers who are found not doing the right thing will be prosecuted.

Since the scheme started, there have been 15 successful prosecutions, with fines totalling \$820,000 imposed by the courts. The Labour Hire Licensing Compliance Unit has also forged strong linkages with other state and federal agencies. This is a real benefit of this licensing scheme. It works with the federal task force in a coordinated and strategic approach to address illegal phoenix activity and collaborates with WorkCover Queensland to ensure labour hire providers have adequate workers compensation policies. This has resulted in over \$870,000 in premiums being paid to WorkCover from this area.

I am pleased that this budget continues our \$6 million four-year election commitment to boost the numbers in the compliance unit with an additional eight frontline audit and inspector positions. I know that an expanded inspectorate will yield greater results and ensure further protections for vulnerable workers.

Labour hire regulation and the need to protect workers engaged in this sector is not an issue confined to Queensland. I have consistently called for a national approach. I am pleased that the federal government has finally taken the step to initiate a meeting with all state and territory ministers about harmonising states and territories who are administering labour hire schemes. I look forward to participating in those discussions, but let me make it clear: any national approach must not be at the expense of meeting the high standards set in Queensland under our scheme. The protections we have put in place must not be diminished by any federal scheme. We will continue to back the workers in Queensland. It has been very successful in this state and I thank the member for the question.

Mr SULLIVAN: In relation to page 7 of the SDS, can the minister advise the committee on how is the government responding to wage theft? How is it making it easier for workers who have been unpaid to recover the moneys that are rightly owing to them?

Ms GRACE: I know that this is an issue that the member has a big interest in. Wage theft has been happening too often and for far too long. It must stop. I was pleased to get a text from an industrial relations support business in my electorate. It is a private business that assists workers. They were very complimentary and they congratulated me on what we have put in place. They have found it to be an easy process—that it is smooth, that it runs very well and that it is protecting vulnerable workers and getting a speedy recovery of wages, superannuation and other entitlements that they were rightly entitled to. I welcome those comments from the business in my electorate.

Wage theft affects one in four Queensland workers and it takes about \$2.2 billion out of the pockets of hardworking people in unpaid wages and superannuation. Behind these astounding figures are hardworking Queenslanders who have been denied their rightful entitlements. I am proud of our record in responding to these issues. We have criminalised wage theft through Australia's first operational wage theft laws and made it easier for workers to recover wages. I am happy to have feedback coming through that this is working.

From 14 September 2020, the maximum penalty for wage theft by an employer is the same as the maximum penalty for stealing as a clerk or servant—that is, 10 years imprisonment. Since wage theft laws came into effect, 10 workers have made complaints to the Queensland Police Service, with seven complaints currently under investigation.

To complement the wage theft laws, on 1 March 21 this year a new wages recovery system commenced. The new streamlined process means all Queensland workers who have been underpaid can recover what they are owed more easily, whether it is wages, penalty rates, superannuation or unlawful or unreasonable deductions from their wages. Making a claim is done through a simple online form available on the QIRC website and there is no fee.

After that, the matter goes to conciliation with a Queensland Industrial Relations commissioner, with the focus obviously on settling the matters between the parties. If there is no resolution, the claim proceeds to the Industrial Magistrates Court, where it will be dealt with in a less formal way than other court matters. This is a recognised court under the Fair Work Act, because most of this is happening in the private sector under the Fair Work Act.

As at 30 June 2021, nearly 40 claims have been lodged through the new system, seven of which have been resolved through conciliation. I am sure the rest are in the process of being heard. It is working well. We are getting good feedback. Hopefully, the wage theft that has been rife under the federal Fair Work Act is being arrested here in Queensland and we are able to take these cases and give workers what they are duly and rightly owed.

CHAIR: The time allotted for consideration of proposed estimates for the portfolios of Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing—

Mr BLEIJIE: I think we are a bit early, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: No. It is 1.58 by my agenda and you are not the chair.

Mr BLEIJIE: We started late. I have a question about donations to the Labor Party by the CFMEU.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana. Are you disrespecting the chair?

Mr BLEIJIE: No, Madam Chair. I thought we—

CHAIR: Yes, you are. I am following an agenda that I have here in front of me.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order—

CHAIR: It was your members who were late to the table.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: We started late.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I am following an agenda; thank you.

Mr BLEIJIE: I wanted to ask about CFMEU donations.

CHAIR: The time allotted for consideration of the proposed estimates for the portfolios of the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing has expired.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order, Madam Chair—

CHAIR: Your point of order, member for Kawana?

Mr BLEIJIE: The director-general was coming back to us within the hour—

CHAIR: You have not let me finish, member for Kawana, so perhaps if you wait and just be a little bit patient I will allow them to respond to those questions.

Mr BLEIJIE: You have called me to address my point of order, so if I could finish my point of order, thank you—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, there is no point of order. With regard to questions taken on notice, if not answered during the hearing, I note that there was a question taken on notice from the member for Hinchinbrook in relation to the regional split of industrial relations officers. I am not sure if you have that information to provide the committee with now.

Ms GRACE: We do, Chair, and I want to clarify an earlier answer under education. I think I mentioned Nanango State High School for Link and Launch; it is actually Kingaroy State High School. Obviously young people from Nanango can access that program through Kingaroy. In terms of the numbers, member for Hinchinbrook, there are 885 full-time equivalents and 293 are in the regions, so around 300 are in regional Queensland in our very good offices around the state.

Mr Cook: I have a few answers. The member for Kawana asked a question about any conflicts of interest between CFMEU and OIR employees. There are no conflicts of interest listed on the conflicts of interest register. In other matters, just quickly back to education, there was a question about the gross payment from the member for Moggill in relation to Mr Hunt. That gross payment is \$334,929. There was also a question in relation to the dust sampling work that QBuild undertakes for us. There were 96 dust samples undertaken. Some 92 of those were negative and four were positive. They were included in the schools that I outlined earlier this morning.

In relation to the conversion of temporary teachers to permanent, in 2020 21, 1,032 temporary teachers were converted to permanent through the formal conversion process. There was a question, I think, also about the ratio of permanent teachers. In Queensland the ratio of permanent teaching staff is 83.9 per cent, and that has increased from about 81 per cent a couple of years ago. That compares favourably to Victoria, where it is 83.5 per cent, and New South Wales, which is 66.7 per cent.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Director-General. I believe that they were all of the questions that required responding to, so there are no questions taken on notice. Minister, on behalf of the committee, I thank you, the directors-general who have been before us today and all officials who have been here for your attendance. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. 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 thank you all again.

Ms GRACE: Chair, I want to say thank you to my departments—Education, Industrial Relations, Racing Queensland and QRIC. A lot of work goes into estimates and I am very grateful to all of them for all of their hard work. I thank my ministerial staff for all of their loyal and hard work as well, particularly my Chief of Staff, Sharon Durham. I thank you, Chair, and members of the Education, Employment and Training Committee on your second estimates in this parliament already. It is good to have the parliamentary calendar back on track after the interruptions of 2020. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Indeed. Thank you very much, Minister.

Proceedings suspended from 2.03 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

Mr S Koch, Deputy Director-General

TAFE Queensland

Ms M Campbell, Chief Executive Officer

Queensland Training Ombudsman

Mr G Favell

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2021 for the portfolio of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development until 5.15 pm. As was determined by the House, the committee will examine areas within the minister's portfolio as follows: training and skills development from 2.30 until 4 pm and employment and small business from 4.15 until 5.15. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the times specified for the area as was agreed by the House. The committee will suspend proceedings for a break from 4 pm to 4.15 pm. The following non-committee members have sought and been granted leave to participate in the hearing in accordance with standing orders: the member for Broadwater, the member for Buderim, who is at the table with us, the member for Chatsworth, the member for Everton, the member for Kawana, the member for Maiwar, the member for Maroochydore, the member for Mirani, the member for Moggill, the member for Scenic Rim, the member for South Brisbane and the member for Toowoomba South.

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 apply for questions in this hearing as those that apply in the Legislative Assembly, 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, argument or opinion. I intend to guide these proceedings respectfully today so that relevant issues can be explored fully and to ensure there is adequate opportunity to address questions from both 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. While mobile phone use is not permitted in the public gallery, an exception has been made for staff who are assisting witnesses here today and who have been permitted the use of their device for this purpose. However, I do ask all others to ensure that phones or other electronic devices are switched to silent mode if they are not turned off. In line with the COVID-Safe Estimates Hearings guideline issued by the Chief Health Officer, I remind everyone to maintain social distancing while in this chamber. Face masks are to be worn at all times and removed only to speak during the proceedings. The COVID-Safe Estimates Hearings guideline is available from the secretariat.

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 five minutes.

Ms FARMER: Thank you, 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 acknowledge at the table Warwick Agnew, my Director-General, and Steve Koch, the Deputy Director-General of Investment. I acknowledge Mary Campbell, who is the CEO of TAFE Queensland, and Geoff Favell, who is the Queensland Training Ombudsman.

It is an absolute privilege to serve as the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, not just because the success of this portfolio is vital to the state's continuing economic recovery—backing small business and investing in skills and training are critical parts of the Palaszczuk government's \$14.2 billion COVID-19 economic recovery plan—but because of the people that this portfolio is about: small business owners and other employers right across our great state who give around one million Queenslanders a job and keep our communities going; the incredible staff and students at the heart of our investment in training and skills development, making sure Queenslanders are ready for the jobs of the future; and our industry partners who work alongside us and play such a key role. While throughout this hearing I will be sharing some pretty impressive statistics, I will be sharing stories about the human element as well because those statistics are about people, about Queenslanders being supported to take every opportunity they can to have a good future.

Our economy in Queensland is roaring back to life. It is now stronger than it was before the pandemic. The latest ABS labour force data shows not only that Queensland unemployment is at its lowest level for more than 12 years but that we are creating more than half of the nation's jobs. As the Treasurer said, the data highlights once again that Queensland is the place to work, to do business and to invest. We know that you cannot have a successful economy without successful small businesses. Earlier this year I travelled across Queensland on our small business roadshow and in person and via our survey I spoke with more than 2½ thousand businesses. Their feedback was clear and unambiguous and it has influenced every decision we have and will make for small business in Queensland. It was the basis for our Big Plans for Small Business strategy, which includes a \$140 million package of support. Some \$25 million of grants are rolling out now with our \$15,000 Business Boost applications opening tomorrow. This is on top of all of our other support for small businesses, including our Small Business Commissioner; our state government procurement target, which has seen more than \$2.6 billion spent with Queensland small businesses; our online payment policy; our mentoring programs; our measures to reduce red tape, including our Small Business Friendly Councils initiative and Business Launchpad; and much else.

We will keep listening and keep doing more. EOIs for a revitalised Small Business Advisory Council closed earlier this week, and I look forward to working with the new members, who must all be small business owners, as we move forward in the COVID and post-COVID economy. We know that for businesses to grow they need the right people with the right skills going into the right jobs, which is why it is great news that our record-breaking investment in training and skills is paying off. Apprenticeship commencements are up by 56.6 per cent, with over 45,700 commencements in the year to June 2021. More than 36,000 people have benefited from our free TAFE and free apprenticeships in priority industries for under-25s and we are investing \$25 million in pre-apprenticeship support. We are making sure the pipeline for the labour force is flowing. We also continue to invest in skills for the future, including the hydrogen industry. In fact, as part of the \$100 million Equipping TAFE for Our Future initiative, we are focusing on infrastructure for emerging industries.

There is also nearly \$500 million for our flagship training and employment programs Back to Work and the now permanent—isn't it wonderful to be able to say that?— Skilling Queenslanders for Work. These programs have already helped more than 60,000 people into jobs. We know that labour shortages are a pressing issue in Queensland and in fact right across Australia and I have already announced that we will hold a workforce summit in the coming months to bring together key business, industry and training stakeholders to ensure Queensland has the workforce that industry and small business need. We say here in Queensland that nobody should be left behind, that every Queenslanders deserves the chance to get good training and a good job, and those chances are exactly what the Palaszczuk government is creating. Our employment and training programs are changing lives. They help people access opportunities, they build confidence and they unlock potential. Since 2015 the Palaszczuk government has created more than 350,000 jobs. Thanks to the investment in business and training announced in this budget, we are going to create thousands more. I welcome the committee's questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I turn to the deputy chair for the first question.

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, in the 2020-21 budget there was a target of 11½ thousand apprenticeships being completed. The government only delivered 8½ thousand. Can you provide an explanation as to why the completed apprenticeships were 26 per cent below target?

Mr Agnew: In relation to the SDS target, I can confirm that, yes, we have targets for apprenticeships, traineeships and school based apprenticeships and traineeships which we work to and report against under the Service Delivery Statements. I would also note that that is for all apprenticeships across the state. With regard to apprenticeship completions, which is what those measures relate to, obviously completions for any of those items are affected by the broader labour market and, as we know, particularly over the last 12 months, the labour market in Queensland, as it has been nationally, has been heavily affected by the pandemic.

We have seen quite strongly that right across the nation there has been a reduction in completions of apprenticeships and traineeships and the movement in Queensland is essentially in line with that. That said, Queensland performs very well when we compare against the national percentage of apprenticeships and traineeships, holding over 25 per cent of those. What we do in the department is provide a lot of support, through our people particularly within the Queensland apprenticeships and traineeships office, to have direct relationships with apprentices and employers to ensure there is support as much as possible so that solutions can be found to try to keep those apprentices on. That is evident also in the level of completions as a rate in Queensland which is strong compared with the national average as well.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, you spoke about the last 12 months and labour market interruptions. If we go back to previous years, in 2019-20 the target was 11½ thousand but the government delivered 8,800; in 2018-19 the target was 11½ thousand and the delivery was 8,400; in 2017-18 the target was 11½ thousand and the delivery was 8,900; in 2016-17 the target was 11½ thousand with 9,800 delivered; in 2015-16 the target was also 11½ thousand and the delivery came close at 11,400. In every year since the government came to power they have not met the target for apprenticeship completions. Can you explain how the targets are arrived at in the SDS?

Mr Agnew: I note that those targets have been maintained. I have before me only the last Service Delivery Statements, but I have been advised that those targets have been relatively at those levels for those years. I have also been advised that throughout that time the support that has been provided from the department for subsidising apprenticeships in Queensland has remained. It is a demand-led system in Queensland for the subsidised levels. When there is a demand from an employer for apprenticeships those subsidies remain, as has remained the support from the department in supporting those employers and apprenticeships through that time.

Ms FARMER: I wonder if I could add to that, with your permission?

CHAIR: Yes, Minister.

Ms FARMER: Thank you. The member may recall the figures that I quoted in my opening statement, where we actually had an unprecedented increase in the number of apprenticeship commencements—a 56.6 per cent increase, which is actually astonishing in these times. Queensland is also the national leader in school based apprenticeships and trainees, at 57 per cent of the national total. We are also the national leader in VET in schools, with just over 79,000 students, or over 33 per cent, of the national total. As the director-general said, while we have seen a trend across the nation of a decrease in completions, Queensland actually leads the nation in completions at just over 25 per cent. That extraordinary increase in commencements is a fantastic pipeline for the future. You might have heard me—

Mr MICKELBERG: Point of order: I note that the question was directed to the director-general and under standing orders 181 and 182 the minister cannot supplement the answer. I have given her a bit of latitude there.

CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Buderim, your next question?

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, since 2015-16 the government has delivered 13,200 fewer apprenticeships than budgeted. Has the department done any modelling on the economic impact of having 13,200 fewer qualified tradespeople in Queensland?

Mr Agnew: I refer to my previous answer, essentially, that the role of the department is to provide support through subsidy for apprenticeships in Queensland. It is a demand-led system. When an employer wants to employ an apprentice, for those eligible employees in those priority skills areas as determined by the government they will receive a subsidy for that.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, noting the current chronic skills shortage right across Queensland and the government's failure to meet its own apprenticeship completion targets—

CHAIR: Member, if you could recast the question without the imputation, please.

Mr MICKELBERG: Noting the chronic skills shortage across Queensland and the data I mentioned earlier with respect to the failure to meet the target set out in the SDS, can you assure the committee that the 2021-22 target will be met in that regard?

Ms FARMER: Skills and training is one of the key elements of the COVID-19 economic recovery plan for Queensland, and that is why we have invested over \$1 billion in skills and training this year alone. I think it is very clear what the results of that investment are. We lead the nation in terms of completions, at 25.1 per cent. We have seen a growing trend across the nation of a decrease in completions. It is very pleasing that our investment is actually keeping us at the top of that table.

What is deeply impressive—deeply impressive and completely unprecedented—is the increase in the number of commencements: a 56.6 per cent increase in the last year alone. That is as a result of our investment in free TAFE and apprenticeships for under-25s. We also have committed \$25 million to our preapprenticeship support program, which is about making sure that both employers and employees are prepared beforehand and well matched in the apprenticeship into which they are entering. That is our commitment. The numbers speak for themselves. These programs are backed up by our other employment programs like Back to Work and Skilling Queenslanders for Work. We are seeing record numbers of trainees and apprentices going through those programs.

I also comment particularly on the priority areas that we are targeting for under-25s. We are looking at making sure that we are supporting young people where there is demand for jobs in the future. This is about a pipeline. It is starting in school. I know that the education minister was speaking this morning about the Gateway to Industry Schools Program, where we are encouraging young people at school level to think about apprenticeships, in particular in priority areas. We are supporting them to enter TAFE in the free TAFE and apprenticeships for under-25s program and we are seeing those numbers coming through.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, can you advise, noting the minister has just referenced this information, why apprentice and trainee participation activity data and statistics on the departmental website have not yet been updated from information from the 2019-20 financial year?

Mr Agnew: I will take advice on that particular item.

Mr MICKELBERG: Can you also provide information on when it will be updated?

Mr Agnew: Similarly, I will take advice on that and get back to the committee before the end of the hearing. I am sure we can do that.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, according to your department's strategic plan for 2019-2023, the government will use data to drive innovation and inclusion in its business practices. Given this, can you explain to me why the department does not have any data on the demand for future workforce skills requirements?

Mr Agnew: Essentially, the key source of support for future skills is the department and essentially through Jobs Queensland's 'Future skills. Future workforce', which is our key source within government on research and data-driven analysis on the future of skills in Queensland. I also receive very strong feedback from our stakeholders, whether that is our regional jobs committees or external industry participants, on the value of those statistics. That is the key source for us in providing a service for within government and outside of government for industry and others in terms of that analysis and that data.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, without that quality data, how can the department know that the training that is being provided is actually providing necessary skills to meet future demand? You spoke about anecdotal examples and word of mouth. Without data how can the department know that it is meeting the needs of the future demand?

Mr Agnew: To be clear, I did not say we did not have data. In fact, we do use data very strongly in working through what the priority skills investments should be for Queensland. We have our own supply and demand model within the department that utilises the latest statistics, particularly national statistics from the NCVET and other labour market statistics. We also use more than anecdotal data. We have a very strong network of industry skills advisers that are experienced advisers and leaders within each of their industry fields that we work with and have done over time in terms of determining

what the priority skills are as well as use the Jobs Queensland analysis of data on anticipating future skills for Queensland in driving where those priority skills needs are for Queensland. We do definitely have sophisticated data analysis behind what we do in the department.

Mr MICKELBERG: I note the answer to question on notice 527 from the minister stated, 'the Department does not forecast the number of workers required to hold a specific qualification.' Are you saying that is incorrect, Director-General?

Mr Agnew: The analysis that we do is indicative of the needs of industry, not of specific qualifications but of areas of growth and for future demand for skills. That then supports our demand-led model for Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: Noting you said—and I do not mean to verbal you—that the modelling drives not specific qualifications but broad industry need, can you tell me what data is used to determine the courses that are included on the Priority Skills List?

Mr Agnew: I am certain I could return to the committee with some of the examples of the types of official data that we use. As I say, we do input official data from the national vocational certification stream as well as other broader ABS catalogue information. I am sure we will be able to provide that information for you.

Mr MICKELBERG: With respect to the Priority Skills List, does the department make changes to the federal priority skills list and, if so, can you provide an example where they have done so?

Mr Agnew: I am not exactly sure what you are asking, whether we make changes to the federal skills list?

CHAIR: I am curious as to that question because the Queensland state government does not change federal policy or position.

Mr MICKELBERG: I will reword the question. Director-General, why does the DESBT website say that the department reviews the Priority Skills List and updates the list accordingly? Can you give me some examples where the Priority Skills List has changed as a consequence of Queensland needs?

Mr Agnew: The Priority Skills List for Queensland is constantly updated. We are in constant contact with industry. As to specific examples, I am sure we could track that over time. We do undertake qualification updates as and when they arise as well in relation to that Priority Skills List. That is a live list that we use and update on a regular basis.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, are there any caps in relation to the number of people who can undertake subsidised study in each of the courses on the Priority Skills List? For example, in May 2021 there were 140 people completing a diploma in interior design. What data does the department hold that shows that Queensland needs 140 more interior designers as a priority over coming years?

Mr Agnew: As I said earlier, the Priority Skills List is there to support areas of subsidy for a demand-led subsidy approach philosophy that we have behind the way in which the Queensland government invests in skills in Queensland. There are some small areas—some categories—where we have some investment limits in place in that. Those small number of categories are the only areas where we have a limit. That is essentially there for quality concerns.

Another part of our key approach and philosophy is to ensure that we do have quality providers that are subsidised by the Queensland government to ensure good outcomes for the students themselves and, of course, for the employers when they receive the benefit of those trained individuals. We do not disclose what those particular small number of categories are because we believe that might drive some behaviour within the market. We do look for and monitor areas of strong growth and of potentially poor graduate outcomes and that is where we may well act to limit the number. Otherwise, we do not limit the number of graduates in any of the other courses that are on the Priority Skills List.

Mr MICKELBERG: In relation to the Certificate III in Meat Processing (Boning Room), I understand five people are currently completing that qualification. Meat processors are telling me of extreme labour shortages in Queensland's abattoirs. Director-General, what industry engagement has the department undertaken to determine whether or not those five individuals doing the certificate III in meat processing will be adequate for the meat industry's future needs?

Mr Agnew: I could perhaps answer the question a little more generally than speaking about five individuals. In essence, again we have a demand-led model that we roll out. We provide that information to industry so that, where employers require trainees in areas of priority, individuals and students into those systems have the ability to receive subsidies to meet the costs of their training. That would relate in this particular instance and I confirm with my team we obviously do have meat processing on our

Priority Skills List. We also promote our Priority Skills List through industry skills advisers to ensure that industry participants are well aware of those programs. We have regional field officers as well who ensure that the system is known there. Our particular industry skills adviser for the meat processing industry is Ai Group and they, as I say, engage with us strongly throughout our processes.

Mr MICKELBERG: My next set of questions is to the Training Ombudsman. At the last estimates, the minister tabled the government's response to your report in relation to issues surrounding the integrity of the training system. Is the provision of gifts as inducements for the completion of training an issue of concern in terms of the integrity of the training system?

Mr Favell: The issue of gifts as inducements has been a concern for some time, whether we talk about the VET FEE-HELP program from the Commonwealth department that moved quickly so that it was not allowed. Generally, in state subsidised training it is not allowed either, but in fee-for-service training it is hard to regulate that. Gifts are of concern, without doubt.

Mr MICKELBERG: This question is to the Training Ombudsman. Would an offer of a free fuel voucher for people who signed up for state subsidised training constitute an inducement in your eyes?

Mr Favell: Without knowing the current terms and conditions of the contract, that is probably more a question for the department as to whether that did constitute inducement. That would be a request for the department, I would suggest.

CHAIR: Be careful as to seeking an opinion. Think about the wording of your question, member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Training Ombudsman, I have been provided with an email advertising material from a company by the name of Navig8Biz Queensland which is providing \$5,000 worth of Queensland government funding for online training for small businesses. The email calls on businesses to 'register up before 28 February 2021 and receive your free fuel voucher'. Given that is state subsidised training, would that constitute an inducement?

Mr Favell: As with my previous answer, I am not aware of what the current conditions are in the contract they have with the department. That would be a question for the department. What I can add is that if someone wanted to lodge a complaint with my office—and we do not have complaints about that—I would certainly be more than happy to investigate that issue.

CHAIR: That is possibly a follow-up action for you, member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, Chair. Director-General, the email I refer to also makes a number of factually incorrect assertions in relation to the quantum and the availability of Queensland government funding. The email contains unprofessional language, which the Clerk has informed me—because I wanted to table this email—is unparliamentary and hence I have redacted it. The minister's answer to estimates question No. 13 states that 'the department has strong risk mitigation measures in place and undertakes regular compliance monitoring in accordance with the SAS agreement'. Can you tell me: is Navig8Biz an SAS provider? Why was the conduct of Navig8Biz not identified by the department?

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair: I wonder if the member could table that email. He has referred to it being redacted.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy to table it. I can get the deputy chair to table it. There are sufficient copies there.

Mr LISTER: Rather than table it, we are happy to provide it. I know that tabling often takes several minutes of our time to examine the document before it is accepted. Chair, would the officer and the minister be happy simply to take a copy for their interest?

CHAIR: It still needs to be tabled, member. There is nothing that offends the standing orders, so I am happy for these to be tabled.

Mr LISTER: I move for it to be tabled, Chair.

Ms FARMER: Chair, could we see a copy, please?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr MICKELBERG: Can I continue, Chair?

CHAIR: Does the director-general need a moment to review in order to respond to your question?

Mr Agnew: I note the document that you have tabled. I would, however, like to exercise care in expressing an opinion in relation to a specific provider.

CHAIR: Absolutely.

Mr Agnew: I confirm that as part of the requirements of our contracted providers in Queensland, our SAS agreements prohibit funded RTOs from engaging in marketing practices not consistent with the department of small business and training's policies, including false and misleading advertising. If the department proves a funded RTO has breached its obligations, appropriate action is taken.

CHAIR: I note in question on notice No. 13 that concerns about this sort of behaviour from an RTO should be referred to the Training Ombudsman.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear, I will be providing it to the Training Ombudsman after estimates is concluded. Director-General, noting you are not prepared to speak about the specifics of this case, what course of action will the department take to ensure that public funding and public confidence in relation to the training system is maintained in light of this advertising?

CHAIR: Member for Buderim, this matter will not have been dealt with. It has only been brought to the attention of the committee and the director-general at this point in time. Director-General, you may answer that, but there is certainly latitude allowed in how you respond.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Chair. Essentially the answer is that we have undertaken a number of actions to ensure confidence in registered training organisations in Queensland. As I said earlier, a key platform of our philosophy in providing subsidies for training in Queensland is to ensure there is quality. That is for the employers as well as the students themselves. This matter of false and misleading advertising was something that was brought to light and, as referenced in your questions to the ombudsman earlier, referred to in his report. We have certainly engaged with the ombudsman on all of his recommendations. The government endorsed all of his recommendations—agreed to or agreed in principle to each one of those recommendations—and we have continued to implement those since they came about. I also say that in the last financial year we had 16 complaints in relation to false and misleading advertising in Queensland in relation to 10 SAS providers. Each one of those investigations was followed through on and no sanctions were required on each one of those.

Mr DAMETTO: Firstly, thank you very much, Minister, for coming along today to provide some feedback in response to the committee's questions. I also thank your director-general, staff and the Training Ombudsman. Minister, regional Queensland has a chronic shortage of skilled labour within the agricultural industry. In some cases, growers are leaving product in the paddock; they cannot find staff to man their farms or conduct agricultural processes. Can you tell us what the government is doing from a training perspective to ensure we have skilled labour for regional Queensland's agricultural sector?

Ms FARMER: The member will be aware, as I said in my introductory speech, that earlier this year I travelled across Queensland on my small business roadshow, visiting 17 different locations across Queensland. The No. 1 issue raised with me by small business operators and industry bodies was the challenge of recruiting and retaining workers, including those with the right skills. I heard it in every region and across every sector. I acknowledge that the challenges for the agriculture sector have been canvassed quite widely. This issue remains a challenge. It is why investing in skills and training is a major priority for this government. As I have said, we have invested over a billion dollars this year alone into skills and training. It is why skills and training is such a key part of our COVID-19 economic recovery plan.

We all know that COVID has changed everything, and we all need to work together to navigate a new economic landscape. We need to think in a way that we have never thought before. The workforce summit that I have announced for the coming months will be the forum for that to happen, bringing together industry and business leaders, major employers and training providers to identify strategies and partnerships to help industry to access the workforce they need. We will have a series of satellite events in the lead-up, including with our regional jobs committees—three new committees, along with the six that were already established—our industry skills advisers and utilising the skills and expertise of Jobs Queensland. The work of those three groups just on their own will be incredibly important in addressing the issue of labour shortages: the regional jobs committees in providing place based analysis and solutions; our industry skills advisers in their in-depth and on-the-ground knowledge of the themes in their respective sectors; and Jobs Queensland, whose work plan this year is geared ever more closely to considering employment and unemployment trends.

While their work and the planning for the summit is taking place, we will continue to implement a range of policies we have in place to tackle the shortage. They are policies that are making a real difference. There is our free and subsidised training in priority areas—that is, where we know there is demand now and in the future.

The number of students supported through Queensland government funded VET programs increased by over 10 per cent in 2021 to over 230,000 students. More than 36,000 people have taken advantage of our free TAFE and free apprenticeships for under-25s. As I have said, our long-term commitment to backing apprenticeships is paying off. We have seen a 56.6 per cent increase in the number of commencements from the previous year and commencement of the \$25 million suite of pre-apprenticeship initiatives to make sure that we are matching employers and employees so that once they start they stay in the apprenticeship. We really need to know that we have a pipeline of skilled workers coming through the system. This marked increase in commencements and the numbers of students taking up VET opportunities is encouraging.

That will be supported by our \$100 million infrastructure spend through our Equipping TAFE for our Future program. This will make sure that we have world-class training facilities right across Queensland that will meet current and future needs. We also know that if we are training people who might otherwise be employment challenged to enter the workforce we are supporting employers to take on workers whom they might otherwise not have thought of. It is why our investment in Skilling Queenslanders for Work and Back to Work is so important. We know that Skilling Queenslanders for Work has a 73 per cent success rate in making sure participants go on to further training or employment. It gives that employment to employment challenged people, including those from vulnerable population groups—people with disabilities, people with English as a second language, young people and the long-term unemployed. We have not only committed \$320 million to that initiative over the next four years, we have made it a permanent budget item.

Our revamped Back to Work program has an additional \$140 million commitment. The new version of the Back to Work program also supports employers not only to take on the right person for the job but to actually keep them in that job as well. We are all aware that the significant initiatives supporting skilled workforce development is supplemented by some sectoral initiatives. There is the \$7½ million—

Mr DAMETTO: Madam Chair, I refer the minister back to the question. It is very specific to the agricultural sector in Queensland. Are there any free or subsidised VET programs specific to the agricultural sector in Queensland being funded by the state government?

CHAIR: That is restating the question and not really a point of order. The minister was being responsive to the question.

Ms FARMER: I know the member is very concerned about this issue so I appreciate his interest. I will get you some information on some of the specific courses that are on the priorities skills list. I point the member to some significant infrastructure which we are developing as part of that the Equipping TAFE for Our Future program. In Bowen there is \$3.4 million for a new agricultural centre of excellence. In the Whitsundays there is \$2 million for a new aquaculture training centre. In Toowoomba there is \$1 million for stage 2 of a rural centre of excellence. In Bundaberg there is \$4.35 million for a new agriculture and horticulture centre.

In fact, I was in Bundaberg a couple of weeks ago speaking to a local fruit and vegetable growers organisation—I cannot remember the name of the organisation. I had a really good conversation with them about making sure the courses that are offered at that new TAFE facility are actually relevant to the needs of the industry. We know that the needs in a place like Bundaberg might be different to the needs in a place like the member's own electorate. That is where the regional jobs committees are incredibly important. We will be taking local employers, training organisations, educators, local industry groups and looking at the specific needs. The Bundaberg one is a good example of that.

I will add some information—and thank you to the director-general for this—about our industry skills advisers. Through that system the Queensland Farmers' Federation is funded \$160,000 to employ an industry skills adviser to support the agriculture and horticulture industry sectors. We rely on those people to give us current and local information. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is funded \$255,000 annually to deliver the Agribusiness Gateway to Industry Schools program. As I mentioned earlier, it is important that we are engaging students at school level to enter the industry. The AgForce School to Industry Partnership Program has been funded \$100,000 annually. This project is delivered in conjunction with the Agribusiness Gateway to Industry Schools program delivered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. They work closely with select Queensland schools to make connections and events with local agribusinesses. If the member would like some further information about the priority skills list we can commit to getting that to the member as soon as possible.

CHAIR: We now turn to government questions. Minister, could you provide an update on the Palaszczuk government's support to get more women into trades?

Ms FARMER: I know the member's extremely strong interest in this issue. The Palaszczuk government has made gender equity a key priority through our policy making. As the former minister for women, encouraging, empowering and putting a spotlight on opportunities for women has been one of my most abiding values. No girl, no woman should have to go through life feeling excluded from something she really wants to do just because she is not a male.

As minister for my particular portfolio, getting more women into traditionally male dominated occupations like the trades is a key priority. It is not just recruitment that is an issue here; it is about completions as well. While important work has already begun and results are being achieved in getting more women into male dominated occupations, we cannot walk away from the issue of completions as well. Unfortunately, I hear too many stories about the work environments which are not sufficiently supportive of women and that create unnecessary barriers for women, including outright instances of bullying and sexual harassment, which no woman should have to endure and which would make any woman question whether she wanted to be in that workplace.

That is why I have written to the Queensland Training Ombudsman asking him to investigate the support provided to female apprentices and trainees in male dominated professions, to identify any barriers that are put in their way and to look at improvements or gaps in current arrangements and additional measures if needed, including reducing instances of sexual harassment and poor treatment, to ensure that Queensland has safe productive workplaces that do not create barriers for female apprentices and trainees.

I want to outline some of the important work we have already started to see more women in male dominated occupations. At TAFE 53 per cent of those taking up VET funded programs are women. Within government subsidised apprenticeship and traineeship programs we are also seeing female participation increasing in traditionally male dominated sectors. The number of female engineering trainees, for instance, has increased by more 500 per cent in the last year and female engineering apprentices by 22 per cent.

Construction Skills Queensland has reported that the number of female apprentices in Queensland looking to build their careers in construction has doubled in the last 10 years. Unfortunately, that means we have gone from two per cent to four per cent. Women make up just 15 per cent of the total workforce and less than five per cent of trades and labourers. In mining, the Queensland Resources Council reported their female workforce grew by 25 per cent in 2019-20 compared to the previous year. I know the significant efforts that the Queensland Resources Council has put into those results.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported 16.6 per cent of all trade workers in 2020 were women—up from 14.7 per cent in 2018. Although overall numbers are still low, to see those sorts of increments is really encouraging. The Palaszczuk government has put in place some quite specific targets to increase recruitment of women into trades. We have set targets for female participation with QBuild with the women in construction target of 11 per cent to get more Queensland women on to work sites. In Cannon Hill we are just about finished building 20 new social housing units. That project has been established as an exemplar specifically looking for the best ways to build women's participation in construction and to support more qualified female apprentices in trades. I am really proud to say that that is a project that is operating in my electorate. I loved visiting there a little while back to talk to both men and women on the site about what they were learning from having a greater proportion of women on the site. Queensland now sits at 14 per cent of women on its work sites. We only want to see that number grow.

When it comes to supporting female tradies, we know that government policy cannot change culture overnight, but governments certainly can provide the leadership that will lead to cultural change. As I said earlier, it is not just about getting women into those roles but also about making sure we remove barriers to them staying there. It is a sad fact that right across this country women face harassment and bullying in the workplace purely because they are women. We do not want to just do the right thing about recruiting women; it is critical that once they are employed there are no barriers to women completing their apprenticeships and traineeships. That is important for both public and private sector workplaces. I am looking forward to working with the Queensland Training Ombudsman over the coming months to make sure that female apprentices and trainees have positive experiences on their work placements, that barriers are removed and that they have the support they need to thrive.

Before I finish I want to acknowledge the enormous contribution that some of our excellent organisations like the National Association of Women in Construction and—

CHAIR: You read my mind, Minister. I was going to give a shout-out to the National Association of Women in Construction. As a former member, I know they are doing a terrific job at setting goals and targets.

Ms FARMER: That is fantastic. They are making such a contribution in this space. I also want to mention Women in Mining and Resources Queensland. They and others like them will continue to be important partners. We want every girl in Queensland to be whoever and whatever she wants to be. Our government is working hard to make sure that happens.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with reference to page 10 of the SDS, can you advise the committee how the Palaszczuk government is supporting TAFE to grow and support more Queenslanders?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I know how enthusiastic the member for Rockhampton is about TAFE. I acknowledge the public provider based in Rockhampton, Central Queensland University, with whom I know the member has a great working relationship.

As I have said, skills and training are really important elements of the Queensland COVID-19 economic recovery plan, which is why the Palaszczuk government is the No. 1 supporter of Queensland's largest public training provider—TAFE. We say in Queensland that no matter who you are or where you live you deserve the same opportunity as the next person to a high-quality vocational education. That is where TAFE comes in. At its 60 campuses across Queensland, TAFE plays an absolutely critical role in training the skilled workforce that is needed to drive economic growth and future prosperity. If you want to go to TAFE, we will support you to do that. Member, doesn't TAFE do a great job?

Queensland is the most contestable VET market in Australia, with the highest number of private registered training organisations. Despite this, and despite what we ask of them in terms of operating in an inefficient but critical part of the system, including rural and remote communities, TAFE continues to ensure the highest quality outcomes for students and employers, with competency completion rates of 89 per cent, student satisfaction rates of 89.5 per cent and employer satisfaction of more than 91 per cent.

In this last financial year in particular, in what must be the most challenging year in living history, their performance has been outstanding. As at June 2021, they had student enrolments of 129,000, which is an increase of about 18 per cent in the last year. That is about 20,000 students. It is the largest cohort since 2015. They have increased their revenue and they have delivered a balanced budget.

Despite these magnificent outcomes, the financial year we are now in is going to be harder, as it will be for many higher education institutions. Without a stream of new international students or adult migrants we are going to see the impacts of international border closures hit TAFE's bottom line. We understand why our health response has to be the absolute priority, but the sooner the vaccines roll out and everyone has them the better it is going to be for all of us and for training providers like TAFE.

No matter what happens, we will continue to support TAFE to keep on doing what they do best, that is, giving Queenslanders the skills and the hope they need to find a job. They are looking to the future and for opportunities to increase their revenue, including through securing additional national training contracts, even in these uncertain times. They recently secured a lucrative Commonwealth government contract to deliver vital maritime training to people from the Pacific Islands. They stole it away from Tasmania after 28 years. Under the initial five-year, \$36 million contract, TAFE Queensland will deliver maritime training to Pacific Islanders who will crew 21 Guardian patrol boats. Those patrol boats will be gifted by the Australian government under the Australian Defence Cooperation Program. TAFE won this contract because they are good at what they do.

TAFE Queensland make sure that their training is always industry relevant and that the people they train can add value to their employers. They work with the industry to help make graduates job ready not only in traditional markets but in emerging and growth sectors as well. For example, TAFE is working with industry in implementing their renewable energy strategy and its hydrogen industry road map, with TAFE being part of our hydrogen industry subcommittee. They are also working with companies like BMA and Rheinmetall to help train current and future workers. They are a partner in the Higher Level Apprenticeship Pilot, which is delivering Queensland's first ever Diploma of Applied Technologies, and also supporting the Queensland craft brewing industry by delivering a formal beer-making qualification for new or transitioning employees in Queensland's craft beer industry.

Other great industry partnerships include re-signing with Toyota Motor Corporation to continue the 10-year-plus partnership to provide technical and apprenticeship training to Toyota's workforce, delivering an internship program for staff at Wesley Mission Queensland that provides specialist training in complex disability skill sets. The list goes on.

TAFE Queensland is critical in regional areas. They operate in some of the most remote parts of Queensland. We provide them with higher subsidies to do this. Many of the initiatives run in rural and remote areas support communities, reduce social isolation and provide training to disadvantaged and marginalised Queenslanders. That is because our support for TAFE means that TAFE can focus on training and skilling rather than being focused on increasing profits or pursuing solely commercial objectives.

TAFE is at the centre of everything we do—skills, emerging industries, supporting small business and creating jobs. Put simply, we could not have got through the pandemic without them and we cannot roll out our economic recovery plan without them.

CHAIR: Redlands is where the rubber hits the road when it comes to hydrogen. Minister, could you outline what programs are in place to support training in this emerging industry for Queensland?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question and also acknowledge the role you have, Chair, as a hydrogen champion. Thank you. It was great to have you at the recent Ministerial Energy Council talking about what is an enormous opportunity for Queensland in both domestic and export markets.

There is absolutely no doubt that the hydrogen jobs boom is coming to Queensland. The hydrogen industry is going to provide huge opportunities for Queensland, particularly in regional areas. That is why the Premier specifically appointed a Minister for Energy, Renewables and Hydrogen and an Assistant Minister for Hydrogen Development and the 50% Renewable Energy Target by 2030. The government is working hard to make sure our workforce will have the skills needed to be ready.

This is an emerging industry that is going to require Queenslanders with specialist skills in engineering, technicians for fuel cells and electrolyzers, as well as skills in traditional trades such as plumbers and electricians, and skills from the LNG industry. The fact that there is a \$2 billion Queensland Renewable Energy and Hydrogen Jobs Fund shows that it is something we are taking very seriously.

For Queenslanders to be able to do the highly skilled jobs required they are going to need access to world-class training. TAFE has already developed a hydrogen industry road map to help them look at future training needs. Some of this will be about developing new courses and some will be about cross-skilling existing workers, but we will need world-class facilities for this training to take place.

That is why under our Hydrogen Industry Strategy we are making a significant investment in training facilities. That includes \$20 million towards stage 2 of the Queensland Apprenticeship Centre at Beenleigh, which will include a Hydrogen Training Centre of Excellence; \$10.6 million towards a hydrogen and renewable energy training facility at Bohle trade training TAFE in Townsville as part of our \$100 million Equipping TAFE for our Future initiative; and \$2 million committed to upgrade training facilities at Gladstone State High School to prepare students for jobs in the emerging hydrogen industry. That is part of the \$45 million industry linked skills training facility initiative. I believe that the Minister for Education may have spoken a little bit about that this morning. There is also \$23 million for the renewable energy training facility to be constructed at Pinkenba with a \$17 million government investment supported by a \$6 million contribution from industry.

It is not all just about investment in training, as vital as that is. We also need to engage closely, as the member knows, with industry and make sure we are leading the conversation about new and revised competencies and the qualifications that are going to be needed. Our emerging industries workforce development team is leading our department's work program to develop a coordinated approach to meeting the skills needs of the emerging hydrogen industry. As the industry is still in its infancy and the technology and development pathways for the industry are still taking shape, it is challenging to define the nature, timing and distribution of skills and workforce needs for the industry. It is important for skills development and workforce planning efforts to progress now so that Queenslanders are well-positioned to compete for, and benefit from, future opportunities.

It is for that reason that skills development and workforce planning are a key focus of the hydrogen development subcommittee which, as the member knows, is a sub-committee of the Ministerial Energy Council. Along with the assistant minister I have already co-chaired two meetings of the hydrogen development subcommittee of the Ministerial Energy Council with key stakeholders in May and this month, with more to come. Those meetings have included representatives from industry, unions, training providers and Professor Peta Ashworth, chair of the Queensland Hydrogen Taskforce. We are currently developing a forward work plan which will include: a focus on opportunities to cross-skill existing workers, especially from the LNG industry, for hydrogen; potential for micro credentials and skill sets to respond to emerging needs in a timely manner; and training opportunities drawing on training materials developed interstate, abroad and by hydrogen technology providers.

As a state, we are best placed to support a renewable hydrogen industry. Activities are already underway to invest in skills to support our regional workforce. These are really exciting times for this industry, and I look forward to working alongside you, Chair, as we see that rollout.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It is an enormous opportunity for Queensland.

Mr SULLIVAN: I am pleased to ask this question, Minister, as it is a real passion of mine. If I could ask about the budget's \$320 million commitment to the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, and if the minister can advise the committee what changes have been made to the funding model for the program and what that means on the ground for our community sector.

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I acknowledge that we had a very nice time—was it just last week, I think—at the Multicultural Community Centre.

Mr SULLIVAN: It was at the MCC, yes.

Ms FARMER: A more enthusiastic supporter of that program I think would be hard to meet. I think there were 200 people graduating from that program, and weren't there some absolutely fantastic stories.

Mr SULLIVAN: Extraordinary.

Ms FARMER: Under the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, over 37,000 people have found jobs since it was reinstated in 2015. The program has directly helped over 60,000 people so far. The initiative surpassed its assistance target of 54,000 people nine months ahead of schedule. An evaluation from Deloitte Access Economics estimated that, for every dollar of government investment in Skilling Queenslanders for Work, Queensland's gross state product increased by \$2.30. Deloitte found that the program is increasing and enhancing Queensland's labour supply, particularly in regional areas and for disadvantaged Queenslanders. This is exactly what jobseekers, community organisations and employers are telling us they need right now. We also know that 73 per cent of participants gained a positive outcome 12 months after finishing Skilling Queenslanders for Work either in employment, training or a combination of both. It is literally one of the most successful programs of its kind in Australia.

Now that Queensland is experiencing a jobs boom, with the lowest unemployment rate in 12 years, Skilling Queenslanders for Work is more important than ever to fill gaps in the labour market and support disadvantaged jobseekers. It is a critical part of our COVID-19 economic recovery plan. That is why I was so delighted to see \$320 million in funding allocated to it in this year's budget but, more importantly, the funding is now embedded in the base of the budget. I know there were cheers all around Queensland with that announcement. One of the first things the Palaszczuk government did when we were re-elected in 2015 was reinstate the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, as it had been cancelled by the LNP government. We have made it permanent, as I said, and the new program is being improved.

The member asked about two new skill programs to meet Queensland's changing needs. The Community Foundation Skills program will build up people's language, literacy and numeracy skills to improve their job prospects or support them in further training. It also supports projects to develop participants' digital skills as technology reaches into more workplaces and industries. The second new program, Skill Up, will target adult workers who have been retrenched or displaced as well as women returning to the workplace, with training focused on getting people started on career paths in in-demand industries. A number of the members today have been asking about our skill shortages—I refer to the previous member's question—and this is where Skilling Queenslanders for Work is going to play such an important role. The new program is responding to the changes in the labour market as a result of COVID-19. We saw that has disproportionately affected women and increased the demand for skilled workers. We are also expanding existing programs such as the Ready for Work program by removing the age limit to help mature age workers as well as young people. We have already exceeded our assistance target, so we are increasing the annual target with the bar set at assisting 15,000 Queenslanders each year.

This program is not just about statistics. As we well know, those statistics represent real human stories and life-changing experiences. When I was with the Treasurer and the member for Nudgee to talk about announcing the funding for Skilling Queenslanders for Work, we met a young man called Cody Weaver who had been unemployed for some time and accessed Centrelink for support. With the skills and confidence he gained from Skilling Queenslanders for Work he said, 'I've gone from being on Centrelink to working for Centrelink as a security systems technician.' He said that the program literally changed his life. The member and I met a young woman called Ta Naw Naw Po at the multicultural

centre last week. Ta is a refugee from Myanmar who came to Australia with her family aged 18. She did not know a word of English so she studied it at TAFE Queensland. She got a job as a florist and then as a cleaner. She was laid off because of COVID but then she took a certificate III in individual support through our SQW program and now works providing personalised home care to aged and disabled people. Of course, we all know what tremendous need there is particularly in those sectors. She told us her story with a smile, beaming from ear to ear. Every single member of this House would be familiar with similar stories of people who are doing the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program.

Many crucial parts of the program are not being changed because they work. We are retaining the place based service delivery model due to its effectiveness and the positive relationships it fosters in communities. Funding rounds will remain open and contestable, which is important to preserve the transparency and fairness of the program. The funding round for 2021-22 is still open until 5 pm on Thursday, 19 August, and government staff are running information sessions to inform community organisations of the changing arrangements and goals. I encourage all members to make sure that groups in their electorates are aware of this, because it really is just a fantastic program with fantastic outcomes.

CHAIR: Indeed it is. Thank you, Minister.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, in the 2020-21 budget there is \$5 million included for a Workforce Transition Support Program. Is that funding for both the North Stradbroke Island Workers Assistance Scheme and the Just Transition?

Mr Agnew: Just to confirm that particular budget line item, it relates to our Future Skills Fund.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, to be clear, is the Future Skills Fund a different pool of money to the Workforce Transition Support Program? Is it an additional \$5 million?

Mr Agnew: I might actually refer to our deputy director-general for investment, who might know that line item.

Mr Koch: The Workforce Transition Support Program is a \$5 million program that is part of the \$200 million Future Skills Fund. It is a component within the overall allocation for that Future Skills Fund.

Mr MICKELBERG: I will go back to my original question, and I am happy for either of you to answer it. Does the Workforce Transition Support Program support the North Stradbroke Island Workers Assistance Scheme and/or the Just Transition Group?

CHAIR: That question is directed to the director-general and he may defer then to Mr Koch.

Mr Agnew: I will defer to the deputy director-general.

Mr Koch: The Workforce Transition Support Program is a separate pool of funding to the North Stradbroke Island funding support, as well as the other funding support that you mentioned.

Mr MICKELBERG: My next set of questions is to the TAFE Queensland CEO. Can you tell me what interaction TAFE has with the various regional jobs committees?

Ms Campbell: TAFE Queensland regularly interacts across the state with the regional jobs committees. Across every industry sector that we run we have regular industry sector panels. They meet two to four times a year and we take a lot of advice from industry. They come into our TAFE campuses, they tell us what is going on in their particular industries and what skills they are looking for, and then we liaise at those meetings with the regional committees. We are also in constant touch with them as employers to talk to them about the skilling needs in their various areas.

Mr MICKELBERG: Is TAFE Queensland represented on any of the regional jobs committees?

Ms Campbell: Can I just clarify? Are you meaning are we a member of those committees?

Mr MICKELBERG: Yes.

Ms Campbell: I do not have with me that exact information down to the level of each committee, but I will get that for you before the end of the session.

Mr MICKELBERG: Can you provide any examples where, because of recommendations from a regional jobs committee, a local TAFE offering has been modified in response to an identified local need?

Ms Campbell: I certainly can give you a recent example where we had the regional jobs committee person for agriculture that we were talking about and we were working with the Farmers' Federation and others around what we were delivering in Bundaberg. There was a need for a

horticulture nursery qualification, and we took that information from the regional jobs committee member, the Farmers' Federation and associated federations and we have now commenced that training at our Bundaberg location.

Mr MICKELBERG: Can you please provide me the completion rate for the free training that TAFE delivers, expressed as a percentage or in number terms?

Ms Campbell: Can you clarify that? Are you talking about the Free TAFE for Under 25s?

Mr MICKELBERG: Yes.

Ms Campbell: If you give me one moment, I have those figures with me. For our Free TAFE for Under 25s, including apprenticeships in 2020-21, we trained 3,087 students under Free TAFE for Under 25s and 12,169 under the free apprenticeships program. They were both significant increases on the year before.

Mr MICKELBERG: Just for clarification, was that commencements or completions?

Ms Campbell: In the free apprenticeships, that will be new commencements. We have had a terrific year with the initiatives by the federal and the state governments in terms of commencements right across the state—with 3,800 new commencements—but we have also improved our completions rate. We have an extra 1,300 completions this year as opposed to June 2020. We are certainly working hard. We have a 98 per cent competency completion rate in our training and apprenticeships which we are very proud of. As you know, there are many economic factors involved in an apprentice that is employed, and we certainly work with them across the state to ensure they get the very best training and we encourage them to continue on to complete that qualification.

Mr MICKELBERG: Noting you spoke there with respect to numbers of completions, can you tell me how the percentage completion rate for free TAFE training or state sponsored free TAFE training is relative to training that trainees are required to pay for?

Ms Campbell: I am not sure I have fully comprehended that question. From what I hear you saying, the training available under those programs is skills that are on the Priority Skills List, and that is how that is determined.

Mr MICKELBERG: I understand.

CHAIR: I just note that that previous question was not quite clear. Could you look at the succinctness of your questions?

Mr MICKELBERG: I understand. I will try to be a bit clearer. The question I am trying to determine is: how do the completion rates in relation to state sponsored, fully funded training compare to that training where an individual has to pay for it themselves across all training that TAFE Queensland delivers?

CHAIR: Member, could you try again? I am even struggling to understand the premise of that question. Could you try to rephrase that with a little bit more clarity?

Mr MICKELBERG: The premise of the question is to ascertain the effectiveness of delivery—we have spoken about commencements—completions of qualifications, not competencies, across the training that TAFE delivers, particularly comparing free training with training that an individual has to pay for themselves.

Ms Campbell: Our rolled up figure is 89.5 per cent in terms of what we deliver. We deliver over 465 programs, as you can imagine—full qualifications, fee-for-service skill sets, micro-credentials and so on. If you require some very detailed figures, I do not have those at hand with me. If you have a particular program or something you would like to compare, I can get that to you before the end of the session today.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy for that to be taken on notice, if you would like. I have explained what the premise of the question is and why I want that information. If that requires to be taken on notice, that is fine.

CHAIR: It has not been taken on notice. Ms Campbell has said she will come back before the end of the session with information that she is able to provide.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, can you tell me how many trainees and apprentices are employed directly by the state?

Mr Agnew: I do not have that data directly to hand. I will seek some advice. I am informed by the deputy director-general that QBuild is our main employer of apprentices and traineeships. We do not have that detail to hand. That would be an appropriate question for them.

Mr MICKELBERG: Are you able to take that on notice, given that you have carriage for traineeships and apprenticeships?

CHAIR: Sorry, Director-General, are you saying that that question should be directed to QBuild?

Mr Agnew: It could be addressed to any department that has responsibility for infrastructure or for their own employment in terms of traineeships. It is up to each individual department to interpret how they want to go about their traineeship employment.

Mr MICKELBERG: To be clear, Director-General, you do not know how many apprentices, noting your department has carriage for training and apprentices? Be they trainees or apprentices, your department has carriage of that, but you do not know how many the state government employs?

Mr SULLIVAN: Point of order, Chair: this is not within the portfolio of the training minister. They provide training. They do not provide state government employment programs. That is, as the director-general has stated, in the purview of relevant CEOs.

CHAIR: I note that we have had the data provided in regards to the number of traineeships and apprenticeships that the department is running.

Mr MICKELBERG: I do not accept the contention from the member for Stafford. Surely your department, Director-General, should have an understanding of the number of apprentices and trainees that are employed by the state, noting that you have cited numerous examples—both you, Director-General, and the minister—in relation to the number of commencements across Queensland as a whole. One would think that as the department responsible for trainees and apprentices, you would have an understanding of that across government. Is that not the case?

CHAIR: Director-General, I note you have answered that question, as have the minister and the deputy director-general, in the course of proceedings. I will give you some latitude in how you wish to respond to the member for Buderim.

Mr Agnew: I say again that the employment of apprentices and trainees is an employer-by-employer decision and the gathering of that data would be for each one of those employers—therefore, by each agency.

CHAIR: We will move on now, noting that it is 10 to 4 and there is a question from the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: My question is to the minister. This question would be true to your heart being about your previous portfolio of youth justice. As we have continuing youth justice issues in Townsville, is there any collaboration between the department of youth justice and the department of training in Queensland to ensure there are transition programs so that young people can transition from youth justice into gainful employment?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for his question and I acknowledge the member's interest and the many conversations we have had over the years about this issue. I would have to seek advice about the actual interactions between the department of youth justice and our programs. The member would be familiar with Transition 2 Success, Project Booyah and our Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, which cover a very similar cohort; they are looking at people who are disadvantaged in terms of employment. We know that with a number of those young people if we can actually give them training, they are more likely to get a job and that is more likely to get them on the straight and narrow.

I thank the deputy director-general, who just handed me a note to say that we do collaborate with the Transition 2 Success program. As I said, the foundations of those programs are very similar. If the member would like, we can get you some more information about that, particularly as it relates to North Queensland.

Mr DAMETTO: That would be good if we could get some specific information for Townsville and for the Hinchinbrook electorate.

Ms FARMER: We can do that for sure.

CHAIR: I invite to the table the member for Maiwar for the next question.

Mr BERKMAN: I have a question, first of all, for the director-general. Can you tell us what proportion of Queensland's vocational education and training budget is currently spent on TAFE as the public provider of VET in Queensland?

Mr Agnew: I thank the member for the question. I believe we might have had a recent question on notice as well in relation to that. I can confirm for you that 42 per cent of contestable vocational education and training was provided to public providers.

Mr BERKMAN: In that light, I will put—

CHAIR: Do you have a further question, member for Maiwar?

Mr BERKMAN: If I might. I will make it brief, though, because I know the member for South Brisbane is keen to ask a question if that is at all possible. Minister, I am curious. Does the government have a target or a plan for increasing the share of state VET funding going to TAFE to 80 per cent or above?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. As the member will know, vocational education is a demand driven system. We have the most contestable market in Australia; 39 per cent of Queensland government funded students studied at a public provider. As I said, public providers receive 42 per cent of contestable vocational education. We are unashamed supporters of the public provider.

CHAIR: With a tiny bit of time remaining, I know the member for Rockhampton had one final question.

Mr O'ROURKE: Minister, with reference to page 1 of the SDS and the government's support for training and apprenticeships, can you provide an update on pre-apprentice support programs?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. As I have said throughout the afternoon, investing in skills is at the heart of the Palaszczuk government's COVID-19 economic recovery plan, and for good reason. We know that if you get good training then you are more likely to get a good job, and an apprenticeship can literally be life changing. We are investing \$1 billion in training and skills this year alone. As we have said today, when it comes to apprenticeships, that investment is really paying off, with an almost 57 per cent increase in commencements compared to this time last year.

We know that an apprenticeship is a really big commitment. We know that not only do prospective apprentices need to work out the best option for them but also employers need to feel confident that if they are going to take someone on and invest in them, they are more likely to stay. It is not only recruitment of apprentices and trainees that is important, especially in this time of labour shortages, which we have referred to a bit this afternoon; it is also retention, which is why our \$25 million pre-apprenticeship support program, which is part of our Future Skills Fund, is just so important. It means we have new pathways for people interested in starting an apprenticeship and it expands our current programs supporting Queenslanders to become skilled workers.

There are five different elements to this program. There is the group training organisation pre-apprenticeship program that is going to fund selected GTOs to recruit young people aged between 15 and 24 years to study a relevant certificate I level qualification in hospitality, construction or engineering while they are undertaking paid employment. I am conscious of the time, so I will give you a summary of these if that is okay. We have SchoolTech, which is being extended. It is a collaboration between TAFE Queensland, Woree State High School in Cairns and a vocational partnerships group where school students complete two certificate II qualifications, work experience and core school subjects in years 11 and 12. That is to improve their chances of getting an apprenticeship once they finish school. As I said, Woree State High School leads the program. I am really looking forward to visiting there very soon with the local member, the Speaker of the parliament, the member for Mulgrave. That program supports students from a network of other Far North Queensland schools.

We have our Trade Skills Assessment and Gap Training Program that is being expanded so that more people with industry experience can be supported to complete our priority trade qualification. To support priority industries, the complementary trade training arrangements, supported through the Registered Trade Skills Pathway Program, are being expanded, helping individuals to achieve a trade qualification where workforce factors might prevent them from following the traditional apprenticeship pathways. We are also enhancing the support through Queensland's out of trade register which the Australian Employment Network administers. That is a program that helps apprentices who have had their training contracts cancelled to find a new employer and get back on track towards completing their qualifications.

All of this, as I said, is part of the Palaszczuk government's \$200 million Future Skills Fund, which focuses on skills attainment for the jobs we are going to need in the future. It supports disadvantaged groups of people and provides modern infrastructure for TAFE Queensland. As you can see, we are looking at the big picture and thinking about every part of the training journey. That includes our Gateway to Industry Schools Program to ensure we have skilled and trained workers ready to do the jobs that our state needs.

CHAIR: We have a little bit of time left and we might need to come back to this. Director-General and Ms Campbell, do you have any further information you want to provide on some of the earlier questions?

Mr Agnew: In particular, in relation to the matter tabled by the member, I can confirm that that particular RTO is not a former or current contract with the department in terms of SAS; however, we will seek to investigate the matter. The QTO may well be an avenue that it needs to go to. We will ensure that is followed up.

Ms Campbell: I can confirm that we are a member on all of the regional jobs committees across Queensland and can provide that information in detail, if requested. With regard to free TAFE, we have 3,000 students in the under-25s, as I said, this year—we can run the data on that for you—and 12,100 who have access to free apprentices for under-25s. I will run the data sets on both of those to provide them, if we can, before completion this afternoon to look at their completion rates.

Proceedings suspended from 4.00 pm to 4.15 pm.



CHAIR: The hearing is resumed. Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the estimates for the employment and small business portfolio areas. Deputy Chair?

Mr LISTER: I defer to the member for Buderim.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, has the department undertaken any contingency planning or modelling in relation to the impact of lockdowns on small and family business?

Mr Agnew: I note that a similar question was put to the Under Treasurer at the estimates hearing and note also that the settings that were related to by the Under Treasurer at that time for the budget were for no widespread or prolonged lockdown for Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: The question was: has your department undertaken any modelling in relation to the impact on small and family business?

Mr Agnew: Similar to the Under Treasurer, the department joins with Queensland Treasury in monitoring the impact of the COVID pandemic on the economy, including for small business. That includes monitoring key indicators of economic activity. I note the same summary the Under Treasurer provided, that short-term lockdowns are not evidencing the economic impacts we see for much longer, prolonged lockdowns.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, as you said, at estimates the Under Treasurer said that 'the economic impacts of short-term lockdowns have been very small'. In contrast to the Under Treasurer's comments, the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland and small business owners have been very vocal in relation to the impact that lockdowns are having in relation to confidence and viability of the small business sector. What advice has your department provided Treasury or Queensland Health about the impacts on small and family business from the most recent lockdown, given these divergent views?

Mr Agnew: Absolutely, the confidence indices that are available for Queensland in terms of business confidence are relevant for consideration. I do note that the NAB, Westpac and CCIQ confidence indices are all reporting strong confidence compared with 12 months ago in particular. The department's role more broadly in liaising with Treasury and Queensland Health is to ensure we are using our networks—including our direct engagements through our network of contact with small businesses and through all of our public media outlets—to ensure that messaging is getting out in relation to any of the responses from the Queensland government. That includes the short-term lockdowns we have had this year. We will continue to make sure that we have our hotlines available to answer any questions from small businesses to ensure they are supported with the information they need to manage their way through those situations. We provide any input from that through to our colleagues at Treasury and Queensland Health.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, you spoke about the department doing monitoring, which is a reactive way to assess the impact. I asked a question about modelling. Has the department or any other government department that you are aware of done any modelling—forecasting—of the likely impact of lockdowns on small business?

Mr Agnew: I refer the member to the first answer on this question. I understand the settings within the state budget are for a no widespread or prolonged lockdown from COVID-19.

Ms FARMER: I raise a point of order. I think the member has asked this question a number of times and I seek your guidance on whether it has really been done now.

CHAIR: I agree. I think the question has been answered in three different ways.

Mr MICKELBERG: As a follow-up to your answer, Director-General, you mentioned that one of the assumptions that underpinned the budget was that there would be no widespread lockdown. Given that we were in a widespread lockdown on 1 July, what advice did your department provide to Treasury or Queensland Health with respect to the impact of that lockdown which was in effect on 1 July?

CHAIR: Member for Buderim, for my mind that sounds extraordinarily similar to the last three questions that have been fairly comprehensively answered by the DG.

Mr MICKELBERG: I raise a point of order. These are important issues that we are dealing with.

CHAIR: I totally agree.

Mr MICKELBERG: I was talking about a very large proportion of the economy that has been directly impacted as a consequence of government decisions. The question is quite simple: what advice was provided in relation to a specific lockdown which was referenced in the DG's answer to the previous question?

Ms FARMER: I raise a point of order. Chair, I certainly support your comments about repetitive questioning, but I think the premise of the member's most recent question—that there was a lengthy lockdown—is actually incorrect.

Mr MICKELBERG: I think I said 'widespread', actually.

CHAIR: Would you like to recast your question?

Mr MICKELBERG: No, I would not like to, Chair. I am happy to restate it.

CHAIR: Just for clarity.

Mr MICKELBERG: The question is very simple: given that you referenced the fact that the budget is underpinned by an assumption that the state would not be in a widespread or lengthy lockdown and the state was in a widespread lockdown on 1 July, what guidance or information did your department provide to Treasury or Queensland Health in relation to the impact on small business?

Mr Agnew: I reference my previous answer but would also add that a key part of our role is to facilitate the relationship between government—that includes Queensland Health—and some of our key advocacy agencies, and we do support the minister in ensuring that there is a direct line through into a number of those agencies through Restaurant & Catering, through the CCIQ and through quite a number of those stakeholder organisations and any feedback from those sessions we ensure is fed into our colleagues at Premiers, Treasury and Queensland Health as well.

CHAIR: And reflected in the Queensland road map to recovery.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, when the budget was released, as we spoke about earlier, the Treasurer said, regarding the potential of another outbreak, 'Heaven forbid there is'. Given the lack of support to small business through the last lockdown and since, was divine intervention the government's only plan to support small and family business in the event of a further COVID outbreak this year and the consequent lockdown that we have experienced?

CHAIR: Member, there were multiple inferences in that question, so if you could recast that please.

Mr MICKELBERG: Can you please identify the inference, Chair?

CHAIR: I am asking you to recast the question.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is to the minister. Noting the failure to support small business through the last lockdown and since, what was the government's plan in the event of a lockdown?

CHAIR: Thank you, member.

Ms FARMER: That is an interesting question coming from a member of a party that did not even take a small business commitment to the—

Mr LISTER: I raise a point of order. Under standing order 118(a), the minister is not at liberty to debate—

Ms FARMER:—election as an alternative. However—

CHAIR: I have a point of order, Minister.

Mr LISTER: Under standing order 118(a), the minister is not at liberty to debate the question. She is there to answer the question.

CHAIR: Thank you, member.

Ms FARMER: I am very happy to answer the question and I reject a number of the inferences that the member has made. The Premier and the Treasurer were asked questions around this issue in their estimates hearing on 16 July and I reiterate what the Premier said at that time. On 16 July she said—

If hypothetically we had to do a five-day lockdown at some stage in the future and it was agreed with the federal government, we would find that funding. Governments have the opportunity to do that, just as if there was a cyclone or natural disaster.

However, having said that, I point out several really important things. The best thing that the Palaszczuk government can do for small businesses in this state is to ensure that we have a strong economy, and that is what we are seeing in Queensland right now. Our economy is growing at twice the rate of any other state or territory in Australia. While we do not wish any disadvantage on any of our colleagues in any of the other states and territories, the fact is that our economy is strong. Our unemployment is the lowest it has been in 12 years at 5.1 per cent.

As the director-general referred to, we have a number of well-regarded institutions showing confidence in our sector. In fact, the CCIQ Suncorp Pulse survey for the March quarter of this year shows that general business conditions in Queensland are up by 10.3 points to 58.3. The director-general referred to the NAB quarterly business survey which shows the business confidence index in Queensland well above pre-pandemic levels and slightly above the national average. The Westpac-Melbourne Institute consumer sentiment index for July saw consumer sentiment rise in Queensland to be 23.8 per cent higher over the year and 6.6 per cent above pre-COVID levels. That is the best thing that we can do for small businesses in Queensland to provide that strong economy and a foundation for growth.

In addition, the Queensland COVID-19 economic recovery plan has invested \$14.2 billion into that recovery plan. When COVID first hit, we invested a billion dollars into interest-free loans, almost \$200 million into COVID adaptation grants and a range of other supports and subsidies for small businesses. In June this year I announced the Big Plans for Small Business strategy, which includes \$140 million in grants for small businesses. It also included significant initiatives that support small business. For example, with regard to our SME procurement target where we said that we would commit 25 per cent of government spending to small businesses, by the end of the first six months alone of that initiative we had not only reached that 25 per cent target but we had smashed it—28.6 per cent. It was equivalent to \$2.7 billion of government business going to small businesses, and there are a range of other initiatives.

We need to be there for the long haul for small businesses, and I refer to the other really important piece of this conversation—that is, Queensland has had three short, sharp lockdowns. It is thanks to the leadership of the Premier of this state, of the Chief Health Officer and of every single person in Queensland doing the right thing that we are in the position we are now. We look at our friends in Sydney in New South Wales in particular and we all feel desperately for them. We look at our friends in Melbourne and feel desperately for them, but it is because of the leadership here that we are in a good position and I want to really thank small businesses. A lot of people have been harder hit than others by COVID, and I really want to thank our frontline workers, our health workers and our other emergency services workers who have been a key part of that. Our small businesses have also done it particularly tough. I know that for those short, sharp lockdowns there have been some challenges and I really want to acknowledge the efforts that they make. I have spoken to thousands of businesses since I have been the small business minister and they are really punching above their weight. They are being responsible and they are looking after themselves and their communities.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, the need for certainty is one of the biggest issues that small business is facing as we navigate COVID and the associated public health decisions. Why has the government not clearly articulated what support will be paid to small businesses in the event of a future lockdown?

Ms FARMER: Perhaps the member did not hear what I said in my previous response. I am happy to say it again.

Mr MICKELBERG: You do not need to say it again. Answer the question.

Ms FARMER: As the Premier said on 16 July, if hypothetically we had to do a five-day lockdown at some stage in the future and it was agreed with the federal government, we would find that funding. Governments have the opportunity to do that, just as if there was a cyclone or a natural disaster.

Queensland supports a national approach to supporting businesses and individuals affected by necessary COVID-19 lockdowns. That is why Queensland repeatedly called for JobKeeper to be extended. Despite the fact that it was not particularly for targeted industry sectors, Queensland agreed to the fifty-fifty principle for business and community lockdown support outlined by the Prime Minister at national cabinet on 4 June 2021. At the time the Prime Minister said—

So I think this is a very fair arrangement. States are looking after business payments and we will be addressing individuals' payments after that seven-day period.

Of course we have since seen an agreement reached between the Commonwealth and the state for support for what was originally a five-day lockdown in Victoria. In the event of a prolonged lockdown, such as those being experienced in New South Wales and Victoria, Queensland would work with the Commonwealth to provide support to business and the community in line with the arrangements announced by the Prime Minister on 14 July 2021. Just like we respond to cyclones, fires and floods, we will respond to any future lockdowns.

CHAIR: We will now have government questions. Member for Rockhampton?

Mr O'ROURKE: With reference to page 1 of the SDS and the government's focus on growing small businesses in the regions, what are some examples of specific projects or grants assisting small businesses in the regions?

Ms FARMER: I thank the member for the question. I was very happy to join the member on I think it was only our second roadshow event out of those 17. What a magnificent turnout from businesses in Rockhampton. The member knew every single one of them and what their issues were. I heard so many stories of the ways in which the member had supported every single one of those businesses.

Members might recall that our Big Plans for Small Business Strategy, which I announced in May, includes a specific objective to support local and regional economies and communities. It is why I really wanted to share some exciting news with the committee—I am sure the member for Rockhampton in particular is going to really welcome this—about a new grants program specifically for regional small business. I know that the member is a great supporter of small business. I really enjoyed the press conference we did with the owners of the Artizan Gluten Free Bakery. I fairly quickly went down to the bakery to make sure I could sample their products. They spoke to us about how helpful their \$9,400 COVID adaptation grant had been.

As the committee no doubt knows, we are currently rolling out our Big Plans for Small Business grants program: \$25 million across Business Basics, Business Boost and Business Growth grants initiatives. Our Business Basics and Business Growth grants have already been released and the Business Boost grants, as I mentioned in my introductory statement, are open tomorrow. We designed those programs as a specific response to the feedback we received from the Small Business Roadshow which, as members know, we took out to 17 locations across Queensland, including 11 outside South-East Queensland. One of the challenges raised most frequently on the roadshow was the need for one-on-one support to help businesses grow. There was also really strong feedback about some of the operational aspects of our grants, like giving small businesses sufficient time between the announcement and the opening of grants, clearer eligibility guidelines and advice on the information that was required.

I have been delighted to see the very positive reaction we have received to the grants as a result. In fact, we were overwhelmed with demand for the grants, particularly for the Business Basics program. It was so popular that some people missed out, particularly in regional Queensland. I am delighted to share with the committee today that we will be adding \$5 million to the program and launching a regional-only round of Business Basics in August. This is really fantastic news. I can see the member smiling under his mask. They will be able to apply for these \$5,000 grants. The money to fund it is coming from closing a program that is no longer in demand, which is our small business regional COVID adaptation grants.

Members will recall that when COVID first hit we launched the Small Business COVID-19 Adaptation Grant with a \$100 million funding pool that was taken up very quickly, which led us to fund a second \$100 million round with 50 per cent kept separate for regional businesses only. Those grants helped more than 6,000 regional small businesses when the pandemic was at its worst. Although the funds have been available in the regional COVID grants fund up until now, and we and our industry partners have put quite significant effort into promoting them, the demand simply does not appear to be there for this particular type of grant, which is why we are converting those funds to a regional-only round of Business Basics to help get regional small businesses the type of support they have told us they are looking for right now.

In relation to other support for regional businesses, we now have eight regional jobs committees—in Townsville, Mackay, Fraser Coast, Springfield, Toowoomba, the Redlands, the Gold Coast and Bundaberg—and another one is soon to be announced. There is our highly successful Back to Work program, which helps regional employers take on jobseekers with incentive payments and wraparound support. Since July 2016 more than 20,000 people have secured jobs with nearly 9,000 employers through Back to Work and more than 80 per cent of those employers are small businesses.

There is our SME procurement target, which I just spoke about. Within the first six months we spent nearly \$800 million with regional small businesses. Our Business Launchpads help people start residential construction and hospitality businesses by providing a one-stop shop to all the local, state and federal regulatory requirements and information they need. This is currently available in Townsville, Logan, Cairns, Toowoomba and the Sunshine Coast, and we will be announcing more soon.

We have invested \$1.2 million to help CCIQ recruit regional stakeholder managers, which was a specific 12-month COVID response, to provide on-the-ground advice and support in Cairns, Mackay- Whitsunday, Rockhampton, Wide Bay, the Sunshine Coast, Redlands and the Gold Coast. We have signed up 15 regional local authorities to our Small Business Friendly Councils Program, and we are talking to 31 more—and that is only the start. Of course, one of the priorities for membership of my new Queensland Small Business Advisory Council is that there be regional representation from people who are actively living the small business experience.

Chair and member, I could keep going, but I know that we are time limited. I hope you can appreciate that my answers show that the Palaszczuk government is backing small business with tangible plans and money that is already in the pockets of thousands of small business owners, including business owners in the regions.

CHAIR: Minister, you touched on the Small Business Roadshow. I was an extraordinary fan of the roadshow held out in my region. Can you elaborate further on how that panned out and how that benefited businesses further across Queensland?

Ms FARMER: Yes, that was a magnificent roadshow event at Redlands and just showed the strength of partnerships. I note that the member has a number of chambers of commerce in that area and, of course, a regional jobs committee that is operating there and already achieving great outcomes. I acknowledge the chair and coordinator of that committee, who I was very pleased to meet on that day. Congratulations to you and to everyone in the Redlands for the work you are doing together to solve local issues.

The Small Business Roadshow proved to be one of the most valuable exercises I have undertaken so far in regard to meeting the needs of Queensland small businesses. The chance to hear face to face the lived experience and challenges of over 1,400 Queensland small business owners, local councils, chambers of commerce and small business industry bodies was significant and powerful.

They felt the importance of connecting through the roadshow. Some travelled long distances to be part of the face-to-face sessions. I am thinking particularly of the Mount Isa session where we welcomed attendees from Cloncurry, Julia Creek and Richmond, which is a 1,800-kilometre round trip. The diversity of the business representation was vast. I have to mention, in particular, Hamish Brown, our 10-year-old cupcake maker from Hammy's Cupcakes in Toowoomba. He got the morning off school, with permission, to come along to the roadshow event. I am now probably one of his greatest Instagram fans. There are also people like Outback Dan from Camden Park Station tours in Longreach who all have fantastic stories. Through further Zoom meetings I was able to connect with industry representatives and their members such as Bernie Hogan, the CEO of the Queensland Hotels Association, Wes Lambert of the Restaurant and Catering Industry Association plus many more.

Through the combined sessions and online surveys, small businesses were asked how they could benefit from the rollout of the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy. The feedback from the over 2,500 participants was clear and unambiguous across every single location. It told us what small businesses need to build back better for the COVID and post COVID economy. There were two top issues raised. The No. 1 issue related to the difficulty small businesses face in recruiting and retaining suitably skilled staff. We discussed that a little in the earlier session. Other issues included the need for one-on-one support, skills and capability development to respond to the impacts of a changing business environment, streamlined processes for dealing with government, easy access to information and grants and mentoring support and networks, relevant training and development for themselves and positive messaging to build business confidence, which is so important. Small businesses spoke and we listened. Their feedback helped us to shape the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy that I launched on 12 June.

I have referred to the really prominent issue that was raised around workforce. I have already announced that we will hold a Queensland workforce summit in the coming months—and I have discussed that a little today—to identify strategies and partnerships to help small business and industry access the workforce that they need. We announced \$25 million in grants encompassing a suite of three programs. I have talked about those a little.

We have also simplified systems and processes for businesses, including the customised regulatory website via the Queensland Business Launchpad that I referred to earlier. I announced recently the VET Informed Consumer project to help small businesses employ an apprentice or trainee. The Business Queensland website will be upgraded to make sure it is the go-to resource for small business. Of course, we have been delighted to work with councils on the Small Business Friendly Councils initiative, which leads me to thank the Queensland Small Business Commissioner and her team for their great work on that initiative and also right across Queensland. We know that the Small Business Commissioner has received over 4,500 calls for help from small businesses.

We also know that the strategy has actually been really widely welcomed. I go to a comment from the CEO of the National Retail Association, Dominique Lamb, that thousands of small retailers across Queensland will benefit. We will continue to listen to the over 450,000 small businesses that make Queensland the place to do business. It is one of the key reasons, in establishing my new Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, that those small businesses must be living that small business experience. As I said before, I want that council to be my eyes and ears. The advice of current small businesses will be absolutely invaluable.

I want to thank every single person who came out to see us during those roadshows and who responded to our survey. As I said, their feedback has totally shaped what we are doing for small business. We want to continue to communicate with them in what are likely to be rapidly changing circumstances.

CHAIR: We definitely found it invaluable. Member for Hinchinbrook, do you have a question?

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, with the Small Business COVID-19 Adaptation Grant Program there were, I understand, two rounds of \$100 million, one of which was particularly for regional Queensland. The first \$100 million went very quickly and in the eyes of some small business owners suspiciously quickly. Can tell me what control measures were put in place by the government and the department to ensure that those grants went out to the right people and the people who needed them most? Has there been any review into where those grants have been allocated and how those businesses have benefited from the grants?

Ms FARMER: They did go exceptionally quickly, which is really an indication of the strong need at that time. As I said, it is why, particularly for regional businesses, we wanted to make sure that we quarantined a certain amount in that second round. I was not the minister at the time so I will ask the director-general, who may ask the deputy director-general, to comment on some of the details that you are talking about. Certainly a lot of the feedback at that time was that the people who missed out just did not have time. They did not realise it was going to go so quickly and would be sucked up literally within days. That is why we very quickly announced the second round, but gave people quite a lot of notice that it was happening.

I do know the department compliance monitoring activities, including information sharing and data analysis, identified one suspected case of fraud with the small business COVID-19 adaptation grants that the department reviewed. They referred that single case to law enforcement agencies for further investigation. I cannot really comment any further on that because there are ongoing investigations internally and externally. I do not know if the department can perhaps answer, if there are any other specific issues.

Mr DAMETTO: Madam Chair, could I redirect that question to the director-general, please?

Mr Agnew: I will make a couple of comments and refer to the deputy director-general as well. Sorry for the pass on—

Mr DAMETTO: I would rather have the question answered.

Mr Agnew: There was a difference in administration for the two rounds. Round 1 was done, as I was advised—it was before my time as well—essentially by the department and it was done very quickly in response to the need for businesses. Our administration was done with a reallocation of resources from within the department. Round 2 was done through an arrangement with the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority so there was a difference in administration in that.

At all times, of course, there were controls and at all times there were requirements for any of those applicants to have appropriately met the guidelines. I am very keen to make that point to you. Before referring to the deputy director-general for any other compliance comments that he might have, I would mention that we did conduct a survey of the recipients as to whether or not the business found that the funding had helped them to continue to trade. From round 1, the answer 'yes' was 97.7 per cent of businesses and it was very a similar amount for round 2 with 97.6 per cent. I refer to the deputy director-general to add any comments he might have.

Mr Koch: In terms of the assessment of applications under round 1 of the small business COVID-19 adaptation grants, over 11,700 applications were submitted under that round. We assessed each one of those applications. There were requirements for documentation that each small business was required to submit as part of the application form, including financial information that we could assess to make sure there was an assessment of a reduction in turnover for that small business. We also undertook a number of data analytics and analysis around the applications to ensure that businesses were eligible. We had partnerships, as the minister mentioned, with organisations such as WorkCover Queensland so that we could match and share data and MOU around that type of arrangement. Primarily, all of the applications were assessed and we required evidence from those small businesses in terms of their application. Then what we heard across the state, as the director-general outlined, was fantastic results and that survival statistic in terms of the contribution to businesses continuing to trade has been a really good outcome.

Mr DAMETTO: How quickly, once again, was that first \$100 million exhausted?

Mr Koch: We opened the application round and then once we had a suitable number of applications to undertake that assessment we closed that, and that assessment took a period of weeks. My recollection would be that we opened the grants in May and we completed the assessment of all of those applications by the end of July last year. All of the first round of applicants were advised the outcomes and that assessment was completed by the end of July.

Mr DAMETTO: How quickly did we hit the threshold where it had been exhausted so that you were not able to take any more applicants? Was it a couple of days? A week?

Mr Koch: We opened the first round of the COVID-19 small business adaption grants, and then we got a large number of applications, as you referred to. I would have to check definitively, but my recollection is that it closed around four days after the opening for that funding round.

Mr MICKELBERG: Minister, Jacinta contacted the opposition recently. She is in the entertainment industry on the Sunshine Coast and she specialises in variety shows for the elderly. She called your department's COVID-19 business support line looking for help and she was told that there was no assistance available and that it would be best for her to leave the industry. Minister, is the advice that was provided to Jacinta, that she should exit the industry due to a lack of support, consistent with government policy? Are you satisfied that this sort of advice is being provided by your helpline?

CHAIR: Member, before I allow that question, in accordance with standing order 115(b)(vi), can you confirm it is necessary to name the person for the question to make sense?

Mr MICKELBERG: Yes.

CHAIR: Can you also confirm that that name can be authenticated?

Mr MICKELBERG: Yes.

CHAIR: Minister?

Ms FARMER: I do not want to hear of any small business owner or anyone of any kind having a negative experience with our department. I would hope that the member could refer that lady's details to the department so that we can follow up with her. Our business hotline—in fact, the director-general or deputy director-general might be able to give me the figures—is a hotline which is very frequently used and I have had exceptional feedback about it. Our whole department is geared to supporting small businesses in whatever way we can, whether that be through financial assistance, through streamlining processes, through supporting them to take on trainees and apprentices or through mentoring programs. That is why this department exists.

Quite aside from the significant support that we offer to small business from this department, the Treasurer recently announced I think \$7 million for the live music industry, for instance, and I think that there is other support.

Our department, either via the website or the hotline, certainly works to make sure that whoever is calling us is aware of not only the programs that we offer but also that there are a number of other support mechanisms for small business right across the Queensland government, and we always

endeavour to make sure that we are linking them up with those. Just as the member for Hinchinbrook before asked about agriculture, then we would be connecting them with Agriculture and with any other department. I am very sorry if Jacinta did have that experience, but we would welcome her contact details if she is willing to pass them on so that we can follow up and support her.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, are calls to the hotline recorded?

Mr Agnew: That is a point of detail on our hotline that I am personally not aware of. I am advised that, no, they are not recorded.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, on a separate line of questioning, last year's budget included \$8 million over two years for the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund. Can you clarify for me the amount of grant funding available? The website says—

Under the jobs fund, \$3 million in funding will be delivered over the next two years through business development grants for eligible organisations starting with the Community Social Enterprise Development Grant.

Is it \$3 million or \$8 million that is available?

Mr Agnew: I can confirm that the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund in total funding is \$8 million. The \$3 million for grants is part of that \$8 million.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, what is the plan for the remaining \$5 million?

Mr Agnew: The further \$5 million in support out of the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund will support building the strength and resilience of the sector and maximising procurement opportunities for social enterprises. We are working with our key stakeholders, such as the Queensland Social Enterprise Council and other stakeholders, to ensure that initiatives that are developed under the jobs fund will respond to the unique opportunities and challenges for this important sector of Queensland.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, on 29 May this year, the minister announced an extra \$8 million for the 'new Social Enterprise Jobs Fund'. Can you please advise if that is another \$8 million or did it refer to money that was previously announced in the budget?

Mr Agnew: I do not have the minister's particular statement in front of me, but I can confirm we have an \$8 million Social Enterprise Jobs Fund to deliver.

Mr MICKELBERG: I understand that the \$8 million is to be delivered through four different grants packages, none of which have a closing date prior to 1 June this year. Is it fair to say, then, that, of the \$8 million that was in that fund which was announced in 2020-21, none of it was in the hands of social enterprise before the end of last financial year?

Mr Agnew: The information I have provided is as stands. We have \$3 million announced from that \$8 million jobs fund to go towards grants. Those funds will be rolled out in accordance with announcements from the government. We have been liaising very closely with our stakeholders, as I mentioned, in particular QSEC, who I understand, certainly from my perspective, are happy with the pace and rollout of that particular fund.

Mr MICKELBERG: Just to confirm, for clarification, Director-General, no funds have been expended to date; is that correct?

Mr Agnew: In relation to the grants, that is correct. In terms of support for QSEC itself, total funding of \$315,000 for two years and three months, from 1 April 2021 through to 30 June 2023, has been provided from the fund.

Mr MICKELBERG: Director-General, the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy covers the period 2021 through to 2023. Of the \$140 million for that strategy, how much has already been spent or allocated?

Mr Agnew: In relation to the \$100 million fund, which is under administration with the Queensland Investment Corporation, I understand that that particular fund is underway. As the minister outlined through her statements earlier, \$25 million of that \$140 million fund is for grants. \$15 million of that has been announced and is underway through announcements. I do not have the reconciliation in front of me completely for the remaining \$15 million I have not yet mentioned of that \$140 million, but that is there to support various other activities under the fund, such as updating our website. That was a key part of Big Plans for Small Business Strategy in terms of improving communication to small business and was a key feedback area for us.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is for the director-general. In light of the varying impacts of the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions on different kinds of businesses, what consideration has the department given to industry specific grants for small businesses, specifically for the hospitality, fitness and arts sectors, as well as scrapping payroll tax?

Mr Agnew: If I can take the last part of your question first and refer any payroll tax question through to Queensland Treasury as that is their area of responsibility.

In terms of small business grants and support, particularly financial support—it is certainly in our Big Plans for Small Business strategy—it is generally available for all small businesses in Queensland. I would note particularly that the COVID-19 adaption grants which were available to support businesses through that period were available to all industries—there was not a specific area, but they were certainly available to those that could show that they had a decline in revenue as a result of the COVID-19 economic impact on them.

In relation to any industry specific areas, I point out that we liaise with other departments such as the department of tourism to provide support in terms of our administration expertise as to how we have capability in providing assistance to small businesses. I note some of the industry specific assistance that has come from an agency such as the department of tourism. I would refer you to any of those particular portfolio areas if you have any further questions.

CHAIR: We now move to government questions.

Mr O'ROURKE: In relation to the \$8 million Social Enterprise Jobs Fund, can the minister please update the committee on the implementation and rollout of the fund?

Ms FARMER: As the member might know, we have been investing in social enterprises since 2015. It was the Palaszczuk government that released Queensland's first statewide Social Enterprise Strategy in 2019 along \$1 million to help develop the sector. The grants we rolled out were the first ever dedicated social enterprise grants in Queensland.

It was the Palaszczuk government that provided funding to the Queensland Social Enterprise Council to develop the sector. I congratulate the Richard Warner, the current chair—and Emma-Kate Rose before him—Elise Parups, the CEO, and their team for their outstanding stewardship of this incredibly important sector. QSEC has become part of what we call the G8—the group of peak small business bodies such as CCIQ, the Queensland Hotels Association, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council—with whom we consult on a regular basis on issues regarding small business. In establishing my new Queensland Small Business Advisory Council I have been quite specific that I want representation from the social enterprise sector on that council.

In the last budget, the Palaszczuk government committed a record \$8 million investment into the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund and QSEC, the Queensland Social Enterprise Council, welcomed this funding saying—

We're delighted to see our sector's advocacy efforts recognised through this significant level of funding and particularly grateful for Minister Farmer's support in this early stage of the government's response to local economic solutions.

We have a unique emerging social enterprise sector in Queensland and are excited to work with our stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for our communities. The Social Enterprise Jobs Fund includes \$3 million in grants across four proposed grant streams that have been tailored to social enterprises in different stages of their development. Whether they have been operating for decades or started last month, we will have a program to support them. The first of the grants, the Community Social Enterprise Development Grants, has already been announced, with the selection process to allocate that \$600,000 underway. Those grants are going to help non-profit community organisations grow and expand the skills development and employment opportunities they provide for disadvantaged Queenslanders. We will be working closely with QSEC and other sector stakeholders to make sure the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund aligns with the unique opportunities and challenges for social enterprises in Queensland.

I thank them for the excellent working relationship we have had. I know that they went out and surveyed their members on what they would like to see happen with the jobs fund. They certainly have been working alongside me, particularly during the small business roadshows, to look at the feedback we collated from there because, of course, there are so many parallels. It is their input that has really helped guide the way we allocate those funds.

As the director-general said, the \$5 million, which is in addition to the \$3 million in grants, is really going to be for developing the sustainability of this emerging sector. I caught up with Richard Warner, the QSEC chair—I catch up with him pretty regularly—at the Nundah Community Enterprises Co-operative which he established, I think, around 20 years ago. I see the member for Stafford nodding. I think they are very well known. I went there with the member for Nudgee, the Minister for Children,

last week. She was very proud to introduce me. What an organisation that is. They won the Australian Social Enterprise Award in 2015 and the Social Traders Award in 2020. Some 30 people with cognitive or psychosocial disabilities are engaged in meaningful work operating a parks and maintenance business and the Espresso Train Cafe & Catering on Station Street. As a not-for-profit cooperative they focus on helping members in their community. I can assure the member that it does not come at the expense of the quality of the work, producing the best cakes in the area. My staff were very pleased when I came back from that visit with a box of goodies for them. They disappeared very quickly so I can vouch for their quality. In fact, I do not think I even got any.

We are looking forward to organisations like the Nundah Community Enterprises Co-operative achieving the best they can be, supported by the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund. The next grant program, which is worth \$800,000, will be the Social Enterprise Growth Grants, to help social enterprises expand their operations. In the very near future I will be announcing the timing of those grants.

We want to look at those options in the coming months, but of course they were extremely pleased to see the announcement about Skilling Queenslanders for Work, particularly the permanent funding. They recognise what a pivotal moment that was for their sector as so many of the social enterprises are running their programs through Skilling Queenslanders for Work. It was great to hear the feedback of the council. It stated—

We applaud Minister Di Farmer MP—

I am not telling you these quotes just so I can tell you how wonderful I am; they are just straight quotes—

for continuation of the SQW initiatives. SQW provides hands-on training opportunities with access to wraparound support. It helps disadvantaged jobseekers surmount the barriers they face and enter the Queensland workforce. Critical to SQW's success has been partnering with community organisations and social enterprises who know the issues on the ground and are driven by the aspirations of the people they serve. A great partnership.

As we know, member for Stafford, the LNP cut the SQW program almost as soon as their feet hit the ground when they came to government.

Mr SULLIVAN: Yes, you could probably see me smiling under my mask too, Minister. I cannot claim them. They are just across the boundary into the member for Nudgee's electorate, but they are very well known and respected on the north side. Thank you for telling their story. My question is to the minister and refers to page 4 of the SDS. Could the minister please advise the forward work plan of QSBC and the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction?

Ms FARMER: As the Palaszczuk government has already achieved a great deal to make it easier to do business with government through the Small Business Roadshow, earlier this year I heard that small businesses in Queensland want more streamlined processes for dealing with government. That is exactly what we are doing. The functions of the Better Regulation Taskforce have merged with the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction to provide a stronger opportunity for the Queensland Small Business Commissioner and the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction to engage in transformational regulatory reform together.

In fact, the Queensland Small Business Commissioner, as the former chair of the Better Regulation Taskforce, is already working with the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction, having kicked off a series of meetings to identify reform opportunities. I recall that when the member attended the Brisbane north forum there was a lot of discussion about these very issues. I know how much you got out of just being able to hear what the nature of those experiences were.

The Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction within Queensland Treasury commenced operations on 2 June this year. Part of the initial engagement is for both groups to develop a forward work plan and formal working arrangements between the two offices. They are going to work together on projects of mutual priority for Queensland small businesses. They have immediately identified a couple in particular. One of them is the Summertime Taskforce project, which we promised going into the last election, which is going to be led by the Small Business Commissioner. That is going to look at ways our small businesses can make best use of Queensland's great weather by facilitating better use of outdoor areas and on-street dining and to revitalise our CBDs. There will be a number of other reform opportunities there as well.

I want to note some of the non-regulatory initiatives that we have put in place to assist small business, including our Small Business Friendly Councils initiative, which is already underway reducing red tape. There are some fantastic stories about what is happening there with those 15 councils, with another 31 to go. The Queensland SME procurement target we have obviously talked about. That has been a huge success, even if it is early days. The Business Launchpad website is going to make it

easier to deal with government at all three levels with a one-stop shop. We have the VET informed consumer website, which is going to help businesses who have apprentices and trainees, and there is a range of other commitments.

I know that the LNP often claim that they are the red-tape champions. I note that in the April 2015 CCIQ Red Tape Survey report small businesses said—

The burden of red tape has intensified over the past two years and continues to adversely impact the performance of Queensland businesses.

It was the LNP that the small businesses were talking about.

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

CHAIR: Cease your interjections, please. I think we have time for one more question before we come back to the director-general for some details on some of the responses earlier. Member for Hinchinbrook, do you have a final question?

Mr DAMETTO: I understand that insurance does not fall under your portfolio, Minister, but you cannot talk about small business in Queensland right now unless you talk about public liability insurance. It is one of the most burdensome costs to small businesses right now. Minister, what are your department and portfolio doing to advocate for both the federal and state governments to tackle this problem for small business owners in Queensland?

Ms FARMER: The member is right: it is not a matter for my portfolio. However, in general, it was an issue that was raised at a number of the roadshows and probably in North Queensland—I remember that it was raised at the Townsville roadshow in particular. I can say that the Treasurer is looking at the issue.

I would like to reiterate that overall our support for small business is at a couple of different levels. One of them is—despite the fact that most of these matters, and insurance is one of them, fall within the federal sphere—to make sure that we have a strong economy in Queensland from which businesses can operate. That really has to be the No. 1 priority. We need to preserve the health of the state. We know that where there is a strong health recovery there is a strong economic recovery. Queensland's economy is going very well.

We also have our other forms of quite specific support for small business. I would say to the member—because I know the member is genuine about helping small business—that I encourage small businesses who have quite specific issues about their business to access our Mentoring for Growth program, which is a fantastic initiative. I am not sure whether the member is aware of it. Experts in their field will sit down and work one on one with businesses to help them work out how they can best navigate—whether it is just to survive, whether they want to grow, whether it is to grapple with specific issues—and what they need.

Quite aside from this other body of work that I understand the Treasurer is doing—I seem to recall that the Prime Minister made some comments about this as well at some point—in terms of support that is available from our department, I encourage any businesses to sit down one on one with these experts to help them navigate whatever their issues are but also to take up opportunities.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are right out of time.

Mr LISTER: I raise a point of order. I have a procedural motion. I would like to move that the committee extend the hearing for 30 minutes because the non-government side has further questions—

CHAIR: Unfortunately, the time frames have been set by the House. It is not a motion that can be moved.

Mr LISTER: I take your point. Thank you, Chair. I move then that, upon closing, the committee immediately reconvene for a further half an hour for questioning to the minister because we have extra questions concerning small business that we would like to ask.

CHAIR: That is not possible. You certainly have plenty of opportunities in coming weeks and months to ask further questions in the House. I thank the minister, the director-general and the deputy director-general. I know there were questions that you were going to come back to us on. Although we are fast running out of time, Director-General, can you come back to us with some of the responses from questions earlier?

Mr Agnew: I will attempt to do that as quickly as I can. In relation to the information that the minister wanted to provide you on the Small Business Hotline, I can confirm that there were 18,000 calls in the financial year 2020-21 and 39,100 calls since March 2020. I would like to correct a statement that I made in relation to the recording of our Small Business Hotline. Our hotline services are provided

by Smart Service Queensland. I understand that they are recorded. I would be keen, if there is an opportunity, for that individual to provide their number so we could follow up and ensure that information is used for training and correction.

Mr MICKELBERG: Sorry to interrupt, Director-General. I will consult with the individual and come back to you if she is prepared to share her information. We do have it, but I will ask her first.

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Buderim.

Mr Agnew: In relation to a question to the TAFE CEO, I can confirm that TAFE Queensland collects data on students in departmental funding sourced programs via competency completions. For all students who currently access free TAFE for under-25s—which I note commenced last financial year, so we have not had a period for long competencies to complete—I have information here that the competency completion rate currently stands, on the information they collect, at 89.8 per cent. This compares to TAFE Queensland's overall competency rate last financial year at 89 per cent, as detailed on page 12 of the SDS.

In relation to the member for Hinchinbrook's question on youth justice issues in Townsville, I can confirm that the department works with the department of youth justice. The programs are youth-specific programs under the SQW program to provide tailored support, skills development and training for disengaged youth to assist them transitioning into employment or further training. Since 2015, eight projects worth \$1.1 million targeting 323 disengaged youth of the ages 15 to 24 have been funded in the Townsville electorate. To date, 256 young people have been assisted, with 159 gaining a positive outcome from that. We also work collaboratively with Youth Justice on delivery of their Transition 2 Success program, with participants eligible for SQW projects as well.

In addition, the collaborative program activity North Queensland regional director from my department has connected with the Townsville Stronger Communities Executive Committee, and the North Queensland regional team connects with representatives from the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre to align and promote programs. There is a lot of activity happening in that area.

In relation to the member for Buderim's question on what data is used to determine priority skills lists, I can confirm the official data sources that I referred to earlier in my answers to your questions: ABS census data; ABS Labour Force, Australia data; Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment higher education statistics; Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment internet vacancy indices; Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment skill shortage occupational reports; our own priorities skills lists; NCVET data student outcome survey information; NCVET total VET activity data; Faethm automation and augmentation projections; and the Jobs Queensland Anticipating Future Skills program. I have a number of examples here where we have updated our priority skills lists recently, including: the removal of priorities in 13 qualifications; a number of amendments to adjustments for qualifications, including changes to eligibility restrictions; and priorities added in new qualifications and skills set as well in areas such as certificate II in drainage, certificate IV in residential drafting, meat processing and new supervisor skill sets, and certificate II in transport security protection as examples, as you sought in your question.

I can confirm very quickly that the four days referred to by the member for Hinchinbrook on round 1 of the COVID adaptation grants was correct. As the deputy director-general advised, it was 19 May to 23 May.

Finally, the questions from the member for Buderim in relation to transparency and accountability. We are committed to annual survey reports on apprentice and trainee information from the department. We typically prepare them between January and March of each year following the end of the financial year. In addition, apprenticeships and traineeship data on broader VET activity for the 2019-20 financial year was published to the department's website on 5 February this year. Regular monthly data on apprenticeships and traineeships is published to the Queensland open data portal, with the latest data being currently published from June 2021.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question was specifically around the apprentice and trainee participation data. I understand some of that other data you just cited is up on the website. It would be that open data portal or the departmental website. I did ask, though, when that specific data would be uploaded, because it is not there now.

Mr Agnew: It is due to be published imminently.

CHAIR: With no questions being taken on notice, the time allocated for consideration of the post estimates of expenditure for the portfolio for the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development has expired. I thank the minister, the director-general, the

DDG and the chief of staff. I thank all of the members who have contributed to a really robust session today. I thank Hansard and all of the secretariat staff who work very hard to make sure that days like today run very smoothly. Thank you to everybody. Thank you again, Minister. We are very grateful for the time of your team.

Ms FARMER: Firstly, Chair, I would like to thank you for your excellent chairing today and all members of the committee and visitors. This is a really important process. We have certainly appreciated the opportunity to discuss our really important portfolio with you all. I want to thank the Parliament House staff, who do such a good job. This is such an intense experience for the support crew behind this whole effort so I acknowledge all of them, including the people who are not in this room today.

I want to thank my director-general, Warwick Agnew, and the team in his office, Gemma, Jen and Lisa; his deputy director-general, Steve Koch, who has been a witness today; Maryanne Kelly and Rebecca Atkinson in head of corporate; Rhiannon Howell, and all of their teams who work incredibly hard. You have all seen the size of the folders here today. That represents thousands of hours of work and lots of people staying behind late, and I want to say how much I appreciate them.

I want to thank my office as well, in particular: Kate, Dou, Nick, Matt, Lisa, Deb, Cindy and John, who just started this week so that is been quite a baptism of fire, but in particular my chief of staff, Emily Taylor, who has done an outstanding job and is such a great support to me. Thank you to everybody, and we look forward to seeing members in parliament.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and thank you everybody. This hearing is closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.24 pm.