

# **2021-22 Budget Estimates**

**Report No. 8, 57th Parliament**

**Education, Employment and Training Committee**

**August 2021**

## Education, Employment and Training Committee

<b>Chair</b>	Ms Kim Richards MP, Member for Redlands
<b>Deputy Chair</b>	Mr James Lister MP, Member for Southern Downs
<b>Members</b>	Mr Mark Boothman MP, Member for Theodore
	Mr Nick Dametto MP, Member for Hinchinbrook
	Mr Barry O'Rourke MP, Member for Rockhampton
	Mr Jimmy Sullivan MP, Member for Stafford

### Committee Secretariat

<b>Telephone</b>	+61 7 3553 6657
<b>Fax</b>	+61 7 3553 6699
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:eetc@parliament.qld.gov.au">eetc@parliament.qld.gov.au</a>
<b>Technical Scrutiny Secretariat</b>	+61 7 3553 6601
<b>Committee webpage</b>	<a href="http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/EETC">www.parliament.qld.gov.au/EETC</a>

### Acknowledgements

The committee thanks Hon Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing and Hon Di Farmer MP, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, for their assistance in the committee's examination of the budget estimates. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by departmental officers during the estimates process.

## Contents

<b>Chair’s foreword</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Role of the committee	1
1.2 Inquiry process	1
1.3 Aim of this report	1
1.4 Participation by other Members	2
<b>2 Recommendation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 Department of Education	4
3.1.1 Budget overview – Department of Education	4
3.1.2 Capital works program	5
3.2 Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority	5
3.2.1 Budget overview	5
3.3 Queensland Racing Integrity Commission	5
3.3.1 Budget overview	6
3.3.2 Capital works program	6
3.4 Key issues raised during consideration of budget estimates	6
<b>4 Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 Department of Employment, Small Business and Training	8
4.1.1 Budget overview – Department of Employment, Small Business and Training	8
4.1.2 Capital works program	9
4.2 TAFE Queensland	9
4.2.1 Budget overview	9
4.2.2 Capital works program	10
4.3 Key issues raised during consideration of budget estimates	10
<b>5 Statement of Reservation</b>	<b>11</b>

## Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the committee's examination of the budget estimates for the 2021-22 financial year.

Consideration of the budget estimates allows for the public examination of the responsible Ministers and the chief executive officers of agencies within the committee's portfolio areas. This was undertaken through the questions on notice and public hearing process.

The committee has recommended that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2021 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing, the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, and their departmental officers for their co-operation in providing information to the committee throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the members of the committee for their hard work and valuable contribution to the estimates process, and other members whose participation in the hearing provided additional scrutiny of the estimates.

Finally, I thank the committee's secretariat and other Parliamentary Service staff for their assistance throughout the estimates process.



Kim Richards MP  
**Chair**

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Role of the committee

The Education, Employment and Training Committee (the committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly which commenced on 26 November 2020 under the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

The committee's primary areas of responsibility are:

- Education, Industrial Relations and Racing
- Employment, Small Business, Training and Skills Development.

Sections 93(1) and 93(3) of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* provide that a portfolio committee is responsible for examining each Bill and item of subordinate legislation in its portfolio areas to consider:

- the policy to be given effect by the legislation
- the application of fundamental legislative principles to the legislation
- matters arising under the *Human Rights Act 2019*
- for subordinate legislation – its lawfulness.

### 1.2 Inquiry process

On 18 June 2021, the Appropriation Bill 2021 and the estimates for the committee's area of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.<sup>2</sup> At that time, the Legislative Assembly agreed to a resolution suspending standing orders to enable:

- portfolio committees to hold estimates hearings on specified dates and within specified timeframes
- the Leader of the House, after consultation with the Speaker, to set and, if necessary, change the days for estimates hearings
- that where a minister administers a number of distinct portfolio areas, matters relating to each portfolio area may only be raised during the timeframe specified for that area.<sup>3</sup>

On 29 July 2021, the committee conducted a public hearing and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from Hon Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing and Hon Di Farmer MP, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, and other witnesses. A copy of the transcript of the committee's hearing is available from the committee's webpage.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.3 Aim of this report

This report summarises the estimates referred to the committee and highlights some of the issues the committee examined.

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

- budget papers

<sup>1</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Standing Order 194.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Order 177 provides for the automatic referral of the annual appropriation bills to portfolio committees once the bills have been read a second time.

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Parliament, Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2021, pp 2195-2199.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/EETC/inquiries/current-inquiries/Estimates2021>.

- answers to pre-hearing questions on notice
- evidence taken at the hearing
- additional information given in relation to answers.

Prior to the public hearing, the committee provided questions on notice to the Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing and the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development in relation to the estimates for their portfolios. Responses to all questions were received.

Answers to the committee's pre-hearing questions on notice, documents tabled during the hearing, answers to questions taken on notice and additional information provided by Minister Farmer after the hearing are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

#### **1.4 Participation by other Members**

The committee granted leave for other Members to participate in the hearing in accordance with Standing Order 181(e). The following Members attended the hearing:

- Steve Andrew MP, Member for Mirani
- Michael Berkman MP, Member for Maiwar
- Jarrod Bleijie MP, Member for Kawana
- Dr Amy MacMahon MP, Member for South Brisbane
- Tim Mander MP, Member for Everton
- Brent Mickelberg MP, Member for Buderim
- Dr Christian Rowan MP, Member for Moggill
- Fiona Simpson MP, Member for Maroochydore.

## 2 Recommendation

Pursuant to Standing Order 187(1), the committee must state whether the proposed expenditures referred to it are agreed to.

**Recommendation 1**

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2021 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

### 3 Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing

The Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing, Hon Grace Grace MP, has responsibility for the Department of Education and the following statutory entities:

- Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority
- Queensland Racing Integrity Commission.

#### 3.1 Department of Education

In 2021-22 the Department of Education will deliver services in the following areas:

- Early Childhood Education and Care - early years programs for children that support learning and development and transition to school
- School Education - school education and transitioning to further education, training and work
- Industrial Relations – policy, advice and regulation regarding industrial relations, work health and safety, electrical safety, and workers' compensation
- Racing - administering the *Racing Act 2002* and managing programs to support the racing industry in Queensland.

Responsibility for Racing was transferred to the Department of Education from the former Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs as part of machinery-of-government changes effective from 12 November 2020. The 2021-22 estimates for the Department of Education include a full year budget for Racing for the first time since then.

##### 3.1.1 Budget overview – Department of Education

The Department of Education's budgeted expenditure for 2021-22 is \$11.009 billion, which is an increase of \$739.382 million on estimated actual expenditure in 2020-21.<sup>5</sup> The Department of Education Service Delivery Statements (SDS) state that the increases in expenditure for controlled items mainly reflect:

- enrolment growth
- enterprise bargaining outcomes
- increased depreciation associated with school infrastructure investments
- transfer of the Racing function to the Department of Education
- changes to the Racing Infrastructure Fund
- additional expenditure funded under the National School Reform Agreement and Bilateral Agreement.<sup>6</sup>

The Appropriation Bill 2021 proposes that the Department of Education receive appropriation revenue of \$10.365 billion for controlled items in 2021-22.<sup>7</sup> The remainder of the department's \$11.009 billion in operating expenses for 2021-22 will be funded by user charges and fees, grants and other contributions, interest and distributions from managed funds, and other revenue.<sup>8</sup>

The Department of Education also oversees significant administered revenue and expenses. It is proposed that the department receive appropriation revenue of \$4.620 billion for administered items

---

<sup>5</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 11.

<sup>6</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 10.

<sup>7</sup> Appropriation Bill 2021, Schedule 2, p 9.

<sup>8</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 11.

in 2021-22. In regard to these items, the Department of Education SDS advise that ‘major changes in Administered expenses and revenue relate to revised funding for non-state schools’.<sup>9</sup>

The following table compares the appropriation for the Department of Education for 2020-21 and 2021-22.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1: Department of Education – Appropriations for 2020-21 and 2021-22**

<b>Appropriation</b>	<b>Budget 2020-21 \$'000</b>	<b>Est.Actual 2020-21 \$'000</b>	<b>Budget 2021-22 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	9,621,435	9,593,602	10,365,369
equity adjustment	1,109,918	600,814	850,752
<i>Administered Items</i>	3,994,281	4,048,914	4,620,329
<b>Vote</b>	<b>14,725,634</b>	<b>14,243,330</b>	<b>15,836,450</b>

Source: Appropriation Bill 2021, Schedule 2, p 9.

### 3.1.2 Capital works program

Total capital purchases for the Department of Education in 2021-22 are estimated to be \$1.447 billion, a decrease of \$255.624 million from estimated actual expenditure on capital works in 2020-21.<sup>11</sup> The 2021-22 capital works budget is primarily (95.6%) for the construction and refurbishment of school facilities and early childhood education and care services.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the capital program provides for capital grants of \$116.708 million in 2021-22 to the non-state schools sector and student hostels.<sup>13</sup>

The 2021-22 budget also provides for capital grants to the Racing Infrastructure Fund (\$21.530 million) and the Country Racing Program (\$2.600 million).<sup>14</sup>

## 3.2 Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority

The Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority (QCAA) is established under the *Education (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority) Act 2014*. The QCAA delivers curriculum, assessment and certification services to support the Queensland education system.

### 3.2.1 Budget overview

The QCAA’s operating expenditure is estimated to be \$84.522 million in 2021-22, an increase of \$1.060 million on estimated actual expenditure in 2020-21.<sup>15</sup> Employee expenses (65.8%) and supplies and services (30.4%) make up the majority of the QCAA’s operating expenditure in 2021-22. The QCAA is expected to return an operating surplus of \$3.825 million for the financial year.<sup>16</sup>

## 3.3 Queensland Racing Integrity Commission

The Queensland Racing Integrity Commission (QRIC) is an independent statutory body that oversees the integrity and welfare standards of racing animals and participants in Queensland. The QRIC’s

<sup>9</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 10.

<sup>10</sup> Appropriation Bill 2021, Schedule 2, p 9.

<sup>11</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 3.

<sup>12</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 3.

<sup>13</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No 3, pp 36, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No 3, p 49.

<sup>15</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 19.

<sup>16</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Education, p 19.

objective is to work with the racing industry and community to protect racing animals, ensure high standards of racing integrity and safety, and enhance public confidence in the Queensland racing industry.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.3.1 Budget overview**

The QRIC's operating budget for 2021-22 is \$32.766 million, an increase of \$1.712 million from 2020-21 estimated actual expenditure.<sup>18</sup> Most of the QRIC's estimated expenditure in 2021-22 will be on employee expenses (62.2%) and supplies and services (29.2%).

### **3.3.2 Capital works program**

Property plant and equipment purchases planned for the QRIC in 2021-22 are:

- \$1.116 million for software upgrades to the registration and licensing system and laboratory information management system
- \$0.908 million for upgrades to laboratory equipment to support drug testing services provided by the Racing Science Centre
- \$0.300 million for other technical equipment replacements.<sup>19</sup>

## **3.4 Key issues raised during consideration of budget estimates**

Issues raised and considered by the committee in relation to the budget estimates for 2021-22 for the portfolio areas of Education, Industrial Relations and Racing include:

- the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program
- asbestos exposure in state schools
- expansion of schools in the Townsville and South Hinchinbrook
- the introduction of homework centres in Queensland schools
- new schools proposed for 2023 and 2024
- the government's support for student mental health and wellbeing
- expansion of outside school hours care
- the cost to backfill the position of deputy director-general
- employment of new teachers in permanent and contract positions
- retention of teachers employed on contract
- status of the trial to place general practitioners in 20 state secondary schools
- the number of teachers employed and efforts to ensure better gender equity
- the review of respectful relationships education in our Queensland state schools
- proposed increases to the Schooling Resource Standard
- recorded assaults against teachers and related Workcover claims
- support for geographically isolated students attending the Longreach School of Distance Education and the Emerald campus of the Capricornia School of Distance Education
- funding for a new school hall at Kenmore State High School
- funding to support gender-neutral toilets in Queensland state schools

---

<sup>17</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 23.

<sup>18</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p 25.

<sup>19</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No 3, pp 25-26.

- 
- investing in quality teachers
  - the government’s Building Future Schools Fund
  - access to quality kindergarten programs throughout Queensland
  - the government’s partnership with Share the Dignity to provide free sanitary products in schools
  - the School Infrastructure Enhancement Fund
  - the Local Schools Local Jobs policy
  - transitions for young people into further training or employment
  - rates of parental withdrawal from NAPLAN
  - upgrade to the track at the Eagle Farm
  - service standards for racing
  - the integrity of the Queensland racing industry
  - income expected to be generated from the state’s point-of-consumption tax in the 2021-22 financial year and how it will be spent across Queensland
  - the importance of the country racing program in rural and regional Queensland
  - the Queensland Off-the-Track Program
  - the government’s support for animal care through its funding of the racing industry
  - investigation of alleged corrupt conduct in the Office of Industrial Relations by the Crime and Corruption Commission
  - full-time employees employed by the Office of Industrial Relations
  - the government’s response to ensure the health and safety of workers working in the engineered stone industry
  - how the government is responding to the Respect@Work national report recommendations that are relevant to the state industrial relations jurisdiction
  - progress in the review of the Electrical Safety Act
  - implementation of the new portable long service leave scheme for community service workers
  - fraudulent Workcover claims
  - measures being put in place at the Cross River Rail site at Woolloongabba to ensure the safety of workers and nearby residents from exposure to silicosis
  - developments under the labour hire licensing scheme.

## 4 Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development

The Minister for Employment and Small Business, Minister for Training and Skills Development, Hon Di Farmer MP, has responsibility for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training and TAFE Queensland.

### 4.1 Department of Employment, Small Business and Training

In 2021-22 the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training will deliver services in the following areas:

- Employment – to increase employment opportunities for Queenslanders, in particular disadvantaged cohorts and unemployed jobseekers
- Small Business – to ensure small businesses can seamlessly interact with government and are supported to start, grow and employ
- Training and Skills Development – to regulate apprenticeships and traineeships, and facilitate access to and participation in vocational education and training pathways, enabling Queenslanders to gain employment in current and future industries.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Budget overview – Department of Employment, Small Business and Training

The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training’s operating budget for 2021-22 is \$1.268 billion, which is a decrease of \$128.717 million on the 2020-21 estimated actual expenditure.<sup>21</sup> The decrease in revenue in the 2021-22 operating budget is principally because of the conclusion of a number of the COVID-19 Workers Assistance Package initiatives, such as the Small Business Adaption Grants program.<sup>22</sup>

The Appropriation Bill 2021 proposes that the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training receive appropriation revenue of \$1.246 billion for controlled items in 2021-22.<sup>23</sup> The remainder of the department’s \$1.268 billion in operating expenses for 2021-22 will be funded by user charges and fees, grants and other contributions, and other revenue.<sup>24</sup>

The majority of the estimated expenditure by the department in 2021-22 is on grants and subsidies (79.7%), mainly for vocational education and training programs.<sup>25</sup>

The following table compares the appropriation for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training for 2020-21 and 2021-22.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 7.

<sup>22</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 6.

<sup>23</sup> Appropriation Bill 2021, Schedule 2, p 9.

<sup>24</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 7.

<sup>25</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 7.

<sup>26</sup> Appropriation Bill 2021, Schedule 2.

**Table 2: Department of Employment, Small Business and Training – Appropriations for 2020-21 and 2021-22**

Appropriation	Budget 2020-21 \$'000	Est.Actual 2020-21 \$'000	Budget 2021-22 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	1,360,279	1,295,952	1,245,822
equity adjustment	(2,504)	(1,784)	(1,283)
<i>Administered Items</i>	-	-	-
<b>Vote</b>	<b>1,357,775</b>	<b>1,294,168</b>	<b>1,244,539</b>

Source: Appropriation Bill 2021, Schedule 2, p 9.

#### 4.1.2 Capital works program

Total capital purchases for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training for 2021-22 are estimated to be \$53.808 million, a decrease of \$35.746 million on estimated actual capital purchases in 2020-21.<sup>27</sup> This expenditure includes property, plant and equipment purchases for campuses under the *Equipping TAFE for our Future* program (\$18.169 million), the *Revitalising TAFE* initiative which is jointly funded by the Australian Government (\$7.470 million), and the Annual Training Investment Program (\$28.169 million).<sup>28</sup>

The capital program also provides for capital grants of \$34.616 million in 2021-22 for:

- grants under the *Equipping TAFE for our Future* program to 5 TAFE campuses (\$29.616 million)
- the Renewable Energy Training Facility (\$3 million)
- the Hydrogen Apprenticeships Centre (\$2 million).<sup>29</sup>

## 4.2 TAFE Queensland

TAFE Queensland is a statutory body established under the *TAFE Queensland Act 2013* whose primary role is to provide vocational education and training services in a way that is efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of industry, students and the general community.<sup>30</sup>

### 4.2.1 Budget overview

TAFE Queensland's operating expenditure in 2021-22 is estimated to be \$704.476 million, an increase of \$44.278 million on estimated actual expenditure in 2020-21.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the TAFE Queensland's 2021-22 budget is allocated to employee expenses (65.8%) and supplies and services (30.3%). An operating deficit of \$21.963 million is forecast for the financial year.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 2.

<sup>28</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No 3, pp 52-53; Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 2.

<sup>29</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No 3, p 53.

<sup>30</sup> TAFE Queensland Annual Report 2019-20, September 2020, <https://tafeqld.edu.au/assets/oneweb/PDF/about-us/annual-reports/TAFE-Queensland-Annual-Report-2019-20.pdf>, p 3.

<sup>31</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 13.

<sup>32</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, p 13.

#### 4.2.2 Capital works program

Total purchases of property plant and equipment by TAFE Queensland in 2021-22 of \$23.880 million, include provision for fitout and equipment for the Robina Campus, training equipment acquisition, replacement and modernisation, product development, information and communications technology, and other projects.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.3 Key issues raised during consideration of budget estimates

Issues raised and considered by the committee in relation to the budget estimates for 2021-22 for the portfolio areas of Employment, Small Business, Training and Skills Development included:

- apprenticeship completion rates
- economic implications of fewer tradespeople in Queensland
- apprentice and trainee participation activity data and statistics on the department's website
- future workforce skill requirements
- courses listed on the Priority Skills List
- the provision of gifts as inducements for the completion of training
- initiatives to attract skilled labour for regional Queensland's agricultural sector
- the government's support for getting more women into trades
- the government's support for TAFE
- programs in place to support training for the emerging hydrogen industry
- the Skilling Queenslanders for Work Program
- the Workforce Transition Support Program
- interactions between TAFE Queensland and regional jobs committees
- completion rates for Free TAFE for Under 25s
- apprentices and trainees employed by the government
- programs to assist young people transition from youth justice into gainful employment
- pre-apprentice support programs
- contingency planning or modelling in relation to the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on small and family businesses
- government support for small business in the event of COVID-19 lockdowns
- projects or grants assisting small businesses in the regions
- benefits of the government's Small Business Roadshow
- the Small Business COVID-19 Adaption Grant Program
- advice provided to small businesses by the department's COVID-19 business support hotline
- the Social Enterprise Jobs Fund
- the Big Plans for Small Business Strategy
- industry specific grants to support small businesses, particularly those in the hospitality, fitness and arts sectors, manage the impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns
- the forward work plan of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner and the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction
- advocacy for the federal and state government to tackle the high cost of public liability insurance for small business owners in Queensland.

---

<sup>33</sup> Queensland Budget 2021-22, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No 3, p 53.

## 5 Statement of Reservation

### LNP Opposition Statement of Reservation

#### Education, Employment and Training Committee – Budget Estimates 2021/22

The LNP Opposition agrees with passing the 2021/22 Budget.

However, honest Queenslanders expected more from the Labor Government’s budget.

With small and family businesses going to the wall under the pressure of COVID lockdowns, they expected the Labor Government to step up and provide COVID support payments.

What they received was a budget which announced funds without funding and \$4 billion cuts to vital infrastructure spending.

#### Education

Asbestos in state schools and the response by the Department of Education is of significant concern to the LNP. Evidence from both the Minister for Education and the Director-General failed to resolve if appropriate action had been taken, and school communities advised, in a timely manner.

Queensland students and parents expect more when it comes to their safety in the classroom.

Of particular concern is the Government’s response to the asbestos exposure at Sunnybank State High School during the installation of air-conditioning under the Cooler Cleaner Schools Program.

On 10 March 2021 the Minister for Education, in response to a question without notice in the Legislative Assembly, indicated that action was taken immediately in line with departmental procedures. However, documents released under Right to Information reveal that the asbestos exposure incident occurred on 9 November 2020, but it was not until 26 November 2020 – 17 days later – that certificates of asbestos analysis were commissioned. It was also revealed that the same delay occurred before a professional clean-up crew and hygienist despatched for analysis and overnight cleaning of more than 30 rooms at the school.

The Director-General advised the air conditioning contractor was required to clean dust and debris identified by the school in early November. The contractor advised the principal that this had been done, and the school was satisfied that safe work practices had been undertaken.

According to the Director-General, the school made no further report until late November when further asbestos was identified. It remains unacceptable that the entire school community was not advised of this asbestos exposure incident until 27 November 2020.

The report in early November should have been sufficient to raise official concerns within the Department of Education. Students and parents should have been advised at that point and independent departmental inquiries should have been made to assess the state of remediation and ensure teacher, student, and community safety.

Despite the Minister’s assertions, there is a clear difference between the timeline revealed by the Right to Information documents and her assertions in the Legislative Assembly. It is clear action was not taken in a timely manner and the wider school community should have been advised of the event much sooner than occurred. Significant questions still remain whether all actions were taken in accordance with the Department of Education’s dedicated ‘Asbestos Management Plan for DoE Facilities’.

The cavalier approach of the Labor Government in this instance does not reflect well on those involved and sends a clear message that policies, procedures, and processes must be amended to ensure safety is the primary objective, and that there is a need to restore transparency in all such cases.

The fact that the Minister for Education did not grasp the shortcomings in her own department processes is disturbing.

The community needs to have faith in the system when serious issues occur. Processes need be followed quickly and efficiently whilst been transparent to all involved.

Mr Jeff Hunt, Deputy Director-General, remains on suspension following the controversy over the appointment of a principal to the Inner City South State Secondary College.

Mr Hunt's position and circumstances remains unresolved, and he is still the subject of processes undertaken by the Public Service Commission. There also remains no time frame in which this matter will be resolved.

It was confirmed to the Committee that Mr Hunt continues to be employed by the Department of Education and remunerated whilst on suspension, having received \$279,000 in net payments since the commencement of his suspension. In the meantime, Mr Hunt's responsibilities have been devolved to other officials to ensure that the operations of the department can proceed. For both Queensland taxpayers, and the Deputy Director General, this ongoing saga is one of 'justice delayed, justice denied'.

In relation to the effectiveness of strategies to stop violence in our schools, it was revealed that the department could not provide specific information and a comprehensive data set, to understand the extent of such incidents. It was noted that the absence of such comprehensive data would make an evaluation of the Department of Education's strategies to curb violence in Queensland schools difficult. The community expects our schools to be a safe environment and the absence of comprehensive data places question marks over the Department of Education's strategies to curb violence in Queensland Schools. Simply collecting data that doesn't detail circumstances must be viewed with scepticism. This only hinders Departmental Staff from creating meaningful strategies that effectively curb violence. As for any worker, our teachers and school staff deserve a safe workplace environment.

There are significant shortcomings with the Queensland Government's support for the Longreach School of Distance Education and the Emerald campus of the Capricornia School of Distance Education, and a lack of appreciation of the impact that delayed decision making is having on students and their families.

The practice of these students, from remote areas, attending mini schools at these sites for limited periods of time remains in jeopardy. The exclusion of students from these sites, which were funded and maintained by parents, would result in a loss of peer to peer contact and student-teacher contact, which is invaluable to the educational and learning outcomes of these students.

Every effort must be made by the Labor Government to resolve this issue as soon as possible, given that students and their families continue to be disadvantaged by these delays.

### **Small Business and Training**

Just days after the Committee's estimates hearings, parts of Queensland entered their fourth lockdown of 2021 and the second this financial year. The budget demonstrated that the Labor Government had done no planning and no preparation, despite the obvious looming threats from the COVID-19 Delta variant and the potential for future lockdowns.

The fallout seen in the small business community from the most recent lockdowns make a mockery of the Government's assertions that short term lockdowns don't have significant longer-term economic impacts. Many small and family businesses are still struggling to survive following the last lockdown.

Regrettably it was revealed at the estimates hearing that the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (the Department) had not done any modelling on the impacts of COVID lockdowns on small and family businesses.

Queensland small and family business, the economic and jobs backbone of the state, deserved more from the Labor Government.

The two-year, \$8 million Social Enterprise Jobs Fund announced in last year’s budget seems to be stuck in neutral. Of the \$3 million in grants in this fund, exactly zero dollars had been distributed to social enterprises as of the estimates hearing.

As for the remaining \$5 million in this fund, the committee was advised that it will be spent “developing the sustainability of this emerging sector”. No details were disclosed about what that means, how the money will be spent, or any measurable outcomes for the social enterprise sector.

The failures of the Labor Government in the training space were also been brought to light when it was disclosed that 13,200 fewer apprentices have been delivered compared to the Labor Government’s own budget targets. The Department’s failure to model the impacts of these failures is regrettable. The Minister’s own admission that there are labour shortages is welcomed but actions beyond just holding a summit are needed to rectify years of failure in this space.

Despite the Department in their strategic plan highlighting the need for good quality data to drive the right outcomes for Queensland, it was hard to identify an area where the Department had used data for better decision making. For example, the Department was unable to advise if the number of individuals currently obtaining qualifications would meet future workforce needs.

### **Industrial Relations**

In the Industrial Relations estimates hearing, it was publicly revealed that the Crime and Corruption Commission has ordered an investigation into the Office of Industrial Relations over alleged corrupt conduct.

The allegations relate to officers of the Office of Industrial Relations assisting or facilitating the CFMEU in a harassment campaign. The allegations relate 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
- 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
- an employee of the Office of Industrial Relations subject to the complaint who met with the complainant company one week after an investigation was launched by the CCC

During the proceedings, the LNP raised allegations of CFMEU permit holders exhibiting appalling, offensive and derogatory behaviour on site. The Labor Government should be working vigorously to stamp out harassment, intimidation and coercion that occurs on building sites, but instead, it appears to be facilitating this behaviour. Rather than standing up for all Queensland workers, the Palaszczuk Labor Government chooses to only stand up for its biggest donors – the CFMEU.

It begs the question, does the Labor Government prioritise CFMEU donations over the mental health of Queensland construction workers? Queenslanders would expect the latter.

The only hope left for workers in the construction industry is the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), who takes harassment, intimidation and coercion seriously. Thanks to the ABCC, over \$11.2 million in penalties have been handed down by the courts against the CFMEU since 2016. Unlike the Office of Industrial Relations, the ABCC stands up for all Queensland workers in the construction industry.

### **Racing**

The LNP has ongoing concerns with respect to the quality and safety of the Eagle Farm track. Trainers and owners continue to raise genuine concerns about Queensland’s premier racing track, despite the Labor Government spending nearly \$14 million on the facility over the past seven years.

Having Queensland’s premier track maintained to the highest quality and safety is to the benefit of the Queensland racing industry and its supporters. The LNP will continue to closely monitor the circumstances at Eagle Farm to ensure taxpayer money is being spent appropriately and efficiently.

The LNP also has concerns with respect to the effectiveness measure used by the government to gauge racing service standards. Despite contributing more than \$1.6 billion to the Queensland economy, the Labor Government use only one effectiveness measure to evaluate service delivery by Queensland Racing.

A further issue the LNP has noted in the budget papers is in relation to the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission. In the 2020/21 financial year, only 59 percent of community members surveyed were confident in the integrity of the Queensland Racing industry. It is incumbent on the government to do more to improve the perceptions of the racing industry, and ensure that the integrity of racing in Queensland is appropriately upheld.

### **Conclusion**

The LNP feels that these estimate hearings left many questions unanswered and cast doubt on the effectiveness of these procedures. This is of particular concern in the case of incidents that have ramifications to the wider community.

Equally as concerning; there was little reassurance from the departments that they would take on board the concerns aired by opposition members on behalf of the community. This resistance is potential hindering beneficial reform within the departments and may stifle the creation of more effective procedures and outcomes. Governments should continually review their procedures and modify them to ensure the most effective results for all concerned.

Finally, workplaces should be a safe environment devoid of harassment, intimidation and coercion. When reputable media agencies publish articles about workplace intimidation these allegations should be investigated. Any suggestion that such misconduct and unlawful activity is not a problem because no evidence has been brought directly to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is disappointing. That appears to suggest that Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is merely a passive regulator, rather than a vigilant and inquiring watchdog, actively alert to any abuse or unlawful activity which impinges upon the agency’s work.

Queenslanders deserve more from this third term Labor Government.



**James Lister MP**

Deputy Chair

Member for Southern Downs

18 August 2021



**Mark Boothman MP**

Member for Theodore

18 August 2021