



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

Official Committee Hansard

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Consideration of Estimates

MONDAY, 18 AUGUST 1997

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE
CANBERRA 1997

INTERNET

The Proof and Official Hansards of the Senate and the House of Representatives debates, and the Proof and Official Hansards of committee hearings are available on the Internet

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

CONTENTS

MONDAY, 18 AUGUST

Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs—	
Program 1—Schools—	
Subprogram 1.1—General assistance	6
Subprogram 1.2—Targeted assistance	54
Program 2—Higher education—	
Subprogram 2.1—Higher education system	59
Program 5—Student and youth support—	
Subprogram 5.1—Education assistance and income support	89
Program 6—Portfolio administration and advising—	
Subprogram 6.1—Portfolio management, advising and analysis	91
Program 5—Student, youth and Aboriginal education support	96

SENATE**Monday, 18 August 1997****EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEGISLATION COMMITTEE****Portfolio:** Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs**Members:** Senator Tierney (*Chair*), Senator Carr (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Crowley, Ferris, Stott Despoja and Troeth**Participating members:** Senators Abetz, Allison, Bolkus, Brown, Bob Collins, Colston, Cooney, Evans, Forshaw, Harradine, Hogg, Mackay, Margetts, Murphy, O'Brien and Synon**The committee met at 9.08 a.m.****DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH
AFFAIRS**

Proposed expenditure, \$2,400,635,000 (Document A).

Proposed provision, \$143,396,000 (Document B).

In Attendance

Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister

Department of Employment, Education and Training—

Mr Steve Sedgwick, Secretary

Mr Wayne Gibbons, Deputy Secretary

Mr Peter Grant, Deputy Secretary

Program 1—Schools

Subprogram 1.1—General Assistance

Subprogram 1.2—Targeted Assistance

Schools and Curriculum Division (Subprograms 1.1 and 1.2)

Mr Bill Daniels, First Assistant Secretary, Schools Division

Ms Aurora Andruska, Assistant Secretary, Schools Resources Branch

Mr Chris Evans, Assistant Secretary, Budget and Coordination Branch

Dr Evan Arthur, Assistant Secretary, Literacy and Special Programs Branch

Mr Peter Buckskin, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Education Branch

Mr Bruce Furze, Director, Financial Management Section, Indigenous Education Branch

Ms Mary Johnston, Assistant Secretary, Quality Schooling Branch

Mr Ali Jalayer, Schools Division

Program 2—Higher Education

Subprogram 2.1—Higher Education System

Subprogram 2.2—Targeted Research and Scientific Development

Subprogram 2.3—Recognition of Overseas Skills

Higher Education System (Subprograms 2.1 and 2.2)

Mr Michael Gallagher, First Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Division

Mr Bill Burmester, Assistant Secretary, Funding Branch

Dr Tom Karmel, Assistant Secretary, Operations Branch

Ms Marion McDowell, Director, Public Funding Section

Ms Stella Morahan, Director, Private Funding Section

Program 4—Employment

Subprogram 4.1—Jobseeker registration, assessment and referral

Ms Carolyn Hogg, Customer Segment Leader, Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency

Program 5—Student youth and Aboriginal education support

Subprogram 5.1—Education Assistance and Income Support

Subprogram 5.2—Youth Policy and Support

Youth, Students and Social Policy (Subprograms 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3)

Mr Colin Walters, First Assistant Secretary, Youth, Students and Social Policy Division

Ms Frances Davies, Assistant Secretary, Youth Bureau

Dr Peter Whitney, Assistant Secretary, Student Assistance Policy Branch

Ms Anna Kamarul, Assistant Secretary, Social Policy and Cross Sectoral Branch

Mr David Batchelor, Assistant Secretary, Youth and Student Customer Segment Branch,
Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency

Ms Fiona Howe, Youth and Student Customer Segment Leader, Commonwealth Services
Delivery Agency

Program 6—Portfolio Administration and Advising

Subprograms 6.1—Portfolio management, advising and analysis

Subprogram 6.2—International

Analysis and Evaluation (Subprogram 6.1)

Dr Wendy Jarvie, First Assistant Secretary, Analysis and Evaluation Division

Ms Jo Caldwell, Director, Income Support Section

Mr Bob McHugh, Director, Client and Labour Market Analysis Section

Mr Derek Pigram, Director, Employment Monitoring Section

Dr Paul Volker, Assistant Secretary, Economic and Labour Market Analysis Branch

Dr Philip Gattenby, Acting Assistant Secretary, Evaluation and Monitoring Branch

Subprogram 6.1—Corporate Services Division

Mr Bill Mutton, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Corporate Services Division

Mr Tony Swift, Acting Assistant Secretary, Purchasing Branch

Mr Pat Watson, Acting Assistant Secretary, Finance Branch

Mr Rex Waite, Assistant Secretary, Administrative Services Bureau

Subprogram 6.1—Systems Division

Mr John Burston, First Assistant Secretary, Systems Division

Subprogram 6.1—Legal and Review Division

Mr Brian McMillan, General Counsel

Mr Keith Thomas, Acting Assistant Secretary, Fraud Prevention and Benefits Control Branch
International Division

Ms Jenni Gordon, Acting First Assistant Secretary, International Division

Ms Barbara Bennett, Assistant Secretary, International Policy Branch

Mr John Rowling, Assistant Secretary, AIEF Branch

PEPE Task Force

Mr Rod Halstead, First Assistant Secretary, Public Enterprise Taskforce

Department of Finance—

Ms Cathy McKay

Mr Bevan McDonald

Mr Garry Brookes

Ms Olivia Kings

CHAIR—I declare open this public meeting of the Senate Employment, Education and Training Legislation Committee. The committee has already examined this portfolio during its initial round of hearings on 3, 4 and 5 June 1997. Today we will be conducting the supplementary hearings into those matters on which senators have given notice. Under the procedural orders of the Senate, these proceedings are confined to matters on which notice has been given.

For this supplementary hearing, all subprograms have been nominated except subprogram 2.3. The committee will begin with program 1 and continue with programs 2 and 5 and, if time permits, program 6. If scrutiny of the scheduled program is not concluded by late this afternoon, we will adjourn for dinner at 6 p.m. and resume at 7 p.m.

On Tuesday 19 August, the committee will hear programs 3 and 4 and, if required, program 6. The committee has also fixed 22 September 1997 as the date for the submission by the department and agencies of written answers to questions on notice. I welcome Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I also welcome Deputy Secretary Mr Wayne Gibbons and officers from the employment, education and training portfolio. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Senator Vanstone—No, other than to say good morning and welcome to the committee, and to say that we aim to be as efficient as we can be.

CHAIR—Before we go to specific—

Senator Vanstone—I think Mr Grant might have a few matters he would like to raise.

CHAIR—Certainly.

Mr Grant—Thank you, Chair. Firstly, the department is grateful to the committee for agreeing to trial new arrangements for this hearing, under which officers will be given 20 minutes warning of the commencement of consideration of a new program. We acknowledge that those arrangements are on a trial basis only and that they will be tested during the day today to see whether they should be continued for the future. We have set up our own

arrangements to ensure that officials are available promptly as soon as notice is given. We have a strong interest in making this trial work, with a view to reducing the waiting time spent by departmental officials without delaying the committee's proceedings in any way. Thank you again for agreeing to this trial.

I wish to raise one other matter. This is the first estimates hearing since the formal establishment of the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency on 1 July this year under the umbrella of the social security portfolio. As the committee would be aware, the establishment of the agency represents a very significant change in the way that Commonwealth services are delivered to the public. It also carries some important implications for portfolios such as our own. We have arranged in conjunction with the agency to have agency officials on hand to answer questions for the committee about the operational role that the agency plays in the delivery of services for this department.

My colleague Mr Gibbons wrote to the committee secretary on 13 August outlining those arrangements. Specifically, agency officials will be available during consideration of subprogram 4.1—Jobseeker registration, assessment and referral; 5.1—Education assistance and income support; and 5.2—Youth policy and support. A copy of the service agreement between the department and the agency was supplied to the committee on 17 July in response to question on notice No. 180. Should the committee have any further questions about the terms of that service arrangement, I would suggest that those questions might best be raised under subprogram 6.1—Portfolio management, advising and analysis. More generally, as primary responsibility for the agency rests with the social security portfolio, I understand that questions about the agency's operations as a whole will be addressed by the Senate Legislation Committee on Community Affairs.

CHAIR—Thank you. We will move to program 1. Are there general questions on program 1, before we move to the subprograms?

Senator CARR—There are the general questions, Mr Chairman, that are traditionally put at the commencement of the estimates hearings and that go to all programs, or that are general in their nature and cut across programs.

CHAIR—That is not my understanding of standard procedures, Senator Carr. We normally go to the start of each program. We are considering the six programs so, as the matter that is involved comes up under those programs, you can ask it as a general question at the start of each program. Are there any general matters relating to—

Senator CARR—Mr Chairman, this was a matter discussed with the committee secretariat before the agenda was circulated. I understand that you were left under no illusions that, as far as the opposition was concerned, the conventional practice of being allowed to ask general questions that relate to all programs—and in fact are responded to by the department on the basis of all programs—would proceed. If you are not going to allow questions at this point, then I do not think these estimate hearings will go very far.

CHAIR—I am interested that we have two new dot points on this advisory document which were not authorised by me, as a matter of fact, as it was not standard practice to put such matters in at the start of the document. I asked for them to be removed. Somehow, they still got circulated. The clerk has advised me that this is an advisory document only. It does not have any permanent standing, but I am rather curious as to why, Senator Carr, seeing that all six programs are covered, you cannot raise them in the general section at the start of each program.

Senator CARR—They relate to the operations of the department as a whole, or are matters that are general in nature. These were issues which were canvassed before this agenda was circulated—

CHAIR—With whom?

Senator CARR—With the committee's secretariat.

CHAIR—They were not canvassed with the chair and they were not canvassed with the minister.

Senator CARR—The minister, I might say, does not normally determine the agenda of this committee—

CHAIR—But the chair does, and I was not—

Senator CARR—As deputy chair, I was not prepared to accept a proposition as circulated as being a decision of the committee. At this point—

CHAIR—Senator Carr, as chairman of the committee I authorise it.

Senator CARR—So you are not allowing questions of a general nature?

CHAIR—It is not normal procedure in these estimates hearings. I am sticking with what is normal procedure, and I invite you again to indicate whether you have any general questions on program 1, otherwise we will move to the specific subprograms.

Senator CARR—There are a few questions that relate to the failure of the department to answer questions. But, before I ask those, Minister, is the secretary able to attend today?

Senator Vanstone—I will ascertain that for you, Senator Carr. Would it be helpful to the committee, Mr Chairman, if you just have a private meeting to sort this out? We are happy to assist, but it would seem helpful if you could sort out the way you want to conduct the matter today.

The secretary has been at a secretary's retreat over the weekend, as I understand it, but is in Canberra. There are a number of things that need to be attended to, but if you have some specific questions you want to put to him, of course he would come.

Senator CARR—It has been convention in this committee, Minister, for the secretary to attend. I notice that he has not attended the last two meetings of the committee. Has there been a decision taken by—

Senator Vanstone—With respect, Senator Carr, I cannot tell you which one it was, but not long ago he was here and tabled a statement.

CHAIR—And while we were in opposition we rarely saw the secretary—we usually had the deputy secretary—so that is not normal practice.

Senator CARR—Is the secretary coming?

Senator Vanstone—As I have indicated, Senator Carr, the secretary is attending to matters that need to be attended to. If you had some specific questions that for some reason could not be answered by anybody but him, I am sure that he would attend. But the estimates—

Senator CARR—I will come to that one. We will establish that in due course I suspect, Minister. I was wondering then, if that is the case, why are there questions outstanding from the last estimates hearings?

CHAIR—Order, Senator Carr! We are now on program 1, general questions, so proceed.

Program 1—Schools**Subprogram 1.1—General assistance**

Senator CARR—This is the first question that I put to you. Why are there questions outstanding?

Senator Vanstone—Perhaps, Mr Chairman, these sorts of questions are more appropriately handled under program 6, portfolio administration and advising.

Senator FAULKNER—The questions actually go to specifics of program 1, Minister, with respect, that—

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I understand that.

Senator FAULKNER—It seems to me that that suggestion is a nonsense. I have got to say, Mr Chairman, that ordinarily most committees do allow for general questions. I am not a regular attendee here. Last time I graced this committee with my attendance was when we had a special meeting with the secretary of the department and the minister dealing with the Wright family issue. Obviously, if you have got a range of different procedures that do not apply to other committees, so be it, but I would have thought that if questions have not been answered that relate to specific programs or subprograms that are before the chair, it is a bit of a nonsense to suggest that they be dealt with later.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I appreciate that, Senator Faulkner. I understand that there is only one question which is outstanding in program 1—question 29. That question dealt with response times to requests from senators or members for information on schools in their electorates. I am advised that it has been cleared by Dr Kemp's office and not by mine. I have to tell you that that surprises me because I recall looking at an answer in relation to that question. I will get someone to chase that up while we are proceeding with program 1.

Senator CARR—Are there other questions outstanding, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—I think that that comes back to the point I was making before. We might deal with them in program 6, or as we go through each program we will deal with the questions outstanding in that program.

Senator CARR—But there are other questions outstanding?

Senator Vanstone—Yes.

Senator FAULKNER—Can I seek your advice, Mr Chairman? Normally, at most estimates committees, general questions that go to the relationship between the department and the minister's office, and so forth, are dealt with as general questions. I have not heard before an estimates committee chair suggest that these ought not be asked. I suppose they can be asked at some other stage. But let me seek your advice and ask you when, if they are not general questions, you perceive it would be appropriate for these to be asked?

CHAIR—It is appropriate to ask general questions at the start of each of the six programs, if there is some matter that is not specifically covered under those six programs—and seeing that that as the totality of the department, it would be difficult to understand what they would be. But if there are such questions they should be asked at this point.

Senator FAULKNER—I see. So general questions that go to the relationship between the minister's office and the department ought to be asked now?

CHAIR—At this point, yes, if they do not relate to any specific program.

Senator FAULKNER—What if they do relate, if they have a relationship with some specific programs? That is what I am trying to get to. It is hard to quarantine all these things.

CHAIR—I appreciate the problem. If the question fairly obviously relates to a specific portfolio area, it should occur at that point; but if it is general in nature, it should occur now.

Senator CARR—I have some questions which may well cut across a number of divisions of the department. The conventional arrangement has been to ask at the beginning of the estimates hearings. But I might proceed on the basis of the failure to answer questions specifically, Minister. You would agree that the department does not have a good record vis-a-vis other departments on the answering of parliamentary questions?

Senator Vanstone—No I would not immediately agree with that because I do not have the information available to me on which to make a comparison. I can tell you that the due date set by the committee for the provision of answers was 25 July. The committee received answers to 244 questions by the due date, which is 89 per cent. You can round it out at 90, if you like, which is not perfect, but 90 per cent is—I would assume—not bad. You may have information on other committees and you could make the comparison, but I cannot. It was 269 questions by Friday of last week, which comes to 99 per cent.

Senator CARR—In terms of questions asked in the chamber, a similar pattern emerges vis-a-vis this department and others. I am wondering whether or not that is a result of actions that you have taken or those of the department. What procedures have you adopted with regard to actions by members of this committee or opposition senators in relation to dealing with the Public Service? Have you issued any instructions to the department on the way in which they should deal with opposition senators?

Senator Vanstone—Not that I recall, Senator. I work on the basis that the department will do its best on all occasions with respect to questions from whoever they come, whether they come through the estimates committee or through the chamber. Senator Ray raised, as you know, a question in the last session concerning unsatisfactory rate of return of replies to questions on notice. I was grateful he did that. I was able to ascertain that there were a number—two or three; I am not sure how many, but a small number—that had been outstanding for a longer time which quite substantially raised the average time of return beyond what it would normally be. But, in any event, having cleared those outstanding answers I have nonetheless set up a system in my own office where questions on notice are pursued diligently.

Senator CARR—So the question that is outstanding—how does that occur?

Senator Vanstone—If a question is outstanding?

Senator CARR—Yes. There is one outstanding in this particular section. But there are others.

Senator Vanstone—As I indicated to you earlier, Senator, that surprises me because I recall the question. I do not recall it being asked, but I recall looking at an answer. If you had asked me just off the cuff, out in the corridor, I would have said, ‘I think that has been answered but I’ll check for you.’ And that was some time ago.

Senator CARR—There are other questions outstanding, as well, Minister—

Senator Vanstone—I appreciate that, Senator. Having had some experience of opposition, I understand your frustration.

Senator CARR—And they relate to your parliamentary secretary’s office and the association between your department and Ms Pauline Hanson. I am wondering why that would take so long to answer.

Senator Vanstone—I understand that with respect to that particular one—

Senator CARR—There is in fact a series of questions there, Minister.

Senator Vanstone—Questions 256 and 257 are the ones I have got listed as being—

Senator CARR—Yes, but there are about 10 questions in total.

Senator Vanstone—Within each one.

Senator CARR—In total.

Senator Vanstone—Well maybe, but 256 and 257—

Senator CARR—It is a bit misleading to say that one question is outstanding. In fact, if treated separately, there may be substantially more than that number.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I understand the point. You could put 20 questions into one question and you could argue with me that I am being misleading if I call it one question, when in fact it is 20, and I could argue that you are misleading in calling it 20 because you have listed it as one.

Senator CARR—Yes.

Senator Vanstone—In the end, the substance of that is hardly relevant.

Senator CARR—Why hasn't the question been answered is what I am interested in.

Senator Vanstone—You asked that question and I was in the process of answering it. You interrupted to inform me that in a question with one number on it you had chosen to put in a number of questions. As I am advised by a note here, on 13 August—it does not seem that long ago—more information was requested by my office for inclusion in the answer and the information is being sought from DAS. I can assure you there is no reluctance to answer any of those questions.

Senator CARR—It is just that no questions have been answered in regard to those matters.

Senator Vanstone—I think it is a case, Senator—as you say, they are packaged up into one or two questions—of wanting to get the whole lot sorted out for you. It is not the practice, generally speaking, when senators have a two-, three- or 20-part question, to offer answers to the parts. It has been the practice, as I understand it, to wait until you get the whole answer. But I will make some inquiries—

CHAIR—Perhaps I could be of assistance here. We do have a running sheet here on what has been answered. Senator Carr, it seems that question No. 29 from you has not been answered and question No. 226 from Senator O'Brien. They are the only two that have not been—

Senator CARR—No, that is not the case, Mr Chairman. If you were actually following proceedings, you would have heard the minister acknowledge that there are others.

CHAIR—Questions 257 and 256. So there are four in total. I must say that is a remarkably good result. When we were in opposition and you were in government we did not get quite as good a result, so I congratulate the department on an excellent outcome. That is only four to go, Senator Carr. Perhaps we could move on.

Senator CARR—The point is, Mr Chairman, that you can try to frustrate the work of the committee as much as you like. We will have to come back to these issues.

CHAIR—Perhaps, Senator Carr, you would look at this document and tell me where the problem is.

Senator CARR—I am aware of the document. There are questions that I have asked and I am aware of the extent of the failure of somebody—and this is the issue I am coming to,

whether it is the department or the minister's office—to answer questions. You say there are four. I say to you that there is a substantially greater number than that.

CHAIR—Could you identify which questions? I have the running sheet—

Senator CARR—You identify one question, as listed there, as one question and in fact it contains a number of questions on that topic. That is another issue entirely. I ask, Minister, do you believe it reasonable that the department be allowed to clarify answers that are in fact given on notice?

Senator Vanstone—I am not quite sure what you mean by that, Senator Carr.

Senator CARR—It is just that answers are sometimes given by the department in good faith that do not necessarily respond to the material that a questioner may have anticipated, or the question may be misunderstood. Do you think it is appropriate that the department respond to senators to clarify answers?

Senator Vanstone—Any senator who is dissatisfied with an answer can always put in a clarifying question and seek further information.

Senator CARR—There was a case, Minister, that on two specific questions on 11 July my office raised the question of the adequacy of responses to question No. 20, which was on the question of providing a revised table of the effect of budget measures across the whole department—

Senator Vanstone—How was that question raised?

Senator CARR—My office raised that question directly with the departmental officials and, as I understand it, with your office.

Senator Vanstone—I would have to have an opportunity to check with my office in that respect and, for that matter, with department officials. I can only indicate to you at the moment, without having had the opportunity to check it, that, from an opposition's perspective, when I was in opposition that probably would not have been tolerated in the estimates committees I was a part of. It would have been expected that you went back through the committee. Perhaps it was the duration of time we spent in opposition but there was a clear understanding that we were no longer the government and that the public sector was working for the government of the day, not the opposition.

Senator CARR—It is a question of whether or not it is working for the parliament, Minister.

Senator Vanstone—I appreciate that, Senator Carr. Let me put it to you this way. There would have been a pretty clear understanding that it was not the liberty of individual senators and members or members of the public, if you like, to use the relevant departments as a library to satisfy their own personal information. In fact, one of Labor's ministers once ensured that I had to pay a freedom of information request charge to get some basic statistical information of a very simple nature on the government's Priority One traineeship scheme. That was the level of understanding that the previous government took. They had opposition members and senators paying FOI applications to get basic information which should have been available.

Senator CARR—The other question related to a particular chart which had been provided in the previous budget's rounds outlining the net effects of the 1997-98 budget, not the net effects of both 1996-97 and 1997-98. What I asked for was an update of that chart and that was not provided. The answer to the question was not adequate and those matters were pursued with officers and with your office.

Senator Vanstone—Can you assist me, Senator Carr, by indicating whom in my office you spoke to? That might help me track it down more quickly for you.

Senator CARR—As I understand it, the departmental officials had agreed to revise it to answer the question that was asked, not one that had been interpreted to have been asked. And the revised version of that answer was to come. There have been occasions, as you have been aware, Minister, where the department has answered questions inaccurately—inadvertently but nonetheless inaccurately. We have had occasions last year, particularly on matters relating to Austudy and other things, where the answer was just wrong.

Senator Vanstone—I understand that, Senator. It is a matter of significant concern to me as it is to you.

Senator CARR—We have had in the past the capacity to discuss these matters with officers. We are not seeking top secret information; we are asking parliamentary questions seeking relevant information.

Senator Vanstone—With respect, I am suggesting, I suppose, that you have not got to the point of what you are seeking to find out.

Senator CARR—I would like the updated answer.

Senator Vanstone—I will make some inquiries for you, Senator, but you have not given us the number of the question.

Senator CARR—Question 20. This matter has been discussed with officers. I know the information is available.

Senator Vanstone—You indicated it had been raised with my office by you. I am simply asking you for speed in chasing it up. Can you indicate to whom in my office the queries were raised?

Senator CARR—I do not have that information with me. As I understand it, this matter was raised with your office.

Senator Vanstone—By? The inference is by you so far.

Senator CARR—No, not by me personally. I never did say by me personally.

Senator Vanstone—No, it was just an inference.

Senator CARR—I understand it was raised and I know for a fact the matter was directly raised with officers concerned. I am now asking you, Minister, given that this information is available and is readily available, that the updated chart be presented to me to ensure—

Senator Vanstone—I told you I will have a look at it, Senator. I cannot give you any more information than that.

Senator CARR—Secondly, on 13 July my office requested the addresses of Victorian non-government schools which had applied for Commonwealth funding as per the list supplied on question 204. This request again had to be checked with your office and despite—

Senator Vanstone—When you say my office, are you sure it was not Dr Kemp's office?

Senator CARR—It was with the minister's office. I can see where the confusion is. You are nonetheless the portfolio minister and you are the minister that is appearing before this committee.

Senator Vanstone—I understand that. I am simply asking for you to be clear in the assertions you are making as to whom matters have been referred to. It will save time: rather than have me go back to my office only to find that the assertion you have made that my

office has been contacted is incorrect and that in fact it is Dr Kemp's office, this would enable me to go straight to Dr Kemp's office. If you are not sure, I would be grateful if you did not make assertions. It would just be easier.

CHAIR—Fairly obviously, Senator Carr, as it is a question relating to schools, it would have gone to Dr Kemp's office; so perhaps that is the source of the confusion.

Senator Vanstone—I am not making any assumptions. I am just saying I will follow it up for the senator. I am quite happy to follow it up; but, until I can get away from here to do that—

Senator CARR—Thank you, Mr Chairman, for your assistance. Specifically, Minister, I would ask that the addresses of the schools provided in answer to question No. 204 be provided. As I understand it, that was a question that had several follow-up phone calls, and I hoped that the matter could be facilitated as quickly as possible.

CHAIR—Senator Carr, I take it you are now on 1.1?

Senator CARR—No. I have asked a question to the minister.

CHAIR—As we indicated earlier, we are now doing general questions.

Senator CARR—It is going to be a long day, Mr Chairman, a very long day.

CHAIR—If you have things specifically relating to answers that relate to a particular program like 1.1, that is the point where you should ask that matter. That is why I suggested that you had perhaps moved into 1.1, if that is what you are asking about now.

Senator CROWLEY—Mr Chairman, I have some questions of a general nature. One is a question lodged on 8 May from me. I address this to you, Minister. I am not sure whether it is directly to you or to the department which responded, but it is my follow-up question, which I think I have asked subsequently but which I will ask again: how are we going with the establishment of WEETAG? Your deliberations on this are now becoming extraordinarily extensive. The question advises that you 'remain committed to re-establishing a ministerial advisory group to assist with questions of concern to women' in the areas of your portfolio responsibilities, but that you are 'not yet ready to advise precisely when the new group will be up and running.' Can you give us some further information on that matter, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—Only to say that I am closer than I was before, but that is not a general question in relation to program 1, Senator.

CHAIR—I think that relates to higher ed in program 2. Perhaps it would be better to raise that when the relevant officers are here.

Senator CROWLEY—I am in a bit of a trouble because—

CHAIR—Program 6.

Senator CROWLEY—Thank you, Mr Chairman, but I understood that there was some agreement that now might be the time to ask questions of a general nature, and I thought that was. But, if I am wrong about that, can I just float—

CHAIR—Program 6.

Senator CROWLEY—I will come back to that. Are we asking those in program 6?

CHAIR—That particular matter, I am advised, relates to program 6.

Senator CROWLEY—Let me float this question, and then you might assist me when I have to ask this one. I am very concerned about this. Answer to question No. 214 is your response when I asked about a reply to question on notice No. 113—and this is page 1 of volume 3

of your answers, which might assist you. I wanted some further information about the actual moneys involved when you provided a table of users of DEETYA services, which you claim reflects the majority of activity and receipts to date, but there were no receipts.

I do not want to go into the detail of this matter. What I want to know is this. You said that the transactions were of a business nature and related to receipts to the department and not to expenditure of Commonwealth funds. You went on to argue that it might well be a breach of commercial-in-confidence or something of that sort to provide the detail of the finances that I asked about.

This is a question of the greatest gravity. Minister, can you give us any further information about the criteria you are going to use to decide this? If those receipts to the department are not available to the parliament for examination, I do believe we are in one way or another circumventing what the parliament has access to knowing, especially as you may indeed be reducing expenditure under your portfolio, in lieu of the receipts that you actually get.

CHAIR—To clarify this, I think you are actually asking a question that is not in this round of estimates but was actually in the previous round. Is that when the original question was asked?

Senator CROWLEY—I asked a question supplementary to the answer. I asked a question at estimates X and got an answer in estimates Y. I followed that answer up and now I have a subsequent answer.

CHAIR—Estimates Y being the last time we met?

Senator CROWLEY—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator CROWLEY—This is a question of the greatest seriousness and it is certainly something that needs to be pursued very closely. What sorts of access are you saying parliament can have to the workings of your department?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I do not have the question or, for that matter, the answer fresh in my mind, but you would understand from previous estimates, where you may in fact have had different views to me, that I have very strong views about departments and the government being accountable to parliament, and very strong views about the misuse of the term ‘market confidentiality’. There is plenty of history available in *Hansard* of my views in that respect.

Having said that, I would just indicate that I will go back and have another look at the matter myself. I am answering you in the general now—Mr Watson might have some specific information—but if there is anything I want to add I will come back to you later, having looked at the question itself.

Senator CROWLEY—Thank you.

Mr Watson—Senator, one of the issues you brought up there was in relation to how the department uses the receipts. The issue is that what the department has is what is called an annotated appropriation, so the appropriation to the department is already reduced by the estimated amount of the receipts that we receive. So there is no double dipping in that context. We provide to the Department of Finance an estimate by program of the receipts we expect to receive in the forthcoming financial year, and they reduce our appropriation by that amount. Then there is a balancing up, if you like, in the next year as to whether we actually achieve the target we were going to set or not.

In terms of the specific details on the actual receipts we receive in relation to section 35, providing the minister is happy we can provide that detail to you by firm, for what purpose and what the receipt was.

Senator CROWLEY—So, depending on the minister's final view, you expect that that information might be provided to me?

Mr Watson—Yes. I think the way that we answered the question in the first place—I do not have that with me—arose from the view that you were interested in the types of activity that was conducted under section 35 and the types of industry sectors we had dealings with—not necessarily specifically the dollar by dollar receipt from each particular employer, because there would be a great range of receipts and employers we deal with under these various categories.

Senator CROWLEY—It certainly was interesting. I was appreciative when I got the answer back; when I looked at it I realised that none of the receipts were listed. That was information I thought was very useful to add, so I asked the subsequent question. Now I get the answer that says, 'Well, we are deliberating in each case whether or not to provide that information about receipts.'

But I am also interested in it from another point of view, which may indeed be not a question of such a general nature. Indeed, Mr Chairman, I might ask it later. It is actually to do with specific people who are involved in the area who are saying that they have run in the past as a non-profit organisation, for example, and the changed requirements mean that they are in terrible financial difficulty. I suspect the minister has had some of the letters about those sorts of things. So the receipts are of relevance. But I do not want to get into that here. This is a general question about how much the parliament can know about the detail of the receipts coming through to the department. I think that first of all I would argue—and, if I understand the minister correctly, I would support her view—that we should know as much as possible. That is what I think you were saying—that there should be very specific reasons for why those dollars are not made available to the parliament.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I have always argued that there will be occasions of market confidentiality, as I think there is agreement, but that that has been bandied about in the past, if I may say so—not wishing to cast any reflections on the previous government; it is just that it has been bandied about in the past—with far too much glib abandon. There may be other reasons. In other portfolios—I would not think in this one—there would be national security reasons. There are occasionally reasons where it is not appropriate, but generally speaking I agree. What is the purpose of parliament if that is not the case?

Senator CROWLEY—The question therefore is interesting to me and I would certainly like this followed up. I appreciate your comments that you would have a look at the details of this answer—and also you, Mr Watson—because this answer comes to me with the sense of 'We will provide nothing unless it is'—not 'wheeled out of us', exactly, but: 'Our starting view is that we are not providing this in case we breach some kind of confidence.' That seems to be contrary to what you are saying, which is, 'We will provide it all except where we can say, "But we did not provide this because in those circumstances we judged this".'

Senator Vanstone—Well, Senator Crowley, as I have understood what the officer said, an answer was given in good faith on the basis of thinking you were looking at a different aspect, if you like—that you wanted to look through a different window of the building, rather than—

Senator CROWLEY—That is true, but the subsequent question made clear which window I was looking through and it is the answer to the subsequent question that interests me.

Whether it is defensive or not, at least it is a non-forthcoming answer and if we are not going to be forthcoming, then I would like to know more than in general terms here, why. I understand you to say that you expect subsequently that you may well be forthcoming but, if not, can I please have some much more detailed indication of the criteria that you are applying in any particular case that says, 'This is why we are not providing this information'?

Mr Watson—Sure. Let me just make one thing clear, Senator. The types of organisations we are dealing with under these arrangements are generally not community organisations or not-for-profit organisations. They generally relate to transactions with some of the major employers, say, Woolworths or Coles, where we are doing a specific recruitment campaign for them which is over and above the normal sort of activity that, perhaps, the CES would provide. But they want to use our premises and our staff to do pre-screening and all sorts of things so we legitimately charge a price for that service. It is not part of the relationship that we would be charging not-for-profit organisations just for the normal services the department would deliver.

Senator CROWLEY—I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr Watson. But if that is the case, then it seems to me even more reasonable that we should know about it.

Mr Watson—Certainly.

Senator Vanstone—Let me just come back, Mr Chairman, to a question to Senator Carr. Senator Carr, I understand that you were somewhat critical of an answer you have been given to question No. 204 in that you had not been given addresses?

Senator CARR—That is right.

Senator Vanstone—Unless I do not have the right information here, I have question 204 in which you asked for the names of all new schools by state—the names only. You have been given the names and the suburbs. So, you have the name, the suburb and the state when, in fact, you did not ask for the addresses. You now have information at hand that would enable you to make up a mailing list if you wanted. I am at a bit of a loss to understand what the problem is.

Senator CARR—The problem was that when we sought clarification from the department we were referred to your office.

Senator Vanstone—To an office, Senator. I have asked you to make that clear. You do not know.

Senator CARR—Now I am asking specifically. Can we have the addresses of those schools listed?

Senator Vanstone—That is different, Senator. What you were putting before—

Senator CARR—We can play around all day.

Senator Vanstone—What was being put before was that officers of the department had not answered questions in the manner in which they were asked.

CHAIR—It seems very clear—

Senator Vanstone—We are prepared to clearly acknowledge where answers have not been given. We had 80 per cent to 90 per cent of them in by the appropriate time, and 99 per cent by last Friday and then the point was made—and some of the committee's time was taken up—that addresses had been asked for and had not been given.

CHAIR—If I could read the question—

Senator Vanstone—It is only because we have come back to it now and not after the estimates that we can see that, in fact, Senator Carr did not ask for the addresses at all. He was given a lot more than he asked for and yet he still complains. Now he seeks to say that he is actually just asking today for the addresses.

CHAIR—No. You are wasting our time, Senator Carr.

Senator Vanstone—It is unfair to the officers, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—You did not ask for this originally.

Senator CARR—I am quite prepared to spend as much time here as we need.

Senator Vanstone—You always are, Senator.

Senator CARR—I said that there are occasions when the department has not understood the question I have asked, or it has got things wrong, or I was specifically—

CHAIR—That is not the case now.

Senator CARR—When I was making these comments I was specifically referring to the events that related to the approach that my office made to the department on 11 July concerning answers to question 20. I then went on to raise the unconditional issues in relation to question 204 which is the matter of addresses, a separate question.

CHAIR—Which you did not ask for originally.

Senator CARR—If you wish to obstruct the work of the committee, that is fine.

CHAIR—I am not obstructing your work. I just wish you would get your act together. If you did not ask for the addresses, why are you asking questions about it? It is a separate question.

Senator CARR—I am suggesting here, Mr Chairman, that if you actually seek to get the work of this committee completed rather than frustrating it, we will speed our progress.

CHAIR—If you stop asking spurious questions, we will as well. Let us move on.

Senator CARR—I asked my office on 13 July on a separate matter to approach departmental officers regarding the question of addresses of Victorian non-government schools. The matter had to be checked with the minister's office and despite several follow-up phone calls, a response has not been forthcoming. If it requires me now to put down a specific question I will, and I would ask that the addresses of those schools be provided.

Senator Vanstone—I would say first off that you have actually got them. You can write to the blah blah school of blah somewhere in blah state.

Senator CARR—I have asked a specific question: could the addresses be provided?

Senator Vanstone—We will have a look at that. The department is not there to provide address lists for you, Senator.

Senator CARR—I beg your pardon?

Senator Vanstone—The department is not there to compile address lists. What do you want them to do: come and write it out on the envelopes and put the stamps on them for you?

Senator CARR—I want to establish where they are. Now you have said there are a number—

Senator Vanstone—You have that, Senator.

Senator CARR—You must know, Minister, there are so many schools operating—

Senator Vanstone—Condell Park Christian School, Condell Park, New South Wales.

Senator CARR—There are a number of Christian schools—

Senator Vanstone—Deniliquin Christian School, Deniliquin, New South Wales; Good Shepherd Primary School, Hoxton Park, New South Wales. You know where they are, Senator! You have had it sorted by state for you. If someone wanted to be difficult, they would have sorted this by alphabet.

CHAIR—They are actually sorted by suburbs, though—

Senator Vanstone—It has given me an idea—

CHAIR—That is close enough. Get one of your staff to work it out.

Senator CARR—I have asked a specific question. I am asking whether or not you are prepared to answer it and, if you are not, I have other options, as you well know. It is as simple as that.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, if you are putting a question on notice, we will take that on notice and have a look at what effort is required to do it for you.

Senator CARR—Minister, what action is the government taking in regard to the expected number of students to enter schools next year, 1998, as a result of the actions of the government to remove those persons under the age of 18 years from income support and to provide income support only to those under the age of 18 years that are enrolled in educational institutions? What action is the government taking to facilitate—

Senator Vanstone—It is actually those who have completed year 12 or are engaged in full-time training or are 18.

Senator CARR—Or who are under the age of 18 years.

Senator Vanstone—Generally, I think.

Senator CARR—Early school leavers—

Senator Vanstone—Yes.

Senator CARR—And others who will now be obliged to return to educational institutions.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I am very pleased with the government's changes in that respect in particular. I have not understood for a long time why, when looking at the figures for youth unemployed and seeing the devastating consequences of leaving school before year 12, or of leaving at year 12 and doing no further training—and they are devastating consequences in terms of the proportion they make up of unemployed—we have continued to say to those kids, 'It is okay; we do not mind. This is probably going to ruin your life opportunities but, if you do not feel school is for you, we are happy for you to leave and we will give you some income support to look for one of the ever decreasing number of unskilled jobs for which you will be equipped.' Putting a disincentive there, and making it harder for those kids to make that decision to so damage themselves, is a decision that I support.

As you understand, there are exceptions to that—where kids are homeless and a number of others. If more children choose to stay at school, it will be merely an increase in what has been a trend over a number of years since the eighties. I think your government was very pleased, when it was happening, to note that more kids were staying at school. If you look at the change in what is happening with young people, for a decade or more the rising proportion of them have been staying at school and a far diminishing proportion have been leaving school early and simply looking for work.

If that trend continues as a consequence of that change—and I hope it does, I hope more kids do stay at school and give themselves a better chance—then, to the degree to which

schools get per capita funding, schools will get more money. Not only will the kids be better off, schools will get more money.

Let me take the opportunity to say that could mean some schools have to adjust their program and their focus to make themselves more relevant to these children because their school's configuration at any particular time is not relevant for them. The argument I hear most of the time is that for these children school is not relevant. It should be relevant. Schools should be there to educate all of the kids in their charge, not just the ones going to university. I hope the schools do refocus and provide some relevance for those kids who, for whatever reason, at the moment are not finding school relevant and so damaging their lives by leaving early.

Senator CARR—What additional moneys, apart from the per capita recurrent funding, will be provided to assist with students returning to school?

Senator Vanstone—The government will consider that matter in due course.

Senator CARR—So at this point there is no additional money being provided?

Senator Vanstone—I think you could infer that from the answer, Senator. But, as I have indicated, schools are already paid significant amounts of money and they are responsible for all the children in their charge. They will get more money if they have more students, but I am also indicating to you that, on top of that, the government will be looking to see if there are further opportunities to assist.

Senator CARR—With regard to these people, who are not necessarily students—at this point they may not be students; you would like them to be students and, in that regard, I would agree with you—would you agree that they are particularly difficult students to deal with, that they are people who often have not had good experiences of the education system?

Senator Vanstone—We could go into a lot of subjective assessments on the basis of the few people that I have met that have left school at year 10 and of the kids that are at years 10, 11 and 12 that I have talked to who say, 'I would like to leave and get a job.' Anecdotal, that is what assessment is made. Clearly, if kids want to leave school at an early age, school is not providing a sufficient interest, attraction and relevance for them to choose to stay.

Senator CARR—The normal profile of students who leave school early, you would agree, would be that they are often from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not coping well with the curriculum as it is provided, in many senses are not finding that the educational experience provided is particularly relevant and have been regarded as 'at risk'. Would you agree with those assessments?

Senator Vanstone—As I say, I do not have comprehensive information available to say that, yes, you are right, but one would be inclined to think, on a commonsense basis, that some of what you say is true. One aspect I am absolutely certain is true—you simply repeated back to me, in other words, what I have put in my answer to you—is the problem of relevance for some of the students who choose to leave because they do not see school as being relevant for them. That is the whole point, that schools will have to provide curricula that are relevant to all their students.

The schools, in my view, should not be able to choose to provide curricula that is relevant to people who want to go on to university and to ignore the others. That is the whole point and the whole focus of putting more vocational training back into schools that will in fact count, that will not be discarded when a kid leaves school. I think there is a national move

towards this. It is not something only being argued by the federal government, although it is being argued very strongly by us, that there must be more vocational training in schools.

Minister Honeywood in Victoria, for example, has got more vocational training in schools. While I do not have the exact percentage with me, although I might be able to locate if for you, a number of kids who do vocational courses in Victoria nonetheless go on to university. In other words, the provision of vocational training in schools is not, if you like, a locking off into a vocational stream, but it is the provision of relevant teaching for those kids who are not going to go on to universities. If you bear with me, I think I do have that percentage here somewhere.

Senator CROWLEY—Except that you just said, Minister, that sometimes these students do go on to university.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, they do. I do not think any educational interface, if you like, should be seen as a prison: it should provide opportunities to go on to the next step or to shift over to another step.

Senator CARR—Yes. Minister, I do not think anyone would dispute that proposition.

Senator Vanstone—No, I would hope not. I would not think there would be.

Senator CARR—The question arises though, Minister, of how many students will, in the government's estimation, be returning to school as the result of a decision to implement the proposed youth allowance.

Senator Vanstone—Before I come to that, someone will be giving me the answer for that, and I have found the percentage. I understand that 24 per cent of students undertaking vocational subjects at school in Victoria in 1996 have continued on to university, which was the point that I wanted to make.

Senator CARR—True. Minister, we have known for many years that there has been the teaching of various vocational subjects in high schools.

Senator Vanstone—But we also know that there is not enough and that that is why some kids are choosing to leave early. That is the very point we are discussing.

Senator CARR—Minister, I appreciate the point you make. You will have plenty of opportunity—

Senator Vanstone—It just is not enough.

Senator CARR—to explain what action this government is taking actually to fund that program and that commitment that you assert. I would ask you this now, Minister: how many people does the government anticipate will be returning to school as a result of the implementation of the youth allowance?

Senator Vanstone—The department has done some work on this; but, as you will appreciate, it is almost impossible to get an answer that is guaranteed to be accurate, because one is simply making estimates of what would happen; but it may be 25,000, 26,000 or 27,000.

Senator CARR—So somewhere between 25,000 and 27,000 is your estimate, is it?

Senator Vanstone—I have indicated to you that I think any estimate is going to be unreliable, but that is an estimate.

Senator CARR—I understand that. That is the nature of the word 'estimate'. Is that the department's estimate of the number of people returning to school?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, you would not want to take that as a sort of per annum or next year figure, because, as you know, there are a number of exemptions. When you shift to a new policy, you do not necessarily get in the first year the annual effect that you would hope to have. I would additionally point out, though—and I will ask Mr Grant to come to some details of the assessments the department is making of what they are looking at, to give you some more information—that we have glossed over the exemptions for the under 18s without Year 12 or equivalent not needing to be in full-time training. While you probably might be aware of these, just in case you or some other committee members are not, the exemptions will relate to illness, homelessness, substance abuse, traumatic home circumstances, job loss, inability to secure an appropriate education place at the particular time, or other circumstances that make it unreasonable for the young person to undertake full-time study.

Senator CARR—How many persons?

Senator Vanstone—Again, Mr Grant can give you some information on the best estimates that we can make.

Mr Grant—Senator, as the minister indicates, we have made some estimates on these matters. Relevant perhaps is that there are currently some 32,000 teenagers who are unemployed and below the age of 18 years and in receipt of the youth training allowance, so that puts some sort of cap on the estimate, if you like. There are, broadly speaking, three possibilities as we see it. Once the youth allowance is introduced in the middle of next year, it is possible that a small number of young people might choose not to receive the youth allowance and might not return to education or training. More significant numbers, we expect, would—

Senator CARR—Mr Grant, could you take me through your projections for each of these categories?

Mr Grant—I would need to come back to you on the fine detail of each of these elements. I can run through the elements briefly.

Senator CARR—Could you take that on notice? I would like to know precisely how the department has reached its conclusions regarding these estimates.

Mr Grant—I will take that on notice. As I say, there are three broad categories, as we see it. Firstly, there is the group who might not receive the youth allowance but also might not return to education and training. Secondly, as the minister has just mentioned, there is a significant number of young people who would qualify for exemptions from returning to education and training, by dint of the sorts of factors that the minister has just referred to; and, thirdly, there is a group of young people who would respond, we expect, to the new arrangements by returning to education and training, even though they might have left school early, thus far.

Those are all the first-round effects, if you like. Beyond that, looking to the slightly longer term, we would expect that there would be changes in the behaviour of young people in terms of their decisions to stay in or to leave education and training. The broad estimate to which the minister referred, something around the 25,000 to 27,000 mark, is our estimate of the potential effect of the youth allowance on increased numbers of students remaining in education and training, once the youth allowance has been implemented and is fully established, a couple of years out.

Senator CARR—Could you give me an indication of what you believe the expectations to be, year by year, through the out years?

Mr Grant—No. We have not undertaken those estimates. We have not needed to make those estimates thus far.

Senator CARR—Presumably you have undertaken some study of the likely special programs that are required to facilitate the return of those students: is that the case?

Mr Grant—We have certainly explored some options and advised ministers on options for possible measures that might respond to the changed environment, but those matters are before ministers at the moment and I am not in a position to comment further.

Senator CARR—I understand that the advice is before ministers, but the calculations upon which you have based that advice are with the department.

Mr Grant—Yes. I would emphasise the point the minister made a moment ago: these estimates are necessarily crude, and they are subject to a whole host of factors over which the department, certainly, has little or no control. For example, the prevailing state of labour market conditions, two or three years out, will of course be a significant determinant of young people's behaviour and their decisions as to whether to leave education at a particular point.

We would view it as false sophistication to attempt to cater for every possibility. All we have sought to do to date is make some broad estimate of the possible impact of the youth allowance, when implemented next year, on young people's decisions either to stay in or to leave full-time education.

Senator Vanstone—Before you go on with that, I do have that information that I indicated to you I was seeking in relation to the merit of children choosing to stay at school and get further training. As I understand it, there is no dispute about the benefits of that.

I have some information on the percentage make-up of the long-term unemployed by qualification. I understand that a percentage in one particular group might be high because that reflects their percentage of the population. Nonetheless, it does give you some indication when you consider that 53 per cent of the long-term unemployed—over half—did not complete year 12. Not completing year 12 puts you at risk when there is economic change. Perhaps you are less capable of being flexible with the work force changes. Another 20 per cent completed just year 12, so you could say that over three-quarters have no post-school qualifications.

What we are talking about here is trying to ensure that young Australians at least complete year 12 or do some basic or skilled vocational training, and trying to remove the incentives to do the opposite. The proportion for basic vocational training is seven per cent and for skilled vocational training 10 per cent. For people with an associate diploma it is four per cent and for an undergraduate degree one per cent. I could go on. I presume you disagree, but that was the information I was given.

Senator CARR—Obviously I do not have any disagreement with that. There is enormous benefit in providing education and training.

Senator Vanstone—There are just a few other bits that I indicated I would seek to get. There is some information available on the main reason people cite for leaving school before year 12. It is different for males and for females. You might appreciate that many more boys say they are going to do an apprenticeship. It is about 40 per cent who say they are going to do that. These are rough figures: I am not giving you the decimal points. Roughly seven per cent do other training, 20 per cent leave to get a job and seven per cent leave to earn money. They seem much the same to me. Still on the males, 14 per cent indicate they do not like school, another four say they do not like school work and five per cent give some other reason. So that is about 18 per cent who either say openly, 'I don't like school' or 'I'm no good at

it', for boys. For girls, 21 per cent say they do not like school and four per cent say they are no good at it.

They are the kids that we have to try and focus something on that does provide them with relevance at school, so that they have an opportunity for a career path and for planning in the way the kids have who know from year 8 that they are probably going to university. I think it is one of the saddest answers you could get—though 'saddest' overstates the case, so it is not quite the appropriate adjective—when you ask a secondary school student, 'What are you going to do?' and the first answer they give you is in the negative: 'I'm not going to university'. It is appalling that kids should be characterising themselves in that way, and that is the focus behind the government's push for more vocational training in schools.

Senator CARR—And as I say, Minister, it is something the opposition would acknowledge. In our term we put a 50 per cent increase into funding the VET sector. But it does raise some issues, as far as I am concerned, in terms of the quality of that provision. We will come to those in a moment. However, you are saying there are some 32,000 people are under the age of 18 who presumably become your target group, and you would expect a proportion of that number—how many you do not really know—to be returning to school or TAFE. How many of the 32,000 do you think will go to schools and how many will go to TAFE?

Senator Vanstone—As I understand it, we do not have an assessment of that.

Senator CARR—Has the department not sought that information?

Mr Grant—The main interest thus far in terms of development of the youth allowance has been to estimate the number of additional young people who might be in the education and training system as a whole by dint of the introduction of the youth allowance.

Senator CARR—Yes, but you would appreciate that the funding questions specifically relate to the number of heads in a classroom, or whatever you define it as, and they vary from sector to sector.

Mr Grant—To the best of my knowledge, we have not undertaken any dissection by sector of the estimate I referred to before. Relevant here is the fact that the boundaries between the school sector and the TAFE form of vocational education are becoming increasingly blurred, and desirably so. But I am happy to take on notice your question to check whether any estimate has been made, and I will let you know the answer to that.

Senator CARR—Thank you. Specifically, what is the department's estimate of the numbers that will enter the school sector and the numbers that will enter into TAFE colleges? The per unit costs are somewhat different between those sectors.

As I understand it, it is not just a one-off cost for those 27,000 or thereabouts that are likely to enter the school sector. This is a group of people that up until this point have not been part of the school system in recent years, because retention rates are falling. These are a group of people that are most at risk. If they are to go back into the school system or the TAFE system, it is not just the immediate cost that has to be borne, it is the subsequent cost, because they build onto the student numbers as a whole if they stay at school for more than one year. What is the flow-on or compound effect of students that return to school and are retained by the school? How do you calculate that?

Mr Grant—Senator, as I understand it—but again, we will check and confirm—the 27,000 estimate allows for the compounding effect to which you refer.

Senator CARR—So of the 32,000 persons—

Mr Grant—The 32,000 is a point in time estimate, currently.

Senator CARR—Yes, but you were saying that as at March this year 32,000 persons had left the school system and had some income support, and were a target group. Now you are saying that the compound effect will be at maximum 27,000. On your estimates, the numbers returning to school next year must be quite small.

Mr Grant—I have undertaken already, Senator, to come back to you, to the extent I can, with that additional disaggregated information—to the extent we have made some estimates of numbers in the three categories I mentioned before. It is the case that, at the point of transition from existing arrangements to the youth allowance, we would expect the impact to be quite modest, for the various reasons I mentioned before. Not least is the provision in the design of the youth allowance for a significant number of exemptions to be accorded to young people, particularly those young people who are most highly at risk, whom were asking about before.

Senator CARR—Are we talking about half the 32,000?

Mr Grant—I have undertaken to come back to you on those matters.

Senator CARR—Yes, I am just trying to get a fix on what the word ‘modest’ means. Does it mean 7,000? Does it mean 5,000?

Senator Vanstone—I think the officer has given you the best answer he can. If he has chosen to use a word that covers a generality, to proceed and ask the officer to nominate one particular figure that is meant by the word ‘modest’ is not useful. The officer has been as helpful as he can be, and he has indicated he is prepared to go back and have a further look to see if he can be of any further assistance.

Senator CARR—Perhaps you can explain this to me. What numbers of students currently leave school each year before completing year 12?

Mr Grant—The exact number, Senator, we would need to get for you. As you are aware, school retention rates to year 12 are currently in the low seventies, which means that something close to 30 per cent of students do choose to leave the formal school system before completing year 12. My distant recollection is that every year there is a cohort of about 250,000 students in each age range. My colleague has just pointed out these figures: each year there are some 250,000 young people leaving school, and of that number some 90,000 leave school before year 12.

Senator CARR—So in fact a substantial group of people over and above the 32,000 that you mentioned earlier are actually leaving school early. It is 90,000 a year. You believe a very modest number, perhaps as low as five per cent of that, will return to school as a result of the government’s actions.

Senator Vanstone—Let’s not get ourselves confused here. You have just asked for the number leaving school and you have been given an estimate of the numbers leaving school early.

Senator CARR—I have been told it is 90,000.

Senator Vanstone—Yes. What you have not gone on to ask is: what proportion of those are already going to training, which would entitle them to support?

Senator CARR—Perhaps we could ask: how many of those are unemployed?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, the answer you are looking for is one which the government, if it was easily computable, would be computing. These things are, in the end, estimates. It is the number of people who leave school early, who do not do any further training and who

simply look for a job. That is the number you are looking for, not the number of school leavers.

Senator CARR—How many of that 90,000 are unemployed?

Mr Grant—Senator, I mentioned before that there are 32,000 young people under the age of 18 drawing youth training allowance. Of that 32,000, I am told 28,000 are early school leavers. As the minister points out, many of the 90,000 leave not to go into unemployment but to take up employment, particularly as apprentices. In some cases, they move out of school into full-time training, particularly in the TAFE sector. We are talking about two quite different figures, as the minister has mentioned.

Senator CARR—Sure. But what is your estimate of the number of that 90,000 that are actually unemployed?

Mr Grant—I would not speculate on an estimate immediately, Senator. There would be estimates available from the ABS survey. It really depends a bit on your definition of unemployed. Are you talking unemployed in the ABS sense or in terms of unemployed—

Senator CARR—How the department would normally see that, Mr Grant.

Mr Grant—There are different estimates for different purposes, Senator.

Senator CARR—Perhaps you could tell me the number of persons that, in the normal sense of the word 'unemployed', were the department's users. How many of those 90,000 remain unemployed? Would it be 20,000?

Mr Grant—No. I am not going to pick a figure from the air. I would like clarification. By unemployed, do you mean unemployed in the sense of drawing income support in the nature of unemployment benefits, or do you mean unemployed in the sense captured by the ABS labour force survey?

Senator CARR—By the normal method the department uses. What does the department normally use?

Mr Grant—We rely on the ABS labour force survey.

Senator Vanstone—You have already been told that, Senator.

Senator CARR—Sorry. I did not hear what Mr Grant said.

Mr Grant—For official unemployment estimates, we do rely on the ABS labour force survey. If that is the sense in which you are asking the question, I would need to consult with the ABS and get you such estimates as are available.

Senator CARR—I am sure the department already has estimates in this matter, Mr Grant.

Mr Grant—That may well be, Senator. I do not carry those around in my head.

Senator CARR—I appreciate that. While you are there, Mr Grant, can you tell me how many would be part-time employed?

Mr Grant—Part-time employed?

Senator CARR—Part-time.

Mr Grant—Again, Senator, we will see what is available.

Senator CARR—I understand it is about an hour a week. Is it anything more than an hour a week?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, the department has indicated it is happy to go and access the ABS figures, just in the way that you could. To save you the time and effort, we will do it for you.

Senator CARR—I do think we need to be clear about what planning you put into the estimates, Minister. After all this is, as you say, an important government initiative.

Senator Vanstone—I quite agree. I am just indicating that you are asking for information, as you frequently do, that is on the public record and that you are capable of looking up yourself, but you simply choose to get the department to look for you.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I am pleased to have your assistance. Would the department accept that the students that you would treat as at risk and likely to leave school would tend to be persons that have lower levels of school achievement due to low literacy levels?

Mr Grant—By and large, Senator, yes.

Senator CARR—Family dislocation? Itinerary?

Senator Vanstone—I have given you the information we have in this respect. We have covered this ground.

Senator CARR—Violence or abuse, poverty, homelessness?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, we have covered this ground.

Senator CARR—Yes, you have. Minister, if this is the case and you place such emphasis on this matter, why was the students at risk program wound up by your government?

Senator Vanstone—As you know, in a budgetary sense last year was a very, very difficult year. As is often the case when one is left in a parlous state of income, one has to make very, very hard decisions. That is in fact the consequence of having someone irresponsible looking after the money. As you know, when this government came into office it faced something like a \$10 billion deficit and some difficult choices had to be made. I imagine that people who supported the previous government were somewhat embarrassed, if you like, at the parlous state the finances were left in and the steps, therefore, that needed to be taken to bring the budget back into black. But, just as a matter of interest, your own government made some sort of assessment, because, as I am advised, there was no provision in your own forward estimates for the continuation of the STAR program.

Senator CARR—It was of course on a cyclical basis, as you would appreciate, but wasn't it actually decided by your government to wind it up?

Mr Evans—That is incorrect. There was just no provision in the forward estimates and there was no decision taken to—

Senator CARR—We have been through this in the VET bill—the government made no decision; it just did not add any money to the program.

Mr Evans—That is correct.

Senator CARR—So the program actually finished on 31 December 1996—was that the case?

Mr Evans—That is correct.

Senator CARR—That is as a result of the decisions, as you say, not taken in the last budget? That was a program that specifically targeted disadvantaged young people up to the age of 19 who were at risk of not completing school, or had already left school. Was that the case, Mr Evans?

Mr Evans—There was no decision taken in the last budget, or the previous budget or in the budget of the last Labor government.

Senator CARR—That would have had to have been made, though, if it was to continue in last year's budget; was that the case?

Mr Evans—If there was to be money provided to continue the program, it would have been the budget before last.

Senator CARR—What action is the government now considering, Minister, with regard to the students at risk program?

Senator Vanstone—As has been indicated to you, forward funding for the program ceased under your own forward estimates. Additional funding was not added, and that was as a consequence of the \$10 billion deficit we faced after the fiscal ineptitude of the previous government. I do not think for one minute we can pretend that—heaven help us—had your government been returned to office you would have simply left the deficit as it was. You would have had to have made difficult decisions as well, and one of them may have been not to add further money.

You ask what consideration has been given to that program. I will answer a more general question. Your questioning has been in relation to the children who, for whatever reason, leave school. We have canvassed that. I have indicated to you that there will be more funds for schools when they have more students; that is obvious. They get an element of their money per capita. You ask what other measures the government is giving consideration to. When the government has given consideration to those, it will announce its decisions.

Senator CARR—I will turn to the jobs pathway program, Minister. What is the present financial situation within the forward estimates for the jobs pathway program, which of course was another one of those programs under the previous government designed to assist students that were at risk? What action have you taken on that matter?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, perhaps you could be of some assistance here. There are two things I want to say in response. I have indicated to you that the government is considering if it wants to make any further changes as a consequence of what we hope will be the positive changes of the introduction of the youth allowance, that is, more people staying at school. When the government has made those decisions it will announce them. There is not much point in your continuing to go through every option that the government might look at and drumming up a few others yourself to ask, because you are going to get the same answer every time.

Secondly, I just remind you that the jobs pathway program, as I understand it, is in program 3.

Senator CARR—It might well be—at least, not another matter relating specifically to the issue of students at risk.

Senator Vanstone—I am just pointing out where you could ask your question. Anyway, I will give you the same answer.

Senator CARR—I appreciate that. If you wish me to return to these matters then, I am only too happy to do that.

CHAIR—Job pathways really could be asked in either area.

Senator CARR—I would ask, Minister: is it the case that you would anticipate that these students that are, hopefully, returning to education institutions will be in areas of the highest levels of unemployment?

Senator Vanstone—As I am advised, Senator, we have not sought to make a geographic assessment.

Senator CARR—So the department has no expectations of where these people live?

Mr Grant—At a general level it is the case, as you would be aware, that there are significant differences between different regions and parts of the country in the propensity of young people to remain in education and training. To the extent that early school leavers do tend to be concentrated in certain parts of country, then any measure to encourage young people to remain in education and training will, of course, tend to have its greatest impact in those areas. We have certainly not made a detailed quantitative assessment, as the minister mentions, of exactly what the incidence of any impact might be by geography.

Senator CARR—But it would not be an unreasonable expectation that, given the nature of the students we are talking about, particularly social disadvantaged, the areas of greatest social disadvantage tend to have also the highest levels of unemployment. In fact, there is a strong correlation between those, as the minister has already indicated.

Mr Grant—There is a relationship, certainly.

Senator CARR—What action is the government taking, or what provision has the government made, for special services, over and above per capita funding, to assist students in such areas?

Mr Grant—The same answer applies, I think, as before.

Senator CARR—I am sorry, the same measure?

Mr Grant—The same answer applies as before, that these matters are—

Senator CARR—That is that we have got a mirror out and we are having a good look at this, are we? That is the answer: ‘We are looking into this.’

Senator Vanstone—I think, Senator, I have indicated to you on about six occasions—I am beginning to wonder whether you understand—that the government is looking at whether there are additional ways that it would seek to assist schools.

Senator CARR—I am just troubled that you would announce a policy change of this magnitude and not have the funding in place or have thought through the policy implications.

Senator Vanstone—You may be troubled. It does not seem a difficult situation to me, to recognise a major policy change that needs to be made to encourage more students to stay back at school and to indicate that, should further assistance be required, you will work it out and then set about doing it. It is a perfectly logical train of events to me.

Senator CARR—I see. So you normally announce government programs without the funding to support them? That is the normal way in which the Commonwealth behaves, is it?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, that is your interpretation. It is not mine. You are welcome to use your polemics as much as you want but it is not my interpretation.

Senator CARR—What action is the government taking to support teachers, in terms of professional development, in coping with these increased demands that are being placed on the school system?

Dr Arthur—In terms of the specifics of any additional measures the government might contemplate in response to this initiative, the answer previously given by Senator Vanstone would apply. We certainly can provide information of what measures the government is currently contemplating in terms of professional development on an issue which has been identified by Senator Carr as being the key causing element in this, namely, poor literacy skills, where the government has made specific provision for professional development to address that issue.

Senator CARR—I would appreciate a response on the existing measure. I would ask, though, Dr Arthur, what additional measures the government is undertaking to facilitate the re-entry of this particularly group of students back into the classrooms. What actions have been taken to facilitate that policy decision?

Dr Arthur—As the minister has indicated, when the government has addressed the question of what measures should or should not be adopted, an announcement will be forthcoming at that time.

Senator CARR—So these are students that are likely to lob at the doors of their schools, perhaps as many as 32,000 persons, at the end of January next year, and at this stage the government has not announced any additional measures to support those students?

Dr Arthur—I think that the position in terms of what future measures might be taken when the youth allowance comes into effect, which at the moment is some time in the future, has already been answered on by the minister.

Senator CARR—When do people who are under the age of 18 lose their unemployment benefits? What is the operative date?

Senator Vanstone—Can I just make a point to you here. I do not underestimate the number, about 27,000 to 30,000. If it was distributed purely on a population basis, in my state you might say that it would be about 3,000 distributed over about 250 schools. There are not 3,000 extra students rolling up to one extra school or to 10 schools; it is distributed fairly broadly—albeit, I accept, as has already been indicated, that the distribution may skew to lower socioeconomic areas.

Senator CARR—Minister, if that is the case—you have indicated South Australia—could you give us a state by state breakdown of your estimates of the impact of—

Senator Vanstone—As I understand it, it has not been done by state. I am simply saying to you that, if then—I see it in my answer—if it followed—

Senator CARR—But you mentioned South Australia. You obviously have an indication, if that is the case.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, people try and do you the favour of listening to your questions. You could at least pretend you are interested in the answer.

Senator CARR—I am very interested in the answer, Minister, because I am very concerned that as of the—

CHAIR—Senator Carr, just let the minister answer.

Senator Vanstone—Mr Chairman, it is not worth going on if, every time I give an answer, the senator chooses to interrupt.

Senator CARR—Is it the case, Minister, that—

CHAIR—Order, Senator Carr!

Senator Vanstone—It is not worth going on and giving him any extra information, and he will simply get the minimum information available if he continues to behave that way.

CHAIR—For the good order of the work in the committee, Senator Carr, could you wait till the minister finishes her answer before you ask the next question.

Senator CARR—I ask, Minister, in terms of the departmental estimates, how that was calculated and the impact it has on a state by state basis.

Senator Vanstone—That has already been answered, Senator. I refer you to the earlier answers.

Senator CARR—I would ask, then, the number of persons under the age of 18 years likely to return to school, state by state, to the best of the department's knowledge.

Senator Vanstone—A state by state estimate has not been made, Senator.

Senator CARR—Presumably you do have an estimate that there are 32,000 young people under the age of 18 who are eligible or will fit into this category of persons who will no longer receive income support unless they are in school or have an exemption. What I seek from you is the state by state distribution of that 32,000.

Senator Vanstone—We will take it on notice, Senator, and if it is not too much work to do it for you, we will.

Senator CARR—I appreciate that, Minister.

CHAIR—Are there any more questions on 1.1?

Senator CARR—Yes. Is it the case that the number of students affected by the implementation of the youth allowance can be calculated from the beginning of the 1998 calendar school year, in terms of entry to—

Mr Grant—Senator, I think this depends very heavily on what judgments young people and their parents make. As you know, the youth allowance is not scheduled to be introduced until 1 July 1998. It is a question then, I think, of what choices young people and their parents decide to make later this year or early next calendar year, with an eye to July. We would be guessing, to be honest.

Senator CARR—Yes, but you can expect that there will be students returning to the schools, presumably in anticipation of a loss of benefits, from the beginning of the school year rather than half way through it?

Mr Grant—That is a possibility, Senator.

Senator CARR—Yes. Now, you are saying that teachers do not have any particular additional programs to call upon and there are no additional student support measures to call upon. Are there any particular curriculum measures that the government has undertaken to support the re-entry of these people?

Senator Vanstone—Can I just make the point, Senator: the tone of your questioning implies that, if schools were to provide for all of their students, teachers and everyone else would need significant realignment and changing. In fact, on your part there seems to be an admission that they have not been providing for all their students, and that they, without additional programs, are not capable of doing so. Frankly, that is not an implication that, if I were you, I would have put.

Senator CARR—That is very good of you, Minister, but I think you would acknowledge that if there are some 32,000 persons currently under the age of 18 not at school or at a TAFE college that is a measure of failure for all governments. You have now taken policy decisions

to force those persons back into the education system. You are obliged, I would have thought, as a government, to provide the resources for that.

Senator Vanstone—You even had a system that encouraged them out of it.

Senator CARR—You say that, Minister, but—

Senator Vanstone—Just as you say we are going to develop one to force them back.

Senator CARR—I would ask what action the government has taken to support the curriculum programs—

Senator Vanstone—And you have been told, Senator, that the government is considering what additional actions might be required in response to a perceived increase in the number of students staying at school, and you have been advised that when the government has made those decisions they will be announced.

Senator CARR—It is just that recently I had the pleasure of speaking to some educational officials in the cities of Ballarat and Bendigo—

Senator Vanstone—Lovely places.

Senator CARR—I was advised there that in Bendigo some 300 persons are estimated to be broadly defined as street kids and that those persons will now be expected to enter the education facilities of the fine city of Bendigo. Teachers and education administrators are particularly concerned that there are no measures being provided to assist them to cope with that influx in a city such as Bendigo. Now, Minister, could you draw to my attention what action this government is taking to facilitate the re-entry of those 300 or 400, or whatever it might be, students in Bendigo?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, isn't it a shame the schools, up until this point, have not chosen to realign their activities to provide for those children? They are now in that position. In response to the second part of your question, I refer you to the answer that you have been given ad infinitum this morning.

Senator CARR—I take it, Minister, there are no actions?

Senator Vanstone—Whatever you like, Senator. I have told you that when the government is ready to make an announcement with respect to these matters it will.

Senator CARR—I trust it is quickly, Minister, because the people are actually trying to cope with these circumstances and commence the planning for the next school year. They would expect, and should have a reasonable expectation, that having announced policy decisions you provide the money to support those policy decisions.

Senator Vanstone—Your implication, Senator, is that the school system is not capable, in its present state, of coping with all the children; that the school system actually encourages students to leave in order to give itself an easier time. That is a negative inference on the school system which I would not cast.

Senator CARR—I am sure that you have been in the job long enough to know how the education system actually works and you would know that these students will require smaller classes, specialist courses and specialist teachers. They will require quite substantial additional resources. If they are put into existing classes, they can actually undermine the education attainment of a much larger number of people unless the resources are provided to back them up.

Senator Vanstone—If they are put into classes that do not suit them, that lack relevance for them—classes without vocational training—and they are expected to behave as though they

are students who will go on to university, I have no doubt that they would be disruptive. That is pretty obvious. That is the whole point about getting more vocational training into schools. What I would be interested to know is what the schools are doing. What are they doing in any event with their existing resources and opportunities? What are they planning to do to cater for all their students? Are they simply saying, 'We couldn't possibly do anything unless there is more money and more programs, otherwise we cannot do anything'? I do not think the school system is that inflexible. I do not think teachers are so minded.

Senator CARR—There have been substantial reductions in resources already in a number of state systems. Class sizes are growing, retention rates are falling and, in fact, the professional development of teachers is declining as a result of the decline in resources. You are now asking the schools to undertake additional responsibilities without the resources—

Senator Vanstone—Senator, you do go on. I will ask Mr Daniels to respond to the assertions you have just made in relation to the Commonwealth's contribution in this area.

Senator CARR—Right.

Mr Evans—Just to pick up a point that you raised about funding: Commonwealth funding for schools is projected to increase in each year of the forward estimates.

Senator CARR—We have been through all of this—

Senator Vanstone—It is an inconvenient reality for you, Senator Carr.

CHAIR—We will have your next question, Senator Carr.

Senator CARR—We also know that it is private schools that are getting the bulk of that increase and that particularly advantaged social areas are getting it. These particular students do not live in those areas and do not have access to those private schools that your government is funding. That is really the issue at stake here. You actually asked some people—

CHAIR—Do you have another question, Senator Carr?

Senator Vanstone—I think that there is some more information I would like the officers to give the senator in relation to that little outburst.

Senator CARR—Yes, I am sure you do, Minister. We have the figures.

Mr Daniels—Senator, there are not decisions which impact in any sense other than on individual states. There has been a maintenance of Commonwealth effort for the current quadrennium. To my knowledge there are no per capita or recurrent reductions which have applied to individual state systems. What state governments have done by way of their own recurrent costs in their own support for state systems varies across the country, as you would expect.

Senator CARR—That is right. So the enrolment benchmark adjustment has no impact?

Mr Daniels—The enrolment benchmark adjustment has not applied.

Senator CARR—We will come to that. Let me ask the minister: you would be aware that in Victoria some 300 schools are closed; that an additional 34 sites have closed through mergers of government schools; that in recent times a number of schools that have been closed have done so as a result of what the government considers to be the unfinancial viability of those schools, and that private schools are often opening in the same sites with half the number of students of the former public institution. Are you aware of that, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, at just about every estimates you choose to raise this point about Victoria. As you know, decisions like that are for the Victorian government to implement and for the Victorian government to answer for.

Senator CARR—Yes. Is it the case that there have been additional applications for new school funding since the last estimates?

Mr Daniels—Senator, that would be correct. There is no cut-off date.

Senator CARR—That is right. So are you now able to update the tables that you provided me in previous estimates?

Mr Daniels—We would be able to do that, Senator.

Senator CARR—Could you do that in terms of questions 202, 204 and 205? What is now the aggregate number of new schools that have received Commonwealth funding this year?

Ms Andruska—The information previously provided to you was for 20 June. Since then there have been an additional three new schools approved. That is as at 1 August.

Senator CARR—Does that now make it 100?

Ms Andruska—No, 96. Ninety-three to 96.

Senator CARR—Where are those three schools?

Ms Andruska—There is one school in Bourke, New South Wales, one in Toowoomba in Queensland and one in Rockingham in Western Australia.

Senator CARR—How many applications do you currently have for schools in Victoria that have not been taken through to the final approval or rejection stage?

Ms Andruska—I do not have that information. There are only, at the moment, 20 applications that are outstanding that we have received that have not been taken through to the final process because applications have been either incomplete or only just recently received.

Senator CARR—That is 20 additional applications. How many are there across the country? Is that 20 for Victoria?

Ms Andruska—No. That was 20 across the country, which would cover the whole range of types of applications under new schools, extensions, progressive extensions, relocations, separations and for other reasons like change of name.

Senator CARR—There were 194 applications in May. How many are there now?

Ms Andruska—As at 1 August 231 applications have been received.

Senator CARR—Are the 20 additional applications that have not been processed for new schools?

Ms Andruska—They range across—

Senator CARR—Can you give me an indication of the breakdown of those 20?

Ms Andruska—I cannot give them to you today. I will take it on notice.

Senator CARR—In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 1 July, Minister, your junior minister's office was claiming that only five new schools had opened their doors this year. How was that figure calculated?

Senator Vanstone—I do not know. One of the officers here might be able to help but if not we will take it on notice and speak to Dr Kemp for you.

Mr Daniels—I am not aware of the article, Senator.

Senator CARR—I will draw it to your attention: it is on page 1, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday, 1 July. 'New funding rules open private school floodgates' was the headline and it says in the second last paragraph, 'A spokesman for federal minister for schools, Dr Kemp,

said only five new non-government schools opened their doors for the first time this year.' It is my understanding that the new school applications had increased this year by over 100 per cent.

Mr Daniels—I do not know whether the spokesperson for Dr Kemp was quoted accurately or whether the context of the article was accurate, but certainly the answers to the questions we have given you and which we have agreed to update is an accurate reflection of the status of—

Senator CARR—Yes. I expect that. It is just that I am puzzled by the apparent inconsistency there. Do you handle schools as job brokers in this particular section?

Mr Grant—I would suggest that those matters might be taken up under the employment program.

Senator CARR—Will officers from the schools division be available then?

Mr Grant—They can be, by agreement, if needed.

Senator CARR—We have been through this before. That is why I asked the question.

Mr Grant—We can arrange for that to happen.

Senator CARR—I would like to refer you to an article that appeared in the *Melbourne Age* on 11 August which indicated that the department or the minister said that there was a new version of technical schools to be proceeded with as a result of the Commonwealth government's actions. Are you familiar with that article, 'New version of technical schools planned'?

Senator Vanstone—I saw the report, I think, some time ago.

Senator CARR—If the Commonwealth is planning to establish technical schools—

Senator Vanstone—The Commonwealth is not, Senator. You understand what the Commonwealth is planning.

Senator CARR—You are saying that nonetheless it is not planning to establish technical schools—

Senator Vanstone—The Commonwealth would like to see more vocational training available in schools.

Senator CARR—Yes, I see. The minister announced, as I understand it, that Victorian schools would receive most of a \$6 million allocation to increase the level and quality of apprenticeships in schools. Ninety schools throughout Victoria will receive funding to allow young people to start apprenticeships and traineeships in schools. Have I understood that correctly?

Senator Vanstone—My officers can give you some information on that matter, Senator.

Ms Johnston—Dr Kemp was announcing the allocation of some funds under the school to work program. A strategic component of that program has just been announced. It will include some projects which will involve students starting paid apprenticeships at schools, but a lot of the other projects will involve a range of activities, particularly things like development of innovative partnership models for delivery of vocational educational and training in schools and including associated professional development with that. There will also be development of programs which support students in years 9 and 10 to access vocational educational and training in their senior years.

Senator CARR—But that is moneys for all of Australia, not for one state?

Ms Johnston—The \$6 million, yes.

Senator CARR—For all of Australia, not for one state?

Ms Johnston—Yes.

Senator CARR—How many young people do you think will benefit from this decision?

Ms Johnston—It is hard to estimate precisely. At least 18,000 we believe will benefit, but a number of projects have not a direct impact on individual students but an impact on systems.

Senator CARR—How many secondary schools would participate in such a program?

Ms Johnston—At least 175 will be directly involved. Others will be impacted because of the innovative projects that they might be able to take up in the future.

Senator CARR—Is this new moneys? Is this a new program that is being announced?

Ms Johnston—It is part of the school to work program.

Senator CARR—Is it part of the matters that were already announced in August? Is that part of the \$147 million announced in August?

Ms Johnston—Yes, part of the \$147 million.

Senator CARR—So it is actually not a new program at all?

Ms Johnston—It is the allocation of that money.

Senator CARR—I see. When do you expect the moneys to be distributed?

Ms Johnston—We are preparing contracts with the organisations which should be distributed very shortly.

Senator CARR—So you are contracting the money out. How is the money being distributed?

Ms Johnston—Through an advertised selection process. Organisations including schools were invited to submit proposals under this program.

Senator CARR—So it will not all go to schools?

Ms Johnston—To some schools.

Senator CARR—How many schools?

Ms Johnston—I do not have a figure of exactly how many schools. There are 28 projects being funded.

Senator CARR—I see. Can you give me a list of the schools?

Ms Johnston—We could take that on notice.

Senator CARR—Thank you very much. How are they being chosen?

Ms Johnston—Through a competitive selection process.

Senator CARR—Who are they competing against?

Ms Johnston—I think approximately 260 applications were received initially.

Senator CARR—Could we have a full list of the applications?

Ms Johnston—There was a two stage process whereby a large number of organisations applied. These were short listed and I think 68 were invited to put a final submission.

Senator CARR—How many schools were amongst those 68?

Ms Johnston—I do not have a figure on exactly how many schools. There were consortiums of schools and individual schools.

Senator CARR—Clusters?

Ms Johnston—Clusters.

Senator CARR—Was it a significant number?

Ms Johnston—There are a significant number of schools involved. I do not have the exact figure.

Senator CARR—I am just trying to get a fix on this. Are we talking about half the 68?

Ms Johnston—I have a breakdown of the recommended projects by organisation. Eleven projects are being run by schools, out of the 28 which were successful.

Senator CARR—Eleven! It strikes me that it is a long way from material presented to the *Age* that there would be a new version of technical schools planned. There are 11!

Ms Johnston—I am not aware of where the *Age* got that information from. It is not—

Senator CARR—Presumably the minister's office.

Ms Johnston—I do not believe that is what is in the minister's office press release.

Senator CARR—It is not in the press statement?

Ms Johnston—Not in the press release.

Senator CARR—Perhaps I can have a copy of that press release so I can confirm it. It is obvious that reporters can sometimes get it wrong, but if it is not from that source presumably it is from others. How is this scheme actually going to work? With the 11 schools or clusters, what time will be spent, in terms of New Apprenticeships, between school and work?

Ms Johnston—Senator, the program funds 28 different projects, each of which has been put up as an innovative project to model different ways, so there would be a lot of different versions of what happens in this program. I cannot give you a figure on how much time would be spent on apprenticeships.

Senator CARR—These are important issues in terms of what actually is undertaken for this money. Presumably if it is an apprenticeship some time was spent on the job. Is that the case?

Ms Johnston—I believe so, yes.

Senator CARR—So how many students who will have access to this program might be termed new apprentices?

Ms Johnston—I would have to look at each of the 28 projects and work out how many would involve part-time apprentices.

Senator CARR—Right. How many traineeships, please?

Ms Johnson—A similar answer.

Senator CARR—This program has been advertised as one to allow young people to start apprenticeships and traineeships in schools. I would be interested to know how many students will be starting apprenticeships and traineeships in schools as a result of this program.

Ms Johnston—Our early estimates of that are that around 900 would start apprenticeships and traineeships through this program.

Senator CARR—Of that 900, how many will be working?

Ms Johnston—If they are on apprenticeships, they will be doing part-time work.

Senator CARR—That is the point. So how much time will be spent on the job and off the job? Do we have any figures on that?

Ms Johnston—I cannot answer that.

Senator CARR—If we say that in a traditional apprenticeship some 280 hours of training are provided per year—which is about the average, as I understand it; it might vary slightly from state to state—how many hours of training will there be through this particular programs of apprenticeships in schools?

Ms Johnston—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator CARR—Thank you. How many of the 900 students will be supervised by qualified teachers in the particular trade area?

Ms Johnston—Again, I would have to take that on notice.

Senator CARR—Thank you. What is the nature of that qualification?

Ms Johnston—I will take that on notice.

Senator CARR—What arrangements have been made to provide appropriate learning environments for new apprentices and traineeships in schools? How much of the \$6 million will go towards capital works or will it all be recurrent moneys?

Ms Johnston—It is recurrent funds.

Senator CARR—All recurrent moneys. So it is wages, is it?

Ms Johnston—It would include wages of teachers involved.

Senator CARR—To what other purposes is this recurrent funding being put?

Ms Johnston—As I mentioned, professional development. There would be a variety of funding arrangements for each of the projects.

Senator CARR—If it is for a traditional high school that is offering a new apprenticeship course, were you saying professional development for the craft teacher was to be upgraded? Is that the idea?

Ms Johnston—It could be to upgrade teachers' qualifications.

Senator CARR—Can I get a specific answer there, please, not just 'could be'? What is it being spent on?

Ms Johnston—As I have mentioned, there are 28 projects. I would have to look at each one of them and work it out.

Senator CARR—If you would not mind, please. I would like to know: how much money has been allocated to upgrade teachers' qualifications so they are qualified to take apprentices?

Mr Daniels—Perhaps it might assist your understanding of this program if we were able to provide an analysis of the organisations, including schools, state education departments and others who are amongst the 28 sponsors or owners of the projects against the selection criteria—and there were seven elements of the selection criteria—with some indication against each of the 28 projects as to what elements of the selection criteria are addressed by the proponents, and some indication in response to your earlier question as to, wherever possible, the number of students in individual schools who will be specifically assisted project by project.

I suspect from your line of questioning that some of the specifics you are asking for would require extensive analysis and, indeed, may not be available in the individual applications. I suggest to you that approach. I have given you some information project by project and addressing the specific selection criteria under the program. That may well assist you.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I appreciate your assistance in that regard. Specifically, I am interested to know whether or not students who undertake these courses will not be seriously disadvantaged by undertaking programs for which not sufficient planning has been undertaken.

It has been put to me that schools not equipped to take apprentices do not have the capital equipment or the necessarily trained staff. They have resorted to the extensive use of pictures to demonstrate the use of machinery and techniques because they do not have the facilities that were even provided in the old technical schools I am familiar with in the state of Victoria. Can you assure me that that is not true, it is not happening and will not happen under this program?

Mr Daniels—I do not think the officers here are in a position to advise you project by project about the specifics in the way in which individual schools or program proponents are intending to proceed. As I have indicated, by giving you the analysis of projects, the department perhaps would allow some further questioning along those lines.

Senator CARR—What is the unit cost of providing this training in schools?

Mr Daniels—Which training?

Senator CARR—The training that you are proposing be covered by this \$6 million program to start apprenticeships and traineeships in schools. What is the unit cost? What is the basis on which the department has calculated the cost of providing such training in schools?

Mr Daniels—The program itself is intended to support about 18,000 students. It is a program that costs about \$6 million.

Senator CARR—Six million dollars is exactly right. If it is to be compared—and, presumably, if they undertake such a program, young people would expect to have a qualification of equal value to that of every other person undertaking such a qualification through a TAFE college—will it be of equal value?

Mr Daniels—I cannot answer that question. But the program is a program which assumes existing infrastructure, both in the school sector and the vocational education sector, which would be accessed by the proponents.

Senator CARR—The problem is that most schools do not have the infrastructure to support apprenticeship training. Would you agree?

Mr Daniels—Absolutely, Senator.

Senator CARR—So how can you offer moneys on this basis to schools that clearly do not have the infrastructure to support apprenticeship training?

Mr Daniels—Senator, I am not agreeing that the schools which will benefit from this program are schools that do not have the infrastructure.

Senator CARR—You are not agreeing?

Mr Daniels—I am not agreeing.

Senator CARR—What quality assurance has been undertaken by the department?

Mr Daniels—This has been a competitive process from 240 applicants. Out of 240 applicants, 28 have been selected. In assessing the projects against selection criteria, the department has used its own resources, and the resources of educationists outside the organisation, to come up with judgments about relative priorities.

Senator CARR—So, you can assure this committee, as a result of the use of these resources in this way, that persons undertaking these apprenticeships in schools will not be disadvantaged, can you?

Mr Daniels—Certainly that is the intention of the program.

Senator CARR—I am asking if the department is in a position to assure this committee.

Mr Daniels—The selection process I have tried to explain is one that is aiming at an outcome that is to benefit the students. Clearly, the department would have no intention at all of disadvantaging any individual student.

Senator CARR—I appreciate that you have no intention to disadvantage anyone. I would not accuse you of such a proposition. I would not even accuse the government of deliberately seeking to disadvantage students. But I would suggest to you that—

Senator Vanstone—Is this an indication that you are turning a new leaf?

Senator CARR—No. You may not be intentionally seeking to disadvantage, but is it not a matter of the import of what actually occurs? It is a separate issue.

Senator Vanstone—I can give you your answer, Senator.

Senator CARR—If you have no idea of the unit cost of such programs, I am wondering on what basis you can calculate that students will not be disadvantaged.

Mr Daniels—Senator, I do not think there would be any agreement across the country of a unit cost.

Senator CARR—Yes, there is. That is the whole point. Through ANTA, there is an agreement as to what the unit costs are. In fact, I put it to you that your own cabinet submissions have indicated a unit cost. Is that not the case?

Mr Daniels—I am not in a position to comment on cabinet submissions.

Senator CARR—No, I did not think you would. It is not clear from my understanding of the circumstances that your department does have a clear understanding of the unit costs of operating a VET sector.

Ms Johnston—Senator, I would add that, while I do not believe there is a unit cost currently available, it is certainly an area that is being investigated by the MCEETYA task force on vocational education and training in schools.

Senator CARR—Yes, that is right. In fact, it is an integral part of the ANTA agreement, is it not?

Mr Evans—Senator, we are not as familiar with the ANTA agreement as the people from program 3 would be.

Senator CARR—Yes. These are about schools, though. We are talking now specifically about schools, and I would like to know whether you have any indications as to the amount of time apprentices, under this proposal, will be spending in the school?

Ms Johnston—We will include that in the answer we have taken on notice.

Senator CARR—Thank you, and the amount of time that apprentices presumably would be spending off, or on, the job?

Ms Johnston—We will include that.

Senator CARR—Do I take it that persons will not be able to enter such a program unless they are 16 years of age?

Ms Johnston—It is for people in years 11 or 12, so it is not an age restriction.

Senator CARR—Not an age restriction! There is no age restriction on this? How does that comply with the normal—

Mr Grant—To the extent that there are standard provisions relating to apprenticeships—state by state—I would certainly expect that those provisions will be honoured in the normal way.

Senator CARR—So, to the extent that there is a standard provision, I presume the Commonwealth is not seeking to break the law?

Mr Grant—I would also presume that, Senator.

Ms Johnston—No.

Senator CARR—Is it the case that there are in fact restrictions on age for apprenticeships across this country?

Mr Grant—Yes; my understanding is that there are such limits and provisions.

Senator CARR—I come back to the proposition that, if you have a program here to ask school students to take apprenticeships, you presumably, as a Commonwealth government, do not anticipate breaking the law and therefore there must be a restriction on age.

Ms Johnston—Part-time apprenticeships and traineeships under this program will be delivered in accordance with whatever regulations apply in the states.

Senator CARR—With the law in the states: I appreciate that.

Mr Grant—Of course.

Senator CARR—It is the case that there are some 900 persons expected to benefit from this measure, and you have already taken on notice how that 900 will be broken down between apprenticeships and traineeships: it is not 18,000, is it? That is the figure that has been used.

Ms Johnston—As I mentioned before, the 18,000 refers to people who will be directly or indirectly receiving some benefit from the various projects.

Senator CARR—Yes. But that is not 18,000 in schools; that is all I wanted to be clear on.

Ms Johnston—It is 18,000 students in schools, some of whom will be in years 9 and 10—obviously not in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships.

Senator CARR—I see. So 18,000 persons will be touched by this program?

Ms Johnston—Touched by it, yes.

Senator CARR—I am worried about them being ‘touched up’ by this program! What is the nature of the credentialling process for students who participate in these programs in years 9 and 10? Will any of their work be accredited or be part of any credit transfer arrangements for future VCE, or the equivalent year 12 qualifications at the various state levels—HSC, or whatever it happens to be?

Ms Johnston—I am not aware. There are 28 separate projects, as I have said. We have to look at each one and see what the qualification was, or what was implied in each program.

Senator CARR—Has that not been established?

Ms Johnston—It would be in the detailed application forms for each of the projects.

Senator CARR—Could you indicate to me, when you examine the credit transfer arrangements for young people participating in these vocational education schemes, whether there would be any disadvantage experienced in terms of their future VCE or HSC studies?

Ms Johnston—We will look at that.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I noticed that in an answer to question 50 the department indicated that the intention of vocational education would be to complement general education. It should be available as a viable education option for all students, including those who have tertiary aspirations. What action can you advise this committee of in regard to state education authorities actually revising their curriculums and assessment procedures to accommodate these programs?

Ms Johnston—I am sorry, Senator Carr. I have now got the question in front of me. Could you repeat your question?

Senator CARR—Yes. You will notice the reference there to the notion that the intention of vocational education is to complement general education and that all students presumably have access to these arrangements. What action has the department taken, and what actions have state education authorities taken, to ensure that there has been a revision of curriculums and assessment procedures to accommodate this program?

Mr Jalayer—There has been a number of reviews by states of the secondary certificates. In particular, New South Wales has recently reviewed its HSC certificate. There have been a number of recommendations made in terms of the implementation of vocational education in schools and I believe New South Wales has yet to respond to that report. I also believe both Victoria and Queensland are reviewing their certificates along the same lines.

Senator CARR—At this stage no action has actually been taken other than to have a review in a number of states?

Mr Jalayer—Again, nothing has been mentioned. The MCEETYA task force has been given the mandate for basically recommending how vocational education should be implemented within schools particularly in respect of New Apprenticeships. Included in that is how it is to be implemented in terms of timetabling of schools, the number of hours available that a student should be at school as compared with the number on the job, what sort of agreement arrangement should be put into place, and what additional unit costs should be provided to schools for the provision of vocational education. As you may be aware, some \$80 million of ANTA funds have been provided to schools over a four-year period specifically for the implementation or expansion of vocational education, and we are talking accredited vocational education. All of that, or at least the \$80 million from ANTA, is concentrated in years 11 and 12.

Senator CARR—Yes. To repeat the question, though, what actions have the states taken to adjust their curriculums or their credential processes to accommodate these new arrangements?

Mr Jalayer—Every secondary board of studies has taken this on board in terms of exactly what they have to do for dual accreditation; that is how they have to accredit vocational courses which can also be recognised for the senior secondary certificate. All boards of studies are undertaking that. They have been provided additional funding—sometimes through the ANTA funds—and again every state, as far as I am aware, is undertaking some form of action in the implementation of vocational education. That includes the accreditation which is the fundamental of implementation for bringing the two together.

Senator CARR—What I am concerned about is that Commonwealth moneys are being distributed for these programs before states have actually changed their curricula or their accreditation processes. Has any state actually announced changes up to this point?

Mr Jalayer—As I said, this program has only just been implemented. The beginning of this year saw the agreement as to the actual provision of funds. That is the \$80 million which is the main bucket of funds for the expansion. Negotiations have been undertaken between states, their state training authorities and ANTA. Agreements have been signed only recently—at the beginning of the financial year—so most of these programs are in their infant stage. The Commonwealth funds or ANTA funds—

Senator CARR—Can I just come back to that. You have said ‘this financial year’. So they are only commencing as of this month?

Mr Jalayer—The funds, in most cases, have started flowing only towards the middle of this year and, as I said, yes, towards the beginning of this financial year. Only a few states signed their agreements with their state training authorities earlier this year. The majority have been in a negotiation position, particularly addressing some of the concerns you have addressed—how it is going to be funded, what they can spend the money for, whether it can be used for capital purposes, whether it can be used for professional development purposes, et cetera.

Senator CARR—Can it be used for the purchase of equipment?

Mr Jalayer—I believe that is one of the issues that have been up for negotiation. I do not believe that anyone has actually had a contract signed on that basis, but I would have to check up on that.

Senator CARR—Could you, please. And I would ask, in terms of professional development: what particular contracts have been signed, in terms of the expenditure, for the upgrading of high school teachers for the teaching of what is regarded as traditional TAFE work, and what is the nature of that upgrade?

Mr Jalayer—As far as I know, the guidelines for the ANTA \$80 million allow professional development on a once-off basis. I believe that has been interpreted to mean that for any project there is allowable an initial professional development component to at least allow teachers to be upgraded for that purpose.

Additionally, the school to work program has provided funds—this was for last financial year—that can be used for the full calendar year for the upgrading of existing teachers for professional development, for vocational education. The remainder of the state based component of the schools program for the next three years is available to provide for increasing the level of expertise within schools to teach vocational education, particularly by either bringing in industry people that have experience with vocational programs or organising exchanges.

Senator CARR—I understand that, but this is why I come back to these questions about the costings. On what basis has the department calculated its costings? It is put to me that the unit cost of the VET in schools projects, for these apprenticeships, is actually calculated to be something less than a half of the cost of training undertaken in a traditional TAFE college. It varies between various industries but on average it is about half. Is that true? Is the expectation that this will be substantially cheaper than the unit costs for a TAFE college, and is it also true that it could be cheaper by as much as half?

Mr Jalayer—I am not aware of any of these studies. None of these have been made available to the department or the area that I actually work in, which is schools. As I said before, there is work being undertaken in ANTA, but I am afraid we have not had any such things made available and it would not be the intention—

Senator CARR—I would ask you to take that on notice, because the department presumably supervises ANTA in these matters and you are responsible for the running of VET in schools. I put it to you that, in terms of the department's calculation for the pre-apprenticeship and pre-traineeship training programs and the various positions that you are currently working on within the department, the cost calculations that you are making are approximately half the costs of programs. I refer you specifically to the access program and the allocation that you are making of 1,300 places, with an expectation of program costs of \$16.3 million and a running cost allocation of \$0.8 million. Or, equally, the other option that you are currently considering, the allocation of \$40 million for programs or \$1.95 million running costs for 3,200 places over four years, is in fact half the allocations for the running of such programs in the TAFE sector.

Mr Grant—We will take that on notice.

Senator CARR—Would you also advise me: what is the nature of the upgrading for high school teachers to undertake such programs, normally considered to be TAFE programs? Is it the case that there are programs being offered to teachers for such upgrading which consist of eight hours of in-service training?

Mr Jalayer—As I mentioned earlier, there is a program, called the state based component of the school to work program, which is providing, I believe, about \$15 million over four years for the upgrading of the level of knowledge in schools to teach vocational education. Part of that program involves the upgrading of existing teachers. I am sorry, I cannot confirm those figures you said. We are not aware of any figures to that effect and we have not in any way—

Senator CARR—Okay. But I put it to you again: you are responsible for the administration of a program, you are responsible for the outcomes of such a program and, I presume, the quality assurance of such a program. If it is the case that teachers are being provided with a one-day course to upgrade a high school teacher to become a trade teacher, then that, by any calculation, is inadequate.

Mr Jalayer—As I said, I am not quite aware of those figures. We are interested in outcomes, in terms of exactly what is achieved at the end. How that is actually achieved, given the state of schools administration, is more or less left to states.

Senator CARR—This is a traditional answer that we have been through for many years under many governments now, with many ministers. But, at the end of the day, we have a lot of young people who are being drawn into these programs. They are being widely advertised by ministers to provide some nirvana, but in fact they may not be worth a dob of glue. If it is the case that young people are being told to go into these programs and there is no capital equipment to support them, no tools effective to train them in the necessary skills and no teachers to train them, then what we have got is a cheap gimmick which could seriously disadvantage young people.

Mr Jalayer—The establishing of the vocational education program in schools does not necessarily imply that the actual vocational education has to be undertaken in schools. In terms of all the programs which we are trying to implement, they are all supposed to be accredited so they must be taught by accredited providers. We do not specify whether the provider must be within a school or outside a school, a TAFE system or external. We would assume that, if students are being taught qualifications that expect and demand any funds that we provide, it must be through accredited training by qualified providers.

Senator CARR—That is right. You would expect that to happen. I am putting it to you that that is not happening. I am also putting it to you that, in experience that I have had in recent

times, in the last break, I have had the opportunity to go and talk to a few TAFE institute directors. They have advised me that, in terms of the subcontracting to TAFE colleges for schools operating these programs, they have been offering those courses at 70 per cent of cost, to meet the budgetary requirements that presumably the department has imposed. They have been ordered from next year to charge the full fee.

There is no obligation on those schools to actually use the TAFE institute. If they cannot meet the budgetary requirements that are being imposed, is there not a danger that the quality will drop even further?

Mr Grant—If you could supply us with the specific information which you are quoting, in sufficient detail for us to follow up those matters, we will be happy to do so and come back to you.

Senator CARR—I might put that on notice and go back to my sources to make sure that they are prepared to reveal the specifics.

Mr Grant—Fine.

Senator CARR—That may have to come outside of the normal cut-off period for the questions on notice. If necessary I will put it on notice through the chamber, if you could keep an eye out for that.

Mr Grant—You will understand, though, that we find it difficult to respond to generalities. The more specific and practical—

Senator CARR—Yes. Well I put to you that the generality is more widespread, given the obvious implications of such a policy decision, and that if I can identify these issues, the department, with all the experience and expertise that it has at its disposal, must have considered them as well.

Mr Grant—I would simply say, Senator, that of course we have an interest in issues of quality in the sorts of matters that you raise and if you can supply us with specific evidence that substantiates your concerns we will be happy to follow that up.

Senator CARR—I would also put to you that your departmental submission to the cabinet cites this very fact. It says, ‘It is expected that employer organisations and employers will be particularly supportive of measures—’ that is, this particular measure you have before the cabinet, and you understand what I am talking about in terms of attachment C, the access program—‘because it reduces the costs of training an apprentice and trainee and enables them to obtain a fully skilled worker more quickly.’ So I put it to you, Mr Grant, that the department has given quite considerable consideration to the question of training costs.

Mr Grant—You will understand, Senator, I am not in a position to comment—

Senator CARR—That you could not comment on a cabinet submission—yes, I appreciate that.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Mr Grant, I have a supplementary to one of the questions Senator Carr was asking earlier. You identified three groups that would be affected as a result of the common youth allowance changes. I understand that you are not in a position to give specific estimates as to the number of people who will be affected within those particular categories. But the first group that I was interested in was the one you identified as obviously not going on to further education and training—the ones that would be left out of the system. They would not be obtaining financial assistance either in group 2—that is, they would not qualify for the exemptions that the minister outlined. They would not go on to further education and training, so what do you envisage will happen to those people? I understand

you cannot give a specific estimate as to the number you expect will be left out of that financial assistance, but where do you expect that they will get some kind of income support?

Mr Grant—I think there are various possibilities. At all times, of course, those young people will have the option of meeting the conditions that will apply to the receipt of income support by choosing, if they wish to so choose, to return to education and training. So it is not as though in any sense they are being debarred from access to income support, provided that they meet the conditions. However, ultimately that will be their choice. We have entertained the possibility that some small number—and we would expect the number in this category to be small—might choose not to return to education and training and to rely on other forms of income support, for example, from family resources or other resources to which they have access.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—What kind of research or work is the department undertaking to find out more about that projected number or those particular groups, assuming you have some understanding of the people who might be affected and can perhaps get an idea of, or look into, the kind of family support that they would be entitled to now, let alone under the changes?

Mr Grant—It is extremely difficult to make estimates in these circumstances.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—I acknowledge that.

Mr Grant—The hope and the expectation would be that the numbers in this category would be very low because, typically, if these young people are receiving income support at the moment, it suggests that their circumstances are at the difficult end of the spectrum. Moreover, as you know and as the minister mentioned before, the whole policy intention underlying the youth allowance is to recognise the importance of education, training and skills, not only to the immediate prospects of young people but particularly to their longer-term prospects and performance in the labour market and in society at large.

The hope would be that most would exercise the more constructive choice, namely, to return to education and training where that is a condition of receiving income support under the youth allowance. But it is a theoretical possibility, at least, that some will not exercise that choice. As I say, we would hope and expect that the numbers involved would be very small, but we cannot ignore the possibility. To be honest, as far as I am aware we have not commissioned any specific research on that group, though as you would know there is a great deal of research that has been done over the years into the circumstances of highly disadvantaged young people. If you wish, we can come back to that issue when we consider youth matters later in the day.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—In response to Senator Carr, did you nominate a time when you would be willing to give an estimate of the number of people you expect to be affected within those particular categories? Or are you preferring to wait until the proposal is implemented?

Mr Grant—No. In response to Senator Carr's question earlier, I agreed that we would take that particular question on notice and come back, if at all possible, within whatever time limit applies to questions from these hearings.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Thank you. I have a couple of general questions that relate to the participation rates of public and private school graduates in the university system. I understand that some of these questions will overlap with higher education, so I am happy to put them on notice. Can I ask the minister, or departmental officials, what major

impediments have been identified by the department that would explain the different levels of participation in higher education?

CHAIR—Senator, you are moving on to subprogram 2.1. I know we do have officers here—

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Mr Chairman, I am willing to put that on notice, but it leads on to my particular interest within this category—that is, what programs within schools are being implemented to overcome some of these impediments?

CHAIR—With the agreement of the minister, perhaps we could call the relevant officer up from program 2, if that is necessary.

Senator Vanstone—Senator Stott Despoja wants to get to another matter, so I am happy to take that on notice and we will give an answer as best we can. There is a variety of assessments, as I understand it, that have been done. We will come back to you on that.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—I am happy for that to be taken on notice. At this stage then, with people from the schools department in this particular program, would someone be able to identify for me some of the initiatives that this government is taking in relation to ensuring that the participation rate of public school graduates in higher education, specifically the university system, is increased? Are there particular programs? I am happy for people to take that on notice as well.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, realistically, that might come under higher education as well.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—One final question, which can be taken on notice: how many students are streamed into internally assessed subjects in the final years of high school in government schools, for example, as opposed to non-government schools? That is, how many people are being internally assessed for the purposes of matriculation, or whatever the relevant state terminology is, versus those from private schools? Do you have that data available?

Mr Daniels—Senator, we could check, but I doubt whether the Commonwealth would have that information at all.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, just as a matter of interest, without wanting to delay the committee, in South Australia, as you realise, there are two sorts of assessment subjects you can do. There was a young lady who did five, six or seven subjects—I am not sure of the numbers—and the ones she did were the ones that were generally not done for university entry. She got straight 20s in all of them. You might have seen some publicity about this young woman who I think came from Snowtown.

As I am advised by Mary O’Kane, the Vice-Chancellor of Adelaide University, other than on a special entry program—which most universities have and that is a good thing—the young lady would not have qualified for entry to Adelaide University. That is an indication of the stupidity of relying on a single entry assessment arrangement. Everyone said that she was one of the brightest people in the state and should do medicine. I can happily inform you she is doing exactly what she wanted to do in the first place, which is nursing.

That separate assessment measure and the different weighting applied, which is definitely linked to access to university, may also be linked to not increasing access from public schools.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Because of that particular link I would be curious to find out. I realise it is a difficult statistic to obtain because of the Commonwealth’s access to that kind of information from non-government sources. It is difficult also because of the people who decide to do a mix of school assessed subjects and external assessed subjects. However, I will leave that on notice because I would be curious to see if you have any of those figures available. I will lodge the rest of my questions on notice.

Senator CARR—On 7 August Dr Kemp said that 9,000 apprenticeships could not be filled because of inadequacy in terms of literacy skills. Are any of the officers familiar with that claim?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, that is best dealt with under program 3.

Senator CARR—Fine, I will deal with it then. You are quoted in the *Age* of 9 August as saying:

I have little doubt that the ideologically driven dismantling of technical schools, without any form of replacement, is a significant factor in the high rate of youth unemployment.

Were you quoted correctly?

Senator Vanstone—I could check if those were the exact words I used, but that is roughly my view.

Senator CARR—Can you indicate to the committee whether that view is based on any research?

Senator Vanstone—I can indicate to you what the view is based on. If you look at the make-up of the unemployed you will see the disadvantage someone is at if they do not go into some form of further training. You have agreed with that yourself, there is across-the-board agreement. It is not a party political matter.

We need more vocational training in schools. We need to make schools more relevant to those who do not want to go on to university. That is a clear admission that we have not provided sufficient vocational training in schools. That has meant that school has not been as relevant to some students as we all would have liked. That has contributed to some of them leaving early. We have discussed some of this this morning. We know that if you leave school early, in a world where unskilled jobs are diminishing in number, you diminish your chances of getting a job.

Senator CARR—So it was an intuitive response, was it, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—I do not know that I would describe it as intuitive. You agree, and there is a general agreement across the board that we need more vocational training in schools. There are figures available to show the make-up of unemployed, some of which I have given you this morning, indicating the risk someone puts themselves at if they do not complete year 12 or undertake further training. These issues have been very broadly canvassed. They were canvassed, for example, in the higher education debate on the increased private benefit, a very special private benefit, that graduates get by further training.

I do not think I would describe as intuitive what you and I agree on. That is, we agree that the more education and training you have the more the likelihood you have of not only getting a job—it is not as basic as that—but also of having a rewarding and satisfying life.

Senator CARR—You mention specifically the dismantling of technical schools. Was that reference accurate?

Senator Vanstone—I am sorry. I have been busy talking to you rather than checking. We did dismantle them. They were dismantled by the states.

Senator CARR—They were dismantled. Is that consistent with what you are saying?

Senator Vanstone—Yes.

Senator CARR—You said, ‘the ideologically driven dismantling of technical schools’—

Senator Vanstone—Yes, yes.

Senator CARR—Was there any research undertaken to support that statement?

Senator Vanstone—What do you mean? The adjective ‘ideologically driven’?

Senator CARR—Either one. I do not mind which one.

Senator Vanstone—We agreed that they have been dismantled, so we do not need anything to ascertain that. I presume that is what you are asking. I am just trying to find out what you are asking.

Senator CARR—Was there any research undertaken that you are aware of—

Senator Vanstone—I do not think research is required to make that statement.

Senator CARR—You do not think there is any research required?

Senator Vanstone—No.

Senator CARR—If that is the case, Minister, would you agree that the old technical schools had a much higher operating cost than the conventional high school?

Senator Vanstone—I do not know, Senator.

Senator CARR—Perhaps I could advise you that there were substantially higher operating costs in the technical division. For instance, in the education department of Victoria, that came about as a result of the higher student specification rates. There were larger classes. The physical environment in a technical school was different from that provided at a high school. The provision of lathes and various other items of equipment in the technical school meant that the cost of equipping a school was higher than a high school. They had a smaller staff-student ratio. In Victoria, it was one to 20. Minister, are you familiar with any of those statistics?

Senator Vanstone—Not the ones that you have raised, Senator.

Senator CARR—Are you familiar with the proposition that there were higher operating costs involved in the operations of a technical school?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I do not have any argument with figures you might want to record in that respect.

Senator CARR—You do not. I am pleased to hear that. Minister, in that statement where you said an ideologically driven dismantling of technical schools without any form of replacement was a significant factor in a higher rate of youth unemployment, were you foreshadowing a new system of funding of schools to enable them to re-equip with the necessary hardware and staff support for a stronger vocational educational emphasis?

Senator Vanstone—No, Senator. I was simply highlighting what I understand from your remarks this morning is an agreed commitment across all parties—and, I think, governments—to get more. I have not checked with Minister Aquilina. I mentioned Minister Honeywood’s efforts in Victoria this morning. I could mention Minister Barnett’s efforts in Western Australia.

There is an agreement that we have to have more vocational training in schools. You cannot turn the clock back. Nobody suggests that you can. Generally speaking, I think you cannot—maybe on some occasions you can. What you can do is put vocational training in schools and establish links with schools and industry for kids for whom, if you do not do that, school will be irrelevant. You can give them a chance; you can give them a pathway to plan and we all think that is important.

Senator CARR—There are things that can be done, like the provision of technology centres. Has the Commonwealth any plans to provide the states with additional moneys to fund technology centres in schools?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, whenever the Commonwealth decides to make an announcement that it is going to spend some money, it will make it.

Senator CARR—Are you familiar, Minister, with the demographics that occurred in the technical schools in the state of Victoria compared to those of a general high school?

Senator VANSTONE—No, Senator.

Senator CARR—Were you aware that there was a much higher level of funding for special needs in those schools?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I have already indicated to you that the answer to that question is no. If that information is particularly relevant, I would be happy to have a look at it.

Senator CARR—Is the Commonwealth planning to provide any additional resources for special needs of students who are having greater difficulty and are subject to higher levels of unemployment?

Senator Vanstone—The way to assist those people who are suffering—or that cohort, if you like, not necessarily the individual people—from high levels of unemployment due to not having taken on further training is to get rid of the incentive that was there to leave school too early. The common youth allowance does that. We very much hope it will implement a newer system, where more people are backing up the previous government's policy changes, and more people will stay at school or go into further training.

The same question you were asking earlier today was: does the government plan, in addition to any per capita increases as a consequence of more students, to do anything subsequent to that? I have indicated to you that, if the government is thinking of doing something subsequent to that, when it announces it, you will be amongst the first to know.

Senator CARR—Are you aware, Minister, of last year's survey by ACER, which shows that currently 74 per cent of government schools, 64 per cent of Catholic schools and 25 per cent of independent schools across Australia provide some form of industry based programs—VET programs?

Senator Vanstone—Those figures do not particularly come to mind. I am very much aware that some schools across all the sections that you mentioned are doing it. Some are doing an excellent job. I did take the opportunity the other day to highlight—and have subsequently taken the opportunity to highlight again, with no parochialism particularly in mind—Salisbury High School, a government high school in my own state that has nothing short of an excellent record in catering to its students. I say that because, as I am advised, they have something like a 98 per cent employment level for their school leavers.

That means the school has recognised the cohort of people that it has coming in and it has provided what that cohort of people need. It clearly can be done. It is being done across the sectors in differing ways. But some schools are much, much better at it than others, and I would pick Salisbury High as being a first-rate example of what can be done.

Senator CARR—Yes, perhaps we can look at the general situation. Minister, I am sure you would be aware that, according to surveys that have been undertaken, now some 64 per cent of schools across Australia—which is an increase from 46 per cent in 1995—are running employment based programs, work experience type programs or the like.

Senator Vanstone—Isn't that good news?

Senator CARR—You would be aware of that, wouldn't you, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—It is very good news, don't you think?

Senator CARR—Yes, but would you be aware of it?

Senator Vanstone—I would not say those figures would have dropped out of my mind if you had asked me could I quote them without going back to look at some other information, Senator.

Senator CARR—But there has been a significant increase in the performance of schools in this area. Would you agree with that?

Senator Vanstone—Would you be happy with the performance thus far? Do you think it needs to go further?

Senator CARR—I am just wondering, Minister. It is just that you have made a big play of this proposition that school leavers from state secondary schools were 10 times more likely to end up on the dole than their private school counterparts.

Senator Vanstone—With respect, that is not quite right, Senator.

Senator CARR—Perhaps you would like to explain to us what is right.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I would be happy to do so. What I quoted in a speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in Adelaide, last week I think—

Senator CARR—I have it here as 8 August.

Senator Vanstone—A bit more than last week, sorry—is the need for schools to respond to the needs of all of their students, highlighting a speech that I made a week before that, that schools should not be TER factories and the concern I have with the TER in itself. I chose in that to refer to some ABS material on the destination of year 12 school leavers in 1995—not all school leavers. The figures would be quite different if you looked at all school leavers.

Looking at year 12 in 1995, the figures showed a number of things. For those who completed year 12 in 1995, twice as many boys from government schools as from non-government schools chose to enter the work force. That is a clear indicator in my speech of the different cohort that the schools are dealing with. I then went on to point out that 35 per cent of boys from government schools entering the work force—that is, leaving school to look for work—could not get a job. I translated that into the proportion of the school leavers—it is 14 per cent of all boys finishing at a government school who ended up unemployed—and I compared that to the same ABS figures in relation to non-government schools. But, as you would understand, you cannot extrapolate figures on year 12 to be a statement across the board. They are a cohort of school leavers quite different to all school leavers.

Senator CARR—Your speech said:

In total, the ABS estimates that of school leavers at the end of year 12 who end up being unemployed the proportion from government schools is ten times greater than the proportion from non-government schools.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I think that is right.

Senator CARR—You went on:

The bottom line is that for school leavers, private schools have beaten unemployment.

That is what you said, Minister, isn't it?

Senator Vanstone—Yes.

Senator CARR—I wanted to quote you directly there, because I know how easy it is to misrepresent these things, and the press often does. I notice that the quote from the *Age* that I referred to earlier was a quote taken directly from the speech as well. You said:

I have little doubt that the ideologically driven dismantling of technical schools, without any form of replacement, is a significant factor in the high rate of youth unemployment.

Given that, Minister, and given that you are not actually advocating that we spend any additional monies to facilitate the re-creation of technical schools—

Senator Vanstone—I have not actually said that. What I have said is that where more students go to schools, in relation to their per capita funding they will get more money; and I further indicated to you that when the government is ready to make an announcement about any subsequent actions it wishes to take in relation to this matter, it will announce them. I have not said to you that the government is not looking at any further initiatives.

Senator CARR—If we know that there are work related programs in 74 per cent of government schools and in 64 per cent of Catholic schools, but only 25 per cent of Australia's independent schools are providing those industry programs, don't you think it is a little inconsistent? Isn't there an inherent contradiction in the fact that the lowest percentage of vocationally oriented subjects is in private schools?

Senator Vanstone—I would like to come back to you on that. Equally, I would point out that some people would say that when you say that 10 times as many are likely to be unemployed in relation to year 12 leavers in 1995, you need to understand that it might not be a function of the schooling. I certainly did not assert that it was. It can be a whole range of factors.

Senator CARR—Like class, and some old-fashioned concepts like that; like the demographic from which these students are drawn.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, generally speaking. Some other aspects can come into play. A number of people from one side of the argument would say, speaking generally, that it is not surprising because a much higher proportion of the students who go to private schools would be expecting to go on to university and would not be expecting to go into employment, so the cohorts are different, and that is why. Many argue that it is because the cohorts coming in are different that it is very important to have increased vocational training in government schools, and I think it is probably an explanation of why it is a bit lower in the private schools. The other thing I would like to have a look at is the basis on which you, or whoever it was came to these percentages, came to them.

Senator CARR—ACER.

Senator Vanstone—Fair enough. Nobody is the bible. I am just pointing out to you the queries that I would want answered, that you may have if you have got the material in front of you. What does it mean to have ticked 'yes' in the box 'Has a vocational element in their school'? If they have a vocational element in their school—one class, perhaps, to do one particular type of vocational training—and that is it, they get a tick. Yet if the school that ticks 'yes' and gets a point for that has a very high cohort of kids that would benefit from vocational training, and that one class is clearly not enough, then I would say figures that show that 74 per cent have a vocational element do not give you a proper picture. Similarly, I would say with respect to a private school that if they had six classes and only a few students who wanted to take them, then they were over-catering.

Senator CARR—Yes, but you would acknowledge that the private schools in this country draw upon different social strata, in general.

Senator Vanstone—In general, yes.

Senator CARR—Would you acknowledge that students who go to private schools tend to be from better off and more privileged sections of our society?

Senator Vanstone—I would acknowledge that in general, yes.

Senator CARR—And that 60 per cent of private school students actually go on to university—would you acknowledge that?

Senator Vanstone—I have raised this point plenty of times. I have got a reasonably clear perception of what the situation is, and I do not know that your view would be very different from mine. That is one of the reasons I made a speech the previous week, and have decided to allocate \$1 million for pilot funding—seed funding—to look at new ways of looking at university entry. I believe that if you take a very bright student who goes to a school and sits in class with a cohort of kids that for one reason or another are of lesser ability, that kid will not get a TER score that is a proper reflection of his or her ability; and may well, as a consequence of relying solely on that TER, miss out on university entry. That comes back to the sort of stuff that Senator Stott Despoja was talking about. I have not said we should scrap the TER; I see a measure of value in it. But in my view, as I articulated the week before, if we rely solely on the TER, it clearly advantages students from private schools—from higher income families—in access to university.

Senator CARR—That is right. They are already privileged. But it is the nature of our education system that it tends to re-create social—

Senator Vanstone—You might make that comment. I am simply saying what I would like to look at is people working sensibly towards devising ways that can more fairly and more sensibly ascertain a student's ability rather than simply where they showed up in a TER assessment.

Senator CARR—The whole question emerges in terms of the approach that you are now taking, Minister, that it is abundantly clear that the private schools undertake a greater emphasis on academic subjects, and as a consequence seem to produce more people going to universities and therefore having access.

Senator Vanstone—It might be a consequence of the people they get in rather than the focus they put on at school.

Senator CARR—That might be the case, but we would both acknowledge that access to higher education provides you with access to a better range of life options. Would it not also follow that if it is a question of the type of studies being undertaken, schools would be encouraged to take on academic oriented studies? Is that not the logic of what you are suggesting?

Senator Vanstone—No, I do not think it is. There are a few lines—I do not think it is a poem—but it says, 'Beware of the temptation, difficult to resist, of the arrogance of rationality . . .' and on it goes.

Senator CARR—You are the one that has made these outrageous statements about public education in this country.

Senator Vanstone—You have a view that they are outrageous, Senator. I have simply quoted some ABS 1995 year 12 school leaver destination figures. They are not figures I have made up, they are the facts. If you are unhappy with them—

Senator CARR—And you have then loaded them up with the proposition that private schools have beaten unemployment. That is what you said. You sought to make political advantage out of that.

Senator Vanstone—The proportion of kids from private schools that end up unemployed is so small that the ABS has some difficulty in saying it is completely reliable. If you are at a private school and someone says that the percentage of students that are going to be looking for work is two per cent, then in anybody's language you have got there. There would be a variety of reasons for that, and we have already discussed that. Some of them relate to the cohort going in.

Senator CARR—Some of them.

Senator Vanstone—Yes.

Senator CARR—We have already established that you are not actually intending to spend any additional money to even up—

Senator Vanstone—No, we have not established that, Senator. You can keep raving on and repeating yourself all the time, and I will keep coming back and telling you that it is not what we have established. It is what you would like to establish, but, regrettably for you, you have not been able to.

Senator CARR—We will see whether that is the case in due course.

Senator Vanstone—In due course, we will, Senator, but you have not established it today.

Senator CARR—We have established though, Minister, that the success of private schools in ensuring that their participants go on to university may not necessarily be directly related to the failure of the public education system in this country.

Senator Vanstone—I do not see—

Senator CARR—Which is what you were suggesting in the quote:

The bottom line is that for school leavers, private schools have beaten unemployment.

Senator Vanstone—As I say to you, Senator, if you went to a private school in 1995, the year 12 exit figures show—and it varied from girls to boys, actually, down near two per cent—that you would have to say that that was the case. The figures were done by ABS, not by me. As I have indicated to you, there would be a variety of reasons for that, one of which may well be the cohort going in.

Senator CARR—Yes.

Senator Vanstone—Can I just say, too—you asked a question—to put it another way: would the answer not be, therefore, to put more academic classes into government schools? And I said that it would not be. You would fall into 'the temptation of the arrogance of rationality' if you did that. That is simply because—I come back to the whole point of that speech—schools must cater to the students that they have coming in.

I also made the point in the speech that schools should not be TER factories. Private schools, perhaps, have very thick skins. They have not taken that as a remark that in any way challenges the way in which they operate. I made the comment on TERs there and the week before that a school's job is not simply to get you a higher TER. A school's job is to prepare

you for life. But the whole thrust of that speech, which I am sure you have read—I hope you have—

Senator CARR—No.

Senator Vanstone—That is to say, you have to cater for the students you have coming in. Let me put it to you this way: if it is true that a particular type of school has a much greater cohort of people who are going to be looking for work, then that only underlines the point that that type of school with that type of cohort going in must have a much greater emphasis on vocational training. It must cater to the needs of its students. Students should be fitting in with schools. Schools should be providing what students need. Some will need help with getting their TER up, amongst the other, hopefully, broadening experiences they have at school. Some will need help in whatever studies they want to do to go on to TAFE. Others will need help in equipping them with the skills to go into entry level training. And still others will still want to leave school and get a job. Schools must cater to the cohort of students that they have. That was the whole point of the speech.

CHAIR—Are there any more questions on program 1.1?

Senator CARR—Yes. Minister, has the department finalised its projections for non-government schools enrolments for the year 2001?

Mr Evans—Senator, in response to a question on notice, we indicated that we had not for the year 2001.

Senator CARR—You had not?

Mr Evans—That is correct, Senator.

Senator CARR—You have provided me with information up until the year 2000.

Mr Evans—That is right.

Senator CARR—So you are saying that no growth was built in for the enrolments of 2001, and the projections for that year are still being finalised. Is that still the case?

Mr Evans—That is correct for budget time, Senator. There is some work being done on retention rates. I am not sure whether that work has been completed, but it is the impact of retention rates that would affect the projections for the year 2001.

Senator CARR—At what point will you be able to advise the committee on your projections for the year 2001?

Mr Evans—Senator, I believe that within the deadline for any responses to this hearing, I would be able to provide you with that information.

Senator CARR—So, you will be able to take on notice at this point to provide the committee with a projection of private school enrolments for the year 2001?

Mr Evans—That is correct—for government and non-government, because I think you asked two questions.

Senator CARR—Yes, I did. I just want to be clear, because when we come away from these hearings we are not always clear as to what it is that we had actually agreed to do or not do. Is it your expectation that the growth rates for private schools will remain consistent with the expectations you have provided to this committee on previous occasions?

Mr Evans—I would like to have the opportunity to look at the projections for 2001.

Senator CARR—That will be the first period outside—it will be the new data, will it? Will it be able to give you an indication of whether or not there has been a substantial or significant departure from your estimates in previous hearings of the growth of private schools?

Mr Evans—As I say, Senator, I would like to just look at the estimates, and probably incorporate that in the answer that we provide.

Senator CARR—If you would not mind, could you indicate to me what the department's expectations are of the particular growth rate? I would ask, also, whether or not you have undertaken an evaluation of the broadbanding approach to the equity funding since the passage of the bill last year?

Mr Daniels—No, because 1997 is the first program year for the broadbanded range of programs. It would be too early to do an evaluation.

Senator CARR—When do you expect an evaluation to be undertaken? When are you planning to do one?

Mr Daniels—In all probability, evaluations would occur program by program, but the earliest I would expect it to be done is 1999. There is an ongoing program of evaluations. I think the language program is scheduled for evaluation either this year or next, but that program was not particularly affected by the broadbanding arrangements. For those programs that have been significantly broadbanded, I would think 1999 would be when we would first look at them.

Senator CARR—In a previous question, No. 37, I raised the issue of the national standards and guidelines for the initial teacher education project. The department indicated to me that consultation had been held in all states and territories with the exception of Darwin. You said that the advisory committee for the project has indicated that it now expects to report by mid-September 1997. Is it still your expectation that the advisory committee on initial teacher education will report in mid-September?

Mr Daniels—I am not sure, Senator. I would have to check that.

Senator CARR—Would you do that. In regard to the circulation of the report, is access being refused to that report?

Mr Daniels—No decision has been made yet.

Senator CARR—When will I be able to get access to that report?

Mr Daniels—When a decision is made, Senator.

Senator CARR—That is the whole point. I am just wondering on what basis there is no decision made, because that is equivalent to denying access to the report, surely. It has the same effect. It is another way of saying, 'No, we haven't made a decision.'

Mr Daniels—Senator, there isn't a report. The report does not exist. When the report exists, the minister will make a decision about the circulation or otherwise of the report.

Senator CARR—This is a report that goes to the question of initial teacher education. The groups that have been consulted include the state Catholic independent school authorities, the faculties of education, indigenous education groups, teacher subject associations and education unions. What possible grounds could there be for denying access to such a report?

Mr Daniels—Senator, I am not prepared to speculate on that matter. I am saying that there is no decision; there is no report.

Senator CARR—Will you take on notice my request to have a copy of that report as soon as it is prepared?

Mr Daniels—Yes.

Senator CARR—The answers to question No. 42, which goes to the information technology in schools—

CHAIR—Senator Carr, are you moving on to 1.2 now?

Senator CARR—There is just one other issue before I do. I would not want to get out of sequence here. I have a question about private donations. I understand that the Smith Family program known as EDUCATE is a DEETYA supported program. Does the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs contribute to the Smith Family for its student support programs?

Dr Arthur—I am not aware of it in terms of my programs. It may well be in another part of the portfolio.

Senator Vanstone—It might come under the youth affairs area. Any funding of them would.

Senator CARR—I will turn to the remaining questions I have, which I will seek to conclude by lunchtime. I will seek to; it depends on the answers.

Subprogram 1.2—Targeted assistance

Senator CARR—With regard to answer No. 42, I could not get a clear response from you on the issue of the information technology in schools. I ask again: is it the Commonwealth's intention to develop a comprehensive national technology strategy?

Dr Arthur—I think the answer was in response to a question which said, 'Is this why the Commonwealth has not?' and the answer went to the particular way that question was phrased. The Commonwealth, at the moment, has a number of strategies dealing with the issue of technology in education. At the school level there is a major strategy which goes under the generic name of Education Network Australia, which brings together, in its consultation aspects, all of the key players involved in technology and education at the school, vocational education and training, and higher education levels and which, in its consultation structures, addresses a wide range of issues to do with the use of technology in education. Whether or not the government chooses to have a document prepared which sets out all the initiatives involved in education and training which it might term a strategy is not a decision that has yet been taken.

Senator CARR—Is it being currently considered? I have got to get this formula right, because a new expression has come into the lexicon in terms of these hearings, that 'a decision has not been taken'. Would it be appropriate at this point to ask you if a decision is under consideration?

Dr Arthur—The issue of technology in education, with appropriate policies and approaches to that, is certainly under consideration.

Senator CARR—Is it under active consideration?

Dr Arthur—The issues surrounded with technology in education are certainly under active consideration.

Senator CARR—At what level?

Dr Arthur—There is regular consultation between the department and the minister on the issue of technology in education. In terms of schools, I am aware of a number of issues where that is taken forward but in detail I am not aware of the initiatives in terms of vocational education and training and higher education.

Senator CARR—Has the department presented to the minister advice which is currently being considered for an initiative in terms of the establishment of a national technology strategy?

Dr Arthur—No.

Senator CARR—When you say that it is under active consideration, that does not actually go to the government doing anything?

Dr Arthur—I said that there are a range of initiatives to do with the use of technology in education which are receiving active consideration, which go to specific initiatives. There has been a number of specific initiatives, both in terms of consultation and in terms of funding.

Senator CARR—Can you outline to the committee the nature of the specific initiatives that the government is currently considering?

Dr Arthur—I could at some length, if you wished me to do so; it would require some length to go into the full range of initiatives.

Senator CARR—Could you take that on notice, please?

Dr Arthur—Certainly.

Senator CARR—I would like the specific action the government is taking in this area. Thank you very much. You said that the answer that you gave was in relation to whether or not this was an explanation. The question that I actually asked you was this: in regard to the provision of information technology in schools, does DEETYA monitor and assemble information about the number, type and ratio per student of computers in schools? And the answer was no.

Dr Arthur—That is the correct answer.

Senator CARR—No doubt that is right; you would not have a clue what is being spent by schools on this area.

Mr Daniels—Senator, with due respect, the answer was not ‘No.’ The answer was no, with an explanation about the study which the department is participating in with MCEETYA.

Senator CARR—Yes, you are part of a committee.

Mr Daniels—We are an integral part of a MCEETYA study on information technology skills in schools.

Senator CARR—Yes, and you are also part of the presentation of the annual national report on schooling, which takes some years, as we have discussed on many occasions, to actually report on anything. I also asked whether DEETYA has information on the growing disparity of provision of information technology between schools, regions, areas and sectors. I specifically referred to the situation at Sunshine North Primary School in Melbourne, which has to rely almost exclusively on its own resources to purchase computers. It has only one computer room, for 13 leased Apple Macs. The Apollo Park Primary School in Greensborough, by comparison, is a designated Navigator school with state-of-the-art computers and programs. Again, the answer to that was no, without qualification.

Mr Daniels—No, that is not correct, Senator.

Senator CARR—What is correct, then?

Mr Daniels—The question was: does DEETYA have information on the growing disparity of provision of information technology between schools, regions, areas and sectors? The answer to that was no. The answer to the previous question about the information held by the

department, or available to the department, on the ratio of computers per student in schools was that the Commonwealth is, with MCEETYA, working on a sample study which will provide input to the 1997 national report on schooling in Australia. In relation to individual schools, it is certainly true that DEETYA has no information on a school-by-school basis. A sample study will provide a snapshot of the situation Australia-wide.

Senator CARR—Mr Daniels, I appreciate the point you are making, but I asked the question No. 42(b), as I have outlined, and the answer to 42(b) is the word ‘no’. That is what the answer says.

Mr Daniels—That is correct.

Senator CARR—That question was specifically: does DEETYA have information on the growing disparity of provision of information technology between schools?

Mr Daniels—That is correct, Senator.

Senator CARR—The answer is no.

Mr Daniels—That is correct, Senator.

Senator CARR—In terms of answer number 47(b) about targeted assistance, this question relates to the provision of the national literacy framework: is the department undertaking any work on the development of a national literacy framework?

Dr Arthur—The department is not carrying out work which is directed towards something with those exact words; however, as you would be aware, the department is carrying out a range of activities towards improving literacy performance in Australian schools. I would characterise that as being work which is designed to advance the national literacy plan that was endorsed by all state, territory and Commonwealth ministers at the last but one MCEETYA meeting. The range of activities that the department engaged in can be detailed, if you wish us to do so.

Senator CARR—Thank you. The department has no copies of the report from Language Australia on Australian literacies, as referred to in question No. 47, has it?

Dr Arthur—I would expect that the department does have some copies on Australian literacies, Senator.

Senator CARR—Can they be provided to the committee?

Dr Arthur—I will take that on notice, thank you.

Senator CARR—Thank you very much. I can read the answer too. It says ‘at the cost of \$25’. Are you suggesting that we buy copies?

Dr Arthur—I am not making any particular suggestion.

Senator CARR—No, thank you. I do note the way that the answer is formed. If that were the intention of the department, it would be an unfortunate departure from the normal practice in terms of the provision of information to the committee, if we were required to purchase copies of government reports.

Senator Vanstone—Although it is sometimes—

Senator CARR—I am sure you would be interested in that line of inquiry, Minister, but clearly you will understand why I will be resisting such a proposition fiercely.

Senator Vanstone—I am shaking in my boots. The trouble is that you should not get yourself excited, because that was not in fact the line I was going to run. That was not in fact

the point I was going to make, so you have got yourself ready for a war we are not going to have—sadly for you, that is.

Senator CARR—Oh yes.

Senator Vanstone—I was simply going to say that the department happily provides a whole range of information that is publicly available. It is only my regret that, from the previous estimates committees, it is abundantly clear that some people who ask questions over a long period of time do not bother to read it.

Senator CARR—You can see by these, Minister, that we in fact have read the answers provided and we are not satisfied—

Senator Vanstone—But I am talking about the public.

Senator CARR—Yes, sure.

Senator Vanstone—You know your favourite line, ‘Take me to page 44. Just refresh my memory,’—using public time and money asking public servants to walk you through material that has been made available.

Senator CARR—While you are walking me through material, answer question No. 201, Minister, which I am sure you would be familiar with. It relates to the percentage of students in private schools who are disabled. Could you indicate why there is such a discrepancy between the percentage of students with disabilities in government schools, compared with non-government schools?

Dr Arthur—Senator, those figures, as the question I hope makes clear, are based on self-reporting. They are based on the figures provided under that element of the funding that is derived on a per capita basis for students who are reported as meeting the definition of disability for that particular program element.

Senator CARR—Yes, I understand that. It describes the nature of the disability in very general terms. But can you indicate to me specifically why it is that, across all states, non-government schools have a markedly lower percentage of students with disabilities than government schools do?

Dr Arthur—We do not have any clear understanding of the basis for those figures being the way they are. Assuming that the figures are an accurate reflection of the populations—an assumption which it may be reasonable to make but which is not necessarily guaranteed to be correct—it has been suggested that it has been historically more common for students with disabilities to be enrolled in government schools in the past. The reasons for that, in detail, I do not think we have a good understanding of. It is certainly one of the issues that we are interested in addressing, as part of looking at these programs in general.

Senator CARR—Thank you, Dr Arthur. We do not really know; have I understood you correctly?

Dr Arthur—We do not have a clear understanding of it. As I say, assuming those figures are an accurate reflection of the situation, we do not have a full understanding of why it is the case.

Senator CARR—Perhaps we will return to that when we talk about how well private schools do in preparing people for life experiences, Minister. Question No. 198(c) of course related to the percentage of capital programs in government and non-government schools in Victoria and the percentage of Commonwealth contribution towards those projects, and you

have indicated that you are not able to provide information on that. In the past, has that information been provided?

Ms Andruska—Are you asking specifically about the notes made in relation to Victoria and Queensland?

Senator CARR—Yes. Is it the case that you in fact provided me with information along these lines in previous estimate rounds?

Ms Andruska—When we have the information, we do provide it to you.

Senator CARR—When will you have the information?

Ms Andruska—I would expect that we would have the information fairly shortly. I do not have an exact date of when we would expect to receive the schedule from Victoria.

Senator CARR—I would ask you to take on notice that you provide that information.

Ms Andruska—When we have the information, we will provide it.

Senator CARR—Yes. When you have that information, could I have a copy of the Commonwealth contribution towards those capital programs in government and non-government schools? I am particularly interested to see whether or not there has been any shift in those percentages in recent times. Is it also the case that you could in fact establish that from state government budgetary sources? Is there any study undertaken along those lines?

Ms Andruska—I do not know the answer to that.

Senator CARR—I would ask if you could advise me on whether that is in fact the case.

Mr Evans—One point on the state budgetary sources: the data would not be directly comparable because the figures have been presented here in calendar years whereas the state budgets, as you are aware, Senator, are in financial years.

Senator CARR—Yes. There are many obstacles to the truth in this business, aren't there, Mr Evans? It is unfortunate, in some respects, to not be able to get to the bottom of these questions. Numbers 220 and 222: you have indicated that these are questions relating to 50 academics that wrote to the government regarding literacy policy and basic literacy testing. You said that this was a matter that the minister's office should answer. Minister, are you now prepared to answer that question?

Senator Vanstone—It does not come to mind, Senator. I will have a look and come back to you this afternoon.

Senator CARR—These might be others we could put on the list of unanswered questions. That is 220 and 222. While there is technically an answer—that is, a sheet of paper has been provided—what the department in fact has said is that this was a question more appropriately directed to the minister's office.

Senator Vanstone—Yes. In that instance, of course, it refers to Dr Kemp.

Senator CARR—I am not particularly fussed which minister answers it.

Senator Vanstone—I appreciate that and I have indicated to you that I will chase it up for you.

Senator CARR—Thank you. To question 211, you provided me with an answer on the basis that the removal of the provision of buildings and grounds within the Commonwealth special purpose funds would in fact occur. Can you indicate to me what the implications of the decision to remove the provision of buildings and grounds from the Commonwealth special purpose funds are? How does that actually work in practice?

Mr Evans—Senator, I believe that this question was in a sequence of questions concerning the enrolment benchmark adjustment. What it involves is that any application of the enrolment benchmark adjustment would be only on recurrent expenditure. Therefore, any costs for capital were to be excluded from the calculations.

Senator CARR—Can you just repeat that last sentence?

Mr Evans—Any cost for capital would be excluded from any calculations to do with enrolment benchmark adjustments.

Senator CARR—Thank you very much. That concludes my questions in that area.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Senator Carr. There being no more questions on program 1, that concludes program 1 and we will adjourn for one hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.39 p.m. to 1.40 p.m.

[1.48 p.m.]

Program 2—Higher education

Subprogram 2.1—Higher education system

CHAIR—Senator Carr, do you wish to ask a question?

Senator CARR—I understand that Senator Faulkner wants to.

CHAIR—Senator Faulkner.

Senator FAULKNER—Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to ask it.

Senator Vanstone—Welcome back, Senator.

Senator FAULKNER—Thank you, Minister. It is lovely to be here. I just wanted to ask a couple of questions on program 2. I am interested in what I think is called the academic hotline—‘dob in a lecturer’, as it has been styled in the press, so that we know what we are talking about.

Senator Vanstone—It should not be so styled.

Senator FAULKNER—What is the official title?

Senator Vanstone—It has not got an official title. The concept is of having an Australia-wide survey of student perceptions of quality, in a similar way to that which we do for graduates. Some of it will be set questions but it is also to provide, say, at the end—but it might be in the middle, I do not know; where it is placed is irrelevant—an opportunity for more open-ended comment, which will be able to be made either by filling out an open space or by ringing a hotline. A hotline has not been separately established, but we are planning on establishing it as the survey goes out.

None of that has been finalised, and there may be an argument for saying, ‘Establish it a month before to get teething problems sorted out about how many people you have on the line and all that sort of stuff.’ But generally speaking it is simply an opportunity for a more open-ended comment.

Senator FAULKNER—Thanks for that. So what am I best describing the ‘hotline’ as, so that we both understand what we are talking about?

Senator Vanstone—I had in mind, if one were to have a separate name for it—if one needs names for these things—the ‘higher education quality line’, which would in a semi-phonetic sense be called HEQL, pronounced ‘heckle’.

Senator FAULKNER—Let's call it HEQL.

Senator Vanstone—I do not put much on a name, Senator.

Senator FAULKNER—It is good to have an acronym, I think.

Senator Vanstone—What is important is the opportunity for students to have that input.

Senator FAULKNER—HEQL is one of the more appropriate acronyms I have heard for this. I would be interested in hearing about how it is actually going to work. I do not quite understand whether it is part of the national survey for students to comment on their courses or whether, in effect, it is a separate assessment tool. I would be interested to hear your comments on that, please.

Senator Vanstone—As I say, the opportunity to contribute will be provided as a consequence of the survey, as, 'Write out what else you would like to say. Is there anything else you would like to add?'—the sort of thing the policeman asks you when you go and make a statement about having had a car crash, 'Anything else you would like to say?'—or by way of a telephone hotline. As I have indicated to you, there may be an argument for starting it up a few weeks before to get administrative things sorted out. I do not have any particular expectations about the duration of its remaining open. But I do think it is important that students have the opportunity not just to answer the specific questions that we want to ask but also to say what they want to say about their perceptions of quality.

Senator FAULKNER—But I come back to the question I am asking you. Is HEQL a part of the survey—

Senator Vanstone—I think that is what I have indicated to you.

Senator FAULKNER—Or do you see it as a separate assessment tool? That is what I was interested in understanding from you.

Senator Vanstone—You would have to have some sort of reporting that distinguished the two types of answers—none of which has been settled, incidentally. I will be announcing today a reference group, if you would like to put it that way, of people to assist in the compilation and design of the survey. I think this is the first time students across Australia have been consulted in this way, and it is important that that opportunity is not wasted.

Senator FAULKNER—So the form of the written survey itself, as yet, has not been established, Minister. Is that right?

Senator Vanstone—It certainly has not been finalised. I have seen a draft of something that might well fit the bill, but I think it is important that that is considered by people with considerable experience in that area. That is why I have established a reference group which I am announcing today. Someone has just gone to get me a copy of the—

Senator FAULKNER—I do not want to pre-empt the announcement if you are going to make it at a later stage.

Senator Vanstone—I am not going to go and do a doorstep. We were simply going to issue a release so that people understood who would be advising us and so on.

Senator FAULKNER—Who in the department, or what part of the department, has been responsible for preparing the draft of the written survey?

Senator Vanstone—It is people within the higher education division generally.

Senator FAULKNER—And that has just been completed, has it not?

Senator Vanstone—A draft, I am advised, was used as a means of conducting consultations with some peak organisations last week. As I say, nothing has been finalised. Work is being done, but nothing has been finalised.

Senator FAULKNER—I understand what you are saying about the role of the reference group. What is the nature of the consultations with the peak groups? Who are we describing as peak groups, firstly; and what is the nature of the consultations?

Senator Vanstone—Mr Gallagher has been conducting those, so he can give you an answer.

Mr Gallagher—We have consulted the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, the National Tertiary Education Industry Union, the National Union of Students and the council of Australian Postgraduate Associations.

Senator FAULKNER—How have those consultations taken place? Have you been sitting around a table with them and talking to them?

Mr Gallagher—Yes, we sat around a table with each of the groups, either in Canberra or in Melbourne. We exchanged documentation. We sought informal views on the different elements of the survey and also of the Prime Minister's awards.

Senator FAULKNER—So you have shown them drafts of the written survey?

Mr Gallagher—There exists for graduates, which was initially developed for current students, a thing that is called a course experience questionnaire which now has some track record and credibility in the sector. Some modification of that, together with the addition of some demographic information that we could obtain through a large survey, has been put together on a form and we have taken feedback from the peak groups as to other questions they might see as worthwhile, or the general validity of the approach, before going to the reference group for technical advice.

Senator FAULKNER—You said you have had consultations with the AVCC. I read an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* where Professor Geoff Wilson, the acting president of the AVCC, described the hotline as absurd. That is not a good starting point for consultation, is it?

Mr Gallagher—That is just a public statement. We had very useful discussions with Stuart Hamilton and John Mullarvey from the AVCC.

Senator FAULKNER—According to the same article, I read that student unionists and the peak academic union were also very critical of the plan.

Mr Gallagher—The views of the groups that we have discussed the matter with vary on different points.

Senator FAULKNER—Do any of them support it?

Mr Gallagher—All support the Prime Minister's awards for excellence in university teaching. All have indicated to us a preparedness to go along with the survey. There have been some reservations raised about the hotline.

Senator Vanstone—I do not think that is surprising.

Senator FAULKNER—We will go from HEQL to hotline because you are using the terminology 'hotline'. Hotline is HEQL.

Senator Vanstone—I think hotline is the appropriate terminology because it does not have a name. It is part of a survey at this point.

Senator FAULKNER—I was attracted to the acronym you used.

Senator Vanstone—If you have to have a name, that would be one you might consider using.

Senator FAULKNER—Have any of the groups that you have been consulting with supported the hotline?

Mr Gallagher—All of the groups have indicated their preferences, were it to go ahead, for avoiding problems that might arise that concern them.

Senator Vanstone—Which, after all, is the purpose of consultation.

Senator FAULKNER—Yes, but it does not answer my question as to whether any of the groups you have been consulting with support the idea.

Mr Gallagher—None of them said they will not cooperate.

Senator FAULKNER—Have any of them said they will support the idea?

Mr Gallagher—Some have indicated they do not favour it as much as they support the other two options.

Senator FAULKNER—That does not sound like it is a ringing endorsement. Of more interest in this article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the mention of the possibility that more than 500,000 university students would be asked to rate lecturers and standard of campus services, et cetera, under this proposal. Is that figure, 500,000, a reasonable ballpark figure or is the journalist who has written that got it wrong?

Mr Gallagher—That is about right for the total undergraduate student body.

Senator FAULKNER—Have you done any survey work of any description or preparatory work that would indicate what might be a likely response rate?

Mr Gallagher—This is one of the reasons why the reference group is being brought together. It contains people with technical backgrounds in these matters. The response rate from the course experience questionnaire which is the draft that is going to this committee is of the order of 70 per cent which is obtained by follow-up action on the part of universities to hold the response rate at a reasonable level. It does vary across institutions and by field. We would be confident that with adequate arrangements for distribution and follow-up we could shoot for something of the order of 70 per cent.

Senator FAULKNER—Sorry, 70?

Mr Gallagher—Yes, seven zero.

Senator FAULKNER—That is your expected response rate, 70 per cent?

Mr Gallagher—Yes.

Senator FAULKNER—But you are hoping it might be more.

Mr Gallagher—Yes.

Senator FAULKNER—That would be 350,000 responses, if my maths is correct.

Mr Gallagher—Yes.

Senator FAULKNER—In the old days I used to be a bit of a numbers man and worry about all these sorts of things but I have left that well behind me now, but around 350,000—I thought that would inspire an interjection but it did not. It died of shock. What sort of pre-planning has been done in terms of working out how you might sift through these? What sort of resources would be involved?

Mr Gallagher—Again, Senator, the full logistics of this would be a matter for the reference group to give advice on, although we have had preliminary discussions with an agency that has experience in the course experience questionnaire. It is possible to arrange, with the cooperation of the universities, for both the distribution and follow-up of the instrument at the university level and then for the return of that to an agency that we would contract to do the data processing so that the whole process is seen to be at arm's length from us as a department and from the institution. Given it is a reliable instrument, the data should be robust.

Senator FAULKNER—Effectively, what the department is doing is considering the outsourcing of the administration of the responses to the survey?

Mr Gallagher—We do not have the internal capacity to do that volume of data processing and, in many cases, we already have data processing done by dedicated agencies.

Senator FAULKNER—I see. Did the department advise the minister of that logistical problem in the early stages of the development of this idea?

Mr Gallagher—I do not regard it as a problem, Senator. It is a logistical requirement but the—

Senator FAULKNER—But what is it going to cost?

Mr Gallagher—That is a matter that we are currently negotiating with the agency so I do not think it is proper to put that on the table.

Senator FAULKNER—This proposition is being developed without any costings?

Mr Gallagher—No, Senator, we have cost estimates but we are currently wanting to commercially contract an agency and we want to strike the best price deal we can.

Senator FAULKNER—Are you saying to me that you would consider those estimates to be commercial-in-confidence at this point because you will be looking for some form of competitive tendering process in this?

Mr Gallagher—There are only a couple of agencies that have the required expertise. But there will be competition and therefore it is commercial-in-confidence.

Senator FAULKNER—Am I right in saying that if I were to ask you the question, 'What work have you done', even though I think it is a very reasonable question to be asked by an estimates committee, you would say to me, 'There might be some commercial-in-confidence considerations in relation to this and it might be best looked at at a later stage'? Or can you give the committee more detail at this stage?

Mr Gallagher—I do not think it is appropriate. We have done our internal cost estimations. We are currently in the process of negotiating not only with an external agency for managing it and for data processing, but we also have to negotiate with universities what they might require by way of support for this process.

Senator FAULKNER—Okay. So managing this process is likely to be outsourced, the data processing is likely to be outsourced and there is possibly going to be some role for the universities? Is that right?

Mr Gallagher—Yes.

Senator FAULKNER—What will the department be doing?

Mr Gallagher—The department is having input into the reference committee. The department will be taking the advice of the reference committee to the minister. The department will be analysing the information and publishing what is appropriate to publish from the survey results.

Senator FAULKNER—The actual mailing out, and so forth, of 500,000 questionnaires—that will be likely to be outsourced to some agency, will it?

Senator Vanstone—You can bet we will not be sitting in my office licking 500,000 stamps! You would presumably complain if—

Senator FAULKNER—I do not think anyone, with respect, Minister, would be suggesting that that would be appropriate for the minister's office.

Senator Vanstone—I agree.

Senator FAULKNER—I would be amazed, frankly, if any minister—even you—would contemplate such a thing. Obviously, if it were to be done in-house, effectively it would be done by your department.

Senator Vanstone—That is right. I just want to indicate to you that nothing in this matter has been completely settled, but we will use the most commercially sensible and efficient arrangements possible. You would expect nothing less.

Senator FAULKNER—Well, I would hope for nothing less. But there are, as you can appreciate, significant issues here about how much this is going to cost; what public moneys might be involved. I hear, in fact I think I even anticipated, what Mr Gallagher might be telling us about that and it being commercial-in-confidence, but they are significant issues. On the assessment of the responses to the questionnaire, is that likely to be done at a departmental level, or is that also likely to be something you would consider contracting out?

Mr Gallagher—The coding of the responses is probably most efficiently done by a dedicated agency with skills in that task. The interpretation of those results would be a matter for the department, but once the survey results are in the public domain other agencies would also seek to make their interpretations of the findings.

Senator FAULKNER—Are they likely to be posted out or are they going to go through some sort of university internal mail system? Is there a postage cost of significance here?

Mr Gallagher—There is likely to be, Senator. The answer to your question is that our preference would be to have it mailed out through the universities. That would mean that we would incur the costs of printing the materials and the postage costs associated with both the initial dispatch and any follow-up that is required.

Senator FAULKNER—Are you actually going to do anything to encourage students to take part in the survey? Has your thinking gone to that yet?

Senator Vanstone—It has crossed my mind but I have not resolved anything.

Senator FAULKNER—It has crossed your mind. Has it crossed the department—

Senator Vanstone—Of course it has. The whole purpose of this is to ascertain what students think. It would not be successful if you just said, 'I will send out a survey and I do not give tuppence if they respond or not.' Of course you care if they respond; of course you want them to respond.

Senator FAULKNER—But I was wondering if it had crossed the department's mind too and whether there had been any advice generated or developed on that issue at all?

Mr Gallagher—We have raised this matter in consultations with the peak bodies I mentioned previously. Options in terms of improving the response rate can include follow-up, targeted follow-up or some form of incentive whereby some prize is available randomly to students who complete the form. There is no closure on any of those options; they are all under consideration with a view to improving the response rate.

Senator FAULKNER—Who is going to administer the hotline?

Mr Gallagher—That is a matter that we think, given its sensitivities, would be managed within the department.

Senator FAULKNER—Thank you for that. What sort of costing have you considered would be appropriate for the establishment, staffing and operating of the hotline?

Mr Gallagher—We have done a range of estimates, depending on whether there is a low take-up or a high take-up of calls. We do manage other hotlines within the department, including the HECS hotline. This is not a high cost activity.

Senator FAULKNER—What sort of range are we talking about?

Mr Gallagher—Of the order of \$100,000.

Senator FAULKNER—Are you proposing in any way to have the universities themselves involved in the analysis of the responses?

Mr Gallagher—The best way to answer your question may be to say that, once that information is in the public domain, various interest groups make their own interpretations of this. The experience with the course experience questionnaire, which is administered through the Graduate Careers Council of Australia, is that the Graduate Careers Council does the publishing of the material and makes interpretations.

Senator FAULKNER—I noticed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* article I referred to that—

Senator Vanstone—I do not want to be too disparaging of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, because it is basically a very good paper, but I do remember in the 1980-something election, someone thrusting a microphone into Andrew Peacock's face and saying, 'What do you say about this article in the *Herald*?'—as you recall, the election was just before Christmas—to which he responded, 'Hark, the Herald's wrong again.' That has always stuck in my mind. I have been waiting for years to repeat that story, so I thank you for the opportunity. I just caution you not to rely too much on what you read in the paper.

Senator FAULKNER—I have learned over the years that you do not rely too much on anyone or anything. I suppose that is a lesson that you have been learning too, Minister. A senior official of the National Tertiary Education Union is quoted here—I would not put it at any higher level—as saying the 'dob in your lecturer' scheme will come up with meaningless scuttlebutt. I would like to understand how the department is planning to filter out the meaningless scuttlebutt.

Mr Gallagher—We have put a fair bit of work into this and taken advice. What we have designed internally for the people who will be on the end of the phone is a pro forma which cascades into various sorts of directions, depending on the sorts of things people want to talk about, whether they are commending somebody for good work or whether they are concerned about the absence of a service.

Senator FAULKNER—Would you be able to provide a copy of that to the committee, please?

Mr Gallagher—We are still finalising that. It will allow us to identify mischievous material, if that is forthcoming, and to categorise helpful material so that we can give as meaningful an input to the universities as possible.

Senator FAULKNER—Would you be able to provide a copy of that to the committee?

Mr Gallagher—Not of the draft, no.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I do not think that is appropriate while it is in draft. When it is settled, and the line is running, I think it is perfectly appropriate for people to see how incoming calls are handled. There will have to be some protocols for the handling of what some people might say who either genuinely have a problem that needs to be dealt with delicately or mischievously generate a problem. In both of those cases, the information would have to be handled very carefully. When the pro forma and the protocols are settled, it would be a perfectly sensible thing to have them completely transparent, because I want there to be confidence in this survey, both in terms of the specific questions and the general opportunities, and there will not be that confidence if the manner in which the information is handled is not transparent. I can only assure you that it will be.

Senator FAULKNER—Are you worried about witch hunts and personal vendettas and so on?

Senator Vanstone—I am not worrying about them in the sense that I think the hotline would be swamped with them, or that the general answers would be swamped with them. But, if you keep your eyes open and are aware of the sorts of claims that can be made without much justification and that could, if not handled properly, be particularly damaging, depending on whether personnel are identified or not, and if you have appropriate protocols for handling it, then it can be properly managed.

Mr Gallagher said that we have had significant consultations on this, and he is right. I am very conscious of the fact that just one badly motivated person without a hotline even now can do very serious damage to someone. They can ring up and say dreadful things about people, or things that I might not perceive as dreadful but which are nonetheless a matter for that person's private life and not for public consideration. Anyone in possession of that sort of information needs to handle it very carefully.

At the same time, I have the view that, if a student wants to put a view and feels, for one reason or another, reluctant to take that view elsewhere, it would be our job to ensure that that information was very carefully and very appropriately handled, so that someone was not told, 'Look, that is not our problem, sister; go ring someone else.'

Senator FAULKNER—What are you going to do if there is a ground swell of student opinion against a lecturer or a professor? What is your plan then?

Senator Vanstone—As I say, the reference group is there to assist in trying to finalise the sort of protocols for handling that information and reporting. But if you will accept this as preliminary thinking and not a general expectation—if it shows up in one university that there is a particular problem: is that what you meant?

Senator FAULKNER—Yes. I am thinking about there being a ground swell of opinion from the student body very critical of a particular lecturer or professor. What are you going to do?

Senator Vanstone—The reporting that I am in a preliminary sense envisaging would be very general; but, even if you generalise reporting, for example, by university or by state, and if you then break it down to faculty, if in one university as opposed to all of the others there is a much higher incidence of a particular type of complaint in general, I would have thought that would tip the Vice-Chancellor off to hop on down to that faculty and have a good look at it.

Senator FAULKNER—So, someone is going to contact the Vice-Chancellor?

Senator Vanstone—No, I think that the information should generally be publicly available in general form, not that Mary Smith rang up and said 'blab, blab, blab,' but that, of 1,000

open-ended comments, roughly—this might be spread across universities, just as general information—you might categorise them by the type of comment made, into different categories of what sort of positive comment they were, or—

Senator FAULKNER—Are you going to name university staff in this?

Senator Vanstone—I would not think it appropriate in any public way to be naming any individual staff member whatsoever. The purpose is to get the students' perceptions of what their quality is, not to finger individual staff members. I do not envisage any reporting which names individual members whatsoever. I am sorry if that is the impression you have got.

Senator FAULKNER—No. I am interested in understanding how you will act in those circumstances.

Senator Vanstone—You are asking me how I will act in terms of public reporting? In terms of public reporting, I am not envisaging any individual naming—

Senator FAULKNER—But how will you, as minister, or your department act when you have a lot of complaints about a particular member of staff? Let us say there is a consistency that is of concern to either you or your department. What are you going to do then?

Senator Vanstone—As I say, I am envisaging reporting of a generalised nature. This is for the sake of argument; I am not about to nominate percentages with a view to that being what I am expecting. Say, for example, that in one university they had a standard positive comment rate of, say, two per cent and a standard negative comment rate of three per cent across all their faculties, and in one faculty the negative comment rate was much higher or the positive comment rate was much higher: I would think that would say to the university that there was something different happening in this faculty.

Senator FAULKNER—Who will be tasked in your department to do that?

Senator Vanstone—That is a case of simply preparing the public reporting and then, on publication of it, universities following it up as they think appropriate. But, in a private sense—if this is what you are alluding to; and I do not mean that you particularly are, because I understand there are different ways in which your question could be interpreted—if information came to hand where it appeared that a student felt at risk, for example, or where there was some suggestion that a criminal offence might have been committed, we would need very careful protocols about how to handle that—and there would be very careful protocols about how to handle that. You surely would not expect, if that information came to hand, someone to say, 'It's not our problem.' But, equally, that sort of information has to be handled very carefully.

Senator FAULKNER—Could you explain to the committee where this idea germinated from?

Senator Vanstone—The package of ideas is a combination of ideas from the department and my office.

Senator FAULKNER—The package was; but was this particular idea yours or was it the department's?

Senator Vanstone—Which particular idea?

Senator FAULKNER—The one we are talking about at the moment, the hotline.

Senator Vanstone—I think it was I who first thought of the concept of giving students an open-ended opportunity to comment on quality.

Senator FAULKNER—So that is your idea?

Senator Vanstone—Yes. I think it is a very good idea.

Senator FAULKNER—I assume you do.

Senator Vanstone—I think the students have not been consulted anywhere near enough.

Senator FAULKNER—And the survey? Was that your idea, or the department's?

Senator Vanstone—I think the survey came from the department. But this was in a number of discussions over a period of time, and ideas have come up and been discarded and put together and have changed their form. I do not think it is relevant, really.

Senator FAULKNER—But was there, in fact, a meeting that you convened between your office and the department to discuss these sorts of issues?

Senator Vanstone—We have had a number of meetings to discuss these sorts of issues. Officers from the department and my office, sometimes with me there, sometimes not, have met on numerous occasions in relation to these matters.

Senator FAULKNER—Did you have a particular meeting with the aim of building bridges, if you like, with the student population—who have, over recent times, been alienated from government policy? I am asking whether you specifically convened a meeting with your office and departmental officers to canvass these issues; a brainstorming session, if you like.

Senator Vanstone—I would not describe any meeting we have had as coming into that category. You might have something in mind, but I cannot quite picture what you are trying to get at. I would not describe any meeting we have had in that way.

Senator FAULKNER—But I think it is perfectly reasonable to ask you: where have these ideas been generated?

Senator Vanstone—You might think it is reasonable. I think it is irrelevant. I would hope that a government would generate some of its own ideas, would take ideas from the public service and public consultations even as, in our reform of employment services, we have added on to ideas that the previous government generated. I do not think the source of an idea gives it any merit or demerit.

Senator FAULKNER—I suppose part of it is the motivation, isn't it? If you have a general get-together with your staff and the department for the purposes of trying to build bridges with the student population, increase your diminished standing, and this costs the Australian taxpayer a significant amount of money, it is an issue for the estimates committee, isn't it?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, you are more cynical than I can imagine even someone such as yourself would become. Your government spent about \$70 million on quality in each of three years and you are seeking to argue—I presume—that to ask the students what they think of quality is somehow a waste of money and a bad thing. I fundamentally disagree with you. I think it is about time the students were consulted as to what they think.

Senator FAULKNER—It is not a question of disagreeing with me. I am merely asking you a question.

Senator Vanstone—I am simply putting in my view. I think it is very, very important that students are given the opportunity to comment on quality. I note that a number of universities already do this. I took the opportunity, when we made the announcement of this, to congratulate those universities. The current president of the AVCC, Fay Gale, was instrumental in ensuring student feedback, as I understand it, and improving it at Adelaide University. She has, as I understand it, implemented it at the University of WA. John Hay, who is now at the

University of Queensland, was instrumental in implementing this sort of feedback at Deakin University.

A number of our universities recognise that feedback from their students is not a negative to be opposed. It is a very positive opportunity for them to understand how well they are providing a service that meets the students' needs. I would hope that, after a number of years of such a survey—less if it were possible—all the universities take this up and give all their students the opportunity to regularly comment on quality and take it seriously enough to publish the results. In which case, such a survey would not be necessary, because each of the universities would have independently done it. I suppose, in your wildest dreams, if they ever got to a common format, it would be very easy for students who were deciding where to go to make a comparison of the assessments of previous students. That would be an ideal, but I think that is a fair way off.

In the meantime, the Commonwealth puts, as you know, about \$5 billion a year into higher education. Students are putting in an increased contribution. We, together, fund the universities and we, together, have a very strong interest in quality being delivered to the students. I do not deny we have quality delivery now, but it can be made better. Your government recognised that and this one does as well. One means of ensuring that, and contributing to raising the standard, is to ask students what they think. They have been left out of the equation for far too long.

Senator FAULKNER—In terms of other possible approaches to have a feel good and bridge building process with the student population—

Senator Vanstone—You characterise it as that, Senator. That is not my characterisation at all. Undoubtedly, you will seek to portray it as that.

Senator FAULKNER—It is my characterisation. I would be interested in understanding whether you or the department are planning to communicate with students who missed out on the Austudy payment because of the Austudy means test. They might not understand, I suppose, why they missed out.

Senator Vanstone—They were, in fact, communicated with.

Senator FAULKNER—Have you got any plans there?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, that comes under program 5. Those students were communicated with. I do not mean to disparage the department's intentions at the time, because we were all working to try to improve what was not a satisfactory situation. There was a suggestion that a press release and a press conference on the changes we would make to remedy the problem would be enough. It was at my instigation that every person was written to.

I think it is very important that people who are inconvenienced by administration are communicated with personally. I do not mean they were rung up, but they were written to whether they got an improvement in their Austudy, a decrease, or were scrubbed out.

Senator FAULKNER—I appreciate it might be a different program, but to save a bit of time I think we will deal with it quickly now. Have you got any plans to produce a brochure for those students?

Senator Vanstone—For which students?

Senator FAULKNER—For those students who were refused Austudy because of the assets test.

Senator Vanstone—Do you mean the AMT?

Senator FAULKNER—Yes. Are there plans that have been recently generated to produce such a brochure?

Senator Vanstone—Not that the officers here are aware of, and certainly not that I am aware of. That is the equivalent of asking Senator Newman, for example, to write personally to every social security applicant who is not successful.

Senator FAULKNER—Have you heard of any suggestion for the design of a Christmas card competition for university students?

Senator Vanstone—I have heard of such a suggestion, yes.

Senator FAULKNER—Was it your Christmas card?

Senator Vanstone—I have not established a Christmas card. One suggestion was that since we have a number of excellent art schools at our universities one of them might like to provide a demonstration, if you like, of artwork that they have. The suggestion was then raised that that could cause difficulties in selecting one on the basis of personal preference and so it might be better to have a competition. That has not been acted on.

Senator FAULKNER—Was that your idea?

Senator Vanstone—No, the competition was not. To say that instead of buying a standard card it might be worth using an example from the universities and demonstrating the excellent quality they have, yes, that was my idea, but the idea to have a competition, no.

Senator FAULKNER—Are you saying to the Senate estimates committee that that was not your idea?

Senator Vanstone—To establish a competition was not my idea.

Senator CARR—Not the competition, the idea to have a Christmas card.

Senator Vanstone—I have accepted that. There are two different lines of thought running here.

Senator FAULKNER—What was your idea?

Senator Vanstone—I have indicated that to you, Senator.

Senator FAULKNER—If you could just clarify it.

Senator Vanstone—I am about to do that. A query was raised with respect to what sort of Christmas card we would use this year.

Senator FAULKNER—Who raised that query?

Senator Vanstone—An administrative officer in the office who was getting the lists and that sort of stuff ready. There is no great excitement here, Senator.

Senator FAULKNER—Who raised it?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, there was just a general discussion in my office. I do not think that which person in my office said what is of relevance. As best that I can recall, I suggested considering using an artwork from an art school. I am not talking about one in their collection, I am talking about an artwork from a student. As I recall the conversation, someone in my office said, ‘Well, you would have difficulty picking,’ and someone else said, ‘What about a competition?’

Senator FAULKNER—Was this raised—

Senator Vanstone—It might have come from the department, the suggestion to have a competition. I do not know. It has not gone anywhere.

Senator FAULKNER—Was this raised with departmental officers?

Senator Vanstone—It probably would have been.

Senator FAULKNER—Can you tell the committee what the prize was for the design of your Christmas card?

Senator Vanstone—To the best of my knowledge, it did not go far enough to even consider that.

Senator FAULKNER—Are you saying to the committee that you did not raise the issue of a prize for students for the design of your Christmas card?

Senator Vanstone—If you had a competition, presumably you would give something to the person who won. What I am saying to you is that to the best of my knowledge it was not progressed sufficiently far to even consider what that would be. You asked, ‘What was the prize?’, and I said, ‘I don’t think it has even got that far.’

CHAIR—This is fascinating, Senator, but could we move on to some more substantive matters. Time is going by.

Senator FAULKNER—We are nearly through this line of questioning.

Senator Vanstone—May I say, Senator, that I would hope that you would support an education minister, instead of using on their Christmas card some design generated by a factory whose job it is to make money out of Christmas cards, having something on the Christmas card that was the work of universities.

Senator FAULKNER—I might, Minister. It would depend on a range of issues that I am trying to get to the bottom of. It would depend, for example, whether you suggested to officers of your department that the prize for the design of your Christmas card might be a waiver of the HECS debt. Is that right?

Senator Vanstone—No, certainly not. No disrespect to whoever thought of that, but if we were to proceed—and when I say it has not got that far, nothing has happened; there have been other priorities than sorting out Christmas cards—with choosing something from a university by way of a competition amongst the art schools, remembering that there are things you could do to choose something from a university other than by way of competition, we would presumably offer to buy the work or pay the student a reasonable sum for the work and the copyright if we were going to put it on a card. That is what I would envisage one would do.

Senator FAULKNER—But you did not raise such a suggestion, or your office did not raise such a suggestion with the department?

Senator Vanstone—As I say, it is not my view that any discussions have been held with the department in relation to what one might give to a student who happened to win a competition, were one to be held, for an artwork to go on a Christmas card. Let us get this right here. The competition presumably would not—or might—contain entries, if people wanted to enter, of a design of a Christmas card. Someone else might simply say, ‘I did this silk-screen’—there are plenty of Christmas cards like that, which are not Christmassy in themselves—and I would like to enter this as being something that went on the front of the Christmas card.’ Just hold on and I will check for you.

I am right; that concept has not got to the point of being discussed other than as in general conversation, ‘Well, you’d have to give something to the person who won if you did that.’

But we might not do that, Senator. We might just use a standard commercial Christmas card. I would feel a bit flat if we did that. I think it might be an opportunity to demonstrate the sort of work that comes out of Australian art schools.

Senator FAULKNER—But this is not something that has been formally raised by your ministerial office with the department?

Senator Vanstone—To the best of my knowledge, that is exactly what I have told you.

Senator FAULKNER—As you talk about these issues, the other thing that, as you asked me my view, I would take account of would be the motivation that any minister might have in establishing a complaints hotline, the awards, possibly a Christmas card competition, the idea of the brochure and so forth.

Senator Vanstone—What is the brochure? I have not got this brochure business you are asking me about, sorry.

Senator FAULKNER—I am interested in what might be a minister's motivation.

Senator Vanstone—But you asked me if we had designed a brochure to explain to unsuccessful AMT clients why they were not getting Austudy. I just cannot get a grip on this.

Senator FAULKNER—You have indicated to me—I have heard what you have said—that the department is not producing such a brochure, as I understand it. You have made that clear.

Senator Vanstone—Yes. I cannot say that there is not a junior officer cooking up some idea that they think is spectacular and that is going to appear on my desk in a couple of weeks or tomorrow, but to the best of my knowledge no-one is planning a brochure to unsuccessful Austudy applicants.

Senator FAULKNER—But you are not cooking it up? That is the point I am making.

Senator Vanstone—No, absolutely not. I was the one who ensured that each of the applicants, whether successful or otherwise, diminished or cut out of Austudy, as a consequence of the AMT, was personally written to. I thought it was the least we could do, since the administration of it was not as good as it should have been.

Senator FAULKNER—And in relation to the Christmas card, you have received no advice, informal or formal, from the department?

Senator Vanstone—No, I did not say that. I indicated to you that there had been general discussions and there might be a brief outlining that—

CHAIR—Could we move on, Senator?

Senator FAULKNER—Let's establish it before we move on. Maybe Mr Gallagher can help.

Mr Gallagher—Senator, at one stage there was a discussion about the option of inviting some form of works of art or something from universities that might go onto a Christmas card. That initiative lapsed, to my knowledge. We never, in the course of the discussions that we had, got to the matter of how to procure it, and certainly there was never discussion of a prize with the department.

Senator FAULKNER—What was the motivation for those discussions?

Senator Vanstone—Christmas cards are of course important, to send people best wishes of the season, but in the priority rankings of one's duties they have not come ahead of other activities that I have had subsequent to that idea being generated. So 'lapsed', in a sense, might convey more finality than it ought to. If my workload is such that I have time to give further consideration to that, I will. If it does not, we will go the standard path we went last year.

Senator FAULKNER—Is the department aware of the motivation for this?

Mr Gallagher—My understanding is that it is to recognise the fact that in the art schools, particularly, there is some very creative output that is not gaining sufficient national recognition.

Senator Vanstone—I bought a piece myself, incidentally, at the University of Ballarat last year—an excellent sculpture by a young student. And, either by dint of not wanting to be left out or because he genuinely liked it as well, Minister Honeywood, of Victoria, also bought a piece. I regard what I purchased as an absolute bargain and think people ought to understand the quality of work coming out of our art schools. Science and research are important but so is the sort of work coming out of the art schools, and it is not getting sufficient recognition.

Senator FAULKNER—Has the department been either targeted by the minister or the minister's office, or involved in activities by the minister or the minister's office, that would go to raising the minister's standing amongst the university student population—building bridges with university students? Have you been involved in any way there?

Mr Gallagher—That has not been communicated to us as a purpose. We have not been involved in the forms of discussion that you allude to. We have been involved in a number of discussions, ranging now over some months, as to the changing character of the financing of higher education and the fact that students, as consumers, are entitled to better information on which to make their choices, that they have a stake in the system and that their views on the adequacy of the system in meeting their expectations should be canvassed and should be reported on.

Senator CARR—I think you have canvassed this quite well, but I want just to recap some of these matters that I thought we might have missed. In terms of the student survey, you indicated that there had been some discussion of the offer of encouragements for students to participate in this survey. Did I understand you correctly that there had been discussion on that?

Mr Gallagher—Senator, I said that there were a number of options for improving the response rate, and I indicated that one of those options is a form of incentive.

Senator CARR—What is the form of incentive that has been discussed? Mr Gallagher, what form of incentive has been discussed?

Mr Gallagher—There have been various options canvassed, including during the process of consultation with the peak bodies. These range from cash prizes, as is common in other surveys—

Senator CARR—What sort of cash prize are we talking about?

Mr Gallagher—We have not settled a figure. Others might be a personal computer, a trip—

Senator CARR—Trips? Where to?

Mr Gallagher—We have not got to that kind of—

Senator Vanstone—It is course related, Senator, just in case you are thinking of writing down 'Bali' or something like that. None of this has been settled, and we are simply trying to go through the range of ways that one could encourage a higher response rate. It is the first survey. We want a decent response rate; we do want to hear what students think. It is important to canvass all options.

Senator CARR—Are they the only options that have been canvassed?

Mr Gallagher—I obtained in the mail last week from my bank a survey instrument on my satisfaction with their services and included in it was the opportunity for me to fill out a component of the form which entered me for a \$10,000 prize.

Senator Vanstone—Which bank? They have not written to me and offered me that.

Mr Gallagher—It is not an uncommon form of trying to improve—

Senator Vanstone—It is not Westpac. I bank with them and they have not written to me that way.

Senator CARR—Are these the only options that are being considered?

Senator Vanstone—There is a whole range, Senator. When we come to settle on something we will let everybody know.

Senator CARR—Was the issue of a HECS exempt scholarship canvassed?

Mr Gallagher—Yes. It is one option.

Senator CARR—And at this stage is that all it is? It is just an option, is it?

Senator Vanstone—Absolutely nothing has been settled, Senator. It may be, on advice, that once the reference group has met it is possible to get a very satisfactory response rate without any such inducement.

Senator CARR—And consideration of fast food vouchers?

Senator Vanstone—Really, that question demeans even you.

Senator CARR—Yes. But has that been considered?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, that question demeans even you.

Senator CARR—So it has not?

Senator Vanstone—That is just a pathetic question. Let me give you a bit of extra information if you want it vis-a-vis the reference group. It will be chaired by Dr Gregor Ramsey whom you may know of. Does that name ring a bell, Senator?

Senator CARR—No, not at the moment.

Senator Vanstone—And it will have Gavin Moodie from the Victoria University of Technology, Sandra Milligan from the *Good Universities Guide*, Associate Professor Jane Morrison who is Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of New South Wales, Dr Ainley from the Australian Council for Educational Research, Professor Ramsden who is the Director of Griffith Institute for Higher Education, Professor Anwyl who was a former director of the Centre for Study of Higher Education at Melbourne University, Ms Caroline Daley from the Bureau of Statistics and, of course, Dr Karmel from the department. So that is a pretty good range of advice, I would think. I hope that indicates the seriousness with which the government takes this.

Senator CARR—That is for the whole survey, isn't it? It is not just for the hotline, is it?

Senator Vanstone—No. That is for the whole survey.

Senator FAULKNER—HEQL complete.

Senator Vanstone—Do not get it out of perspective.

Senator FAULKNER—Your words, Minister, not mine.

Senator Vanstone—As I said, HEQL might be an acronym you might want to use relating to the hotline itself, but it certainly does not relate to the survey as a whole.

Senator FAULKNER—I think that it might be an acronym which will be hoist on its own petard.

Senator CARR—You have no costings for any of this component to the survey?

Senator Vanstone—Which component?

Senator CARR—You said that there was a question here about the administration of it. Do you have an overall budgetary allocation for this project?

Senator Vanstone—I think that matter is best treated the same as the others. When we get these matters settled and to the extent contracts are made, obviously, that is a matter for parliament to have the knowledge of.

Senator FAULKNER—With the outsourcing of these matters and administration relating to the survey, how are you ensuring that privacy concerns are taken account of? Is that a major consideration for you and the department?

Senator Vanstone—It would be a requirement of the contract.

Senator CARR—You are anticipating that this will be an annual event?

Senator Vanstone—I would hope so until such time as—and I would not like to guess how many years it would take—the universities that do not currently offer their students this opportunity, follow the lead given by universities that do offer their students that facility.

Senator CARR—And you are seeking to attract some 350,000 respondents annually?

Senator Vanstone—If you took 70 per cent as an estimate, as Senator Faulkner says—as hazy as his numbers are—that is what it comes out as.

Senator CARR—If I could turn to the awards, what is actually involved with the proposed awards? I understand there are three components to this proposal: a survey, a hotline and then a series of awards. Is that the case?

Senator Vanstone—I would not describe it as three components in that way. There are teaching awards and a survey. That is how I would describe it. I think there has been an appropriate emphasis on increasing research by universities. If you look at the forward estimates and see the addition of \$130 million on research when we came to government, you will see that this government is quite committed to that, despite the fact that the AVCC, incidentally, were happy to drop that money. Rather than have their future operating grant reduced, they were happy to cut research funding—a matter that was of some surprise to the Research Council.

In any event, the spotlight has perhaps dimmed on teaching. Universities without students are the same as hospitals without patients. It is my view that a greater emphasis needs to be given to quality teaching. So much of the progression of academics depends on their research output and perhaps, one might argue, not enough on excellence in teaching, which is what students look for. I do not know your educational experience, Senator, but I remember mine and I could nominate perhaps four or five teachers, out of those for a combined law-arts degree, who were so good that you would park in a no-parking zone or leave your car on an expired meter, and pay for that, in order to hear what that person had to say because they were really good. If you ask students now, they happily pick out that they have one or two in any year that are like that, but not all of them. So we want to put the spotlight on teaching and very positively reward the good teachers.

Senator CARR—Yes. So how much is being spent on professional development within the higher education budget?

Senator Vanstone—It is about \$20 million a year, I think, on the committee for university teaching and staff development. That is important, but I think it is important to have a public recognition of excellent, quality teachers.

Senator CARR—It is not a huge amount of money, is it?

Senator Vanstone—Some people would say \$20 million is a lot of money.

Senator CARR—Given the size of the higher education budget, it is not.

Senator Vanstone—We could have a debate about it, but you have your views and I have mine. You asked me how much.

Senator CARR—We have discussed this at length in the past. If you are considering improving the quality of teaching in the higher education sector, is there a proposal to encourage or require the adoption of formal teaching qualifications, the equivalent of a Dip.Ed., in the higher education sector?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, you and I do not often agree but I have to tell you that either last night or this morning—the time has run together and I cannot tell you which it was—that fact quite independently occurred to me. I have now been advised that the Dearing committee recommended that as well, so you can be sure it will be on the agenda somewhere to have a look at that.

Senator CARR—It is under consideration?

Senator Vanstone—I have not said that, Senator. You have a great tendency to extrapolate. You should have been an artist.

Senator CARR—The problem is that when you say you will have a look at something, then, old-fashioned sort of person that I am, I like to think that you are actually going to do something about it. What are you intending?

Senator Vanstone—It means ‘have a look and make a decision’. It does not mean definitely do something; it does not mean definitely not. It means give consideration to.

Senator CARR—There are in fact currently no requirements for academics to have a formal teaching qualification.

Senator Vanstone—You would know the system operating under the Labor government for the last 13 years better than I would.

Senator CARR—That is the case, is it not?

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I think that is right.

Senator CARR—There are no requirements at all.

CHAIR—Never have been, Senator.

Senator CARR—You say that this is specifically aimed at a quality assurance measure. How much money is spent on quality assurance within the current higher education budget?

Senator Vanstone—The proposition has been put to me that a fair answer to that is \$5 billion annually. Could I indicate to you something else I am interested in? I cannot tell you when I will get to it but I think it is a matter that all parties should be interested in. That is how to have a financial reporting system for a university that gives a genuine indication of how much money goes into genuine student services. I do not think operating grant does that. It clearly does not. I am contemplating that matter and if you have got any ideas on that I would be interested in them.

Senator CARR—Yes, but in the last profiles process, as I understand it, there was a proposal for quality assurance—that is, until the change of government, a specific budget line for quality assurance—to measure the capacity of the universities to actually deliver service at reasonable levels. Was that program maintained?

Mr Gallagher—The program of the former government involved an allocation of \$70 million by way of reward incentive each year for a three-year period. The three years of that cycle of quality reviews were completed and there was nothing in the forward estimates for its continuation.

Senator CARR—Yes. So there is no decision to continue that—

Mr Gallagher—The new government has embedded the quality assurance arrangements now within the annual profiles process, whereby the whole of the amount of Commonwealth investment in higher education is looked at from a quality perspective.

Senator CARR—But that \$70 million allocation under the previous government has not been continued under this government?

Mr Gallagher—It was a three-year program, Senator.

Senator CARR—Yes, but it has not been continued under this government. I make the point, Minister, that if you were so concerned about the issue of quality assurance presumably you would have continued a program such as that.

Senator Vanstone—Not necessarily. You see, people have different views about the outcomes of particular programs and what is the best way to achieve them. Some people—maybe you, since you do not seem to be that positive about the teaching awards—do not think that giving public recognition does anything. I actually think that it does and I am inclined to think it does a lot more than some other things. People make value judgments. It does not mean because they choose a different path that they have a different goal. Nor do I accept that because you spend more money you necessarily get a better result.

Senator CARR—You mentioned the issue of the importance of quality teaching. Would you acknowledge that the national tertiary education union has recently indicated that only 40 per cent of universities academics across Australia still enjoy the benefits of tenured employment? Do you believe that tenure or otherwise has an impact on the quality of teaching provided?

Senator Vanstone—I have some personal views that I am not in a position to articulate at this point. There is no government policy with respect to the matter of whether tenure is an asset or otherwise, so there is nothing I can add for you.

Senator CARR—It is just that universities are claiming that funding cuts are forcing them to undertake short-term casual appointments at the expense of more stable tenured appointments. How do you respond to that?

Senator Vanstone—I just need a couple of minutes. As you know, universities have got more money this year than they had last year, so the proposition that they have to shift to other staffing as a consequence of any cuts is somewhat misleading. They have less than they thought they were going to get but they have more than they had last year.

Senator CARR—If that is the case, Minister, has the department undertaken any research?

Senator Vanstone—I am informed that they had more in 1997 than they had in any year since 1990. If that puts a little bit of colour on the sort of thing you read in the paper and

some of the statements that come out of the higher education sector—if it stands in stark contrast to those things and gives cause for reflection—then I am very pleased.

Senator CARR—Has your department undertaken any research on the effects of the declining levels of job security?

Mr Gallagher—No, we have not.

Senator CARR—Has there been any research undertaken on whether or not there is any disincentive for the best and brightest people to embark on a university career?

Mr Gallagher—Senator, various pieces of research have gone into matters of academic morale and the attractiveness of academe as an occupation. One of these was an international study conducted by Barry Sheehan at Melbourne University in cooperation with the Carnegie Foundation. Another was a survey undertaken by Craig McGuinness and John Anwyl from the University of Melbourne.

They have looked at changes since the Dawkins reforms, whereby academics who were only teaching and are now doing some research tend to have increased levels of satisfaction and morale. Those that were doing more research in the pre-1987 period and are now doing more teaching have mixed reactions—there tends to be a lower level of satisfaction amongst those people. It really depends on who you look at within the sector in terms of what factors affect them. But none of those seem to indicate any relationship in terms of the form of employment impacting on morale.

Senator CARR—Is not a common theme, in terms of submissions to the West review, on the relationship between the declining levels of job security and providing a disincentive to embark upon an academic career?

Mr Gallagher—I cannot answer that question.

Senator CARR—Particularly from academics that have dependants.

Mr Gallagher—We would have to get that on notice, Senator.

Senator CARR—Are you not aware of those?

Mr Gallagher—I have not seen that. The West committee is an independent committee, Senator, and the assessment of those submissions is being undertaken independent of the department.

Senator CARR—It is just that there are media reports to that effect on the loss of tenure and threats to university excellence.

Mr Gallagher—They are the media reports of particular submissions, Senator.

Senator CARR—Yes, they are reports of submissions. Minister, if you are concerned about the issue of teacher quality at university, would that not be part of your thinking as well?

Senator Vanstone—A whole range of things would be a part of my thinking, Senator. As I have indicated to you, there is not a government policy with respect to the appropriateness or otherwise of the level of tenure in universities.

Senator CARR—In fact, it is cheaper to run contracted staff, is it not?

Senator Vanstone—Senator, there are a whole range of discussions one might have in relation to that.

Senator CARR—Perhaps I can go through a few answers to questions that the department has provided me already. I draw your attention to the answer given to question number 239. Mr Gallagher, I presume your section of the department is indicating that final data on the

applications for enrolments in subject areas and the number of enrolments by institutions at the national and state level will be available in July after it has been validated. Can I now have that information?

Mr Gallagher—Senator, we understand that you have that information. It was given to the members of the committee prior to this meeting. It is called, ‘Selected higher education student statistics 1997’.

Senator CARR—If it has come in, thank you very much.

Mr Gallagher—It shows, Senator, that the increase between 1997 and 1996 in undergraduate load was an increase of 14,356.

Senator CARR—How does that relate to the previous years?

Mr Gallagher—In terms of load, I only have in front of me the 1996-97 figures.

Senator CARR—I understand that there has been a number of years where that figure has been exceeded in recent years. Is that correct?

Mr Gallagher—Table 5 of this report, Senator, shows that in 1997 the total load is 514,000. That is the highest ever. In all categories, other than sub-degree enabling programs, there has been growth.

Senator CARR—Then I expect you will be able to advise me on question No. 242: the existing enrolments comparison of the first semester 1997 with the previous agreed targets. Is that information now available?

Mr Gallagher—That information is in this report.

Senator CARR—While the absolute numbers might suggest the highest number, in fact the percentage growth in over-enrolment has been greater in a number of years in recent times—for instance, in 1991 and 1992. Is that correct?

Mr Gallagher—Yes, Senator, and the institutions have improved their management since then.

Senator CARR—But it has in fact had higher levels of enrolment at other times.

Mr Gallagher—No, Senator; there have been higher levels of over-enrolment—that is, the inability of the institutions to manage to their enrolment target.

Senator CARR—Thank you. In terms of the application numbers, is it the case that they are down by 8,000 in 1997?

Senator Vanstone—While they are looking up the numbers, Senator, I might say that, as I understand it, you might describe it this way: there were less people in the shop, but a higher proportion of the people in the shop were genuinely and seriously looking to buy. I am now advised that apparently we do not have the figure here, so we will take that on notice.

Senator CARR—You do not have that figure?

Senator Vanstone—We do have it, but not here. We will take it on notice. I think we have it anyway.

Senator CARR—University enrolment applications are down 8,000 in 1997.

Mr Gallagher—But enrolments are up 15,000.

Senator CARR—Yes, but the applications themselves; yes, we went through that before.

Senator Vanstone—That is right. You can keep pointing out that fewer people applied and we will keep telling you that more people are in. Senator, you would be entitled to be annoyed

if we said to you, 'Applications are up but there are far less people are in.' You would be buzzing around like a bumblebee complaining that there were less people who had access. I do not notice you giving us a compliment that more have access, which is why, of course, you want to focus on applications.

Mr Gallagher—We do have one figure, in response to your earlier question. The over-enrolment in 1997 is 8.64 per cent and the over-enrolment in 1996 was 5.45 per cent.

Senator CARR—In terms of the distribution of additional funds for the rationalisation and restructuring activities, can you clarify whether the distribution of these funds will be entirely by submission?

Mr Gallagher—Yes, Senator. There are guidelines that the minister has approved, and that are being distributed to the institutions, against which the institutions make submissions for the funds.

Senator CARR—Have those guidelines been provided to the committee?

Mr Gallagher—They were only recently approved, Senator.

Senator CARR—Could we have a copy of those guidelines?

Senator Vanstone—As soon as they are in their final format, yes.

Senator CARR—Is there any question of ministerial discretion in the allocation of those moneys?

Mr Gallagher—There always is. Guidelines are guidelines and institutions put forward their proposals. They are then assessed against the criteria in those guidelines and there are recommendations to the minister, as has always been the practice.

Senator CARR—In the answer to 249 you have indicated that there will be an allocation of \$5.374 million for higher education equity programs. How will that money be allocated?

Mr Gallagher—That particular matter is on the agenda for the forthcoming round of profiles discussions we are having with each of the institutions. There are presently arrangements for allocating those funds on the basis of institutions' performance against quite a labyrinth of subsets of targets for each of the equity groups. We are taking advantage of this profiles round to discuss with institutions whether we can come up with something that is, firstly, a bit simpler and, more importantly, which focuses on improving progression and completion for the targeted groups.

Senator CARR—Is that \$5.3 million allocated per annum for the out years?

Mr Gallagher—It is a performance based funding element, Senator, which is allocated annually on the basis of the institution's performance the previous year.

Senator CARR—Yes. But will the total amount for that equity program be \$5.3 million for each year?

Mr Gallagher—As I understand, Senator, yes. It is in the forward estimates as such.

Senator CARR—Does that figure absorb the \$750,000 allowed for the regional disability liaison officer?

Mr Gallagher—Can we take that on notice, Senator? I think that it does absorb it.

Senator CARR—I just noticed in your answer that there was a reference to the regional disability liaison officer initiative being extended into 1997, but there is no reference thereafter. Do I presume from that that that money will be absorbed by the general equity program?

Mr Gallagher—The program is subject to evaluation and then it is up to the government to decide whether it wants to—

Senator CARR—But there is no ongoing allocation for the regional disability liaison officer initiative beyond 1997?

Mr Gallagher—I think that is right, Senator.

Senator CARR—Thank you. In terms of the distribution of the higher education equity program, I take it that you are saying that that is the subject of discussion in the current profile process. You are not able to actually indicate how the moneys will be allocated by equity group. Is that correct?

Mr Gallagher—Except to say, Senator, that there is a dedicated proportion of equity funds for indigenous students and it is evident, on the basis of work that has been done over the last 18 months, particularly, that for all of the equity groups, bar low socioeconomic status groups, there has been improvement. So our view is that we should now make a concerted target on socioeconomic status groups, and that is why we are thinking about changing the arrangements in consultation with the institutions.

Senator CARR—So with regard to students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, presumably that is a separate category from women, is it?

Mr Gallagher—Yes, Senator. Obviously, some of these categories overlap one another and that is part of the problem also.

Senator CARR—Yes. So this is basically working class men.

Mr Gallagher—No. It can be men or women.

Senator Vanstone—They overlap.

Senator CARR—I do understand the term, Minister. I am just wondering about the students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds that have a participation rate of 15.48 per cent, and the equity group of women has a participation rate of 55 per cent. Are you able to distinguish how many students from lower socioeconomic women's groups make up that 55 per cent?

Mr Gallagher—We think we can, but we have not yet. I may be misunderstanding your question, but we have had some work over several years to get agreement on how to measure socioeconomic status, and we still have some studies extant that we hope will shed some light so that we can get some agreement about a new approach. There is an interaction between socioeconomic status and gender. It does seem that men are faring worse. We would have to disaggregate the available data and provide some information at a later time.

Senator CARR—Yes, please. I am particularly interested if you are going to concentrate on lower socioeconomic groups as being your prime focus for equity consideration, will that mean a shift of resources away from the other equity groups?

Mr Gallagher—No. The equity groups are designated groups against which institutions set their own targets for improving the representation of those groups within the institution. On the basis of the overall performance of the institution against its targets, there has been an allocation of funds.

Some of the designated groups, such as women of non-English speaking background, for instance, are also able to be counted within socioeconomic status groups. To that extent we are looking at data about the participation of women in higher education as not constituting

an equity problem as such any more, except in some fields. We would look at women as a subset of socioeconomic status in order to improve participation of the poorer female students.

Senator CARR—I will look forward to seeing how that develops. The answers to question 124 seem to indicate that the department has very little information on the data of participation and success rates of indigenous Australians in higher education, particularly in regard to enabling courses. Also, in response to question 118, you indicated that you felt that the department was working with institutions to verify and resolve issues relating to data on indigenous Australians used in budget deliberations.

To what extent are those two answers in fact inconsistent or contradictory? Are you in fact working on providing additional information from institutions which were used in budget deliberations and would not that same information provide you with a better picture of the numbers and the types of participation of indigenous Australians in higher education? Would you like to take it on notice to take a look at both of those?

Mr Gallagher—Yes, you have lost me, Senator.

Senator CARR—I draw your attention specifically to the answers provided in questions 118 and 124. Could I have, Minister, some outline from you on how you intend to spend this \$1 million pilot. You have allocated \$1 million for a pilot study to develop new and more creative approaches to the system of TER scores as an allocating mechanism. I say that particularly in the context of what I have just raised in regard to the access to higher education by various targeted equity groups. What measures will you be undertaking to facilitate greater access to university through this particular pilot scheme?

Senator Vanstone—I hope, Senator, simply by raising the inadequacy of the TER score being used on its own. It is not that the TER score is completely useless. It is not, but the inadequacy of using it on its own was highlighted by the speech I made. It will occasion those people who have the capacity to control and make changes in this respect to start doing that. If you have read the speech, you will know some already are. The Victoria University of Technology is a very good example and there are others.

We will simply call for applications for money by way of grant to try new methods of assessment for entry. The words might not be exactly right, but I very much endorse Victoria University of Technology's sentiments. That is that the assessment project should be to access people in, not screen them out.

Senator CARR—Do I take it, Minister, that you made those statements with some eye to the Higher Education Council report on alternative university entrance selection criteria which I understand is due out very soon? Do you have a draft copy of that?

Senator Vanstone—I certainly have not seen one. So, if you mean an eye to it—

Senator CARR—That is not true? Is it not preparing a report along those lines?

Mr Gallagher—On what?

Senator CARR—The Higher Education Council report into alternative university entry selection criteria.

Senator Vanstone—Mr Gallagher advises me they have got some study under way.

Senator CARR—That is all you have got? You have made a number of comments about the tyranny of the TER and you say that the TER is grossly unfair.

Senator Vanstone—I think it can be very unfair.

Senator CARR—What alternatives do you have?

Senator Vanstone—You have obviously got the speech.

Senator CARR—Yes, but I am asking—

Senator Vanstone—I know, but I am wanting to know if you have a copy of the speech or are you working on the basis of reports?

Senator CARR—They are based on reports of your speech.

Senator Vanstone—I am just trying to ascertain whether you have a copy of the speech. If not—

Senator CARR—I do not have a copy of the speech in front of me.

Senator Vanstone—But you have got one?

Senator CARR—Yes, I have a copy of it somewhere.

Senator Vanstone—Good. As you know, it is not the Commonwealth's position to particularly mandate some sort of change and we are not seeking to do that. The universities have an interest in improving the entry assessments, as I would think the state governments do. What I intend by allocating the \$1 million is to fund pilots for innovative measures to be undertaken to see if we can find better ways.

I was told last night—this was being discussed just in passing—that Harvard University turned down about 157 students with perfect scores, to the extent that there is a TER equivalent. There is a very big and rich debate to be had about the appropriate entry mechanisms. I related in the speech the story of twin boys who had both gone to a particular school. One boy had left in year 10 due to a sporting preference. Until that time the boys had had roughly equal scores but the one who left had had a higher score. He went to another school and in the end ended up with a TER of 18 points below his brother.

All I seek to raise by virtue of that example is that the difference in the TER was clearly not related to the boys' capacity. They had been twins all their life and all their life at this particular school they had come out roughly even. It can be very unfair to someone in the sense of not being a proper assessment of their own capacity. It might be the school has not brought the best out of them, it might be a whole range of things that has led to the best not being brought out of them, and that is what your capacity is, it is your maximum capacity.

Another problem I raised with it, as you will understand, is that it gives no indication of your suitability to a particular course. Someone who got 99.999 might have a shocking bedside manner and not be suited to medicine.

Senator CARR—I understand the point you are making but you would appreciate that many widely respected practitioners in this field have strongly argued that the TER was not a biased method of entry. In fact, I have seen one report here that Professor Gavin Brown said that it was a godsend for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Professor Niland has also said that he thought the community saw the TER at large to be straightforward and transparent. You seem to be suggesting that it is a grossly unfair measure.

Senator Vanstone—As a matter of interest, since you picked Gavin Brown and John Niland, in a number of their courses, both of their universities use more than simply the TER. They recognise by virtue of what they practice that it is not necessarily the appropriate measure at all. They recognise that in the practice of what they do.

Senator CARR—Given that you are arguing that the TER is not a fair measure of intellectual capacity, why do you support the less comprehensive national literacy and numeracy testing that has actually been proposed by your government?

Senator Vanstone—I am not sure—

Senator CARR—Why then are you supporting the national literacy and numeracy testings proposals that have been advanced by your government?

Senator Vanstone—Why then am I supporting them? They are a completely different field.

Senator CARR—Why then?

Senator Vanstone—The basic answer to that would be that, while I freely say that I do not think a TER score is necessarily a measure of someone's intellectual capacity, it may be, but it may not be too. It is not a measure of their aptitude for a course. That is entirely different from a numeracy and literacy test, given that those skills are so essential to the normal functioning in life. I see them as being entirely different, Senator. It is interesting to note that the University of Sydney, as I understand, led the charge for having graduate medicine courses because they had such a lack of confidence in using the TER as an appropriate entry into medicine.

Senator CARR—Yes.

Senator Vanstone—You know there are occasions that some people will criticise when the prospect of change is raised ever so cautiously and so quietly, with an offer to fund innovative thinking, by those people who want to participate in developing better ways, if they think there are better ways.

Senator CARR—Yes. On another matter, Minister, you have indicated that there will be no loss of government places for the introduction of up-front fees. I draw your attention to recent publicity regarding the replacement of law places offered by Monash University and statements made by Monash Law Dean Professor Bob Williams, who said that within the law faculty there will be 70 less government funded commencing places; it is a very simple situation; we will be crazy not to replace government places with full fee places. What does DEETYA intend to do about this circumstance?

Senator Vanstone—I am aware of those reports and the guidelines that have been in circulation. I was at pains to ascertain what it was that Monash could possibly rely on in order to do that because that is just completely against the government's intentions and I have amended the guidelines accordingly. In addition to that—

Senator CARR—You have amended the guidelines?

Senator Vanstone—The guidelines, yes. If people did not think the government was clear on that point, I have gone to pains to make it even clearer.

Senator CARR—When were those guidelines amended?

Senator Vanstone—Only recently. They have not yet been re-circulated and released but they will be very soon though. All I wish to assure you is that I am aware of the Monash business. I think this was raised at an estimates committee before.

Senator CARR—Yes.

Senator Vanstone—The advice that we had anecdotally was that it really was not a serious plan by Monash; it was just a few people in the back room talking. Clearly it was more than that. I am not prepared to allow the university to circumvent the government's intention in that respect and, when the guidelines are released, that will be abundantly clear to them.

Senator, coming back to your points about Professor Niland and Professor Brown on the TER, I draw your attention to an article in the *Australian* in January this year by Carolyn Jones headed 'Call to scrap HSC score system'. It commences with the words that the vice-chancellor of one of the country's leading universities had raised doubts about the value of the method used to calculate students' year 12 scores in New South Wales and Victoria and claimed it had outlived its usefulness. Professor John Niland of the University of New South Wales yesterday called for the existing TER rank system to be scrapped and replaced with a range of scores that better reflected the diverse choice of subjects taken by students.

Senator CARR—Could I draw your attention then to the statement also by Professor—

Senator Vanstone—I am pleased that you are pleased to have that—

Senator CARR—Yes, I am delighted.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I am just wondering if you could bear that in mind when you occasionally say that so-and-so agrees with this or so-and-so does not agree with that—

Senator CARR—No, no, I was just—

Senator Vanstone—As if I should fall down and die because someone disagrees with me, which is not my usual course of action. This highlights where you have quoted someone as disagreeing, and I can go to something that they apparently said in January this year and last year, and say they do agree.

Senator CARR—I understand that Melbourne University for some years has had alternative methods of entry to that university other than TER—

Senator Vanstone—A number have and they should all be congratulated.

Senator CARR—Is that the sort of proposal you would be looking at—students with disabilities, students who have disadvantaged backgrounds, mature age student entry? These are the sorts of proposals that a number of universities have had for some time. Are you saying that those are the sorts of schemes you would like to see expanded?

Senator Vanstone—I am looking at the development of more innovative schemes than there already are. If people have got some they think they can build on, well and good. All we want to do is say, 'Look, there isn't a lot of money around but there is \$1 million we can put towards this.' It is a matter of common interest between the Commonwealth, the states and the universities. Those people who want to participate in developing a more sensible and innovative assessment scheme will be able to do so.

Senator CARR—So it will be pretty easy money for some of these universities to put forward schemes that they have been using for 15 to 20 years.

Senator Vanstone—We are not going to give people money to simply say, 'Why don't you look at what we've been doing for the last 15 years.'

Senator CARR—You will not give them that.

Senator Vanstone—No.

Senator CARR—I am pleased to hear it. You would also be aware of the Monash vice-chancellor's remarks where he said that you had assured students that overall public places would not rise under full fees. That is quoting you from the *Australian* higher education

supplement of 13 August. The Vice-Chancellor, David Robinson, has indicated that there will not necessarily be an expansion of publicly funded places. In fact, he asks whether it is not the case that next year Monash will withdraw 720 publicly funded places and will lose 1,100 places as a result of federal funding cuts and is it not also the case that those places will be replaced by full-fee paying students?

Senator Vanstone—As you know, the profiles and negotiations are not under way. When the government reduced the universities' plans for money—they have more money this year than they have had in a long time but less money than they thought they were going to have—we indicated to them that we did not expect them to teach the same students for significantly less money. Funding per student is, as you know, one indication for funding available for quality. As you well know, we said that any reduction in load to planned load, to compensate for a reduction in planned funding, would come in the first instance—where it is reasonably possible—from postgraduate course work.

In 1997, 1998 and 1999, Monash has an increase in its undergraduate funded load but a decrease in its postgraduate funded load. As has been discussed here on many occasions, that is the means by which we would ensure that funding per student stays the same. I would like you to cast your eyes over this chart—I think a picture says a thousand words—that has been prepared in order to explain this point to people who have been misled by scurrilous remarks made by some others.

The chart shows that funding per student when Labor came to office in 1983 was around \$12,000. Labor's response to the fiscal difficulties it has faced was always to cut funding per student. It was in fact under Labor that funding came straight down, whereas the changes we have made, I think you will see, leave funding per student pretty much at the 1996 level—in fact, just above the 1996 level.

So we have been at great pains to say to universities, 'Look, you can drop some postgraduate course workload because Labor has allowed you to charge fees for that. People can still do postgraduate course workload. We want to protect the rights of undergraduates, that is why we are funding more government funded undergraduate places.' The net result, in picture form, is that you drastically stuck it to funding per student. This administration has maintained funding per student. To the extent that that is an indicator of quality, and our appreciation of the need to protect quality for students, that should give you a very clear idea of our approach and a very clear idea of your approach. I will make available small copies of the graph to the committee, if they would like them.

Senator TROETH—Yes, or would it be possible for that to be incorporated in *Hansard*?

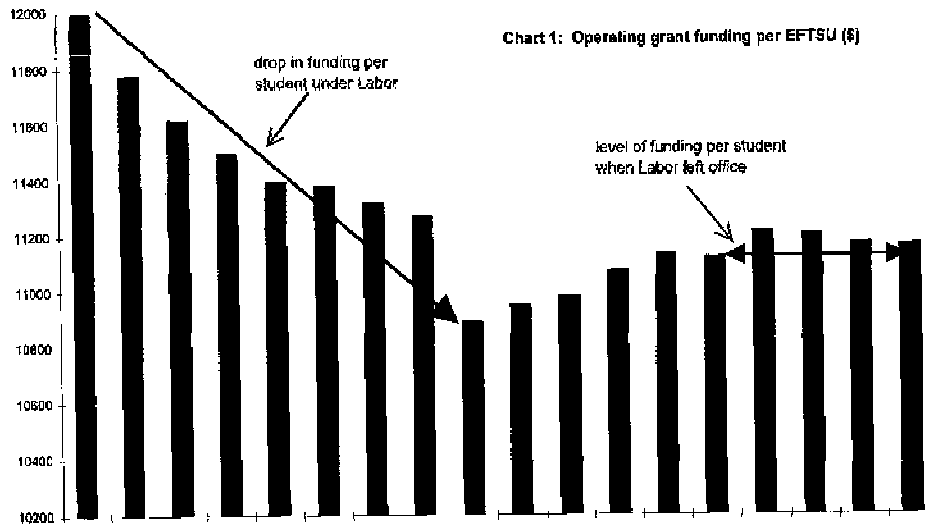
Senator Vanstone—I feel quite sure that would be possible.

Senator TROETH—I think that should be part of the record of estimates.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the graph be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The graph read as follows—

Sheet1 Chart 1



Senator CARR—While you are there, Mr Gallagher, perhaps you could draw the committee's attention to the surveys you have done for me in the past which highlight the amount of money spent as total funding for higher education over the same period? Was it the case that, while enrolments increased by about 64 per cent, Commonwealth expenditure increased by 65 per cent over that period?

Mr Gallagher—I do not have those figures in front of me but I do have two comparisons, the year 1990 with the year 1997. In terms of the operating grant, per equivalent full-time student unit, for 1997 there is \$11,214, which is the highest figure since 1990. In 1991 it was \$10,892. It has gradually shifted up to its high point now in 1997. Let us look at total funding per equivalent full-time student unit for the same period: in 1990 it was \$12,429, and in 1997 it is \$12,994.

Senator CARR—And what is it expected to be through the out years?

Mr Gallagher—By the year 2000 it gets to \$12,810, which is still higher than 1990.

Senator CARR—But is it right that the total expenditure over that same period increased by 65 per cent whereas student numbers increased by only 64 per cent? You can take that on notice.

Mr Gallagher—I do not have those figures in front of me.

Senator CARR—We can do all sorts of things with the figures, can't we, Mr Gallagher?

Mr Gallagher—Not at all, Senator.

Senator CARR—No, of course not! If that is the case, I might put the rest of those on notice because I understand we have another section to do this evening. Minister, now that you have had time to go back to your desk, have you had an opportunity to find out what happened to those questions regarding Mr Abbott's office?

Senator Vanstone—The final version is being typed for you.

Senator CARR—It is just that we are on that section now and I would like to know where the answers are.

Senator Vanstone—I can tell you what I recall the amendment to be, since the answer comes on my behalf. It was a simple matter of an assertion being made that would be made on the basis of Mr Abbott's advice to me. I asked for the answer to be altered on the basis that it read roughly on the basis of advice offered by Mr Abbott.

Senator CARR—Can I suggest that we break until such time as we have seen these questions.

CHAIR—I do not intend having an adjournment. We have a very busy program. Perhaps we might be able to come to it later.

Senator Vanstone—I will see how quick we can get it for you.

Senator CARR—There is no point in proceeding until I have seen the questions, and I am saying to you that unless we see the answers I have no intention of proceeding.

CHAIR—Perhaps we could come back to this program and move on to another one?

Senator CARR—What else is there?

CHAIR—Do you have anything on 2.2?

Senator CARR—I have said that I will put the rest of them on notice. That is the whole point.

CHAIR—I thought you were just talking about 2.1. So everything is on notice for 2.2.

Senator CARR—I am prepared to put the rest on notice but I would like to have the answers to the questions that I have asked. I will not proceed until I get them.

CHAIR—Senator Carr, if the answers are not here, we cannot provide the answers.

Senator CARR—Yes, that is the point. I am suggesting you adjourn the committee until we get the answers.

CHAIR—No, I do not intend adjourning the committee.

Senator Vanstone—Which program are we about to move to?

CHAIR—We will be moving onto program 5.1. If there are no more questions on program 2, we will move to program 5, student, youth and Aboriginal education support.

Senator CARR—I told you that I am not proceeding until I get the answers.

CHAIR—That is your choice to not proceed. We will move on and if there are no more questions we will keep going.

Sitting suspended from 3.40 to 4.26 p.m.

[4.26 p.m.]

Program 5—Student and youth support

Subprogram 5.1—Education assistance and income support

Senator CARR—At the previous hearings—

Senator Vanstone—I am sorry, but you will either have to lean forward or speak up, Senator Carr.

Senator CARR—On 5 June, you advised this committee that the departmental secretary was undertaking an inquiry into the allegations made concerning a wish list of the parliamentary secretary's office of Mr Oldfield, who had close associations with Ms Pauline Hanson and had used his facilities to establish the One Nation party while he was in fact employed by Mr Abbott. Could you advise this committee what actions the secretary has taken in regard to that requirement?

Senator Vanstone—I will just make some inquiries to the secretary's office in relation to that and give you some up-to-date information on how far that has gone.

Senator CARR—I asked earlier in the proceedings today where the secretary was and if he was available. Is he now available?

Mr Grant—The secretary is in the department in Canberra.

Senator CARR—How long will it take to get him?

Mr Grant—I do not know what his immediate commitments are. I would be happy to try to contact him, Senator.

Senator CARR—If you could do that, Mr Grant, perhaps we could then establish whether or not we proceed any further.

Senator Vanstone—We will make those inquiries, Senator. It would have been helpful, when you refused to give the committee a quorum until you had some written answers, if you had indicated that you wanted the secretary here, at that time, some 35 minutes ago, as for your convenience and that of the other committee members we would have made those inquiries of the secretary.

Senator CARR—I would ask, Mr Grant, if you could check on the secretary's availability.

Mr Grant—I will do that, Senator.

Senator CARR—I take it, Minister, that you are not familiar with the secretary's inquiry.

Senator Vanstone—I have not sought to intervene in that in any way. I think it is an inquiry that should be conducted by the secretary, and I should not interfere. No doubt, when it is appropriately concluded, the secretary will report to me on what has happened.

Senator CARR—Have you had a report on its progress?

Senator VANSTONE—I do not recall having had a written brief. But let me check, because once I have seen a file that relates to these answers I think that that is what I have seen. There could have been a separate one, but I certainly do not recall one.

Senator CARR—Have you had any informal brief?

Senator VANSTONE—No, I do not recall that—unless the matter has come up in passing discussion. There is nothing that I would categorise remotely as an informal brief.

Senator CARR—Are any officers here capable of responding to these matters? Is the secretary the most appropriate one?

Senator VANSTONE—I think he is the most appropriate. Mr Oldfield was employed by Mr Abbott, and I think it is appropriate that the secretary deal with that. Mr Abbott has responsibility in this respect, to the best of my knowledge, and therefore the secretary is the appropriate person.

CHAIR—Senator Carr, do you have any more questions on the program?

Senator CARR—I have some other questions relating to program 6. It is on program 5 that I would like to deal with these matters.

Senator VANSTONE—We could go on to program 6 and come straight back to program 5 as soon as the secretary arrives.

CHAIR—Are the officers here for program 6?

Senator VANSTONE—I am not sure. They will probably need 20 minutes notice, which is why it would have been better if the senator had indicated his wish before he refused to allow the quorum.

Senator CARR—These questions were asked on 5 June—simple questions involving simple replies. Minister, when were you aware that the department paid for Mr Oldfield to travel to the launch of the One Nation party?

Senator VANSTONE—I could not tell you. I could not put a date on it. Obviously, I would have become aware on whatever date that I first opened the file that had this answer in it.

Senator CARR—How long have you had this question?

Senator VANSTONE—I could not tell you without having a look. I cannot, equally, guarantee to you that someone did not verbally mention that to me prior to seeing that answer. I do not put much on the date I particularly found that out.

Senator CARR—When did the department forward these answers to you?

Senator VANSTONE—You just asked me that, and I said I did not know.

Senator CARR—Can I ask the officers?

Senator VANSTONE—If the officers can give you that information, yes. If they cannot, I will take it on notice.

Mr Walters—These matters were not looked at by our part of the department.

Senator CARR—We will wait for the secretary, then.

CHAIR—Are there any further questions on program 5? The committee stands adjourned for an indefinite time.

Senator Vanstone—Mr Chairman, am I to understand that the committee is not prepared to proceed even with item 6 in the meantime?

Senator CARR—You do not have your officers here.

Senator Vanstone—Can we come back as soon as they arrive?

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator Vanstone—Mr Chairman, I take it that there were no further questions on program 5.

Sitting suspended from 4.38 p.m. to 5.02 p.m.

[5.02 p.m.]

Program 6—Portfolio administration and advising

Subprogram 6.1—Portfolio management, advising and analysis

Senator CARR—I was wondering whether the officers were able to advise me on the range of polling and public surveys undertaken by DEETYA in the last six months. In the previous answer to question 17, many of these various polling activities have had a direct relationship to government policy and budgetary directions. Given that they are directly related to government policies and budgetary directions, I think that the availability of the results of such surveys might be of interest to the parliament. When will the report on the survey of delivery of Commonwealth Employment Services be available?

Dr Jarvie—Can you explain exactly which survey you are talking about in this list, please, Senator?

Senator CARR—Have you got the question and answer to No. 17?

Dr Jarvie—Yes. I have it in front of me.

Senator CARR—The first dot point concerns the survey cost of \$237,400. The survey was based on a focus group and some personal interviews which were held with jobseekers, employers and case managers. The study, as I understand it, sought to examine gaps in services currently provided to help form the planning of services in the new employment services market. It says that the report on the survey is not yet available. When will that report be available?

Dr Jarvie—As I recall, that survey was done some time ago. What we have done is taken the output from that survey and used it as input to the next survey that we are doing which is actually being run at the moment—that is, July and August. I cannot tell you exactly when the report is going to be available, but I can take that on notice and get it back to you.

Senator CARR—Thank you.

Dr Jarvie—Its main aim was to feed into the survey that is being run now, so that was the priority—to move it through and get results.

Senator CARR—So there is a further qualitative survey being undertaken at the moment?

Dr Jarvie—Yes. The first one was used to develop new ideas of service quality, how you measure it, what things are important to job seekers; then we worked out what things we would like to measure; and now we are running a survey on that.

Senator CARR—Thank you. The first survey was undertaken in March and April of this year. That is the one you are referring to for which the results are not yet known?

Dr Jarvie—We have not released them. But I will have to take that on notice. I cannot give you an absolute answer on that.

Senator CARR—Thank you. Is the cost of the current survey of the same order as the last—\$237,400?

Dr Jarvie—I will probably have to take that on notice too.

Senator CARR—What are the performance indicators that you referred to in this answer that, if I recall rightly, were developed from the survey? What exactly are the performance indicators?

Dr Jarvie—I cannot answer with any precision at the moment, so if you do not mind I will take that on notice too, or I can get someone to see you later.

Senator CARR—I am quite happy to wait for the answer. What method has been used to test these performance indicators and what are the results of that testing?

Dr Jarvie—I will get that in the same answer.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I might move on to the training practices survey which was conducted in February this year and the training expenditure survey conducted in October 1996. Why are the results not available to the committee until the end of 1997?

Dr Jarvie—That is up to the ABS. They are running the surveys. I think it is just simply the time taken to analyse the results of the surveys. These surveys are quite complex and time consuming to put together. That timing is not within DEETYA's control. I can ask the ABS, if you would like?

Senator CARR—If you would not mind, please. Thank you. What were the major points raised in waves 1 and 2 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander longitudinal survey of job seekers which is referred to on page 2 of the answer?

Dr Jarvie—I cannot tell you the outcomes of that—I am sorry to be difficult—at this stage. My understanding is that we have not really analysed these surveys in detail and I cannot give you any sort of feel for the answer. The main thing was to get some quantitative data on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people move in and out of employment. There is very little information available from normal ABS surveys. As you would understand, only 1.5 per cent of the population is in that group, so normal surveys do not pick up this sort of information. These are quite complex surveys; longitudinal surveys are very complicated to analyse.

Senator CARR—Again, there is a question of the results of the survey being made available. Can you provide the results and any reports to date to the committee?

Dr Jarvie—Yes, I will.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I might just take you back to the previous segment of the answer in relation to the survey on education and training conducted from March to May this year. Can you indicate what influence that survey had on the development of the government's attitude or policy towards New Apprenticeships?

Dr Jarvie—The results are not available yet.

Senator CARR—So the department did not influence the government in any way?

Dr Jarvie—I do not see how it could, given that the data is not available.

Senator CARR—That's fine. There were no preliminary reports, no advice made available to government on that survey?

Dr Jarvie—I do not think so. I am fairly sure there has not been. I certainly have not seen any myself.

Senator CARR—Has any data been used from those surveys?

Dr Jarvie—That one is not available at all.

Senator CARR—That is the point I am making. Therefore, no data has been made available from those surveys?

Dr Jarvie—That is my understanding. I can double-check but I am fairly sure of that one.

Senator CARR—Could you take that on notice, please? Could you explain to me why the departmental survey undertaken in April of this year on the labour market for apprentices is not yet available?

Dr Jarvie—It is just that it takes time to analyse data when we have got a lot of competing priorities in the department and within the division. That one was undertaken using departmental resources.

Senator CARR—That's right. It was undertaken in April. This is the one to target employers and group training companies who have recently recruited apprentices. I would have thought it would be of some significance in the run up to the establishment of the new training regime which is to commence from 1 January next year and which, as I understand it, the TAFE enrolment process has commenced. I would have thought it would be of some significance to the department to have that survey analysed.

Dr Jarvie—It was not aimed directly at the new apprenticeship system, it was undertaken in the interests of general policy development and understanding more about the nature of the market. Certainly, we think it would be feeding into New Apprenticeships but that was not the key criterion at this stage.

Senator CARR—It is just that the whole area of apprentices has been a weakness for government. The recruitment of apprentices has not been a strong point of the VET sector. I would have thought that a survey like this might have been of some benefit, particularly as we move into a new regime. It seems odd that there would be a survey undertaken like this and it not be analysed quickly.

Dr Jarvie—It was quite a detailed survey.

Senator CARR—What was the cost?

Dr Jarvie—We do not have a cost available. We used our labour economics officers as part of their other activities they do, which is to talk to employers about skill shortages. You understand that we do work on skill shortages.

Senator CARR—I appreciate that. You would be aware of recent media publicity around the issue of immigration being used to fill skill shortages. I would have thought it would be of relevance to have this processed.

Dr Jarvie—There is a lot of synergies with the other work we do, certainly.

Senator CARR—Can you indicate what the cost is in departmental resources?

Dr Jarvie—No, not at this stage, I could not do that, we have not finished doing analysis so I could not give you a complete—

Senator CARR—I can see the logic of your answer. We do not actually know. I will come back to that, perhaps, at another point. Could you indicate to me when that process will be completed?

Dr Jarvie—I cannot tell you at this stage. We have not finalised the report.

Senator CARR—What is the expectation of the report being finalised? When will that occur?

Dr Jarvie—In the next month.

Senator CARR—Why is it that in April and June 1997 there are survey results for people who have received case management yet other CES registrations have not been made available?

Dr Jarvie—Basically, we have to make a decision on whether we release a full report on a survey we do. There is a cost implied. This one was run as a basis for piloting a method for gathering data. Its main function was to input into another process that we were doing. If we were to stop and do a full report on something that was just meant to inform our further

methodology it would slow us down. I understand your interest in it. It would feed through, though, into the other surveys that we would be doing later on.

Senator CARR—I am not altogether certain why you undertook such a survey, then. Is this survey designed to actually pilot alternate methods of compiling data in relation to these new EPEs? Is that the intention?

Dr Jarvie—Can you explain the question again?

Senator CARR—I will take you through it. You have a survey of 6,000 people who receive case management assistance and 3,000 other CES registrations conducted between April and June 1997. The survey was completed on 12 June. The survey was designed to pilot a method of gathering data into future studies of outcomes of people assisted by employment place enterprises. The approximate cost was \$12,000. Given what you have just said to me about the nature of this particular survey, I was wondering why it was that you were seeking to change the existing data collection arrangements. Is that, in fact, your intention in regard to the EPEs? Are you changing the existing data collection agency?

Dr Jarvie—Under the new arrangements the nature of assistance is changing. People are going to be getting a more integrated form of assistance which covers both labour exchange services and, possibly, if it is under flex 2 or flex 3 there will be more added assistance, as well. The time assistance starts and the time it finishes is different in some ways to the way our labour market programs are measured at the moment. We pilot tested a way of collecting outcomes from case management, which is probably a closer approximation to the new arrangements. That is why we use people in case management as the pilot.

Senator CARR—Right. If I might lead you then to the next report. Di Marzio were contracted by the department to conduct a market research for the New Apprenticeships marketing campaign. When will that report be available?

Mr Grant—Senator, could I suggest on this question that we ask relevant officers to provide that information to you in the discussion of program 3 tomorrow? I doubt that there is any officer here at the moment who would have that information, but tomorrow we should be able to supply it to you.

Senator CARR—Thank you. What I would like specifically is a copy of the consultancy report. Can that be provided?

Mr Grant—I will certainly raise that question overnight and we will have an answer to you tomorrow and, if possible, a copy of the report.

Senator CARR—Thank you. Can you indicate to me whether or not the minister's office or the minister himself had direct consultations with the consultant on this particular project?

Mr Grant—No, I cannot, senator. But, once again, I am happy to raise those questions.

Senator CARR—Your agency, Dr Jarvie, was not responsible? Your division is not responsible for line management on this consultancy?

Dr Jarvie—No.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I will take that up tomorrow with the relevant officers. I would like it if you could provide me with a copy of the consultant's report. I would also ask if you can establish for me who approved the final list of five agencies who were invited to tender, and who were the other four agencies.

Mr Grant—I will convey that.

Senator CARR—Thank you. I would like to move to the AIEF survey of international students studying in Australia.

CHAIR—I take it we are now on subprogram 6.2.

Senator CARR—Yes.

CHAIR—We are doing it program by program.

Senator CARR—I am responding to question No. 17, on which the department has provided an answer to me. It is absolutely consistent with the supplementary estimates processes. I am seeking further information based on the departmental answer. I do not particularly care how you allocate this, but I would like the opportunity to address officers of the department on the specific points raised in the department's answer to my question.

CHAIR—If we shift programs, we often need new officers up. I am just checking where you are.

Senator CARR—I only have a couple here and I am referring specifically to question No. 17.

Dr Jarvie—That one was run by the vocational education and training division. Although we were consulted on it, they would be better placed—

Senator CARR—It is in the same category as the previous one?

Dr Jarvie—Yes. It is in program 3.

Senator CARR—I will come back to program 3 on that tomorrow.

CHAIR—Fine.

Senator CARR—Could I ask that a copy of the KPMG brokerage benchmark study completed in July 1997, the PSI review of DEETYA's international services and the postgrad 1996 report be made available to the committee? They are all referred to in the answer which says that a copy of the results would be available to the committee if required.

Dr Jarvie—Are these the ones you requested a little while ago? They are in the process of being made available to you, I understand. They are being gathered.

Senator CARR—So that is being provided?

Dr Jarvie—Yes. Could you just go through them for me?

Senator CARR—Yes. What I am seeking is a copy of the KPMG brokerage benchmark study, which was completed in July 1997, the PSI review of DEETYA's international services and the postgrad 1996 report. Those are the three which I understand are referred to in the answers.

The only other matter which I have in this section relates to the AIEF survey of international students studying in Australia. Can that be provided to the committee?

Ms Gordon—That study is currently being undertaken. We do not have the results of that yet because it is still in the field. Certainly, when the results are known, we would be able to make it available.

Senator CARR—Thank you very much. Will I not have to ask for that again when it comes because it will come straight through?

Ms Gordon—Yes.

Senator CARR—That is terrific. Thank you. Is this study intending to investigate the recruitment techniques used by institutions to attract overseas students?

Mr Rowling—The survey is designed to give us baseline data and to rebase an earlier study done back in 1991-92, which will give us insights into a whole range of issues relating to international students, including what motivates them to come to Australia to study.

Senator CARR—Will it also examine disincentives?

Mr Rowling—Not directly in those terms. It will give us indications as to those factors that influence students to choose or not choose Australia.

Senator CARR—Will it examine the issue of the alleged change in attitudes on questions of race?

Mr Rowling—I do not recall that there is a specific question on race.

Senator CARR—So you will not from this study be able to ascertain whether or not there has been an impact on recruitment of overseas students as a result of the recent debate in this country around the questions of race and multiculturalism.

Mr Rowling—Not directly, although the types of questions go to issues concerning the assessment by the individual of what they consider to be safety factors which would relate to such issues.

Senator CARR—That is personal safety of students or potential students; perceptions of personal security?

Mr Rowling—Yes.

Senator CARR—When do you expect that report to be available?

Mr Rowling—The survey is in progress at the moment. We would not expect the results of the survey to be available much before the end of the year.

Senator CARR—Will that report be available to the committee when it is completed?

Mr Rowling—The decision as to whether it is publicly released and how it is to be used has not yet been made. The previous study was not publicly released; it was used as an internal study to enable us to develop and base statistical collections.

Senator CARR—Can you take it on notice that I request a copy of that survey when it is completed?

Mr Rowling—Certainly.

Senator CARR—That completes those questions.

CHAIR—Have you finished with program 6?

Senator CARR—Yes.

CHAIR—I thank the officers.

[5.28 p.m.]

Program 5—Student, youth and Aboriginal education support

Senator CARR—Good afternoon, Mr Sedgwick. We appreciate your being able to speak to the committee today. Mr Sedgwick, the department, as you would be aware, has provided me with some answers today on some questions relating to Mr Oldfield and the allegations concerning the misuse of departmental resources to facilitate the formation of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party. Could I ask: when did you provide draft answers to the minister's office?

Mr Sedgwick—I am sorry, I do not know the answer to that question. I did not come prepared to answer that. I just don't know.

Senator CARR—Will you take that on notice? Is it possible to establish that relatively quickly?

Mr Sedgwick—We can establish that, as a matter of fact.

Senator CARR—Thank you. Was it recently? Was it today?

Mr Sedgwick—I do not know.

Senator Vanstone—I cannot give you an exact date but I certainly know the answers have not been provided today. We have had them for a number of weeks but I could not tell you how many.

Senator CARR—A number of weeks. Mr Sedgwick, are you aware whether they were provided before or after the normal cut-off period for answers to questions for the estimates?

Mr Sedgwick—No, I am sorry. I just do not know.

Senator Vanstone—I cannot help you with that, either.

Senator CARR—But it is a number of weeks?

Senator Vanstone—Yes. I just do not have any time spatial of how long but I am certainly not indicating to you it was last week or just the week before. I have had them for some time but I cannot immediately put a date on it.

Senator CARR—Minister, when you said before that you were seeking amendments, was it today you were seeking amendments to these answers?

Senator Vanstone—I am not sure. I did come in to do some work last night and some this morning. As I indicated to you this morning, I think the only amendment was to put on top of a part of one of the answers that this was information provided by Mr Abbott, rather than asserting it was material I knew of my own volition.

Senator CARR—I see. That is the only amendment.

Senator Vanstone—There were two so there must have been another amendment. Equally, I am pretty sure it is of a minor nature, just to be as technically correct as we could.

Senator CARR—Yes. It does tend to distance you and the department from the answers. These answers are conditional. This is information provided by Mr Abbott; it is not information provided by the department.

Senator Vanstone—In respect of one portion, that is where the information comes from as it was provided to me.

Senator CARR—Not the department.

Mr Sedgwick—The department's knowledge here is fairly restricted. I am not certain of the answer you are dealing with here but the element of Mr Oldfield's engagement that we are concerned with is pretty small. It is a computer, a phone and a book of cabcharge vouchers. The bulk of Mr Oldfield's engagement with the Commonwealth is through DAS. We would not necessarily have information about any of those matters.

Senator CARR—You would be aware, I take it, of the committee's proceedings on Thursday, 5 June.

Mr Sedgwick—I must tell you that they are not uppermost in my mind at the moment—what particular part of the proceedings?

Senator CARR—The part that says that you, as secretary to the department, are investigating all aspects of the allegations concerning the misuse of Mr Abbott's office.

Mr Sedgwick—Our investigation of the matter showed that the elements of Mr Oldfield's engagement that we were dealing with were the laptop, the phone and the cabcharge. They were the matters that were properly within our jurisdiction and they were the matters that we checked out. We found out he had not used any cabcharges and he had returned both the mobile phone and the laptop when he left his employment, as he was required to do.

The issue then came down to the extent of any private use of the mobile phone and the calls made for private purposes on the mobile phone. In May we had received from Mr Abbott information that there may have been some calls made on Mr Oldfield's phone which were of a private nature that had not, to that point, been disclosed to us as being of a private nature. We arranged for a full up-to-date bill to be provided by Telstra and began a process whereby we asked Mr Oldfield to identify those calls which were private. There were exchanges of correspondence until last week, I believe, when we sent Mr Oldfield a bill reflecting the agreed use of the phone for private purposes during his period in Mr Abbott's office. There are a couple of calls, I understand, that are still in dispute. We will be writing to him in the next few days to get that sorted out and that should conclude the matter from where we stand.

Senator CARR—Were those private calls to Ms Hanson's secret home number, as reported in the press?

Mr Sedgwick—I am not sure I know Ms Hanson's—

Senator Vanstone—Is that another name for an unlisted phone number?

Senator CARR—I do not know, but the *Courier-Mail* referred to it when it said:

A departmental check of Mr Oldfield's mobile phone records is believed to have revealed that he was in regular contact with Ms Hanson through her secret home telephone number and with her One Nation party secretary, David Ettridge.

Is that what you have discovered?

Mr Sedgwick—It is my understanding that there have been a number of calls to numbers associated with Ms Hanson. I do not know whether they would be classified as being to a secret home number. There have been some calls that were placed to numbers associated with Ms Hanson and to people associated with One Nation. Mr Oldfield has agreed to refund the cost of those.

Senator CARR—How many phone calls were there?

Mr Sedgwick—I do not know. I can tell you the bill.

Senator CARR—Yes. How much was it?

Mr Sedgwick—It was \$873.40.

Senator CARR—What was the frequency of those phone calls?

Mr Sedgwick—I am sorry, I do not know.

Senator CARR—You would no doubt be aware that a Mr David Thomas has made allegations concerning the misuse of departmental resources for the formation of the One Nation party. We were advised on 5 June that you have a copy of that statement. Is that the case?

Mr Sedgwick—Would you ask that again?

Senator Vanstone—Is this the affidavit?

Senator CARR—Yes. It is the statement by Mr David John Thomas which is the basis for the allegations on which you, I presume, launched this inquiry.

Mr Sedgwick—We had available to us a number of bases for seeking confirmation from Mr Oldfield of his use of the private phone. For example, we had the letter from Mr Abbott which, in turn, referred to an article that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of the same day. I do not have it in front of me at the moment and cannot precisely recall the statement that you are dealing with, but I can assure you that my officers have had a number of exchanges with Mr Oldfield to give him every opportunity to identify the calls which were rightfully regarded as private.

Senator CARR—So, you have acted on the inquiry from Mr Abbott, but not the inquiry from Mr Thomas?

Mr Sedgwick—You will have to help with Mr Thomas.

Senator CARR—Mr David Thomas issued the statement on 23 May and Minister Vanstone says that she has read that statement and she has indicated that the secretary has that statement.

Mr Sedgwick—We did receive a copy of that statement. My understanding was that it was alleging exactly what we found, that there were calls that had been made.

Senator CARR—So with your inquiries regarding the misuse—what it says here: the regular daily telephone conversations—have you found that?

Mr Sedgwick—I cannot confirm that there were regular daily conversations. I can certainly confirm that there were a large number of conversations. Whether they were regular and daily or not, I just do not know.

Senator CARR—But there were a large number?

Mr Sedgwick—There were conversations involving Ms Hanson, or people associated with One Nation, from what I understand, yes. Can I just say one other thing to you? Mr Oldfield was entitled to use the phone, but on the basis that he would reimburse the Commonwealth. He has been given the opportunity to reimburse the Commonwealth.

Senator CARR—Yes, and you are seeking reimbursement, to the figure of \$873, for the use of the mobile telephone?

Mr Sedgwick—The mobile phone.

Senator CARR—I presume the other telephones were provided by the department?

Mr Sedgwick—The phones in ministers' offices are probably provided by DAS.

Senator CARR—So the department does not provide any—

Mr Sedgwick—No, we do not—

Senator CARR—That is all DAS?

Mr Sedgwick—Yes, that is my understanding of it.

Senator CARR—What about the use of aircraft—who funds the use of aircraft?

Mr Sedgwick—DAS.

Senator CARR—All by DAS?

Mr Sedgwick—Yes.

Senator CARR—So the reference here to Mr Abbott flying to Ipswich for the launch of the One Nation party—that was provided on the DAS account?

Mr Sedgwick—Yes.

Senator CARR—Minister, has there been any action taken for the recovery of that money?

Senator Vanstone—I understand DAS are pursuing their inquiries but I do not have any further details. That would be a matter that would have to be referred to Minister Jull.

Senator CARR—But you have not referred any other matters to Minister Jull?

Senator Vanstone—It is my understanding that Minister Jull is aware of these matters, is providing such information as is appropriate and will proceed as appropriate, and that I do not need to alert him to something. This is not something that Mr Jull is unaware of.

Senator CARR—You have taken no further action, Minister, other than to have the secretary look at these matters?

Senator Vanstone—At this stage, that is right.

Senator CARR—Is it your intention to take any other action?

Senator Vanstone—It depends what information comes to hand.

Senator CARR—Well, we have information from the answers to the questions that you have had for some weeks. What action have you taken on that?

Mr Sedgwick—The action that is required has been taken. Mr Oldfield has been asked to identify his phone bill and he has been sent a debit notice for those calls—the \$873.40 worth—that he has agreed were private.

Senator CARR—Right. Minister, you advised the committee on 5 June, in regard to Mr Oldfield's resignation, that he gave notice on 28 April but did not say where he was going, that he simply gave notice on the 28th. You added that you had been advised that his last day was the 16th. We are advised by this answer that it was 9 May that Mr Oldfield ceased working in Mr Abbott's office. There seem to me to be some inconsistencies in those answers.

Senator Vanstone—I will get it checked out for you, Senator.

Senator CARR—Thank you. It is just that if you have had these for some weeks, I would have thought the department would have advised you of the inconsistency in your answer.

Senator Vanstone—As I say, Senator, I will get it checked for you. It may relate to date of departure as opposed to date of final payment from the department, or something like that.

Senator CARR—I look forward to the explanation. Mr Sedgwick, is it the normal practice for the department to check the *Hansard* to see that the minister has not inadvertently misled the committee?

Mr Sedgwick—We spend quite a lot of time checking the *Hansard* to identify issues that need to be followed up.

Senator CARR—Was this not one issue that you identified as needed following up?

Mr Sedgwick—Not to my knowledge.

Senator CARR—Can you explain the difference in those dates?

Mr Sedgwick—No.

Senator Vanstone—What is your query again?

Senator CARR—Page 347 is the reference to you advising the committee that Mr Oldfield's last day was 16 April. The department advises us—

Senator Vanstone—Yes, if you turn to page 348, the matter is addressed there.

Senator CARR—I can see what you are saying, yes. Thank you. Mr Sedgwick, you received this allegation containing the statement from Mr David Thomas and the Minister advised us

that this was a matter you had read. Minister, did you refer this statement or did the Secretary refer this statement to Mr Jull or Mr Jull's office?

Senator Vanstone—Mr Abbott did.

Senator CARR—Can you advise the committee when that reference was made?

Mr Sedgwick—As far as we can ascertain, it was shortly after Mr Oldfield left the office. We do not have the exact date.

Senator CARR—So it is presumably around 16 April?

Mr Sedgwick—I cannot give you any confirmation about precise dates.

Senator Vanstone—We can get it for you.

Senator CARR—If you could, please. I am interested because there is a report in the *Sunday Age* dated 10 August which quotes Minister Jull as saying that 'he was briefed on the matter late last Friday.' He was referring to a statement from a former press secretary, Mr David Thomas, dated 23 May for his department to look into. You are certain that you advised Mr Jull, or your office, through Mr Abbott, advised Mr Jull of that statement around the 16th?

Senator Vanstone—No. What you have been told is that, as we can ascertain at the moment by turning around and talking to a member of Mr Abbott's staff, it was fairly soon after his departure but that we could not give you an exact date. That is all you have been told. I have offered, subsequently, to get the specific date that the referral was made and that offer has been accepted by you. I cannot take it much further than that at the moment.

Senator CARR—Did you say you could get it from an officer there?

Senator Vanstone—No. The officer who works for Mr Abbott has given a general answer on the basis of his general information but I have offered to get you the specific date.

Senator CARR—I would appreciate that but it was certainly not on the Friday before 10 August.

Senator Vanstone—The best I can do is get you some information on the communications between Mr Abbott's office and Mr Jull's office. There may have been a situation where a request was first made for information and then a request for investigation of the information sought.

Senator CARR—The question I asked related specifically to the reference of this statement, the basis on which your secretary has launched an inquiry.

Senator Vanstone—I am advised that Mr Abbott was quite properly pursuing this matter; after all, he employed Mr Oldfield. I am also advised that, as a consequence of the statement, information was sought from Mr Jull's office. That information was provided. That information was then returned to Mr Jull's office, with the statement and a request for an investigation. In other words, as I am advised, Mr Abbott sought to satisfy himself that there may or may not be something in the allegations before asking Mr Jull to investigate but did ask Mr Jull for some information. He got that information and then sent it back with a letter, I presume.

Senator CARR—What date was that?

Senator Vanstone—I do not know. The officer who works for Mr Abbott cannot possibly be expected to carry that information around in his brain. I have offered to get it for you and I will. I will get you the date that the request for information was made, the date on which the information was provided and the date on which it was returned with the statement asking for an investigation.

Senator CARR—Would you advise the committee of the date on which Mr Jull had the statement, by Mr David Thomas making a series of allegations, drawn to his attention?

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I have told you I will get those three dates.

Senator CARR—Three specific dates.

Senator Vanstone—Three specific dates: when Mr Abbott requested information from Mr Jull, when Mr Jull provided it, and the date on which that was returned, as I am advised, with a request for investigation and that statement. I will confirm whether that was the first time that came to Mr Jull's attention or otherwise.

Senator CARR—Thank you. Mr Sedgwick, is there any further action that you are contemplating on this matter?

Mr Sedgwick—We have written to Mr Oldfield and asked him to provide us with the \$873.40. We are expecting that to arrive. If it does not, then we will take debt recovery action. There are a couple of phone calls that are still in dispute. We will be writing to Mr Oldfield to finalise those in the next few days. Assuming they are agreed, and paid for, that should be the end of it from our side.

Senator CARR—How long do you intend to give Mr Oldfield to repay those moneys?

Mr Sedgwick—I think he has been sent the standard terms, which I think is 21 days.

Senator CARR—Can you just indicate what date you wrote to Mr Oldfield?

Mr Sedgwick—Last week, 15 August.

Senator CARR—When will you be able to give answers to me on those other dates, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—I do not know that Mr Jull's office is open now. If it is not, I will make inquiries first thing in the morning and ask them to expedite my request as quickly as possible.

Senator CARR—I would have thought these were fairly straightforward administrative matters.

Senator Vanstone—I imagine there is a file there and someone could easily look it up.

Senator CARR—That being the case, Mr Chairman, I will reserve the right to revisit this issue before this round of estimates if we cannot get to the bottom of those dates.

Senator Vanstone—I expect we should be able to.

Senator CROWLEY—I would just like some clarification. When I asked questions about WEETAG this morning I think the Chair said that I should ask them at this program.

CHAIR—No, at program 6, but we have finished program 6. Perhaps you could put the questions on notice.

Senator CROWLEY—Could I just ask the minister if she has anything further to say?

CHAIR—Do we have an understanding that this is just for a few minutes?

Senator CROWLEY—Yes. I am sorry about this. I have been trying to follow what you have been up to and suddenly you went off air.

CHAIR—We also changed rooms.

Senator CROWLEY—Yes.

CHAIR—Do we still have officers from program 6 here?

Senator CROWLEY—I really want to ask the minister. It is about the WEETAG matter. I do not know how many times I have asked you now and you tell me that it is still a matter for your consideration. Could you bring us up to speed on where your thinking is at?

Senator Vanstone—I expect I will be able to make an announcement in respect of advice on employment and women, generally speaking, within the next month.

Senator CROWLEY—Only on employment, Minister?

Senator Vanstone—Let me come back to you with the full details. I am very close but it is not a matter that has, given other events and concerns, been the highest priority. But it is not very far away.

Senator CROWLEY—The reason I am very interested in following it is, firstly, because you indicated some considerable time ago that you were minded to follow it. Secondly, so much of the education and employment data does well for a gender breakdown that reveals things, for example, the higher education report and your press release, which talk about the implications of those changes for women. Given your indication of the likelihood of establishing such a unit and given the impact of the changes on women I would certainly be interested in how quickly you will act on this.

Senator Vanstone—I obviously do not want to tell you something before I make an announcement, do I?

Senator CROWLEY—I am interested in your comments.

Senator Vanstone—That would be foolish.

Senator CROWLEY—I appreciate that, of course, Minister.

Senator Vanstone—All I can tell you is that it is not very far away.

Senator CROWLEY—You also indicated that you did not see it as the highest priority.

Senator Vanstone—Yes, I think that is right. We have had, for example, a request for tender of about \$1.7 billion worth of employment services and, with the greatest of respect, I rank that as a higher priority.

Senator CROWLEY—Indeed. But it may well be that advice coming to you about how those things might be done to take into account the needs of women might be an important part of that priority.

Senator Vanstone—I would not assume that any advice I have had thus far has ignored the needs of women, Senator Crowley. I would not assume that at all if I were you. It is simply a case of how the current situation can be improved, that is all.

Senator CROWLEY—I understand from what you are saying that you are intending to establish a women's advisory group in employment and education.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, I will come back to you. I am almost tempted to say that I will give you the press release before I release it but I do not think I will do that. But I guarantee I will contact you the day it is released and let you know.

Senator CROWLEY—Does this put you out of step with other ministers in this government who are not interested in establishing women's advisory groups or who are, in fact, in the process of unwinding them?

Senator Vanstone—I cannot speak for other portfolios, but my conversations with other ministers indicate a clear concern to understand the concerns relating to women. Our record on the appointment of women to boards, et cetera, is very good and demonstrates that.

Senator CROWLEY—Yes. Your cuts to other areas of women's advancement are also equally significant.

Senator Vanstone—Senator, if you want to range into someone else's portfolio you are welcome to do it but you might do it to the thin air as opposed to me.

Senator CROWLEY—No. I am just interested in where you sit vis-a-vis the rest of the government on this matter.

Senator Vanstone—You make your own assessment of that, Senator.

Senator CROWLEY—I would be interested in the opportunity to hear yours, Minister.

Senator Vanstone—You will find that the whole government, across portfolios, is committed to understanding issues in relation to women and to getting appropriate advice. With the greatest respect, you have left yourself wide open. An indication of our capacity to understand what makes things work for women is the number of women we have in, and your incapacity to do so is indicated by the number that you have in.

Senator CROWLEY—That is certainly something that is open to dispute. I do not want to dispute it here although I am happy to do so, Minister. We are talking about the estimates, here.

Senator Vanstone—We are, but I am just pointing out that you can look at lots of things and say that this means this and this means that, and people dispute them.

Senator CROWLEY—It is certainly interesting to note that it is something like 1½ years since you said that you would do something about this.

Senator Vanstone—I do not know if it is 1½ years since I said I would do something. I do not deny it has been a while but it is not very far off. You will just have to cross your little fingers and count a few more sleeps.

CHAIR—Thank you. There being no further questions the estimates stand adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning. We will be back in the Main Committee room tomorrow where we will be considering program 3 and then program 4. Thank you.

Committee adjourned at 5.59 p.m.