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SENATE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
AFFAIRS

ESTIMATES

(Budget Estimates)

TUESDAY, 22 MAY 2007

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**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

Tuesday, 22 May 2007

Members: Senator Barnett (*Chair*), Senator Crossin (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bartlett, Kirk, Ludwig, Parry, Payne and Trood

Participating members: Senators Allison, Bernardi, Bob Brown, George Campbell, Carr, Chapman, Conroy, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Heffernan, Hogg, Humphries, Hurley, Joyce, Kemp, Lightfoot, Lundy, Ian Macdonald, Sandy Macdonald, McGauran, McLucas, Milne, Murray, Nettle, Patterson, Robert Ray, Sherry, Siewert, Stephens, Stott Despoja, Watson and Webber

Senators in attendance: Senators Barnett, Bartlett, Crossin, Hurley, Joyce, Kirk, Ludwig, Nettle, Parry, Patterson, Payne and Trood

Committee met at 9 am

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

Consideration resumed from 21 May 2007

In Attendance

Senator Ellison, Minister for Human Services

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Executive

Mr Andrew Metcalfe, Secretary

Mr Bob Correll PSM, Deputy Secretary

Ms Carmel McGregor, Deputy Secretary

Mr Peter Hughes, Acting Deputy Secretary

Internal Products: Enabling divisions that provide services and support to the delivery of all outputs

Ms Louise Gray, First Assistant Secretary, Financial Strategy and Reporting Division

Ms Alison Larkins, First Assistant Secretary, People Services, Values and Training Division

Ms Robyn Bicket, Chief Lawyer, Legal Division

Mr Nhan Vo-Van, Assistant Secretary, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services

Mr Des Storer, First Assistant Secretary, Strategic Policy Group

Mr Sandi Logan, National Communications Manager

Ms Susie van den Heuvel, Deputy National Communications Manager

Ms Cheryl Hannah, First Assistant Secretary, Information Technology Services and Security Division

Mr Garry Fleming, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Client Services Division

Outcome 1: Contributing to Australia's society and its economic advancement through the lawful and orderly entry and stay of people

Output 1.1: Migration and temporary entry

Mr Anthony Parsons, First Assistant Secretary, Migration and Temporary Entry Division

Mr Paul Farrell, Assistant Secretary, Temporary Entry Branch

Ms Yole Daniels, Assistant Secretary, Business Branch

Output 1.2: Refugee and humanitarian entry and stay

Ms Arja Keski-Nummi, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Refugee, Humanitarian and International Division

Mr Robert Illingworth, Assistant Secretary, Onshore Protection Branch

Ms Judith O'Neill, Acting Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian Branch

Ms Rosemary Greaves, Assistant Secretary, International Cooperation Branch

Output 1.3: Border security

Mr Vince McMahon PSM, First Assistant Secretary, Detention Services Division

Output 1.4: Compliance

Ms Lyn O'Connell, First Assistant Secretary, Compliance Policy and Case Coordination Division

Mr Peter Richards, Assistant Secretary, Compliance Operations Branch

Ms Joanne Verikios, Assistant Secretary, Case Coordination Branch

Ms Nicole Pearson, Acting Assistant Secretary, Character Assessment and War Crimes Screening Branch

Output 1.5: Detention

Mr Jeff Lamond, First Assistant Secretary, Detention and Offshore Services Division

Mr Dermot Casey, Assistant Secretary, Detention Health Branch

Mr Steve Dreezer, Assistant Secretary, Detention Operations and Client Services Branch

Output 1.6: Offshore asylum seeker management

Mr Jeff Lamond, First Assistant Secretary, Detention and Offshore Services Division

Mr Ross Norton, Director, Offshore Processing Operations, Offshore Asylum Seeker Management Branch

Output 1.7: Safe haven

Ms Arja Keski-Nummi, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Refugee, Humanitarian and International Division

Ms Judith O'Neill, Acting Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian Branch

Output 1.8: Systems for people

Mr Peter McKeon, First Assistant Secretary, Systems Delivery Division

Outcome 2: A society which values Australian citizenship, appreciates cultural diversity and enables migrants to participate equitably

Output 2.1: Settlement services

Ms Kate Pope, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division

Ms Paula Kinsky, Assistant Secretary, Settlement Branch

Mr Daniel Boyer, Acting Senior Manager, Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy Branch

Output 2.2: Translating and interpreting services

Ms Kate Pope, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division

Mr Chris Grotorex, Director, Translating and Interpreting Service National

Output 2.3: Australian citizenship

Ms Kate Pope, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division

Ms Mary-Anne Ellis, Assistant Secretary, Citizenship and Language Services Branch

Mr Peter Vardos PSM, First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship Test and Values Statements Taskforce

Ms Renelle Forster, Assistant Secretary, Citizenship Test and Values Statements Taskforce

Output 2.4: Promoting the benefits of a united and diverse society

Ms Kate Pope, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division

Dr Thu Nguyen-Hoan PSM, Assistant Secretary, Multicultural Affairs Branch

Output 2.5: Systems for people

Mr Peter McKeon, First Assistant Secretary, Systems Delivery Division

Migration Review Tribunal and Refugee Review Tribunal

Mr Steve Karas AO, Principal Member

Mr John Lynch, Registrar

Mr Rhys Jones, Deputy Registrar

Mr Gregory Parkes, Assistant Director Finance

Migration Review Tribunal**Refugee Review Tribunal**

CHAIR (Senator Barnett)—I declare open this public meeting of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. The committee will continue its examination of the Immigration and Citizenship portfolio, beginning with the Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal. I remind witnesses of the procedural advice contained in yesterday's opening statement, copies of which are available from the secretariat. I welcome back Senator the Hon. Chris Ellison, and I would also like to welcome officers from the Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal.

Senator HURLEY—First of all, I would like to welcome the increased funding in the budget for output 2 and settlement services in particular. It is good to see that some of the issues that we have raised in the past and that others in the sector have raised have been addressed in the budget this time. I would like to again ask about the departmental and ministerial arrangements, since we appear to have had another rejigging. We went from having a minister and a junior minister to having a minister and parliamentary secretary, and now we have gone to a minister and an assistant minister. Can I ask, in relation to output 2: what is the breakdown in roles between the minister and the assistant minister?

Mr Metcalfe—I can answer that, but I am not quite sure whether we are on outcome 2 of the department or the tribunals.

CHAIR—We are on the tribunals to kick it off, Senator Hurley. We will start with the MRT and the Refugee Review Tribunal, and then we will move to outcome 2.

Senator LUDWIG—I might start with the tribunals then, if it helps. Page 107 of the 2007-08 PBS states that the financial management and accountability regulations were amended with effect from 1 July 2006 to establish a single prescribed agency. The Migration Review

Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal will be one agency for the purposes of that. I will not go through the directions. The Minister for Finance and Administration issued the appropriate directions under section 32. I have a series of questions to explore with you about this. Was the rationale explained to the MRT and the RRT at the time?

Mr Karas—It was a matter which the tribunals themselves instigated in relation to seeking a single prescribed agency for efficiency purposes in relation to not only the keeping of our accounts as such, but more in keeping with the administrative way that the tribunals were being run. It was felt that, having moved towards having a single annual report for both tribunals, it would be appropriate if we were able to produce a single set of figures. I will hand over to the registrar, who might have a bit more to add in relation to your question.

Mr Lynch—The formation of a single prescribed agency under the financial management regulations was the culmination of several initiatives to achieve efficiencies, as the principal member has pointed out. Those efficiencies include the cross-appointment of all staff and members of the two tribunals. That has progressively occurred through to 1 January of last year, when all current members were cross-appointed. The formation of a single entity has been a natural consequence of the co-location of the registries—the MRT and the RRT registry in Melbourne and Sydney and the two principal registries of the tribunals in Sydney. For financial administration reasons, there are efficiencies derived from running one set of accounts rather than two. Dissecting the work, the energy, the cost and the taxpayers' money between members and staff was becoming increasingly difficult, as you might imagine, where members who are cross-appointed are working on files on their desk that emanate from both tribunals. It has been a natural consequence of the efficiency initiatives of the government which commenced back in the 2000 era.

Senator LUDWIG—I think from the ART era.

Mr Karas—I think it was about 2001, if I remember correctly.

Senator LUDWIG—Yes, it was that long ago. Was it driven from the new minister's or the parliamentary secretary's office, or was it an internally driven initiative?

Mr Lynch—We have been in discussions within government for some time and, as the principal member has indicated, we initiated the rationale—that is, the administrative efficiency concept. We developed that and, along with the Uhrig review which went to the issue of improved corporate governance, we saw it as a very natural and necessary development for the tribunals in this portfolio.

Senator LUDWIG—Can you take me through the tintacks of what has now occurred in terms of the single accountability and what still remains separate so that I can then frame my following questions in that regard.

Mr Lynch—It is becoming more difficult to spot the differences in how we administer the two tribunals. From a corporate governance point of view, we have a joint management board that has been in existence now for some three or four years. We have combined the two senior management groups of the tribunals into a single senior management group. We have reduced the number of senior members in the tribunals to reflect the ease of supervision of members in a co-located environment, and with greater efficiencies in reporting we have utilised a single case management system, called CaseMate, which has enabled us to rationalise our focus on

operational efficiencies and administrative expenditure. All told, the co-location and administrative amalgamation has left us in a position where we do not have too many differences in the tribunals. Work practices are still being worked through and we have had a huge period of work practice change, through which member work practices have had to be learnt afresh. New paradigms have been created to establish a single culture within the tribunals, and that applies to both members and staff. It is an interesting feature, and in my Christmas message to staff last year I said that very thing—that it is becoming increasingly difficult to spot the differences between the two tribunals. We do have separate application forms of course, and under the Migration Act we have two separate application regimes. How we streamline the two application processes to enable a single method of conducting a review is an issue that is under consideration.

Senator LUDWIG—Is that a matter that you are now consulting with government about, or is that an internal working party?

Mr Lynch—That is a matter that is under consultation with DIAC and we would hope to see that progressed in the next 12 to 18 months.

Senator LUDWIG—I will come back to that. Let us get to some of the tints of the benefits, particularly in terms of cost savings and reduced staff. We will start at the board level and work down from there. Is the joint board the same, or has it been reduced in size?

Mr Lynch—The board membership has actually, for the time being, been increased to include an additional senior member. That is a result of one position in the RRT—the position of deputy principal member—not being substantively filled. We have all three senior members of the joint management board sitting with the principal member and the registrar as a board and that makes a total of five members. We have operated in the past with four. Essentially we have a senior management group that considers operational issues in the main, and the board looks at more strategic issues. The senior management group is largely made up of the same people but includes district registrars who manage the New South Wales and Victorian registries. So we are going through a period of, I guess, trialling the new-look board. It has only been in existence for two or three months now. From the end of last year, a senior member in Melbourne was not reappointed, reducing the number in Melbourne to one. In Sydney the number of senior members was reduced by two at the end of those two senior members' appointments. We are actually managing with fewer senior members oversighting roughly about 30 members each.

Senator LUDWIG—Has the senior management group expanded slightly or has it contracted?

Mr Lynch—The senior management group has reduced by two senior members. We utilise one senior member on the senior management group in the board, as a matter of convenience and to make sure that that senior member is not left out in the cold as far as policy development and strategic directions being discussed at the board level are concerned.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the actual tribunal members themselves, is there a figure available from before the joining of the two tribunals to now? Has everyone been reappointed in the same position and terms, or have the terms changed?

Mr Karas—There are presently 95 members of the tribunals and they are cross-appointed to both tribunals as at 1 May 2007. That includes 17 full-time members, a principal member and three senior members, as referred to by the registrar, as well as 74 part-time members. They are all cross-appointed, as indicated, to both of the tribunals, and members do work across both tribunals. As a further breakdown: there are 59 female members and 36 male members of the tribunals. So at present there are 95 members of both tribunals.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the RRT and the MRT—if we just step back before I call it a joint situation—did the numbers change when you brought them together or did you simply cross-appoint everyone that was currently there?

Mr Karas—They were all cross-appointed. They were done in a couple of phases. There was an initial batch and then, on 1 January 2005, the last tranche, if I can use that expression, were cross-appointed.

Senator LUDWIG—You now have 95. Before May 2007 you had the same number, but they were broken up between RRT and MRT members?

Mr Karas—There were more members than the 95 presently. There have been some resignations. Generally speaking the figure has hovered around the 100 mark for a couple of years in relation to the membership of the tribunals.

Mr Lynch—You may recall that in 2004, with the very substantial decline in the RRT's caseload, which progressed over a four- or five-year period, and with the decline in MRT lodgements, at the end of the appointments of some 38 members—23 on the RRT and 15 on the MRT—those members were not reappointed. There have been essentially replacement appointment rounds since then to replace members departing from the remaining core of members who were left as of mid-2004. As the principal member indicated, members were progressively cross-appointed through to 1 January 2006, when the last batch of members who had not been cross-appointed to the other tribunal were cross-appointed, by the government.

Senator LUDWIG—As a snapshot, around 2004 how many MRT and RRT tribunal members were there in total?

Mr Karas—I can inform you that, as at 1 July 2006, the tribunals comprised 96 members. All members were appointed to both tribunals, as I had already indicated. Of that membership there was one principal member, six senior members, 16 full-time members and 73 part-time members.

Senator LUDWIG—Do you have a snapshot from 2004?

Mr Lynch—Not a reliable one, no. We would need to take that on notice to give you very precise numbers. I think there has been a reduction, probably in the order of 15 to 20, on both tribunals, but I would need to confirm that.

Senator LUDWIG—I am happy for you to do that. Thank you. Is it envisaged or planned that there will be a further reduction?

Mr Lynch—I guess that depends on a number of factors. We are experiencing some stabilisation of the case loads in both tribunals. Whether that holds, increases or drops further will drive, at the end of the day, the member and staff resources that the tribunals have. The

complexity of the reviews that the members undertake has increased. There is no question that, with case law in particular, extreme care has to be undertaken by members in conducting a review. There are many pitfalls—mainly highly technical procedural matters—that cause cases to be overturned on appeal. On the RRT there is a higher appeal rate. In excess of 40 per cent of our decisions are appealed to the Federal Court. The MRT has a lesser figure, but equally the case law that flows from those cases requires very close scrutiny, very careful management of the review and painstaking care in providing statements of reasons and affording procedural fairness at every turn of the review process, which of course is what members want to provide. But the absolute level of care that is now required is having an impact, and that will continue to have an impact based on changes in policy, legislative change and the like.

As far as efficiencies are concerned, we do expect cross-appointed members to become more efficient and more versatile in managing the work of both tribunals. We are going through an experimental stage, I guess, in many ways. We are trialling the capability of members of the two different tribunals, who have come to the tribunals with different skill sets. We are looking to see them, with a great deal of training, become proficient on both tribunals. The success of that will answer part of the question that you asked. Over the next 12 months to 18 months we will have to wait and see how successful we can be in getting cross-appointed members who can handle any part of the caseload that is put their way.

Senator LUDWIG—Is it the intention to have a review to see how the joining of the two tribunals has gone or is it the intention to wait for a short while and then do an internal review of some sort?

Mr Lynch—We have a performance audit by the Australian National Audit Office in process which is coming to a close. That has been of considerable value to us in reviewing the combination of the tribunals and what efficiencies and higher performances can be obtained. I believe that the board will be considering that report in the context of a review. At the board level, we are looking very closely at the moment at what case load targets and what quality measures we can expect from cross-appointed members who will probably be coming to a full year's completion of work on both tribunals at the end of this calendar year. We have not had members working actively in large numbers on both tribunals until the early months of this year. Probably at the end of this calendar year or perhaps this time next year the time will be right for a full review of how successful we have been in combining the work of the tribunals. But, in the light of the performance audit by the ANAO, we are doing a current analysis of what members are capable of. We have undertaken a constant review over the last 12 months of how our staff should and could be doing business to assist these members who are learning new jobs during this period.

Senator LUDWIG—When will that ANAO performance audit be finalised?

Mr Lynch—It will be tabled next month, I understand.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the lengths of appointments of RRT and MRT members, will they be brought into sync or are members still on four- or three- or two-year appointments?

Mr Karas—All of the members are presently on three-year terms, with different members terms to expire at different times of the year in different years. Presently, there are some 49 members who are up for reappointment as at 30 June this year. That is under active consideration. At the end of December this year, there will also be some members whose terms may be up. The appointments have been purposely staggered over the past couple of years so a continuation of work can be effected each time the terms of a particular tranche of members expires.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the 49 appointments that are going to expire on 30 June, when will government advise you about whether they have achieved reappointment? Do they advise the members directly?

Mr Karas—A number of the members have indicated that they are not seeking reappointment. Those who are seeking reappointment are under active consideration by the government and it is anticipated that they will be advised in the coming weeks.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the distribution of workload, when will you be able to ensure that you have sufficient staff? You will not have those who do not seek reappointment and those who do not achieve reappointment.

Mr Karas—From a management point of view, we have indicated to government that 95 members or thereabouts is the number we believe to be sufficient to be able to handle the case loads of both the tribunals, given, as the registrar has said, that they are now stabilising. As at 30 April 2007, the Migration Review Tribunal had received some 4,812 new lodgements. For the same time, the Refugee Review Tribunal had received just over 2,400. Given that members do have targets and are working conscientiously to get through the case load, it is pleasing to note that, for the Refugee Review Tribunal as at 30 April 2007, the number of cases on hand was down to 570, which is one of the lowest figures ever for that tribunal. For the Migration Review Tribunal, again as at 30 April, the cases on hand were down to just over 3,700, of which some 42 per cent, a little over 1,550, had not been constituted. So, from a management point of view, it appears that members are working conscientiously with the case load as such, and that the number of cases on hand will continue to trend downwards. And, as I have indicated, it appears that, from management's point of view, the flexibility in the member resources also seems to be now settling around the 95 mark.

Senator LUDWIG—I will come back to the case loads, but I want to continue on with the merger—if I can call it that. Are even the full-time tribunal members on three-year terms?

Mr Karas—Yes, all the members, including the principal member, are.

Senator LUDWIG—Can you say whether the performance audit deals with the issue of the term of the members, or was that matter simply outside of the performance audit?

Mr Lynch—We are not at liberty to discuss anything in the audit, I am afraid.

Senator LUDWIG—Perhaps I will ask the question differently then. Has there been a review or a submission by the RRT or the MRT on behalf of the tribunal members to extend or reduce the three-year term?

Mr Karas—The act provides for terms of members to be for a period of up to five years, and government, at this stage, has found that three-year appointments are appropriate in the

circumstances. At this particular stage, the tribunals' memberships have accepted the fact that appointments are for three years. And advertisements for new members usually state that the appointment is for a term of three years.

Senator LUDWIG—Are you able to say whether it provides certainty of employment for a tribunal member to undertake a three-year contract, and whether you gain a good cross-section of qualified people to perform the task?

Mr Karas—Members are up for reappointment and, if the portfolio tribunals are compared to other tribunals, it seems to be just about the norm now that most appointments to administrative tribunals are for a period of three years.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the staff themselves, it seems to me that their numbers have dropped. Let us compare the 2006-07 budget paper average staffing level figure with the figure in the 2007-08 budget paper. For the MRT I think the figure was 174 and for RRT it was 190 in the 2006-07 budget, a total of 364. But the staffing figure for MRT and RRT—it is going to be a long acronym—was 340 in the latest budget, which is a reduction of 24. Is that accurate: that there are about 24 that have been—

Mr Karas—As at 14 May 2007, there was a total of 280 staff on the tribunals that were cross-appointed, 176 of whom were female and 104 of whom were male. In comparison, the total number of staff as at 30 June 2006 appears, from the annual report, to have been 264. So there has been—

Mr Lynch—The figure of 340 is an equivalent full-time figure for both members and staff. That figure fluctuates during the course of a year. In terms of individuals, we have brought the overall staff numbers down by about 60, if I am not mistaken, over the last three years. That is in terms of individuals. I do not have the full-time equivalent figure with me today to show what the changes have been year by year.

Senator LUDWIG—What I want to do is compare apples with something close to apples, and oranges with something close to oranges. If I use the budget papers, they talk about average equivalent staffing level, and the staffing includes both tribunal members and staff. The annual report looks at a certain date and includes whole persons. Is that right?

Mr Lynch—Yes. There are a few tricks in analysing—

Senator LUDWIG—Perhaps you should not say that in front of the minister.

Mr Lynch—accounting terms. The part-time members of the tribunal work a range of days. Some work two days, some work three days and some work four days. Then you have the full-timers, who work five days. They work 230 days a year. The maximum number of days per year for a part-timer is 200. That would need to be agreed with a senior member and that would require four days a week consistently through the year. Most part-time members do not do that. We would count a part-time member as 0.6 of a full-time member, with them working 200 days a year as opposed to the 230 days a year of a full-time member. We also have a range of ongoing full-time and part-time staff. We have non-ongoing full-time and part-time staff, as well as some few—I am pleased to say—casual staff. What we can rely on is that there are 280 persons filling positions on the staff and 95 persons filling member positions at the moment. In that mix, taking account of the work patterns—and this is an

estimate—we anticipate that, for 2007-08, 340 will be required, allowing for the current case load, the complexity of the case load, new policy, legislative change and so forth. We could go away and give you a detailed breakdown, but all of those factors combine to add up to the average staffing level that we have estimated there of 340. We are carrying 280 staff. We used to carry in excess of 300. I do not have a precise figure here today. We are reducing our reliance on staff. We expect the new case management system, which requires more administrative effort by members in self-managing their reviews, to assist us to a degree in reducing reliance on staff support. Equally, at the end of the day, with more diligent and proficient members on both tribunals, we would anticipate some reductions. But we could not foreshadow that on current case load and complexity for another 12 months.

Senator LUDWIG—So staff numbers—excluding tribunal members—have been trending downwards?

Mr Lynch—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—And that is in full-time, part-time and non-ongoing staff.

Mr Lynch—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—If I understand what you have been saying, there have been two principal reasons for that. The first is that there has been a change in the management structure—in other words, the combining of the MRT and the RRT. The second is that the work load has also changed. You have also had efficiencies from other sources, but they are the two principal reasons. Are you able to separate it out and tell me how much of the staff reduction relates to the combination of the MRT and the RRT? Are you able to tell me the savings that resulted from that?

Mr Lynch—Precision with each aspect of the merger is difficult, Senator. What we can say is that we are not costing government or the taxpayer more in running the tribunals. We are coping with increased wages for staff. Every year there is a certified agreement pay rise for staff of at least four per cent. Every year the Remuneration Tribunal reviews members' total remuneration and has been increasing that by at least four per cent. There are government efficiency dividends that we have to pay for. So I guess we have not seen a substantial reduction yet, but we can say to you that that is a significant saving that we have definitely built in, because we are picking up additional complexity of case, new policy, new legislative change, which is costing money. We have not put a cost on those. That is a very hard thing to do.

Senator LUDWIG—Are you able to identify if there has been a staff reduction and by what amount and—I will try again—even if you have a combination of the of cost savings that might have been achieved out of the establishment of a single prescribed agency? It seems to me that it is important to be able to identify whether or not there has been a benefit in terms of not only the physical environment, the workload and the ability to be able to respond across tribunal member appointments but also for government. I suspect they would ask, 'How much money have we saved?' as I think Senator Joyce so aptly put.

Mr Lynch—I think we will be able to come back to you with some data on that. We have, for example, saved on an EL2 position in Victoria and in Sydney, as we had two district registrars in each of Melbourne and Sydney running registries. So we have made a saving

there in excess of \$100,000 in Victoria and in Sydney. That has been a progressive saving over the last three years. Equally, not filling some positions or reducing the number of senior members has led to savings. One would think one could just look at the total remuneration for those individuals and say that that is half a million dollars worth of savings. I think we can do that analysis for you and point to a number of areas where costs have been reduced. Equally, accommodation costs, lease costs in Melbourne and Sydney, have been a significant cost item for us and we would like to produce some data on that which will show you what some of the efficiencies have been, some of the cost savings or some of the increases.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the registries that have been combined, there is only the one?

Mr Lynch—No, the MRT and RRT had two separate registries in Victoria and two separate registries in New South Wales. They have both been combined. The principal registry was combined some years back. There was a principal registry of MRT in Canberra. That office was closed and moved to Sydney.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of both Victoria and New South Wales, is the co-location completed?

Mr Lynch—In Victoria two tribunals operate out of one registry in Lonsdale Street and the two New South Wales registries operate out of a single Clarence Street office.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the principal registry, is that now in New South Wales?

Mr Lynch—It is, for both tribunals.

Senator LUDWIG—Then in other states there is a principal office?

Mr Karas—In Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, the tribunals operate out of Administrative Appeals Tribunal premises, under a memorandum of understanding between the portfolio tribunals and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Support services are provided for by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to the single members who are in Perth and Adelaide. There are three members in Brisbane and we are trialling having an officer or a staff member of the tribunals there assisting those three members at present.

Senator LUDWIG—And in Darwin?

Mr Karas—In Darwin there is no office; there is no office in Hobart either. The offices are only on the mainland, in Perth, Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. There is not much of a case load from Tasmania or from Darwin, but those cases are generally handled by the Melbourne office in relation to Tasmania and by the Sydney office in relation to Darwin. As I said, there are not all that many cases but, so as to ensure that the services and potential applicants are satisfied with what is occurring, just recently the district registrar from Melbourne visited Tasmania and spoke not only to the NGOs but also to other people there, including DIAC, and was assured that the arrangement is not causing any difficulty so far as potential applicants might be concerned. I understand that the same is the case for Darwin as well. We do conduct, as I think I have mentioned time and again here, videoconferencing hearings, so that people do not have to travel large distances. If they are in Darwin or Hobart, they can access government facilities there so that the videoconferencing hearings can take place.

Senator LUDWIG—What facilities do they use in Hobart and Darwin—the AAT?

Mr Karas—Yes, I understand that it is done through the AAT. On occasions I think we have used the Federal Court as well.

Senator LUDWIG—Looking to the future, is there a plan—a strategic rather than an operational plan—which outlines the next phase? What you have done is co-locate, in both Victoria and New South Wales. You have been established as a single prescribed agency. I will come to the corporate structure, but I take it that there is now one corporate structure?

Mr Karas—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—Those have been merged, so you now have all the human resource management functions in one. The accounting is now in the one—

Mr Karas—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—Stop me if I am wrong about this. Is it finished, in that sense, to the point of being a single prescribed agency, or is there more work to be done? Do more functions need to be co-located, streamlined or reduced or eliminated?

Mr Lynch—I think it gets back to what we were discussing earlier about the future alignment of the application and review processes of the tribunals. In the annual report last year, the principal member foreshadowed that consideration was expected to be given to the possibility of further alignment of the application and review processes of the tribunals. As I have indicated, we have had some consultation with DIAC officers about that. We anticipate that probably over the next 12 to 18 months there will be some streamlining of the three parts of the act that currently deal with the establishment, powers and processes of the two tribunals—parts 4, 5 and 6.

Senator LUDWIG—To come back to the physical structures of the tribunals, is there a view about whether the single prescribed agency will streamline the operations and reduce staff, and by how much? Has there been any work done to assess what the gain will be?

Mr Lynch—It is still early days. We do envisage having a close review of our operations. We are currently reviewing the impact of CaseMate on our operations and assessing what efficiencies and savings are going to emanate from the full and effective use of CaseMate by both members and staff. We have established terms of reference and a committee, and that committee is due to report, if I am not mistaken, in the next three to six months. It is an interesting review because we have different skill sets in both members and staff, and their usage of the new technology is mixed. Many members do not wish to use computer technology at all, but some are very quick to take it up and do not want staff doing anything on their cases because they want to do it all. It is a question of setting work level standards for members and staff, and we are doing that, and I think this review in the next three to six months will establish what efficiencies there have been and what further development of the technology we should be pursuing. We have got additional stages phased over the next 12 to 18 months planned and that is part of this efficiency drive. Feedback and assessing what efficiencies have occurred is on our agenda, but we think it is still too early days. This is our first year of being a single agency under the financial management regulations, and we may well find, once we have had the Audit Office review our financial statements at the end of this

financial year, that we will be in a position to assess at the board level just what benefits have derived from this single prescribed agency status.

Senator LUDWIG—I will come back to CaseMate shortly. As I indicated earlier, I want to examine a little bit more the internal functions of the two tribunals that have now merged. Perhaps we can do it in a broad sweep: you can indicate the merged areas and then what has remained separate.

Mr Karas—You asked earlier whether the tribunal had a plan. We are about to complete a tribunal plan for the years 2007 through to 2010 to replace the present tribunal plans as such, and it is intended that this new plan will set out the tribunal's key strategic aims and priorities, its core business processes and outcomes, the leadership model and core values; so much so that the draft of the plan was recently circulated not only to members and staff of the tribunals but also to our external stakeholders for comments, which are now coming in. We anticipate that the final plan will be able to be implemented on 1 July this year. That will be, of course, publicly available.

Senator LUDWIG—Can we go through the merged internal products, which I assume is the accounting functions. Could you build the description on those?

Mr Lynch—We have a corporate services group that is managed by the deputy registrar, Mr Jones. That comprises a finance section, a business services section and an IT section. The staff for each of those sections are cross-appointed to both tribunals and service both tribunals, without distinction. Their business cards reflect their status with both tribunals. All the bank accounts are in the name of the single prescribed agency, the MRT/RRT. All those functions are delivered to both staff and members of both tribunals. The corporate function was amalgamated back in 2004 when the ACT registry closed and the principal registry of the MRT moved to Sydney. The IT section has progressively been combined. We have staff based in both Melbourne and Sydney who service our IT needs. Our business services people are based in Sydney and they look after our accommodation requirements and a range of other property business activities. That is a very integrated unit.

The registries themselves are under constant review in terms of their structure and resourcing. The board is soon to receive four submissions on restructures and reclassifications that are currently proposed to better reflect the need for professionalism amongst the staff. We are examining work level standards and the nature of the work being done. This is a necessary feature of the co-location but also the changing business environment—the work is changing, complexity is changing and members' work practices are changing. Being a support service, staff in the registries have to change the way that they do business as well. The registries are run by EL2 officers in both Sydney and Melbourne, and they are supported by two EL1 officers in Melbourne and three in Sydney. There are approximately 100 staff in the Sydney registry and 60 in the Melbourne registry.

Our country research staff have a team that is partly based in Melbourne and partly based in Sydney. That totals just under 20 staff. Most of the staff are in Sydney. They are highly skilled researchers who do country research work for the RRT in the main but also do information searches for the MRT and service members directly. We have a legal service, which is also staffed partly out of Melbourne, but mainly out of Sydney, where the bulk of the

members are, and it provides high-level legal services, which is a specialised activity. These tribunals probably have more judicial review than any other tribunal in the world, and there is more jurisprudence that emanates in respect of our activities than, I think, with any other tribunal in the world.

Senator LUDWIG—I am not going to dispute you on that.

Mr Lynch—It keeps the Federal Court and the High Court very busy.

Senator LUDWIG—They do tell me that.

Mr Lynch—The legal unit is a vital element of our staffing support. We then have an executive support and policy and procedures unit that is substantially based in Sydney, with one or two staff in Melbourne. We have developed a new case management team, which produces better quality reporting to the senior management, but also to members, about where they are up to with cases, what cases are coming into the compactus, what cases need priority attention and that sort of thing. They also provide more intelligence—if I can use that word—on what trends are occurring in application lodgements and review finalisations. So they assist us in producing improved reports to the parliament and to the minister.

Senator LUDWIG—What functions are still separated?

Mr Lynch—Virtually none.

Senator LUDWIG—That was the impression I got.

Mr Lynch—I cannot think of any today and, as I said earlier, spotting the difference is becoming extremely difficult.

Senator LUDWIG—We might move to CaseMate. When was that introduced?

Mr Lynch—It went live on 3 April last year.

Senator LUDWIG—Where is it from? Is it an off-the-shelf product or was it developed internally?

Mr Lynch—It is a product that I think is partly off the shelf, but we hired some consultants to develop it for our specialised needs.

Senator LUDWIG—You say it is off the shelf; who supports the product?

Mr Lynch—I will pass that to the deputy registrar, who is much more familiar with this.

Mr Jones—It is a product called Global 360 and it is largely a bespoke system. It has been developed using SQL as the database platform. But a lot of the screens are of course custom designed for the use of the tribunals.

Senator LUDWIG—Is this the only tribunal that has this system in place?

Mr Jones—It is the only tribunal that we know of, yes.

Senator LUDWIG—The Federal Court have a different system. The Family Court have the same system as the Federal Court. What about the AAT?

Mr Jones—The AAT have just developed a new system of their own.

Senator LUDWIG—And you have CaseMate, which is a system you have developed on your own?

Mr Jones—That is right.

Senator LUDWIG—Was any consideration given to harmonisation of the various administrative tribunals with a single case management system?

Mr Lynch—There certainly was. The registrars of the tribunals did have discussions and our IT directors participated on each other's tender committees. We have had a great deal of consultation between the tribunals on what was the best type of system to develop and acquire. We found that with our highly unique system of application processing it would have been difficult to have used any of the other systems, which, prior to their replacement in the courts and tribunals in recent years, were very much past their use-by date. We have custom made a system that will enable us to report on the vastly different clientele that we have to, say, the AAT, the SSAT, the Veterans' Review Board; to comply with the reporting obligations for internal management purposes, self-management by members and staff; and also to enable reports to the parliament, which are quite different to those of the courts and the other tribunals in the way that they use their systems. We felt that the expenditure that we undertook, which was a few million dollars, was money well spent and it would avoid the high costs of maintaining the two obsolete databases that we have now left behind. We think that was a necessary and proper move forward.

Senator LUDWIG—What is the total cost to date of the system?

Mr Jones—We spent \$2.5 million on the initial build and we spent another \$750,000 on further development post the initial implementation.

Senator LUDWIG—Can you describe the ongoing support. How much it will be and what type of support is provided by Global 360? Is there a continuing contract?

Mr Jones—The support is provided by Volante. I believe that has now been taken over by Commander systems, which is an Australian based company. I cannot give you an exact breakdown of both the maintenance component and the further development component at the moment.

Senator LUDWIG—Perhaps you could take that on notice. How is the system supported? Is it supported by Commander systems? Is it ongoing support? Where is it based?

Mr Jones—We have a CaseMate project team that is made up of our own people. It supports the maintenance and ongoing development of the system. We also have Volante resources. At any one time we might have three or four people from Volante who are working on system development. The initial implementation of CaseMate was designed to provide us with the basic functionality to replace our two existing case management systems. It was anticipated that there would be an ongoing program of development to make full use of the Global 360 platform. One of the elements in the development of CaseMate was building links with the departmental systems, and that is part of the CaseMate solution as well.

Senator LUDWIG—Is it only the management of the tribunal files or does it include broader support? In other words, there is more than simply the database with the CaseMate system. There are also laptops and other IT. Is it one whole contract that looks after that as well?

Mr Jones—We do have a range of IT, but it is not a single contract. It is a single contract in relation to the CaseMate system. The CaseMate system looks after file management and case management. It records a lot of the case details like the allocation of members to cases and case actions. It assists in setting down hearings and scheduling hearings. It has all of our template letters and documents built into it. As I mentioned before, it also provides communications on the lodgement and finalisation of cases to the department.

Senator LUDWIG—So it also creates a web based interface—

Mr Jones—It is a web based interface.

Senator LUDWIG—for people to then communicate with you online and lodge forms.

Mr Jones—It does not have an external component in terms of allowing direct entry from outside of applications to the tribunal. That is a possible element of future development.

Senator LUDWIG—So it is only an internal management system at the moment.

Mr Jones—That is right.

Senator LUDWIG—In the figures that you will provide, will you break down the Volante contract and the ongoing support that it provides for that system?

Mr Jones—Sure.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the remaining IT, do you have the costs, or is that managed by a separate contract?

Mr Jones—There are a range of products that we have. We have other systems that assist with the management of country research requests, legal requests and what have you. A lot of those are managed in-house through our own IT area.

Senator LUDWIG—What are they? Are they separate databases on country data?

Mr Jones—That is right.

Senator LUDWIG—Have they been updated recently or are they still the ones that we have been talking about for a couple of years?

Mr Jones—They have been updated from time to time.

Senator LUDWIG—I do not mean in terms of the data. I mean in terms of the physical infrastructure.

Mr Jones—There have only been incremental changes to those. They tend to be less sophisticated systems than CaseMate, which we are seeing as our main business system. The other systems are just managing particular aspects of our work that is carried out in other areas of the tribunal.

Senator LUDWIG—Are they maintained by contract or are they internally maintained?

Mr Jones—Internally maintained.

Senator LUDWIG—Perhaps you could give a brief description on notice of what that is and how much that operates.

Mr Jones—Sure.

Senator LUDWIG—That is all the IT that you have got?

Mr Jones—Broadly speaking, yes. We run an internet site for each tribunal as well as an intranet for the tribunals. Again, all of those products are managed internally.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of CaseMate when you are collocated with the AAT, how is that separately provided for in Queensland? Could you give me an example, or do they have access on the internal web base?

Mr Lynch—They have remote access to our CaseMate from their own computers in Queensland, Adelaide and Perth. We train the AAT officers in how to process applications that may be lodged in those registries.

Senator LUDWIG—Did you examine the systems of the AAT, the SSAT and the Veterans' Review Board to see whether or not they could be adapted? It seems to me—and it is gratuitous, I know—that you have three other tribunals plus effectively two that are combined which are now operating under a different case management system, let alone the court structures that operate. The courts appear to be at least heading towards harmonisation where you have got the Family Court and the Federal Court adopting the same thing. I will ask about the High Court later—tomorrow perhaps—as to the direction in which they are going. But it seems to me it is still about decisions at an administrative level.

Mr Lynch—I guess the unique feature of the system that we were looking for was a system that required a greater degree of member contribution to the administrative effort in conducting a lawful review. We saw that as a way to ensure that members managed their case loads very effectively and that it enabled highly effective communication between staff and members. I believe it is a fairly unique working environment in our two immigration tribunals whereby, because of the nature of the work and the interaction with community representatives and applicants, there is a much greater team effort than you might find in, say, a court.

Senator LUDWIG—They might dispute that.

Mr Lynch—I guess, from our experience of how we need to do business, there is a much higher degree of staff involvement. That is a bit of a hangover from the early establishment days of the MRT when staff were very highly active in assisting members throughout all phases of the review. That paradigm has been modified to have members conduct all key aspects of the review themselves but with a high degree of support from staff. Having had a look at the needs of other tribunals and the courts, we felt that the best way forward was to spend the sort of money that we were proposing rather than try and establish a single system. Bear in mind that the other courts and tribunals were at different stages of change as to their systems and we needed, with collocation, to have a system up and running that would start delivering some efficiencies in terms of work practices for members and conduct of the reviews. So, for those reasons, we felt it was not worth engaging with the other organisations to come up with a single system. We had no brief to do that and we believe we took the right steps.

Senator LUDWIG—When you say you had no brief, would that have been in respect of a direction from government or from the minister or from your internal management board?

Alternatively, did you approach the other tribunals and say, 'What have you got? Can we have a look at it? Do we want to look at harmonisation?'—or was that step never taken?

Mr Karas—From time to time the Commonwealth heads of tribunals meet and discuss matters of common interest or so. Attached, so to speak, to those meetings are meetings of the registrars. If I remember correctly, a couple of years ago there were discussions in relation to the sorts of matters that we have been talking about. It was found that it was a fact that the VRB's and also the SSAT's systems were quite enmeshed with the departments, and the AAT's was an adversarial system whereas our portfolios are non-adversarial. For a host of reasons, a number of which have been touched on by the registrar, it was thought that there would not be efficiency savings and nor would we be able to get one system which would satisfy the requirements of the tribunals as such. After some initial investigations, including contact between the IT officers or the directors of those sections and between the tribunals, it was thought that the best way to proceed was as we did so far as our portfolio tribunals were concerned. As indicated, as to the other tribunals and the Veterans' Review Board, because of the systems they had where they were quite advanced as well, it was thought best that we go off and do what we had done in relation to the establishment of our system and that they stay with theirs. But it was a matter that was considered, as I said, at a heads of tribunals meeting, with the registrars also considering it from their administrative side as well.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the output, if we look at the cases, are you now reporting both the RRT and the MRT figures separately?

Mr Karas—Yes, we continue to have separate statistics in relation to the lodgements, finalisation, cases on hand for those two tribunals.

Senator LUDWIG—But you will now have the same member that might then appear on both?

Mr Karas—Yes, you would have members as indicated who will be finalising and dealing with cases from both tribunals.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the case workload, I think you indicated some information earlier this morning, but if we then start to break it down a little bit more—in other words, how long it takes between a lodgement and a finalisation process—from my recollection, those have been trending down for some time, although I think there was a peak at some point.

Mr Karas—Yes, that is true. There has been a change in average times for cases at the Migration Review Tribunal from the time of the last annual report to 30 April 2007. We are talking now from the time of lodgement to decision. If I could just refer to a couple of areas. In relation to the bridging visas, which are usually the detention cases, completion of those cases has decreased from 12 to 10 calendar days, or approximately seven working days. Visa cancellations have decreased from about 22 weeks or 158 days to about 21 weeks or 149 calendar days. All of the other MRT cases have decreased from about 44 weeks or 310 calendar days to 42 weeks or 294 calendar days. I think it would be true to say that the average for all cases decided is down to about 37 weeks or 262 days from the time of lodgement to decision.

Senator LUDWIG—Do you express in a graph or a chart the break-up of the workload between bridging visas, visa cancellations and MRT cases?

Mr Karas—Yes, I think we do. Mr Jones might be able to give you some more information in relation to that. Also, in our annual reports we have some graphs and charts which indicate the lodgement and the case for the visa classes in relation to the case load as such.

Mr Jones—In relation to the MRT lodgements so far this year, partner visa refusals represent about 34 per cent of our case load; student cancellations, 17 per cent; skilled link refusals, 12 per cent; family refusals, nine per cent; student refusals, seven per cent; visitor refusals, five per cent; temporary business refusals, four per cent; permanent business refusals, three per cent; bridging visa refusals, two per cent; and sponsorship approval refusals, about one per cent. That represents 4,812 cases that were lodged up to 30 April so far this year on the MRT site.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the student cancellations of 17 per cent, has that been trending up or down?

Mr Jones—It has been trending up.

Senator LUDWIG—What is the nature of the cases? Do you examine the reasons behind the types of trends to then discern what skills you might have to provide to the tribunal members or what issues you might have to deal with for the tribunal members as to the reason it is trending up, or is that just a function of a greater number of students coming into the country?

Mr Jones—It tends to be related to the conditions on the visa, because the visas are cancelled for breach of conditions.

Senator LUDWIG—Yes.

Mr Jones—Probably the three most common breaches of condition that we see are working in excess of the 20-hour limit, unsatisfactory attendance, attendance of less than 80 per cent and not making satisfactory academic progress. The volume is driven by the overall volume, but it is the activity of both the institutions and the department in terms of identifying people who have breached their student visa conditions.

Senator LUDWIG—It is by and large the department, in its compliance audits or checks, that provides one of those three reasons?

Mr Jones—And the education institutions. They are reporting particularly in terms of satisfactory progress and attendance records.

Senator LUDWIG—Do the visa cancellations include the 501s?

Mr Jones—We do not have jurisdiction to deal with the 501s; they go to the AAT.

Senator LUDWIG—You just have to remind me—sometimes I forget these things as I have been away from questioning you in this area—your visa cancellations then are broken up into which main area?

Mr Karas—Student visa cancellations, partner visa cancellations, the general type of visa cancellations as such. However, those dealing with a 501 or a character requirement are not handled by the portfolio tribunals. And of course there is the cancellation of protection visas.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the separation of work that goes to the AAT, the MRT and the RRT, those which are 501s and the other cancellations you mentioned will then have a different case management system that attaches to them once they have been lodged with the AAT and go through that administrative tribunal. So, explain to me this: what is the unique part of your system that requires a different case tracking system to that which the AAT might apply to the 501s, where effectively the underlying premise is that they are still a visa cancellation as such?

Mr Lynch—The very process itself for both the MRT and the RRT is quite unique. The applications are treated differently. We have prescribed periods, prescribed ways of dealing with the application and the applicant and with authorised recipients that are quite unique to our tribunal. So we have had to establish functions in our computer that records contact by authorised recipients, whether there is an authorised recipient, address details of a range of people, which would not necessarily be something the AAT might be interested in. The validity of our decisions can stand or fall on whether we have got an address correct and so we have quite a different application regime and review regime that requires very separate treatment to any review or litigation that is conducted in the other tribunals or courts.

Mr Karas—Again, the AAT conducts its proceedings in an adversarial manner whereas we are an inquisitorial tribunal.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the appellant process, do you keep statistics on the cases which are returned, overturned or confirmed?

Mr Lynch—Which process did you—

Senator LUDWIG—The appellant process; appeals of RRT or MRT decisions.

Mr Lynch—We treat cases that are appealed to the courts and then remitted to us as new applications and they are processed—

Senator LUDWIG—They are treated de novo then?

Mr Lynch—They are treated de novo by a new member. A new file is created and new details are entered into the case management system, but there is a linkage between the earlier file and the newly created file.

Senator LUDWIG—What are the statistics up to this year for cases that have been confirmed by the RRT—I think you said you keep the RRT and the MRT cases separate—and those which have been dismissed?

Mr Karas—From 1 July 2006 to 30 April 2007 there were 2,686 cases finalised. There were 1,467 applications for judicial review lodged—some 47.9 per cent. Of the 1,747 judicial review applications determined during the period, 485 were remitted—27.8 per cent of the judicial review applications determined in that period—107 were set aside by judgement and 378 were remitted back to the tribunal by consent.

Senator LUDWIG—Can you explain the process by which a case remitted back by consent?

Mr Karas—It is with the consent of the department and the party concerned. For whatever reason, it is given back to the tribunal to reconsider without it being the subject of a court hearing or a court decision.

Mr Lynch—I might just add to that. Consent remittals require court orders and federal magistrates require that the basis for the remittal be established before they will issue an order. Establishment of the issue is by way of advice and not by way of trial, as the principal member indicated.

Senator LUDWIG—But you still require the federal magistrate to then provide the order.

Mr Karas—Yes. They have to go before the federal magistrate and he or she has to be convinced that it is appropriate in the circumstances that it be remitted by consent.

Senator LUDWIG—Is there an indicative example that you can provide? I am just trying to understand the types of cases that would be remitted. Is that where the department has erred in the beginning or there is a material defect in the application which can be remedied easily?

Mr Karas—It can be for a host of reasons. It can also be because the tribunal may have sent out a 424A letter and covered a host of matters but not covered one or two particular matters. It might also be where the counsel looking at the decision thinks that there may be a jurisdictional error or that something may have been misaddressed or not dealt with in the way that it should have been. There are a host of reasons why these things occur.

Senator LUDWIG—I only needed a snapshot. Do you look at that area as a way to improve the overall process? in other words, do you examine those matters and then say, ‘We need to talk to the department,’ or, ‘We need to provide a report, a review or provide additional information to applicants to reduce the number of remittals’?

Mr Karas—A number of factors come into play and, as indicated previously, we also have liaison meetings with the department every six months to discuss matters of common interest. Often times, cases of interest are raised. But generally speaking one of the outcomes for administrative review by tribunals is improved decision making at the primary level as well. That is on the basis that the tribunals provide not only de novo reviews but full merits reviews. It is accepted that decisions made in the administrative review system should have an affect on the primary decision maker and, over a period of time, perhaps lead to improvement in primary decision making.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the workload of each tribunal member, do you track the number of cases that they deal with in a period?

Mr Karas—Yes. A full-time member working 230 days across both tribunals would be expected to finalise around 140 cases from the Migration Review Tribunal and about 55 cases from the Refugee Review Tribunal, and for a part-time member it would be proportionate as well. We have a fair and equitable distribution or allocation of cases now and as members complete their cases they are topped up. That is also so that the cases do not sit in compactus for an inordinate period of time. In other words, a full-time member might have a holding—and I am just using these figures by way of example—of 45 cases on the Migration Review

Tribunal side and 15 cases on the Refugee Review Tribunal side, or 60 cases altogether. As that member completes cases, he or she would be topped up by cases being allocated to them out of compactus on a fair and equitable basis.

Senator LUDWIG—Who determines the fair and equitable basis? Is that you?

Mr Karas—Yes. It is the subject of principal member direction of case load, constitution and policy. Each year we look at it, and it is a consultation process as well.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the workload, how is that determined to be dealt with? Is it an adequate workload?

Mr Karas—It is expected that a conscientious member would be able to finalise, as we say, a number of cases over a period of time. But, individually, the senior members do have discussions with members who, because they may be going on leave of absence or for a host of other reasons, may not want as many cases in their kitbag, so to speak. Others may complete cases a little more quickly or have a higher finalisation rate and they may seek to hold more cases than perhaps some of their colleagues do. It fluctuates between members because of individual needs and requirements over a period of time. The constitution, case-load policies and principal member directions look at the median, so to speak, and at what should be able to be achieved by a conscientious member working as indicated.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the representation in the MRT and the RRT, do you keep statistics on those who are self-represented, those who are legally aided, those who appear with counsel, and then the department itself when it appears?

Mr Karas—The department normally does not appear as a party to the proceedings, other than making the file and relevant material available to the tribunal; that is about as far as their involvement goes. Perhaps on occasion they might make a submission to the tribunal, but that is very rare. We do keep statistics in relation to cases where there is a registered migration agent involved and those where the applicants are self-represented. As at 30 June last year, in 67 per cent of the cases in the MRT the applicants were represented, and in 63 per cent of the cases in the Refugee Review Tribunal they were represented. Those are about the figures; they do not fluctuate all that much. But we do keep figures.

Senator LUDWIG—And that is in terms of—

Mr Karas—Both tribunals, yes.

Senator LUDWIG—So both tribunals and their registered migration agents?

Mr Karas—Yes, whether they are represented or not.

Senator LUDWIG—Those who are self-represented are still a high proportion.

Mr Karas—Yes, but our procedures and processes are such that an applicant who is not represented before the tribunal would not be prejudiced by that fact alone. In other words, our procedures and processes are such that they do take into account the large proportion of applicants who are not represented. And, in an inquisitorial method of operation, we feel that those people are not disadvantaged. Whilst I do not have the figures in front of me, I think it would be correct to say that the set-aside rates for unrepresented as opposed to represented applicants would not show all that much difference.

CHAIR—Senator Ludwig, I appreciate your eagerness to continue but, it being 10.30 am, we will suspend the hearing for a short break and resume at 10.45.

Proceedings suspended from 10.30 am to 10.47 am

CHAIR—We will resume. I will pass to Senator Ludwig.

Senator LUDWIG—Earlier I was following up on self-represented litigants. But you were saying that, in your view, it was really the case that, because of the inquisitorial system, the difference is not that great between the outcomes. I want to get a breakdown of those figures.

Mr Karas—We will take it notice. I do not have those figures in front of me now—other than those which I referred to out of last year's annual report.

Senator LUDWIG—When translation services are required, is the use of that service significant? Do you meet that cost from within your budget?

Mr Karas—We do meet the cost from within our budget. If I look at last year's figures, I see that the hearings where an interpreter was required were 66 per cent in the MRT and 90 per cent in the Refugee Review Tribunal. That covers in excess of 90-odd languages or so.

Senator LUDWIG—What is the cost of that translation service in total?

Mr Lynch—It is about a million dollars a year.

Senator LUDWIG—Are both the use of and the cost of translation services growing?

Mr Lynch—The level of usage of interpreters has been fairly stable over the last four or five years. Our case load has declined so, while I do not have interpreter cost figures here, I would be surprised if they were not reducing relative to the case load. There are a couple of issues here. We have had a single contractor, ONCALL Interpreting Services, providing services to us for the last couple of years. We are about to consider re-tendering as that contract has come to an end. We are extending the contract for a limited period to enable fresh contracting services to be obtained. We will be going to tender in the next few months. I would expect, in view of the decline in case load—certainly from four years ago when both the MRT compactus and RRT compactus looked very different to how they look today—that our usage might differ. Having said that, the rate of finalisation of cases on both tribunals has been fairly consistent, although it has been reducing, albeit not entirely proportionate to the case lodgement decline. We have maintained positive clearance rates on both tribunals—that is, we are finalising more cases than were actually lodged. I would need to come back to you with some real dollar figures on the interpreter usage.

Senator LUDWIG—I would not mind that. Thank you very much.

Senator NETTLE—I want to ask some questions about how the RRT deals with issues around sexuality. You have outlined quite a lot of the training that is done by members. Does any component of that training go to the issue of sexuality?

Mr Karas—The tribunals are looking now at producing some guidelines or guidance in relation to how tribunal members should deal with who we term 'vulnerable persons'. That term covers the matters that you have raised, along with, for example, children and others who might have suffered torture and trauma. It is an exercise which is presently on foot and we hope to be able to complete it some time later in the year. In relation to that, we are also

seeking input from the usual stakeholders and others. In relation to specific training on the subject which you have raised, it would only come up in relation to interdependent visas within the partner category on the Migration Review Tribunal side. In relation to the refugee side, they would be the sorts of sensitivities—if I could use that word—that we would be looking at in relation to the constitution of the matters, if in fact that became an issue. But since the Khawar case, the tribunal members have become aware of the situations that can arise. Members are charged with providing a mechanism of review that is fair, just, economical, informal and quick. On occasion, one does have to test the evidence that comes before the tribunal and credibility sometimes becomes an issue. In relation to the conduct of a case, if in fact that is being suggested as the reason or one of the reasons why a protection visa is being sought, then the member would have to conduct a line of questioning so that they could establish the applicant's credibility in relation to the truth of the claims of persecution. The overall training which is given to members—not only training at the induction stage but ongoing training—covers a host of matters, including testing credibility and matters associated with the visa applications that are before the members.

Senator NETTLE—So are you saying that currently in the training there is nothing specific to sexuality?

Mr Karas—To my knowledge, yes.

Senator NETTLE—You said that there is a project being worked on to have—

Mr Karas—Yes, in relation to vulnerable persons and guidance in relation to how members would deal with vulnerable people who come before the tribunal. It is similar to the exercise we have just completed in relation to our guidance on credibility and how that is tested by tribunal members.

Senator NETTLE—Can you outline the areas that will be covered in that project around vulnerability—for instance, you mentioned children—just so I get a sense of how large it is.

Mr Karas—It is quite large. I do not have the information here in front of me now, but it covers women at risk; children, as I have indicated; people who have suffered torture and trauma; and others who are generally termed vulnerable persons. I am sorry I cannot assist you any more in relation to it, but I am happy to take the question on notice and give you more detail if you would like that.

Senator NETTLE—Yes, that would be appreciated. Is that a training package?

Mr Karas—No, it is a working paper, and it will be available to the public as such. It will be, as I say, along the lines of guidelines as to how members would conduct themselves in relation to people of that category. At the same time, it will be made available so that applicants, stakeholders and others who come before the tribunal are aware of the sorts of considerations and matters that would be taken into account in relation to it.

It arose out of some feedback that we received at our community liaison committee meetings, and we undertook then to draft some guidelines in relation to gender related claims in refugee matters. However, it has expanded since then, and we have decided to widen the scope to include what we call 'vulnerable applicants', which would include women with gender related claims, children, persons with mental illness and survivors of torture and

trauma. The guideline will, as I have indicated, provide tribunal members, applicants and migration practitioners with general guidance on how to approach the assessment of the claims presented by vulnerable applicants, and important issues to be considered when assessing such claims. Again, as we did with our other guidance paper, we will circulate this one to the external stakeholders during the drafting process. We hope to produce a draft for external consultation shortly, and that we will be able to publish the guidelines sometime this year.

Senator NETTLE—You did not mention sexuality there, in saying what the guidelines were going to look at.

Mr Karas—Perhaps it is something that we should take into account, now that you have raised it, and given the fact that it has come up in some cases in the past. It is something which we could take on board and consider.

Senator NETTLE—Okay. Can you give us an idea of the sorts of organisations you would be consulting with in the external release of the paper?

Mr Karas—A number of NGOs and other organisations come along to our liaison meetings. That would be a starting point. And if it is thought appropriate that we cast the net wider and consult others, we will do so. In fact, if you have any suggestions we would be happy to consider those as well.

Senator NETTLE—Thank you, I will definitely take that offer up. When you talk about ‘producing the working paper is intended for producing guidelines’—have I got the sequence right?

Mr Karas—Yes, it will be guidance, so that people can be familiar with the way in which the tribunal would deal with those sorts of matters and the considerations that it would take into account in dealing with those claims.

Senator NETTLE—So are the guidelines for the public or for the members?

Mr Karas—They will be made available on the web for the public, as has been done with the guidance in relation to credibility, which is widely available.

Senator NETTLE—I am trying to work out if there is anything in train in terms of providing guidance to RRT members in relation to sexuality.

Mr Karas—Other than the general training that I have indicated to you—which covers a host of matters, starting with basic principles of administrative law, to how to conduct themselves at a hearing with interpreters and like matters—nothing specific as such, no.

Senator NETTLE—This process of developing a working paper and guidelines is not intended to be for training of members on the issue of sexuality?

Mr Karas—If it is identified that, yes, that is an area which we need to address, it will be taken up in training. I should say that at this stage some of the training is generated from the members themselves who feel that there is an area where specific training is lacking, and in the past, when we were dealing with a number of cases where there were allegations and suggestions of torture and trauma, we did use organisations like STARRTS and the Victoria

torture and trauma organisations and have representatives from those organisations come along to address the membership in training session.

Senator NETTLE—You mentioned in your first answer a particular case. Which case was that?

Mr Karas—I might have been speaking generally in relation to what I thought you were referring to as the High Court case in I think S135, where the suggestion or the claimed persecution was because of homosexuality in Bangladesh.

Senator NETTLE—What has been the response of the Refugee Review Tribunal to that ruling in relation to sexuality?

Mr Karas—There have been legal issues papers prepared as a result of it for guidance of the members and also that case and an analysis offered has figured in our legal bulletin.

Mr Lynch—If I could just add to what the principal member has said about the way in which the RRT deals with claims of any kind: so long as they are relevant to the convention definition of ‘refugee’, members are required to assess the evidence fairly and carefully and take expert opinion where that is appropriate. They also have to test credibility as to the genuineness and truthfulness of claims. On the credibility paper, which the principal member mentioned, I can’t recall offhand whether it deals with sexual orientation as an issue, but if it doesn’t, we will certainly look at that and deal specifically with that in that paper. But gender related issues are dealt with and there is good guidance given in that paper to members and applicants and advisors who appear before the tribunals on what the issues are and what the tribunal’s approach is in relation to assessing credibility in respect of the range of matters that might be pertinent to a particular review.

We would be dealing with the vulnerability paper that the principal member mentioned in much the same way as with the credibility paper. Its genesis came from the community about 18 months ago. We developed it in tandem with the community practitioners and NGOs and it is now a paper that is available widely. It is on our website. We encourage the industry to actually refer the applicants to that document and basically school them in what the issues are that the presiding member on a particular appeal will be considering and how the member will tackle issues of credibility requiring questioning on delicate issues.

We also have in our constitutions policy capacity for members of a particular gender to be selected depending on the nature of the case, depending on the applicant’s wishes. That applies also to the gender of the interpreter that is to be used in a particular case. Applicants and advisors can basically select gender, not select the interpreter as such, and can create an environment where the applicant might feel better placed to present their case. We are going to use and are using that credibility paper for training, professional development and induction of new members.

I also wanted to mention—it might assist you with the interest that you have in this—that we are currently conducting or have just finished a two-day workshop for members on fairness and emotions, managing expectations in hearings. That is a recognition by the tribunals of the need to really understand the environment of a hearing from an applicant’s perspective as much as their own and to recognise the very difficult and sensitive issues that

occur. So we anticipate putting new members through perhaps a similar abbreviated program, being aware of expectations of individuals in coming to hearings before the tribunals.

Senator NETTLE—You mentioned the legal issues paper that had been written in response to the court decision. Is it possible to have that tabled for the committee?

Mr Lynch—Certainly.

Senator NETTLE—You also mentioned that there was something in your legal bulletin in response to that case. Is it possible to table that?

Mr Karas—Most probably that is a summary of the case, its facts and the outcome of it.

Senator NETTLE—Would you be able to table that?

Mr Karas—Would you like a copy of that as well?

Senator NETTLE—Yes.

Mr Lynch—I think S395 was the High Court case.

Mr Karas—Not 135, as I had indicated.

Senator NETTLE—How would a member test the credibility of a person's sexuality? I understand the credibility issues; I am specifically dealing with the sexuality issues, and you seem to be linking the two—so I just thought it was worth asking.

Mr Karas—It would depend on the facts and circumstances of the case. It is not as if one has a series of questions which one would go down and tick like a checklist and, depending on the outcome, say whether therefore the person fell on one side or the other side of the line. As I say, it depends on the facts and circumstances of each particular case and the member in dealing with that aspect of the claim. It is not one on which I say that we give straight-jacketed directions in relation to how it is to be done. The members are independent in their decision making and it is a matter for them, depending again on the facts and circumstances, to conduct themselves accordingly at the hearing. As we have indicated, there is that assistance available in relation to their training which we feel makes them able to deal with the facts that come before them. Under the act not only are we charged with providing a mechanism of review that is fair, just, economical, informal and quick but also one has to look at substantial justice and the merit of the case, of course.

Senator NETTLE—The reason I ask the question is that there is a case that has been in the media from the end of last year in which the tribunal member did not believe that the person was the sexuality that they put forward. The rationale that was in the decision was that the relationship the person was having with the same-sex partner was simply the product of a situation where only partners of the same sex were available and he said nothing about his sexual orientation. This has been one of the cases that has prompted me to ask about this, because that indicates to me that there is a need for some level of training for tribunal members in assessing these sorts of situations. Is that something you would agree with—that there is a need for some training in this area?

Mr Karas—Now that you have identified it, it would be a matter that would be considered by the professional development committee which considers what training is to be scheduled, so to speak, for members over a period of time. As I indicated earlier, often it is the members

themselves who generate the topics which are to be the subject of training, and at this stage we have not had any request in the area which you have identified. But I am sure now that it has been raised—and I am aware of the article to which you have referred—it may be that there would be a suggestion or a recommendation that in fact this be considered. But, as I have indicated, it has been considered in the past in a general sort of a way and the registrar did touch on the recent exercise, which was conducted over a couple of days, in relation to emotions and fairness and other associated matters in relation to the conduct of the hearings.

Mr Lynch—If I could perhaps add to that: members are called on to deal with a vast range of life issues and members come from a great many walks of life and have a substantial life experience. With respect to determining sexual orientation, whilst I think there may be some benefit in having presenters and some training that assists members—because it is a very delicate issue to discuss with any individual—these are issues that members are trained to deal with in the vast range of issues that they have to consider: whether somebody has been physically abused at home, violently or emotionally; whether they have been subjected to psychological torture. These are issues that require fine judgements on evidence—oral evidence, in the main. Much of the evidence that comes before the RRT in particular is not documented and is not susceptible to documentation in many cases. Members have to grapple with these issues and search diligently with applicants and their advisors for the truth. We would probably say—and our members would probably say, if they were here—that they are able to make these fine judgements on gender related issues and sexual orientation issues without the need for particular training. I do not know if there is particular training that you might have in mind. We would certainly be looking to openly receive advice on that and consider it, as the principal member says. But we would expect our members to continue to do the work that they do, and that is assess credibility, particularly in areas of this nature where credibility is important, and look to evidence from other sources, witnesses and so on, and try and reach the truth. It is a very difficult job that they have.

Senator NETTLE—I accept that and I know it is difficult. In the case that you talk about going to the court, the ruling by the RRT was that the gay refugees had to be discreet in their country of origin. I suppose that is the kind of instance which I think require an understanding of issues related to how credibility and sexuality interact. If somebody has been hiding their sexuality because of persecution in their home country, there is an interaction between sexuality and credibility where there would need to be some awareness of those sorts of issues by tribunal members. These cases might not be something they have to deal with a lot. There might not be a large number of those cases. I would imagine it would be able to provide people with some confidence in making those kinds of decisions along the way. I will certainly be in touch with you about some suggestions for training opportunities.

Mr Karas—Thank you.

Senator NETTLE—One other thing I wanted to ask relates to the ‘tribunals at a glance’ section in the front of the annual report. The difference between the number of primary decisions being affirmed between the MRT and the RRT was the one that stuck out to me. I heard your comments before in relation to a view that there was comparable decision making between the two. That one stuck out to me and I just thought I would ask if there was a reason or an explanation or a view on that one.

Mr Lynch—It is in the nature of the visa classes. The range of visa classes on the MRT and the volume of applications in relation to particular visa subclasses and against the one visa class on the RRT—the answer is in there. You will find in the annual report that the set-aside rate for partner cases, which is probably a third of MRT’s case load, is in excess of 60 per cent and has been for some years. That really would substantially account for that apparent discrepancy or dissimilarity in the set-aside and affirmed rates between the two tribunals.

There are a range of other factors too. The RRT’s decision making is based on the convention definition of ‘refugee’ and the numbers of cases that come before it that are not approved of course by the department are cases where there has been that initial assessment of not meeting the definition. The RRT undertakes its task as fairly and as well as it can and that is the result. It has been fairly consistent over the years, since 1993. It has risen and fallen, depending on country situations, but it has held at somewhere between 10 per cent and 30 per cent for quite some time.

Senator NETTLE—The primary decision is being affirmed. One reading of that—and I am not saying this is a correct reading—is to look at it and say, ‘Oh, well, the RRT seems to agree with the government decision makers twice as much as the MRT.’ That might be a totally wrong reading, so that is why I thought I would ask.

Mr Lynch—If one descends into consideration of the sorts of issues that I have been referring to and has a close look at the outcomes of the particular visa subclasses that exist on the MRT, and taking account of the spouse outcomes, the partner cases, I think you will see some consistency in decision making, at least within that tribunal. And, equally, on the RRT, part of the members’ code of conduct is to make consistent decisions on similar facts. So we would expect to see reasonably similar outcomes on similar facts in the RRT. It is a little bit of comparing apples with oranges and there is not a ready analysis that you can go to such as you have suggested.

Senator NETTLE—I have one more question on the sexuality issue. Does that part of the decision record that I read out on whether or not somebody’s relationship was an indication of their sexual orientation—I am trying to be careful about not asking for a legal opinion on whether that is a correct decision—raise any concerns for you?

Mr Lynch—A couple of things: we cannot actually discuss that case. We are prohibited by the Migration Act from discussing any case and disclosing particular circumstances; but the applicant certainly always has recourse to the courts, and a great many applicants do take that.

Senator NETTLE—It is not my intention to ask about that particular case. The reason I was using that—and I can use the High Court case as another example—was to see whether you thought that there was a concern about a lack of training of tribunal members on sexuality issues, because to me those cases indicate that that is the case. That is what I wanted to ask—whether that was a view that RRT shared as well.

Mr Karas—I do not think it was a view that I would have said I had before coming here and hearing you this morning; however, that is not to say that I have not always had confidence in the members being able to make lawful and timely decisions, given the fact that they carry out their task conscientiously, they are all hardworking and at the same time they

do have the act and policy et cetera to guide them. That said, it is not to say that on occasions there is not some area of training which we can look at, and I have already indicated to you that it is something we will take on board. I think you have also indicated that you are going to give us some information in relation to that. But, overall, as has been indicated, the members come from a wide variety of backgrounds and one would have to have confidence in them being able to make a correct or preferable decision in relation to the matters that come before them.

Senator NETTLE—I am glad I raised it, because in the report that we are talking about, the article in the *Bulletin* magazine, there is a magistrate talking about the preliminary views of tribunal members in relation to sexuality and a view the magistrate had that they had a closed mind. That is of concern to me. I appreciate that you have indicated it is an issue that may be able to be looked up.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions for the members of the tribunal, we thank them very much for their attendance and their feedback today.

[11.20 am]

CHAIR—We will move to outcome 2 and I will pass over to Senator Hurley.

Senator HURLEY—I will go back to my slightly premature question about the roles of the minister and the assistant minister in outcome 2.

Mr Metcalfe—Senator Ludwig actually asked a question on notice at the last estimates on this very point, on 12 February, question No. L&CA 4. I am advised that a response was provided to the committee on 16 May in relation to that, but if you would like to, I can read out that answer if it is not immediately available to you.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, thank you.

Mr Metcalfe—It reads:

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship is responsible for all matters relating to immigration and citizenship not delegated to his parliamentary secretary.

This was prepared prior to the parliamentary secretary becoming an assistant minister.

Senator HURLEY—I think that is what I was alluding to. Is there any change since the title was changed from parliamentary—

Mr Metcalfe—I will tell what you the role of the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship is, and I will let you know how that has changed since she became assistant minister. She is responsible for multicultural affairs; settlement; language services; temporary entry policy and programs, with the exception of subclass 457 temporary entries; migration agent liaison and monitoring; regional migration programs; oversight of the client service improvement programs and detention health improvement programs; all legislation associated with the responsibilities; and all correspondence related to those responsibilities as well as other non-critical correspondence. I am advised that recently the assistant minister has also been asked to oversee the review of migration agent legislation, which is quite a substantial body of work to occur, and is also responsible for overseeing the work of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council, which is a key portfolio advisory body.

Senator HURLEY—Has the staff allocation changed for the assistant minister?

Mr Metcalfe—I am not sure. I can take that on notice and let you know.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. If you could get me the staff allocation, the number, the classification of the staff and their home base location.

Mr Metcalfe—I will take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. Turning to the budget announcement, in particular relating to settlement services—and, as I also said previously, it is good to see the increases in funding for some key areas of settlement services—I just want to clarify some of those areas. In the joint budget release between the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Mr Andrews, and the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Teresa Gambaro, it was announced that there was \$209.2 million over four years to increase support for recently arrived humanitarian entrants, and the press release proceeded to detail those amounts. It said that they included \$5.3 million to subsidise rental and utilities costs in the first month after arrival; \$3.2 million to fund provision of public transport tickets in the first month; \$12.2 million for torture and trauma services; \$6.4 million for crisis payment for humanitarian entrants on arrival; a \$1.5 million discretionary fund to support long-term resettlement in regional areas; \$0.4 million to encourage new interpreters; \$127.8 million for the education of school-age arrivals in English; \$35.2 million to establish the complex case support services; and \$16.6 million for the new proposer support program. That totalled, I think, \$208.6 million. I notice there was another announcement about some money for policing, but it is sometimes difficult in all the different groupings in the budget announcement to work out what is included.

Ms Pope—There is a \$500,000 amount for initiatives relating to policing that was not itemised in the press release. The rest of the minor discrepancy would probably be explained by rounding and then adding the rounded figure into the total. But \$209.2 million is the correct total.

Senator HURLEY—So there is \$500,000 for policing. The announcement elsewhere was for \$900,000. Did that include another—

Ms Pope—That combines the \$400,000 for interpreting initiatives. They were grouped together under the heading ‘connecting to Australia’. In some places they are reported separately and in some places they are reported together, but they are the two measures.

Senator HURLEY—I want to turn to some of the details in those announcements—for example, the regional development initiative, which is \$1.5 million over four years. It was said that the funds would be to train local service providers, build community support for settlement and facilitate data gathering on refugees and skill matching. I want to find out what will be done there in a little bit more detail. For example, which local service providers will be trained, what will they be trained in and how will they be trained?

Ms Pope—The main reason for the creation of this discretionary fund is to address the fact that, as you would be aware, the Settlement Grants Program has an annual cycle and there may be times when we would like to be able to address a need in a regional area out of cycle with the Settlement Grants Program. So this small amount of funding is to do similar things to

what the Settlement Grants Program delivers but to be able to target that to a particular location where we are seeking to promote a regional settlement pilot.

Senator HURLEY—So what sort of local service providers do you see that are in need of training?

Ms Pope—It will be the same sorts of things that we fund under the Settlement Grants Program. If we are looking at settling a certain community, it might be to help them develop expertise in that particular community. As you know, we try to create a cohesive new community when we set up a regional settlement pilot, such as the Congolese in Shepparton. That is one of the possibilities. There may be a gap in service provision that we need to fund a local organisation to provide if there is no grant in that location. At the moment, we focus our regional strategies on areas where there are already grants. This gives us a bit more flexibility to look at other locations and to fund grants out of cycle for those kinds of things—community development, service provision and so on.

Senator HURLEY—When you say ‘service providers’, generally there would not be a migrant resource centre or anything like that in a—

Ms Pope—No, but often local councils have capacity and we often fund local councils in that regard. There might be a church based or other volunteer organisation that could be funded.

Senator HURLEY—What will they be trained in?

Ms Pope—That will probably pretty much depend on the circumstances and what gap we identify as we are looking at a new regional location. But it could be a whole range of things, from cross cultural issues to service delivery. It might be a specific practical project to deliver a service, such as driver training or homework clubs—the sorts of things that we fund under the Settlement Grants Program currently.

Senator HURLEY—How is it envisaged that community support will be built under this funding?

Ms Pope—We would apply the funding in similar circumstances to the way we prepare regional settlement arrangements currently, which is that we conduct negotiations with state government involvement and talk to a whole range of community representatives about the proposal to develop a regional settlement process. Ordinarily a local settlement committee is established at their own initiative, so they decide who they want represented on that committee and it is that committee that then works with the department and the state government to finalise the details of how they want to go forward. That settlement committee would identify the issues that they needed to focus on, where they felt that their strengths and weaknesses were and that the funding could be used to address some of those gaps.

Senator HURLEY—So would the funding be to help form a committee or for the specific projects that they would develop?

Ms Pope—I would not expect the funding to be used to develop the committee, because we currently do that and it is not a funded exercise. The money would be specifically for projects that we, in agreement with the local community, thought were needed to fill any gaps that might be identified.

Senator HURLEY—But that community support funding would be separate from the service-provider gaps that you want to fund for service providers?

Ms Pope—Yes—I mean, beyond what is currently available. So we would look to have IHSS services, for example, provided there; we would look at what other community support is already there and what other funding we provide. But if there is a gap out of cycle with the settlement grants program that we could address with this funding, then that is what it is designed to do.

Senator HURLEY—I am sorry—you would expect IHSS services in that regional area?

Ms Pope—We would make sure that they were delivered. We do not go ahead with a regional settlement pilot unless we can deliver IHSS services.

Senator HURLEY—Would that be delivered out of an existing service in that state?

Ms Pope—Yes, that has been the case so far.

Senator HURLEY—And that money would not be in addition to the IHSS tender but as part of their tender?

Ms Pope—As part of their tender.

Senator HURLEY—Who will gather and hold the data that will be gathered about refugee skills and skill-matching?

Ms Pope—The Department of Immigration and Citizenship. It is to enhance the information that is gathered at the point of interview overseas and its transmission to potential employers, and to improve that exchange of information so that we can better match entrants with potential employment opportunities.

Senator HURLEY—The next question, that feeds into that, is: how will those regional areas be identified by DIAC? Or will they wait for submissions from local regional groups?

Ms Pope—We have an existing process that works towards the identification of an area. It can come from a range of quarters. A town itself might approach the department requesting to be considered as a location. State government quite often comes up with a suggestion about a location that they might like us to explore. Or we can approach the state government—usually, in tandem, the state government and local area—if we think that the environment looks good for regional settlement.

Senator HURLEY—The area having been identified, or the area having requested some sort of assistance, how would the data be transmitted? Would you identify what job skills were required in that area and how many people you had of a particular ethnic group? How would that work?

Ms Pope—Broadly that is correct. We have a very hands-on process for identifying people who are suitable for regional settlement. We look at families who are ready for visa issue in the refugee and humanitarian classes overseas, and look to match them with locations and opportunities in Australia. As I said, we try to establish viable communities in those settlement locations, so we would not mix nationalities, in the early stages at least; we would focus on one cohort—so, in the case of Shepparton, we are focusing on Congolese, and we are looking at Togolese for possible settlement in Ballarat. The Burmese are an emerging case

load as well. Where there is not a strongly-established existing community, we have an opportunity to help create that in a regional location. But we do get down to looking at the skills and qualifications, if any, held by individuals, and family composition. For example, we do not settle people who have high medical needs in regional areas because the regional infrastructure is not really there to support that. So they are the sorts of factors that we consider.

Senator HURLEY—Speaking of medical needs, there have been, as I understand it, some problems reported with accessing health care, particularly in rural and regional areas, and there are reports that some GPs are unwilling to take on cases of refugees or humanitarian entrants because of the complexity, sometimes, of the cases.

Ms Pope—I have heard anecdotal reporting to that effect as well, and the way that we work to address that is our partnership with the Department of Health and Ageing. We have a refugee health working group which includes representatives of all the state and territory health departments and multicultural affairs departments, our department, both in humanitarian settlement and the humanitarian program side, and areas in the department of health. One of the initiatives that has come out of that working group is the introduction of an additional MBS item supporting a longer consultation, a first consultation for refugee families, to help recognise the additional work that GPs have to undertake when they first meet with what can be quite a reasonably large sized family and assess their medical needs.

Senator HURLEY—So it is via the Medicare system and funding of GPs. That is the incentive to—

Ms Pope—Yes. That is one of the initiatives. There are other initiatives around supporting doctors both in rural and metropolitan areas in areas of refugee health—specific issues that might be of relevance to refugees that they might not ordinarily come across with their normal case load.

Senator HURLEY—Is the availability of GPs or other medical specialists taken into account when areas are identified for regional—

Ms Pope—Yes. It is a pretty fundamental factor. If we cannot be satisfied that medical services can be provided then we do not go ahead with a regional settlement program.

Senator HURLEY—Is there a way of monitoring that health care? What kind of feedback does the department receive about whether appropriate health care is being made available once the humanitarian entrants are settled?

Ms Pope—There are probably a couple of layers to this too. We keep a close eye, through our regional offices, on the partnership in relation to particular locations—Shepparton, Ballarat or wherever that happens to be—and work very closely with the state government. So there is a reporting mechanism there. We conduct evaluations of those pilots to look at what issues have arisen and how we might overcome those in the future. We would also get feedback through that refugee health working group I mentioned, through the state governments, if there were issues emerging there. It is also something that could come up in our consultations with the officials that are part of the immigration and multicultural affairs council. The standing members also would be able to report things to us through that

mechanism. So there are a range of ways that we would know whether things were working smoothly or not beyond medical issues.

Senator HURLEY—Does that council you mentioned go and visit these regional areas and talk to people involved?

Ms Pope—The council is the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. They are the ministers in those areas. Below that sits a level of the standing committee, which is the officials. The state government partners with us very closely in regional settlement and keeps a very strong involvement with us through that whole process. So it would come through that avenue, rather than the council itself going to visit. But certainly there are visits by our staff and those of the state government.

Senator HURLEY—Have there been any reports of difficulties in regional areas with refugees and humanitarian entrants having trouble accessing medical services?

Ms Pope—Not that readily spring to mind, no. It has certainly been an issue in looking at new locations, but I am not aware of access being an issue in the locations where we are currently operating.

Senator HURLEY—So there is no specific training in health issues for refugees for those country GPs or medical specialists?

Ms Pope—I think I mentioned that support is being developed through the Royal Australian College of GPs and—I will probably get the titles wrong—through the department of health to provide access to information about issues that affect refugees in particular. Obviously as part of the discussions with new locations, that would be an issue that would be discussed—that there were GPs who were willing and able to take on that extra work. The state governments, being responsible for the provision of health services, would be aware of the support that is provided to those GPs. I do not have the details of that.

Senator HURLEY—What about interpreters—particularly for medical issues, but generally speaking as well—when new groups of arrivals go to regional areas? How is that catered for?

Ms Pope—The main mechanism is through the doctors priority line which is part of the TIS operations—the telephone interpreter service. GPs can access that service for free. In addition to that, the service providers would have access to bilingual caseworkers, in addition to what is available through the doctors priority line. Those would be the main methods. This would be another issue that would be discussed in setting up the regional program.

Senator HURLEY—When you say that the service providers would have access to case workers, are you talking about the IHSS caseworkers?

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—If, say, we are talking about Shepparton and the IHSS service is based in Melbourne—as I understand it would be—would caseworkers be based in Shepparton or just travelling out to visit?

Ms Pope—I would have to take that particular element on notice. I am not 100 per cent sure, but services are certainly provided through IHSS in Shepparton. I am not sure whether

they have an outpost there or whether it is Melbourne based, but I can certainly confirm that for you on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, if you would that would be useful. How does the department assess whether the regional program has been successful in terms of the general community? How do they get that kind of feedback?

Ms Pope—In the case of Shepparton, that feedback has been gathered through the hiring of a consultant to do a consolidated report on Shepparton. We looked at two elements; in fact, it was two sort of separate streams. One element was the issues encountered by the steering committee that was set up to run the pilot, and that included discussions with the full range of the community participants. The other element was the entrants themselves, including their experiences, what they thought helped them, what issues they encountered and ways they thought those could be overcome for future resettlement programs.

Senator HURLEY—And the community?

Ms Pope—Do you mean the man in the street rather than the people involved—

Senator HURLEY—Yes, the regional community.

Ms Pope—I would have to take that aspect on notice. I am not 100 per cent sure whether that was gathered and how it was gathered. I know that the views of the participants—the schools, the medical providers, the general service providers and those involved in the steering committee, employers and so on—were canvassed, but I am not 100 per cent sure about the general community.

Senator HURLEY—If the employers did identify some training issues or some skills shortages, how would that be dealt with?

Ms Pope—I think it really depends on the people who are actually settled and what opportunities they are able to find. This new funding that we have been talking about comes about as part of our change—refined focus on employment opportunities and looking to see how best we can do that matching. That was not a driving force in the settlement pilot in Shepparton. There were known job vacancies but we were not doing a very strong sort of job matching process in that case. We were working towards having a stronger focus on that into the future. We are still working on how that process would work, and we are in partnership with DEWR in doing that work.

Senator HURLEY—Will that be an aspect of the future considerations—what you do if the job matching is not perfect and there is a need for further training or skills development and how that will operate?

Ms Pope—Yes, it is something we certainly address now. If one of the people who has come is seeking work and having difficulties, then they would be supported to augment their skills or receive training in order to gain employment. But there is not specific funding for that in our programs, and we would not anticipate using this funding for that purpose either. We would be looking to mainstream availability of training and skills enhancement that would be available locally through TAFE and other education providers.

Senator HURLEY—Would that be through the IHSS provider or through DEWR and the Job Network?

Ms Pope—The identification that there was a need would be through the case management provided by the IHSS, but the steering committee is also in a position to recognise a need and work through a way to address it. The steering committee retains a very close relationship and role in ensuring that the whole settlement experience for those people is a positive one and that any issues are addressed. DEWR will help us with finding new locations where we may not have people settled at the moment where there are employment needs, and that is what we are looking to them for: very specific locations where we might consider humanitarian settlement because there are employment vacancies.

Senator HURLEY—Would the employer have any role in undertaking to provide extra training?

Ms Pope—We have not explored that in a lot of detail so far, although we have done some job matching in the meat industry in Queensland. The employers there did offer assistance. Certainly they were prepared to pay some financial assistance for people to move where the jobs were, for example. That was a one-off and we are looking at ways to make that more systematic. It is certainly not out of scope that we would have a discussion with employers about what they would be prepared to offer to attract workers.

Senator HURLEY—In those areas where there already has been regional settlement, is the unemployment rate—or, if you want to put it another way, the employment rate—among the refugee and humanitarian groups better than in the city areas?

Ms Pope—I am not in a position to draw that broader conclusion—and again I would need to take on notice the detail of the employment outcomes for those in the pilot in Shepparton—but there certainly has been a reasonable success in them gaining employment. It would be a fairly long stretch to then compare that to, say, metropolitan Melbourne and how people have done in that sense.

Senator HURLEY—But wouldn't that be the entire focus? You are moving people into regional areas so that they can get jobs, so wouldn't the employment rate be a key indicator of whether that was a worthwhile program?

Ms Pope—That is part of why we are doing it and, as I said, it is an evolving focus on employability and filling employment vacancies that is taking the program forward. But we look at other factors that are advantageous for refugees in settling in a regional area—the community spirit and the size and closeness of the community. Often if people are from a rural background that is a more accessible sort of community life for them than trying to adjust to living in a large city. So there are factors other than employability itself. But, in that realm, the interest is in low-skilled jobs and jobs in agriculture and the meat industry, where there appears to be quite a good skills match between the refugee intake and the vacancies available.

Senator HURLEY—But you do not yet know whether that has been effective—that matching?

Ms Pope—I said I would need to take on notice the actual outcomes in relation to the Shepparton pilot. It is a very small sample, so I think it would be hard to extrapolate it to say that their outcomes are much better. They are hand-picked for the location they are going to and I think—

Senator HURLEY—But that will always be the case, won't it, under this program, as you were saying?

Ms Pope—It will always be the case, yes.

Senator HURLEY—I would like to move to the in-kind support, which removes the contribution by the provider who sponsors a refugee to utilities and rental costs and the public transport tickets in the first four weeks. So this funding—\$8.5 million over four years—will be in place of that contribution. As I understand it, the proposer families were previously required to make a rental contribution of up to 30 per cent of household income and a utilities contribution of \$5 per family member to a maximum of \$25 per family for weeks 2 to 4 after arrival. This funding will remove that contribution and replace it with a government contribution. Did all proposer families make this contribution in the past; if not, what proportion did?

Ms Pope—If I have understood your question properly, that contribution is provided by the people themselves, by the entrants and not by their proposers. Out of their income support payments from Centrelink, they were previously required to make the contributions that you have outlined. They will not be required to make those in the future, in recognition of the fairly difficult financial circumstances in which they arrive.

Senator HURLEY—Were there any requirements of the proposers?

Ms Pope—No, not in that sense. They might have informally supported those that they proposed in that way, but the requirement is of the person who has the visa—the entrant, not the proposer.

Senator HURLEY—The IHSS provider did have the requirement to provide some support, if required, I understand, if there was some financial difficulty.

Ms Pope—To?

Senator HURLEY—To provide some support in terms of accommodation and orientation assistance.

Ms Pope—Yes, and that remains. Where necessary, the providers—to both refugees and SHPs—will continue to source accommodation for them as in the past, but the rental contribution that the individual had to make is now removed.

Senator HURLEY—So the IHSS provider merely identified accommodation for the SHP entrant?

Ms Pope—Yes, where requested.

Senator HURLEY—And did not assist financially?

Ms Pope—Yes, that is right.

Senator HURLEY—They would still provide orientation assistance where required?

Ms Pope—Absolutely.

Senator HURLEY—Still on the proposer support program, there is identified in the budget \$16.6 million over four years. This was identified as the SHP entrants get improved support on arrival and proposers will benefit to ensure that they understand their obligations

and have the capacity to provide support to the SHP entrants. Is that in-kind support, that \$8.5 million, over and above that \$16.6 million, or is that part of it?

Ms Pope—It is over and above. They address quite different objectives. The in-kind support is really about providing additional income support to entrants. So they no longer have to find the money for things that they ordinarily had to pay for out of their Centrelink provided income support in the first four weeks after their arrival. But the SHP proposer support area is a different program, which my colleague Ms Keski-Nummi can address, if you want to ask about that.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, thank you, if you could just run through the detail of that.

Ms Keski-Nummi—The proposer support program is part of the broader humanitarian settlement initiatives. It addresses the provision of support to proposers in making preparations for SHP applicants on their arrival to Australia. It introduces some minimum requirements for proposers around residence and employment. Where people do not meet those requirements, it links them into proposer support groups who will assist them in making those sorts of preparations and in providing early linkages to the IHSS providers as well, where necessary. The broad framework is being developed at the moment in consultation with organisations, but we would envisage working fairly closely with large organisations who are experienced in working with and managing volunteer programs—community liaison and engagement and around those areas. So in many ways it is engaging the community sector and the voluntary sector in providing support to proposers.

Senator HURLEY—So the large groups would be the proposer support groups; is that what you are saying?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes, working with proposer support groups. The proposer support groups themselves might be ethnic community organisations, church based organisations or other volunteer groups.

Senator HURLEY—What specifically will the funding be used for in that case then?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It will be provided for training of volunteers, offsetting some of the costs for volunteers, but again the details around how exactly that funding will be provided are still to be bedded down.

Senator HURLEY—It is a reasonable amount of funding—roughly \$4 million a year.

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes, and \$10.3 million of that is for the proposer support coordinators and groups and \$0.6 million is for information to proposers. We will be managing some information programs around that so that proposers are aware of the undertakings they enter into and demystifying, if you like, some of the ways that we manage the SHP program. The final \$5.7 million or thereabouts is in relation to the set-up costs, legislation changes, systems and staffing.

Senator HURLEY—So around \$10 million is funding for the coordinators—

Ms Keski-Nummi—There is \$10.3 million for the coordinators and support groups.

Senator HURLEY—Who would the coordinators be employed by?

Ms Keski-Nummi—We are working through those issues at the moment, but I would imagine that they would be employed by community based agencies that have a strong track record in managing volunteer programs, providing training and doing all those sorts of things.

Senator HURLEY—How will that funding be accessed? Will those groups make application or will there be a tender?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Those details have not been settled upon yet.

Senator HURLEY—How many coordinators will that \$10 million fund?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Again, those details have not been finalised. It could be a couple of large organisations; it could be state based organisations. Those are the sorts of details that we are working through at the moment.

Senator HURLEY—Are you planning for there be one in each state or several?

Ms Keski-Nummi—I would imagine that there would probably be one or two of those proposed support coordinators in each state. There may be less; there may be a national organisation that may pick up some of that as well.

Senator HURLEY—So you have a budget of \$10.3 million but you are not yet sure how that will be organised.

Ms Keski-Nummi—The proposed support program will come into effect on 1 April; that is the introduction date that we are working to. The devil is in the detail around some of this. We have the broad framework and now we need to establish the parameters around that. We will do that in consultation with other community based organisations. We have been having some discussions through the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council on those parameters.

Senator HURLEY—What kind of community organisations are they? Are they migrant resource centres or St Vincent de Paul or—

Ms Keski-Nummi—We have talked to the Refugee Council of Australia. We have been talking to the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council. It is those sorts of organisations and advisory councils that at this stage we have been consulting with. While we need to talk to possible applicants, the thing about it is that we need to be careful to make sure that whatever we design and establish is something that is open and transparent for all.

Senator HURLEY—And that goes back to my question about whether it will be a tender or an application.

Ms Keski-Nummi—Again, as I said, we have not settled on that detail yet. We have not settled on whether it will be through a funding program or a tender process.

Senator HURLEY—Is the \$5.7 million for set-up costs and staffing within the department?

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is within the department.

Senator HURLEY—What level of staffing will be covered under that?

Ms Keski-Nummi—I would imagine that it will cover staff at the APS6 level in our state and territory offices who will manage the particular funding. There are some legislation costs

for us; there are system set-up costs as well. There are also normal fit-out staffing costs, as well as the cost of a couple of people in our national office.

Senator HURLEY—How many staff overall?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Again, it depends on just how we design the program—for example, on whether we have one in each state and territory office. It may be that there are only one or two in some of the states and territories.

Senator HURLEY—What kinds of outcomes are you looking for out of this proposer support program?

Ms Keski-Nummi—One outcome we are looking for is for proposers to be well equipped to provide the support and assistance to SHP applicants when they arrive in Australia. We want them to be able to then very quickly sort of link them into settlement services and other services in Australia and provide, if you like, the early orientation as well. What we want is for the proposer support groups—with the coordinators and the proposers—to develop settlement plans that would identify what the needs are around housing, education, family size, jobs, linking to IHSS service providers and so forth. That is a part of the planning that we would look at. It would mean early integration and early transition into the Australian community.

Senator HURLEY—One of the issues that a number of potential proposers mentioned is assistance with applying for someone to migrate and the difficulty—there is a certain amount of funding that provides free migration agent advice. Will that be part of this program as well?

Ms Keski-Nummi—We envisage that, while it will not be application assistance or advice, strictly speaking, with the coordinators there would be that scope to better inform proposers about applications and the processes around that. We would certainly be doing some of that ourselves as well with the 0.6.

Senator HURLEY—In terms of the new people that go into the state and territory offices.

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—The proposers will not have any direct access to funding, as such, but they will just get assistance via the coordinators and the department.

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is right, yes.

Senator HURLEY—The migration advice that is currently provided through the settlement grant program will continue.

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is correct.

Senator HURLEY—It will just be this extra layer on the top.

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—Proposer support program 2, \$10.3 million over four years—

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is the same thing, isn't it?

Senator HURLEY—It is the same thing, is it? It was just a different press release. I think it bundled together a whole lot. That is the case—that it is just bundled together?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—They were trying to double up, were they?

Senator HURLEY—Included within that was listed roughly \$150,000 a year for information products—and I think you mentioned that—

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is right, yes.

Senator HURLEY—to inform recently arrived humanitarian entrants about the SHP and the roles and responsibilities of the proposer.

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—That is indeed good, because we know anecdotally that people who come here turn their attention pretty quickly to assisting family members and other people to come to Australia, and it is a great source of anxiety to them. The information products—will they be developed within the department or will they make use of resources that have already been developed by migrant resource centres, for example?

Ms Keski-Nummi—We would be making use of all products that are available plus developing some from feedback that we receive, from community agencies, from individuals themselves and from some of the workshops that we have run in the past with SHP proposers about the sorts of information that is important. We also get some of that feedback from individuals themselves when they arrive. It also helps inform us in terms of developing some of the information packages for our AUSCO programs.

Senator HURLEY—I know from seeing it that a lot of the migrant resource centres have already developed some of this information.

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is correct.

Senator HURLEY—Will you be building on that or incorporating it?

Ms Keski-Nummi—As much as we possibly can, we would be incorporating some of that and building on it.

Senator HURLEY—How will that information then be distributed—via the coordinators and the department, or will it then be made available to other groups?

Ms Keski-Nummi—We would want to distribute it as widely as possible, because we know that clients and applicants will come to us from very many different sources. The more we have that information in the broader community, the more it will assist us also in informing applicants and proposers about how to go about applying and putting in the proposals.

Senator HURLEY—Will that funding cover producing that material in other languages?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—How many languages do you envisage at this stage?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It would be our main client groups, but I have not got that level of detail at this stage.

Senator HURLEY—A number of the migrant resource centres, for example, do produce that information in visual form for those people who have difficulty with literacy or language. Is that also planned to be part of this program?

Ms Keski-Nummi—We have not gone into that sort of detail yet—in terms of looking at the various ways—but I would envisage that we would be looking at whatever ways are the most effective in communicating with clients and applicants.

Senator HURLEY—It just seems to me that there is a great amount of information floating around in all kinds of areas and it just continues to be produced by various bodies. Given the costs involved in translation and production, it seems that there could be a way to consolidate it a bit better and draw on other people's resources rather than reinventing the wheel all the time. Having it produced in different languages, particularly as we get the new groups coming in, would be a significant cost.

Ms Keski-Nummi—It would be true to say we are not looking to duplicate a lot of information that is already out there; essentially we would build on it and test it so that it does meet the mark for what proposers are looking for in relation to understanding the way that the SHP program works.

Senator HURLEY—How will you test it? Will you wait for these support groups to be set up?

Ms Keski-Nummi—No, we will be going out before that. We need to do it in combination with the development of the proposer support program.

Senator HURLEY—So you will test it through migrant resources?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Through the various mechanisms we have at the moment, client reference groups, contact centres that provide feedback, and probably through the IHSS providers.

Senator HURLEY—Do you engage consultants to do that?

Ms Pope—No.

Senator HURLEY—It is done in-house?

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—So if you take it to a group and they say, 'We have produced something like that already,' it is easy to take it back and rework it?

Ms Pope—And to work with them in terms of how we might be able to use it as well.

Senator HURLEY—I might continue along those lines and discuss the complex case support services. This is a significant amount of funding—\$35.2 million over four years—for humanitarian entrants with exceptional needs to get targeted and intensive support to overcome barriers to integration. It is for those entrants up to five years after arrival, so it is basically the same target group as the IHSS program; is that not right?

Ms Pope—I believe it is up to two years after arrival. Currently IHSS focuses on the first six months and, in some cases, up to 12 months, but it has also got a different focus to IHSS, while obviously it needs to be closely complementary.

Senator HURLEY—Right. This was developed subsequent to the IHSS tender in October 2005—

Ms Pope—That is when it was completed. The data upon which it was predicated was from 2002-03.

Senator HURLEY—So it has been evident that there is a greater need among some entrants than had been anticipated, so there was this proposal from the interdepartmental committee.

Ms Pope—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—So why was the decision made to set up a different service rather than incorporating and adding to the IHSS service providers brief?

Ms Pope—The detail of how it will be implemented has not been finalised. There is going to be a round of consultations with service providers, both IHSS and others, about the best way to take this forward. But this was seen as a separate service that needs to be provided in the sorts of cases that you were mentioning, where needs are beyond what was predicated under the IHSS. For example, in a couple of cases we have had live-in case workers supporting families in particularly difficult circumstances. There were a couple of instances where an additional tragedy, a death of a family member, has occurred after arrival in Australia, which has really compromised the capacity of the family to cope with settling in Australia, or left minors without suitable head-of-family arrangements—those sorts of situations. So what we are looking to design is a means to deliver that additional service in a coordinated way. We currently do it in a very small number of cases under the IHSS at the moment and we pay separately for those additional services to the service providers. We have to work through the mechanism we use to access and provide these services.

Senator HURLEY—So currently you are handling some of those more difficult cases through the IHSS program and you are paying those providers an extra amount of money.

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—So you clearly know what the current cost is of the settlement process through the normal IHSS service.

Ms Pope—Yes. We also have a sense of the sort of costs associated with providing full-time caseworkers, for example, to focus on one family up to the point of actually living with them.

Senator HURLEY—Can you explain what those costs are?

Ms Pope—I would have to take that on notice. I have a figure in my head, but I want to be accurate, so I think it would be better if I take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—That would be good. So this new service will separately account for those exceptional needs. Who will determine who has exceptional needs and how will that be done?

Ms Pope—We are still working through the detail of that, but we anticipate that the department will be closely involved in that process of determination of whether someone meets a certain threshold for needing additional support. Our experience with some of the

cases that we have supported up till now will help guide us in making that determination. We will also be seeking close feedback from existing providers within the IHSS settlement grants program, MRCs—the full range of service providers that we currently deal with—for their input on the best way to put this together.

Senator HURLEY—When will it be decided that someone has exceptional needs? Before they arrive or as they arrive—is that what you are saying?

Ms Pope—This is designed to be able to intervene at any point when something happens and someone needs additional support, which is why we are looking at the first two years. For the final 12 months of that period most people would not be in receipt of IHSS services at that point. This allows us to intervene when we need to, even though they are out of scope for routine IHSS service delivery. It could be that we become aware of a circumstance overseas on a case that has been advised to us is coming, where we think in advance they will need additional support. So it can be done at that point. It can be done on arrival if there is something that triggers concern that we need to intervene quickly. As I said, in some of the cases we have experience with so far, something completely unanticipated has happened onshore after their arrival. In the cases I am thinking of, it has involved the death of a family member. We can intervene at that point to assist the family through that particular crisis.

Senator HURLEY—Let us go through that, because you are saying that the department will be involved in identifying people. I can certainly understand that, if something has been identified before arrival. But surely—and please correct me if I am wrong—part of the reason for the decision to tender out the IHSS work was so that someone else, who was paid externally, would pick up that part of looking after migrants or refugees and humanitarian entrants when they come and in those first few months thereafter. So the department actually has very little involvement with people. In fact, that was brought home when there were all those problems in Newcastle with new entrants, in the initial stages of the IHSS program; where it was being reported to the state office it was not coming through to the office here in Canberra.

Ms Pope—I was probably unclear when I made my earlier statement. What I meant was: I anticipate that the department will have a strong, if not determinative, role in deciding what cases meet that threshold for additional services. It is an important sort of accountability measure; it is so that we do not have providers recommending people as needing more services when the money would flow to them, for example. So we will be the gatekeeper, in that sense, of which cases meet the threshold and need access to those additional services. It is not out of the realms of the possible, of course, that the department would become aware of a case independently, but you are right—we would expect the alerts to, and notifications of, cases needing greater intervention to come from service providers and so on.

Senator HURLEY—So if those service providers feel that there are exceptional needs, they will contact someone in the department of immigration?

Ms Pope—The details have not been finalised at all yet, so I cannot say exactly what the mechanism would be, but it would be something along those lines.

Senator HURLEY—You talked about a threshold. How will that threshold be determined?

Ms Pope—Again, we are still working through the detail there. But if they were still in IHSS, we would be looking at the sorts of factors that we would expect to warrant further attention over and above normal IHSS service provision. If they were outside of that, again we would be looking at factors that would warrant an intervention of the kind that we consider to be within the scope of this proposal.

Senator HURLEY—Let us suppose they were within IHSS. You were saying that these complex cases might need a live-in case worker. Would the case worker who referred them from IHSS be that case worker? Would they be paid separately? Or would a separate system come in?

Ms Pope—We have not resolved the details of that. There is quite a lead time in the implementation of this program and quite a deal of consultation will need to take place before we determine all of the factors. That is one that is not yet resolved.

Senator HURLEY—When is it expected to start?

Ms Pope—On 1 July 2008.

Senator HURLEY—Let us briefly go back over the IHSS tender. The tenders are won on the basis of a kind of a lump sum, and they deal with whatever number of refugees or humanitarian entrants come in under that.

Ms Pope—The providers have an expectation of the numbers that they might receive, and there is a level below which their payments will not go, no matter how low their numbers might fall, in order for them to be up and available to deliver services should the numbers go back up again, for example. So there is a threshold that they do not go underneath. But they have an expectation of the sort of rough levels of arrivals that are anticipated. As you would be aware, we determine the location for around 4,000 of the 13,000 a year, and that gives us some ability to allocate numbers by service-provider regions and so on. But most of the factors we use to determine that are personal ones for the family themselves. The rest determine where they go by their own choice—according to where their supporters, relatives or friends are—but we have a fairly good handle on the pattern of settlement and the sorts of numbers that we expect, state by state.

Senator HURLEY—It is obviously costly for them to have the difficult cases. I am not saying they necessarily would do this, but there is a bit of a built-in incentive for an IHSS to try and pass cases off under this complex case support service, is there not? In your consideration, you will need to be very careful about how the assessment is made.

Ms Pope—Yes. As I said before, that is why we anticipate that the department will likely have a determinative role as to which cases are deemed eligible to receive services as a complex case and those which we expect to be managed by the IHSS providers if they are still within the scope of IHSS service provision.

Senator HURLEY—Will that involve any extra staffing levels within the department?

Ms Pope—Yes, it will.

Senator HURLEY—Do you have any idea yet as to—

Ms Pope—There will be a unit in the national office that we are looking at setting up. That will have approximately seven staff across a range of levels. It will effectively be a small section in our structure. We still have to work out the detail of whether additional staffing is likely to be required at regional offices as well. I expect a small number will be required in regional offices.

Senator HURLEY—As we have discussed, the national office does not really have a hands-on role with arrivals. Will the national office staff therefore be looking at the assessments and whether people meet that threshold?

Ms Pope—It is not clear how we will resolve that yet. We do not know yet whether that determining role will happen at a state level in consultation with our national office. But, as you would appreciate, there is quite a policy and legal framework to be set up around this, and that unit will focus on that work in the first instance and we will look at staffing levels over time to see what remains necessary in the national office context.

Senator HURLEY—So, until July next—when it is meant to be implemented—that unit in the national office will be looking more at policy and legal work—

Ms Pope—And undertaking the consultations, working with providers and so on.

Senator HURLEY—So you have not yet looked at what the service requirements will be and how the measurement of outcomes will be done? Will that be part of that process?

Ms Pope—Indeed. As I have said, we have a picture in mind on the basis of some of the cases that we have seen up until now, but we have got work to do on that detail.

Senator HURLEY—Do you have any idea of how many participants might be referred to this service?

Ms Pope—Not yet, but our costings were based—and I will correct myself if I am wrong, or somebody else will—on up to a maximum of 10 per cent of the case load maybe needing at some point in that two years some additional assistance. Obviously, the quantum of that assistance will vary from case to case, so it is an estimate.

Senator HURLEY—Is that 10 per cent estimate based on past activity—the history in the recent past?

Ms Pope—Yes, it is—which is not to suggest that we have provided additional services to 10 per cent of the case load. I should be clear that we are working off a rough estimate that that might be a reasonable amount. We do not expect it to exceed that. That, I guess, is really the calculation at this stage.

Senator HURLEY—Given that there is a stated intention to change the mix of refugees, is that expected to impact on that figure?

Ms Pope—To the extent possible, we have taken that into account. If you are referring to the shift from some of the African source countries to South-East Asia, our expectation is that we will still see a relatively high level of need in those case loads. Also, where we are looking at addressing something that happens onshore, that could happen to anybody. A personal tragedy for which a person might require additional support can really happen to anyone.

Senator HURLEY—So you have no expectation as to which particular countries of origin the participants in this service will be from?

Ms Pope—No, we would expect them to come across from the full 13,000.

Senator HURLEY—I do not believe that I have a breakdown of the budget figures—I may have. Can you tell me how the budget will be spent over the next four years? What are the forward estimates for that?

Ms Pope—It is pretty detailed. I would prefer to give it to you on notice, if I may, because it runs across streams of systems issues and staffing and service provision and so on.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. I will move on to the crisis payment on arrival. This will be \$6.4 million over four years and a one-off cash payment equivalent to a one-week income support payment.

Ms Pope—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—Could you just tell me how this will work, because most entrants are of course assisted to access the correct social security payment et cetera.

Ms Pope—As you have raised with us here before, the Centrelink payments are made in arrears, which means that humanitarian entrants get a two-week payment for the first four weeks of their time in Australia and essentially never catch up. There is provision for them to have some advances and loans and so on, but all of those are recouped or need to be repaid. We have been seeking to address the fact that there is that shortfall of a payment in the first month, and this mechanism has been chosen as a way to directly supplement their income on arrival to Australia. I can give you a bit of a background on crisis payment and how it operates if you wish.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you.

Ms Pope—Currently crisis payment is available to people who have some crisis, usually a crisis of housing. If someone's house burns down or if they need to move from the family home for reasons of domestic violence or other sort of circumstances where you have to set up a new home, people can apply for this additional payment. It has been agreed across government that it would be appropriate to provide access to that payment for people who arrive in refugee situations. On arrival they are in the same sort of circumstances, where they need to set up a household from scratch with very little support. So, in a policy sense, it fits quite nicely and it provides an extra income payment to humanitarian entrants on arrival.

Senator HURLEY—I realise it was not automatic; did any entrants previously get access to this payment?

Ms Pope—No. The eligibility requirements are set out either in legislation or regulations that belong to the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. There was not provision for that particular payment to be made to humanitarian entrants in the past.

Senator HURLEY—At what stage will it be paid? Will it be paid virtually on arrival or will entrants have to wait a week?

Ms Pope—I do not think that has been finally resolved, but our expectation is that it would be very early on. In the usual arrangements now, people are taken to Centrelink in the first couple of days after arrival, and capacity for those payments is set up quite quickly. So it would really be a question for FACSIA and Centrelink as to how past the actual delivery of the money is likely to be. Obviously they would need a bank account; that is the key sort of delivery mechanism. I would have to take the detail on notice if you wanted to know exactly how long. I doubt we would have the answer at this point, but it will be part of the implementation.

Senator HURLEY—As you were saying previously, the usual procedure is that people are met by the IHSS provider, usually at the airport, and taken to short-term accommodation.

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—And they would have food provided for them for that short term as well.

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—There are some days grace.

Ms Pope—There are, but the quicker we get people connected to Centrelink the better, and it is usually in the first couple of days if not the day after arrival that people go for that income support interview with Centrelink and get connected.

Senator HURLEY—But the IHSS provider, despite this payment, will still provide that short-term funding for the family that arrives.

Ms Pope—That is right. This is in addition to that.

Senator HURLEY—This involves FaCSIA, DEWR, DEST and Centrelink, according to the budget papers.

Ms Pope—It does, because the size of the crisis payment is predicated on what other payments you are eligible for, and some of those might be owned by those other departments. Newstart is owned by DEWR, if I am correct. DEST has the study assistance payments. Youth allowance I think sits with them. That might not be accurate, but the picture is that the amount of the payment is derived from the income support that is set up for you at that first interview, and it can come from a range of sources, so it involves those agencies in the funding.

Senator HURLEY—And Centrelink would assess that or would that be the IHSS provider?

Ms Pope—It is derived directly from what Centrelink sets up for the person and their relative eligibilities across all of the family members.

Proceedings suspended from 12.30 pm to 1.31 pm

CHAIR—We will resume the committee and I will pass to Senator Hurley.

Senator HURLEY—I was just going through some of the budget announcements and the new funding that had been put into the settlement program. One of the significant amounts is for ESL funding: \$127.8 million over four years. This is for humanitarian entrants who enrol in Australian primary and secondary schools for intensive English-language tuition. How will

this money be allocated—by the number of students in each school, or by region or by application?

Ms Pope—That is really a matter for the Department of Education, Science and Training, to a large extent. They were part of the IDC, and the money goes to that department for distribution to the states. But my expectation is that it would be delivered in the same way as the existing ESLNA funding is distributed. It adds additional capacity to that program.

Senator HURLEY—So will the department of immigration have any oversight of the program?

Ms Pope—Not directly, no. It is a measure funding the Department of Education, Science and Training.

Senator HURLEY—So, if your department picks up any ongoing problems in new entrants having trouble with English language, how will that be reported or conveyed?

Ms Pope—We have an ongoing capacity to raise issues with the Department of Education, Science and Training across all matters where we have mutual interests, as we do with other departments, and if we were aware of those we would raise them with those departments. One of the places we get feedback on that is through the standing committee on immigration and multicultural affairs that I mentioned earlier. They obviously have a keen interest in this. Our relationship with state governments as well would provide that feedback.

Senator HURLEY—So the outcomes will be determined and measured by the department of education. DIAC will have no contribution?

Ms Pope—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—Let us talk about humanitarian settlement initiatives. There is \$0.9 million over four years for policing initiatives to educate humanitarian arrivals about Australian law. Included in this package are financial incentives to encourage potential interpreters to gain accreditation. Will that amount of money for policing be distributed through another department or will DIAC have some—

Ms Pope—No, it is money that is being allocated to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. It is not a very large amount of money—\$100,000 a year over four years. Given that police forces do not have a readily accessible sort of peak body for us to work with, our intention is to examine the various ways that police forces across Australia, in cooperation with community groups and other organisations, are doing things. It will be a two-fold exercise: firstly, to break down the barriers for humanitarian entrants in relation to the police and the fear of police around the fact that they are sometimes the agents of persecution in the countries from which our entrants have come; and, secondly, as an educative role for our entrants around the rule of law, the role of the police and the sorts of issues that they need to be fully aware of to participate effectively in Australian society. So we will be doing a survey of best practice by police forces across Australia and disseminating that best practice widely, because there is not a body that does that currently.

Senator HURLEY—So that \$100,000 a year will be for staffing and for the survey costs?

Ms Pope—Yes, and for the publication of the report when we finalise it.

Senator HURLEY—The other part of the package as announced was financial incentive to encourage potential interpreters to gain accreditation. What are the perceived problems at the moment with interpreters gaining accreditation?

Ms Pope—The main issue is around new and emerging languages in communities where entrant communities have not been in Australia for very long. Identifying people who have the educational background to be trained as interpreters is a challenge. So it is around looking at those kinds of communities and strategies to identify people who could participate in the sort of training that is available. Somebody behind me might be able to correct me, but the money is not intended to provide the training itself. There are the means to do that, but it is around helping to identify people who would be suitable to be trained as interpreters.

Senator HURLEY—So, again, that is for staffing costs?

Ms Pope—I think the staffing for that is largely absorbed. It is in order to identify people who can be trained and other initiatives that I could give you details of on notice around interpreters.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, if you could, thank you. The final package I think was the torture and trauma services money, again through another department—the department of health—with \$12.2 million over four years, an increase of up to 100,000 services per year and delivery of support to a further 1,800 people per annum. What is the current number of services being provided each year?

Ms Pope—I am sorry, I do not have that detail. The program that is being provided with additional funding—the program of assistance for survivors of torture and trauma—belongs to the department of health and the proposal was theirs. It is the long-term provider of torture/trauma services rather than the short-term ones, which are funded by us through the IHSS, although in many cases the providers are the same. I do not have details of what their client numbers are to hand.

Senator HURLEY—Again, this is purely a health department program and DIAC will have no oversight?

Ms Pope—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—I have a couple of further questions on the general matter of settlement support. One of the ongoing problems that are mentioned by support groups is housing. Of course, the budget has given that extra money to assist with housing, which will be a big help. There is also the problem of some discrimination being reported in the private rental market whereby landlords are reluctant to take on newly arrival migrants, particularly refugees and humanitarian entrants. Has any action been taken to address this problem?

Ms Pope—Yes. Our IHSS providers maintain a range of different strategies to work with the providers of private rental accommodation. For example, they put a lot of effort into cultivating and educating providers, real estate agents and so on in their areas. As they become more experienced in the fact that they turn out to be quite good tenants, their confidence grows in renting properties to refugee entrants. So I guess it is a matter of establishing a relationship and then the credentials of the people that they are representing to seek housing. That is one of the main strategies that our providers are using. Some of them are

also head-leasing properties themselves as organisations so that they have available accommodation that they can work through with newly arrived entrants. So they take out the lease themselves and then sublet to entrant families in the temporary accommodation, for example.

Senator HURLEY—Of course, the cost of housing, even though there is assistance with it, continues to rise in most capital cities, creating huge problems for most people struggling to get on their feet in Australia. Does the department have any dialogue with housing authorities, particularly public housing authorities?

Ms Pope—We are represented on an interdepartmental committee on housing that is chaired by FaCSIA, who have the Commonwealth responsibility for housing. As you would be aware, the provision of public housing is largely a state based matter, but we do participate in that dialogue through the IDC, chaired by FaCSIA, on housing.

Senator HURLEY—What kind of response have you got through that committee?

Ms Pope—Clearly it is a challenge that is represented for client groups beyond refugee and humanitarian entrants. The committee works to identify solutions for the whole spectrum of people seeking housing. It is not an easy issue to solve and public housing is not something that can be created overnight, I guess. And there is the added issue of it being both a state based and Commonwealth responsibility. We have not sought any particular priority for our clients through that process at this stage. We think that the solution for our clients lies in the private housing market rather than the public one at this juncture.

Senator HURLEY—Therefore, do you have any means of dialogue with private housing providers? One of the problems is the flexibility of housing: there are some large families, some split families and that kind of thing. Is there any opportunity that the department has taken to talk to private housing providers?

Ms Pope—The department has not taken up that opportunity but, as I mentioned, the providers have certainly done that and we have supported in their initiatives to engage in that on a local basis.

Senator HURLEY—Most of those budget announcements were in response to the Interdepartmental Committee on Humanitarian Settlement, which was convened in April 2006 to look at a whole-of-government strategy to assist settlement. They made a series of policy recommendations in 14 areas, which are outlined in the report *Measures to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants*. Indeed, I have to say that most of them have been taken up in the current budget or in other ways. One that I cannot see having been taken up is one for the development of youth support coordinators, or is that part of another program?

Ms Pope—No, that initiative has not been directly funded.

Senator HURLEY—Is there any particular reason for that?

Ms Pope—Not one that I am able to discuss. But we continue to provide support for youth through the Settlement Grants Program funding, allocating priority to projects that look at various high-need client groups, youth being one of them. So that is the main focus. Obviously other initiatives, such as the funding for DEST for the ESLNA program will have a direct benefit to young people.

Senator HURLEY—Certainly English and literacy levels on arrival are serious problems. There are cultural issues which young people—particularly those who arrive in their teens—can find quite difficult and can be the cause of a great deal of discrimination, particularly among young boys, who may take up attitudes. There are fears that they may get into groups with other people that may lead them into trouble. This is one of the areas that can lead to a perception by the general population that immigration can be a bad thing or refugee immigration can be a bad thing.

Ms Pope—There are other mainstream services provided for young people. One that I would mention in particular is the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service scheme that is funded and run out of the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, which particularly targets new entrants at risk. The funding under our settlement grants program also contributes to that.

Senator HURLEY—There are a number of volunteer groups and individual volunteers that do a lot of work with young people, particularly in sporting and cultural areas. Even some attempt to coordinate those groups would be useful. Is any coordination done currently?

Ms Pope—Funding is provided through the Living in Harmony program as well, around sporting events in particular, and some of our significant partnerships over the past year have been with the big sporting bodies—Cricket Australia, the NRL, the AFL. We fund projects. For example, Western Spirit, which is the charity sort of community arm of the Western Bulldogs football team in Melbourne, is funded through the settlement grants program for some of the work they do with youth and so on. Our Living in Harmony program, which focuses very much on schools, also has a sort of sporting—but schools based—focus, again for young people.

Senator HURLEY—What about any programs to address problems of young people who may become disillusioned by their treatment and what they perceive as a level of discrimination and a lack of understanding in the Australian culture? I am thinking particularly that this can affect Muslim families, where there is the additional problem of a religion that is seen by some in the general community to be under threat. Are there any programs along those lines?

Ms Pope—We could go into those in relation to the programs that are run through the multicultural affairs area, if you want to, or we can address that when we get to that.

Senator HURLEY—I do have questions there, so perhaps I will leave that to that section.

Ms Pope—Thank you. We will do it when we get there.

Senator HURLEY—Finally, I have a question on the IHSS program, just to follow up a question I asked previously about outcomes in the IHSS—the evaluation and assessment of the program. My memory is that that was being done by a survey of clients. Has there been any more extensive survey work done in that area? I think we are probably about halfway through the tender. Is that right?

Ms Pope—Mid-2008 would be halfway through the program. We are looking at running a survey at that point. I think you may be referring to our having talked about the quality assurance program that we were introducing for IHSS and that has been rolled out now. If you

want us to discuss that, we can let you know the sorts of things we have been doing there. We have not conducted a client survey, but we are looking at mid-2008 as the midpoint of the contract period.

Senator HURLEY—So are you designing that survey at the moment or is that not—

Ms Pope—No. We have not commenced work on that yet.

Senator HURLEY—Could you run through that quality assessment.

Ms Pope—I will invite my colleague Daniel Boyer, who is Acting Senior Manager of the IHSS area, to talk about that.

Mr Boyer—Since December 2006, we have conducted quality assurance reviews across all of the 16 service providers in the 20 contract regions. The reports are in draft form at this stage, and we hope to have them completed within the next three months or so.

Senator HURLEY—On what basis was that assessment done—against what criteria?

Mr Boyer—We looked in particular at the service providers' systems, processes and operations, basically to determine and to assure ourselves that the service provider was delivering services in accordance with the contract. In particular, we focused on the basic services provided under the IHSS. Those included case coordination, information and referrals; on-arrival reception and assistance; accommodation services; short-term torture and trauma counselling, although we focused only on the reporting and invoicing side of that; volunteer coordination; and advocacy and community awareness raising.

Senator HURLEY—When doing that assessment, did you have any benchmarks that you operated from, or were they developed during the study?

Mr Boyer—The program itself was designed by Walter Turnbull, who operate as our consultants. They designed it around the KPIs for the IHSS among other things. But they also looked at the delivery methods in terms of conducting client interviews and they focused on assessing some of the case plans that were in place with each of the service providers and things of that nature.

Senator HURLEY—Did they look at expenditure and how much is spent per client and on what areas and so on?

Mr Boyer—We looked at financial processes rather than expenditure. That initial assessment would have been done as part of the tender evaluation when the contracts were first designed.

Senator HURLEY—What aspect of financial processes did you look at?

Mr Boyer—We looked at the processes just to ensure that they were adequately documented, that what they were telling us through their invoicing processes was appropriately documented and that procedures and processes were in place.

Senator HURLEY—Well, they are now, because you have done the study. But are those kinds of financial processes generally submitted to the department?

Mr Boyer—Absolutely. The early indications from the service providers review are that all of the service providers are delivering services in accordance with the contracts. There are

obviously areas—though not so much in the financial area—where we may be able to recommend improvements to be made. But the early indications are that our service providers are doing a pretty good job.

Senator HURLEY—How much did the consultation cost?

Mr Boyer—At this stage the total expended in terms of Walter Turnbull's consultancy fees is \$124,000 or thereabouts. Our total budget is projected to be around \$140,000 in terms of Walter Turnbull's services.

Senator HURLEY—Will that report be public or is it an internal document?

Mr Boyer—We would like to keep the reports between us and each individual service provider reasonably confidential, obviously, because we feel as though that way we can best maintain the strong relationship we have with each of the service providers. But we will be doing an overarching report that we could make available to the committee, if you would like.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, thank you. That would be good.

Mr Boyer—That will be available later in the year of course.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. I would like to talk about the Settlement Grants Program to a small extent. The portfolio budget statement on page 72, under 'contributions to achievement', I think, talks about 'streamline processes leading up to the announcement of successful settlement grants program recipients.' What does that 'streamline' mean?

Ms Pope—We had a number of initiatives that we were looking at in relation to that. For example, obviously we get quite a lot of providers who apply each year for additional funding. In the past we were requiring them to submit a whole range of documentation that would very likely not change from one year to the next, like their documents of incorporation and other corporate documents—financial reports and that kind of thing. Where those were things that we routinely received, we advised them that we would not be collecting all that information again for existing providers but that we retained the right to request it if we needed to see it. That was sort of a first step at reducing the amount of paperwork that individual applicants for grants had to provide. We also enhanced our systems so that data that we already hold is populated in the fields in the online application form so that they do not have to rekey everything that is existing; they could just correct whatever had changed. We have also introduced three new areas where we are seeking grants, refined the language around that to make it clearer and more practical, and put the sorts of projects that we were looking to fund so that they would have a better sense of where the priorities lie and what we were looking for. Those are the kinds of initiatives that are covered by the word 'streamline' there.

Senator HURLEY—Will the applications begin this year?

Ms Pope—They will commence on 1 July and the announcements will be made quite soon.

Senator HURLEY—Can you advise at this stage what the three new areas are?

Ms Pope—Yes, I can. Some of them incorporate what was provided in the past. The first one is 'orientation to Australia', which is a broad category that looks to provide practical

assistance to promote self-reliance and independence. The second is 'developing communities'. We provide funding to new and emerging community organisations to help them build their capacity and therefore their ability to support members of their own community. Lastly, there is 'integration', a category around inclusion and participation. Those are the three criteria.

Senator HURLEY—I am not totally clear what 'inclusion and participation' would be.

Ms Pope—They foster things like greater interaction between new arrivals and the Australian community. That is a place where initiatives like employment projects, sporting, cooperation and volunteering can be funded.

Senator HURLEY—We are relatively early in the process whereby the core grants to MRCs were removed and the project program grants were determined. Are you monitoring migrant resource centres to see which are struggling with that kind of change, or do you have some way of knowing?

Ms Pope—We have a close dialogue with the national council of MRCs and migrant service agents. Our primary interest at the outset was that we had to encourage the MRCs to believe that they would be competitive for project based funding under the Settlement Grants Program in the absence of core funding, and that proved to be the case. MRCs received in straight-out project funding this year an amount very closely equivalent to what they received in a combination of core funding and grant funding last year. I do not have the figures with me, but in both cases it is around \$14 million across all MRCs. In 2005-06, the combination of grant and core funding would have been around \$14,700,000. This year it is around \$14,100,000. So across all 28 organisations there was about a \$600,000 difference between core plus grant as opposed to just project funding.

Senator HURLEY—So the overall picture looks fairly reasonable. Are there any individual MRCs that might be struggling to cope with the change?

Ms Pope—I am not aware of any that are in financial difficulty. Most of them source their funding from a whole range of different sources and we do not engage with them about the overall process of how they gain their funding. But certainly in the lead-up to the elimination of core funding we have encouraged them to diversify their sources of funding. We have not had a centre close, for example, in the year after the end of core funding.

Senator HURLEY—For these projects, you obviously have to find outcomes which need to be met.

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—Are they monitored only at the end of the project?

Ms Pope—No. For each grant that we give there is a work program that is negotiated between the grant managers in our state and territory offices and the grant recipients. It sets out milestones through the period of the grant—whether it be a one-, two- or three-year grant—with achievements, in outcome terms, that have to be met. Further money is not forthcoming until those arrangements are met. There are occasions when grant recipients sometimes struggle to deliver on those outcomes, and there is a process for ensuring that they

do deliver. When they cannot deliver those outcomes there is intervention to bring the matter to a resolution one way or another.

Senator HURLEY—Have there been any instances of an MRC being in a situation where they need some intervention?

Ms Pope—It is not just MRCs; I was talking about the full range of about 300 grants.

Senator HURLEY—Have there been any instances in the SGP program?

Ms Pope—Not recently. There is one organisation, which does happen to be an MRC, which is experiencing some difficulties and is being closely examined by us. There been a couple of instances in the past where organisations have not been able to manage the finances they were given and we have taken the grant back and allocated it to another organisation that was able to provide the services to the group that that organisation had been assisting. But there have not been any recent ones. The ones I am thinking of were 12 months ago or more.

Senator HURLEY—Is there feedback that the MRCs are managing reasonably well with what for some is the additional paperwork of applying for grants and complying with the monitoring of grants?

Ms Pope—They were already quite significant recipients of grants in the past, so they are pretty expert at preparing the documentation. There are also options to provide the overarching information we require from an organisation in one hit and then the information about the suite of grants and separate project proposals underneath that. So for big organisations there are some economies of scale, I guess, but broadly speaking the MRCs were pretty expert at applying for grant money—and that has not changed.

Senator HURLEY—Perhaps I am wrong, but it triggered some memory I have about a new data collection program that was distributed to the MRCs a little while ago. There were some teething problems with that. Have they been resolved?

Ms Pope—I think you are referring to OSCAR. The reason our grant recipients have some issues with it—and these remain—is that is largely a system that delivers information for us but does not provide very much utility for them. We are in the process of working on a settlement portal under Systems for People. While addressing the problems with OSCAR will not be part of the first iteration of that, we intend for it to be in the second release of the settlement portal. So further work will be done on OSCAR. I think our clients would still say that it does not serve their purposes very well. It continues to serve our purposes better than it serves theirs and we will look at the opposite side of it through the settlement portal.

Senator HURLEY—I have a couple of questions about the AUSCO funding. The AUSCO tender—the Australian Cultural Orientation Program—was finalised in September last year?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes; that is correct.

Senator HURLEY—How has that been going in its first six months or so?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It has been progressing well. We have rolled it out to quite a few regions. We are looking at the curriculum around it. There are four main groups we focus on: adults, youth, children and pre-literate entrants. There are different programs for them. The normal training program takes five days. We are looking at some adjustments, in terms of the

five days, to have a family day as well to allow for families to do some cultural orientation with family groups.

The **Senator HURLEY**—In addition to the five days?

Ms Keski-Nummi—No; it is within the five days. That allows us to also provide information on various things around family relationships, family dynamics, children, dating and a whole lot of things like that, which in Australia can be quite alienating and different from where people have come from. Generally speaking, I think the program is going quite well. We have a group we meet with quite regularly. It includes some people who have recently been through the cultural orientation program on arrival to Australia. It tests what works and what does not work and considers what we need to look at in terms of various groups—for instance, with some of the African groups we need to focus on quite different things from what we might focus on with groups out of Thailand.

In addition, we have invited community groups or individuals from Australia, if they are travelling overseas, to attend cultural orientation programs. Victoria Police recently attended cultural orientation programs in, I think, Cairo or Nairobi. I would have to double check. They had been to Sudan, so they provided a session for people participating in AUSCO at that time, which went down extremely well. The feedback was that people find it very interesting to understand the role of police and policing in Australia, which is very different from where they have been. We are encouraging and working with IOM to either have some of the trainers and presenters come to Australia or have individuals from community based organisations in Australia to be seconded to IOM for short periods of time to be trainers. That gives us two-way communication around it as well. We receive regular reports from IOM, including narrative reports in relation to the programs—the sorts of questions people asked during the AUSCO program—which we can then look at in terms of the workbooks, new information and curriculum changes at any time. We try to keep it fairly dynamic and responsive to the needs of individuals, but also what people say here needs to be included in it. Bear in mind that, in five days, you can only cover so much. It gives you a heads-up as to the sorts of things you will have to confront early on your arrival to Australia.

Senator HURLEY—At what other locations is the AUSCO program being delivered?

Ms Keski-Nummi—We are delivering it in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. I would have to have a look at the particular locations.

Senator HURLEY—It would be fine if you gave that to me on notice.

Ms Keski-Nummi—It is being delivered wherever we have a major resettlement program.

Senator HURLEY—Is the orientation once people arrive in Australia being done in consultation with the AUSCO people?

Ms Keski-Nummi—There is a flow-on from what is included in the curriculum for AUSCO, and there is the onshore program as well.

Ms Pope—And it happens in reverse. We get feedback about things that people say they were told at AUSCO that do not gel with what they experience when they get here. We feed that information directly back to national office and then on to the providers of AUSCO.

Senator HURLEY—Are AUSCO providers given material to bring with them, or is it purely oral?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Much of it is oral. They will be provided with some information, but at the moment it is mostly oral transmission of information.

Senator HURLEY—I think there was an Ernst and Young internal evaluation carried out last year.

Ms Keski-Nummi—Yes, that was the audit report. It was a couple of years ago.

Senator HURLEY—Has there been another report done since then?

Ms Keski-Nummi—No, because we went through that tender process after the Ernst and Young audit, and have built into the contracts some of the observations that the internal audit had made in terms of the AUSCO prior to that.

Senator HURLEY—Is that report a public document or is it an internal document?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It is an internal audit report.

Senator HURLEY—Could it be made available to the committee?

Ms Keski-Nummi—I will take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—How was the tender done? Was it done on the basis of a number of sites, the number of hours delivered or the number of participants? How was that tender evaluated?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It was done through the department's normal tender program. They would have visited some of the AUSCO sites overseas and would have looked at the various elements of the AUSCO, IOM and the trainers. They made certain observations in relation to what they saw and also what the policy parameters were around the Australian Cultural Orientation Training Program and whether it was broadly meeting the mark. In the context of that examination, they made some recommendations to us about how we could enhance and improve the Cultural Orientation Training Program.

Senator HURLEY—Was the tender designed to have one company or organisation deliver the service across the range of sites?

Ms Keski-Nummi—The way the tender was managed it could either be a panel of providers or one provider. The evaluation was that IOM provided the best value service across all of the sites. So they tendered for the various sites.

Senator HURLEY—Was the number of sites predetermined or was it up to the discretion of the—

Ms Keski-Nummi—There was a global one for areas where we do not have a humanitarian program but where there may be a humanitarian program in the future and also one in relation to the various sites where we currently do have active offshore humanitarian programs. It accommodated both possibilities.

Senator HURLEY—How long is the tender for?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Three years.

Senator HURLEY—And the tenderers were given an estimate of the number of—

Ms Keski-Nummi—That is correct.

Senator HURLEY—Is the current tender about the same cost as the previous one?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It is \$5.5 million over three years.

CHAIR—Senator Hurley, have you finished your questions on the settlement programs?

Senator HURLEY—In one sense, though I do have some questions on the AMEP.

CHAIR—We are on output 2.1, settlement services. I am happy to proceed to output 2.2 if we are ready to do that.

Senator HURLEY—AMEP is under output 2.1.4.

Mr Metcalfe—Chair, if we are moving off that topic, I would like to, with the indulgence of the committee, take the opportunity to thank the staff who have been involved in bringing to fruition the suite of issues that Senator Hurley has been discussing. The IDC on the settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants was a significant cross-portfolio piece of work, and I was personally delighted that the government accepted many of the recommendations and funded it in the budget. Peter Hughes, Kate Pope, Arja Keski-Nummi, Daniel Boyer and other staff put a great deal of work into this, and it is terrific to see the outcome that was achieved. I would like to put that on the record.

CHAIR—That is well noted. Thank you.

Senator HURLEY—I suppose the Adult Migrant English Program, AMEP, has got new significance with the increasing emphasis on learning English as part of the settlement process. It provides English-language tuition for new arrivals who do not have functional English. Clients generally, I understand, are entitled to 510 hours of tuition, but there is a special preparatory program prior to commencement for some entrants who are assessed as benefiting from an informal learning environment, and that is an extra program before they go in. Then there are some entrants who have access to up to 400 hours of tuition in addition to that 510 hours. Could you advise what numbers, and or percentages, of AMEP clients fit into those categories for the different hours?

Ms Pope—I am sorry; we do not have that information with us but we can provide that on notice. If you are under 25 the special preparatory program that you mentioned offers an additional 400 hours. For those over 25 it is an additional 100 hours.

Senator HURLEY—There has been an increase in the allocated funds for this project for 2007-08, but the anticipated demand, as I understand, is unchanged from last year—that is, 39,810. What is the explanation for this? Does it reflect an anticipated increase in hours taken up by AMEP participants?

Ms Pope—Not particularly. AMEP funding is demand driven, as you are aware, and the amount available for the appropriation is administered funding, so if we need more money we can seek additional funding to meet the need. There is an expectation of some additional flow-on—due to the additional 4,000 places for spouses in the family stream this financial year—of about another \$10 million. We expect that we may need to seek some additional funding but there is an established process for seeking that additional funding on the basis of demand.

Senator HURLEY—Right, so the figure cited was just based on historical information.

Ms Pope—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—You said that there is an expectation that demand might increase next year because of the—

Ms Pope—The slight increase, the additional 5,000 places. Some of that may flow through to increased demand for the AMEP, although where the increases are in the skilled program there is very little flow-on. If it is in family migration, there would be a greater flow-on. But it all depends on demand, and we can respond to that expeditiously, if it arises, towards the end of the financial year.

Senator HURLEY—What about the impending introduction of the citizenship test? Do you expect that people might stay in longer to improve their English further because of the higher English requirement expected from the citizenship test?

Ms Pope—That is possible.

Senator HURLEY—Has that been factored in at this stage?

Ms Pope—It can be handled in the same way as any other increase in demand. There are fairly clear arrangements for eligibility for AMEP and if people were to seek additional hours and they were eligible clients then the appropriation will expand to meet that requirement.

Senator HURLEY—The existing services—the number of places available, the childcare places and that kind of thing—are not expected to be put under pressure by such an increase?

Ms Pope—We will certainly keep it under close watch as we go through the process but, as I said, the funding will expand to meet the required demand.

Senator HURLEY—So it is really impossible to do any kind of forward estimate for funding, because it is simply demand driven?

Ms Pope—It is fairly difficult, yes.

Senator HURLEY—I want to address the average cost per client. It is cited as \$2,907.77. Could you clarify this figure?

Ms Pope—We would probably have to take the absolute detail of it on notice. Basically it is my expectation that it would be the total cost over the financial year divided by the number of clients.

Senator HURLEY—That is on the average hours of tuition.

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—If, because of the citizenship test, people complete more hours, will that affect that average cost?

Ms Pope—The average would increase if the overall expenditure increases and the number of clients stays steady. But if they access more hours you would expect that average to go up.

Senator HURLEY—If a combination of those things happen—if clients stay more hours and if there is an increase in the number of clients from general immigration plus the number

of people being interested in AMEP because of the citizenship test—is there an unlimited supply, or is it definitely on demand? Is there any limit reached?

Ms Pope—We monitor the rates of access over the year. We would alert the department of finance if we were expecting that we would overrun the appropriation that we have, and we would provide them with information about what has driven that increase. It is my expectation that it is a demand-driven program and that Finance would fund as high as it needed to go to in order to provide that service to eligible clients.

Senator HURLEY—Is the historical information that is used to provide the current estimate in the budget simply for the last year or does it go back to previous years? Is it an average over a number of years or just last year's figure?

Ms Pope—I think it is broadly the previous year's figures plus any anticipated increases because of program changes. I need to clarify that it is the 510 hours that increases with the program demand. The SPP part of it—those additional 100 or 400 hours—is actually capped. If you are going to ask me how much it is capped at, I do not have the figure to hand, but I can get it if you would like it.

Senator HURLEY—Yes. That would be good. In the last two or three years has there been a significant difference between the anticipated demand and the actual enrolments for the 510?

Ms Keski-Nummi—There has not been a significant difference. The expenditure has essentially been either within the appropriation or slightly below.

Senator HURLEY—As part of planning, does the department need to anticipate how many hours a client will complete, or does it just assume that it will be 510 hours?

Ms Keski-Nummi—It is an assumption that the average number of hours to be used will be around 510.

Senator HURLEY—But in fact it is not, really, is it?

Ms Keski-Nummi—Some might do less than that.

Ms Pope—It is really a question of the money responding to the demand in the 510 hours either above or below. If we ran behind the appropriation one year, that would not mean that we were allocated less money in the following year. Even if we were, there is the capacity to seek additional funding as we get closer to the end of the financial year, if there is a need.

Senator HURLEY—Of the various categories of migrants who are eligible for the AMEP program, is there any difference in the average number of hours that those different categories do?

Ms Pope—Is your question: what are they entitled to?

Senator HURLEY—No; the actual hours completed.

Ms Pope—What they access. I am not sure if we have that information by stream.

Ms Keski-Nummi—I do not think we have that information by stream, but we could take it on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Yes.

Ms Pope—We might have it for last year. We have just found it in our brief. The retention and average hours per client in 2005-06 for the humanitarian stream was 422 hours. For the family stream it was 366 hours and for the dependants of the skilled stream it was 377 hours.

Senator HURLEY—This is probably exceptionally detailed. Is there any variation regionally?

Ms Pope—I would not be able to answer that question.

Senator HURLEY—Is there a figure for the average cost per hour of delivering this service across all of the providers?

Ms Pope—I do not think we have that. I could investigate whether that is available on notice. I am not sure whether it is, but we can check.

Senator HURLEY—There is a phrase that is used in the department with regard to the AMEP program: ‘adjusted offered hours’. Could you explain to me what that means?

Ms Pope—The reason we are swapping and changing a little bit is that AMEP used to sit in the citizenship branch and it was under citizenship and language services. Since last estimates it has moved to the settlement branch, so you have a new team looking at AMEP issues. That is a question that our colleague Mary-Anne might be able to answer. No. She is pulling a face that does not look very encouraging, so maybe we will take that one on notice.

Senator HURLEY—I might table later a series of questions arising out of that as well.

Ms Pope—Certainly.

Senator HURLEY—In terms of completion and number of hours, how is that measured? Obviously, some clients will advise the provider that they are not coming again and that will be cut off. But sometimes people just will not turn up again. So how is that measured? Is it reported by the number of actual hours or when the provider reports that the participant is clearly not turning up again?

Ms Pope—Again, that might be a question for Ms Ellis.

Ms Ellis—I am sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Senator HURLEY—How is the number of hours completed reported? Some participants, some clients, will say to their provider, ‘That’s enough. I am not coming again. I have a job,’ or whatever, and they will know. But some clients will just simply not turn up. I am just wondering how that is reported to the department in terms of statistics. Is it actual hours attended at the end of the year or the end of the session? Or is it a kind of an estimate?

Ms Ellis—There is a reporting and management system for the AMEP. The service providers are required to report progressively throughout the year because it is on the basis of the hours of tuition that are made available that they are paid. So the fact that someone has advised that they will not be coming back again, separate to someone who simply stops coming, is not a factor that is included in the reporting. It is simply about the hours of tuition that have been provided.

Senator HURLEY—I see. So a provider makes available a tutor and makes available the facilities. Therefore, they are paid on that class provided, rather than on the actual hours attended.

Ms Ellis—It is the hours per student. We can take on notice the question of exactly how the formula is based—

Senator HURLEY—Yes, if you could.

Ms Ellis—but it is generally on the hours offered per student. So if ten people were no longer in the class, the provider would be paid on the basis of the tuition given to those remaining in the class.

Senator HURLEY—Would the tutor tick off attendance, for example—is it done on that basis?

Ms Ellis—Yes, they are required to report on the hours that are provided to each individual. Part of the process is also about there being an incentive for the service providers to keep the students in the class. It is to their benefit that they continue to keep students in the class.

Senator HURLEY—What happens if a student indicates that they are leaving or if a student does not show up? Is there any particular protocol that is gone through? Is there any kind of assessment or is that up to the provider?

Ms Ellis—There is no protocol. If an individual decides that they no longer wish to take advantage of their entitlement to English language tuition then that is a matter for the individual. One would hope that they would give notice to the service provider but that is not always the case, as you have noted.

Senator HURLEY—Is there any understanding by the providers that is communicated to the department as to why most people would withdraw voluntarily?

Ms Ellis—It is not so much formal reporting as anecdotal information. Clearly there are some people who would let the service provider know as to why they were not going to continue to attend for tuition. For some people it is because of employment; for others it is for family reasons. There are some people who might stop going to tuition for a period of time because of family circumstances, and they might start up again a few months later when their circumstances permit. But that information is not something that is formally collected, to my knowledge. If we find out that anything is different then we will provide you with that information.

Senator HURLEY—I turn now to the Special Preparatory Program. I understand that, from the commencement of the current contract on 1 July 2003 to 30 June last year, 78 per cent of clients were eligible for the 510 hours; 22 per cent were assessed as being eligible for the 100 hours; and 0.8 per cent of clients were eligible for the additional 400 hours. I think you were going to provide information on whether that is still so. You did indicate that the Special Preparatory Program is capped, and that you would provide me with the details of how much that is, for last year and for next year. Is it not capped in advance?

Ms Ellis—I would have to check but if that information is available we will certainly give it to you.

Senator HURLEY—With the capping for the Special Preparatory Program, how is this rationed—in terms of the number of people who are offered assistance, or the number of hours that are made available? Let me start again. Has it been necessary to ration the number

of people going into the program because of the cap, or have people been easily accommodated within that cap?

Ms Pope—A historical question for Ms Ellis.

Ms Ellis—On the amount of funding: it is a process that happens throughout the year. The service providers are given parameters within which to make an assessment as to whether someone should be offered the Special Preparatory Program before they commence the 510 hours. I would note that the additional 400 hours only commenced in 2004-05; that was in the 2004 budget. Throughout the year there is, if you like, an estimate of demand in particular locations. There is ongoing reporting to ensure that, if there is less expenditure than anticipated in a particular area and a higher demand in another location, the funds will be made available to that other location.

Senator HURLEY—So until now there has never been a question of reaching the cap.

Ms Ellis—I would have to take that question on notice. Generally we have been able to manage it within the funding cap.

Senator HURLEY—Given that it might be managed within the cap, is there any policy or protocol if it is not, if there is a reduction in the number of clients or a reduction in the number of hours per client, for example?

Ms Ellis—That question would arise at some point later in the financial year. If it were apparent that the funds were going to be expended before the end of the financial year, that would have to be factored in and discussions would have to be held with the service providers about what that meant for anyone who might enrol for tuition before the next financial year commenced and whether there were further funds available for the special preparatory program.

Senator HURLEY—So, if later in the year things are getting a bit tight, someone might be put straight into the normal program rather than going through the Special Preparatory Program?

Ms Ellis—To my knowledge that has not happened because of the way the Special Preparatory Program funding is carefully managed throughout the year.

Senator HURLEY—Do most clients complete the 100 hours before they go into the mainstream program, or is there a variation?

Ms Ellis—The provision is up to 100 hours and up to 400 hours. Whether they complete all of those hours depends very much on their progress through the Special Preparatory Program. Some individuals might get half or three-quarters of the way through and be assessed as being at the point where they can take advantage of the more formal tuition delivered through the 510 hours. It is done on an as-needs basis; there are some people who need more and others who need less.

Senator HURLEY—Do you have figures for how many people complete the 100 hours?

Ms Ellis—We would need to take that question on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. An appropriation of \$8.4 million in departmental costs has been made for the administration of the AMEP budget. Is there a breakdown of how that money is spent?

Ms Pope—We will take that question on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. How is the AMEP research centre funded? Is it funded through departmental or administrative funds?

Ms Pope—I believe that that is also an administrative item.

Senator HURLEY—Right.

Ms Pope—Ms Ellis has advised me that she thinks the AMEP research contract is probably part of the \$8.4 million you just mentioned, but we will take the detail on notice.

Senator HURLEY—I will table that after I receive the answers to the follow-up questions on that area.

Ms Pope—Thank you.

Senator HURLEY—I have a similar question for the national information management unit. I will table those questions as well because they are along similar lines.

Ms Pope—Thank you.

Senator HURLEY—Are there any other non-service-provider costs relevant to AMEP, for example, consultancy fees, payments for the maintenance of the database or anything like that?

Ms Pope—There are, for example, systems costs in relation to the database and the management system that supports the AMEP—I do not have the exact figure for that. Obviously there are staffing costs for the area that manages the contracts and so on in the national office. There are probably other elements of that too, which we could take on notice if that suits.

Senator HURLEY—Yes. I will table those questions as well. There was a question in the February additional estimates this year about the planned review of AMEP, and there was a report that the next round of tender was under consideration. Can you give me an update on what is happening there?

Ms Pope—The department, with the agreement of the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Minister for Finance and Administration, has agreed that it will exercise the option to negotiate to extend the AMEP contracts for a period of notionally around an additional 12 months, which would take the completion date through to June 2009.

Senator HURLEY—What was the reason for that extension?

Ms Pope—There are a couple of reasons. One is that it aligns the expiry date for the AMEP with the expiry date for the DEST contract for the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program, which is the other large Commonwealth funded program that delivers services to some similar clients. We also wanted to be able to spend the time to review the situation for both the AMEP and the LLNP and prepare for that contract letting at the same time.

Senator HURLEY—Was there any intention to do both as one tender or to merge them in any way?

Ms Pope—We have not reached any conclusions on that yet, but we will be looking at the synergies between the two programs' alignment and so on leading up to that.

Senator HURLEY—I take it that will include a review of the cost structure of AMEP.

Ms Pope—Yes, it will be a thorough tender process.

Senator HURLEY—Will the review be internally within DIAC or will there be an external consultant doing that one?

Ms Pope—We have not finalised the details of how we will take that forward yet.

Senator HURLEY—When would you expect that those details would be finalised?

Ms Pope—We would normally expect to commence that sort of work at least 12 months out from the expiry date of the contracts, so, with that time frame, late this year or early next year would provide us with a sound 18 months lead time to do that work.

Senator HURLEY—I refer back to a question that I asked last year in the October supplementary budget estimates about using AMEP as a means of accelerating people into the workforce. Part of the answer was that, at the AMEP national conference, the former parliamentary secretary Andrew Robb announced:

With the Minister for Workforce Participation Sharman Stone, I am also looking at the role the Australian Migrant English Program plays in preparing family stream and humanitarian migrants for work.

In the existing program, there are modules which are focussed on employment, but we are looking to see if there are other ways that the programmes can help people start work earlier.

In the response to my question, the department said that the government was still considering options at that time. Has that advanced to any extent?

Ms Pope—Yes, an interdepartmental committee on English-language training has been established and its first meeting was held on 4 May. That IDC involves Immigration, the Department of Education, Science and Training, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Human Services, Centrelink, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Finance and Administration. It is looking at a range of issues around delivery of English-language training across the Commonwealth programs.

Senator HURLEY—So that is delivery across Commonwealth programs. Is there any intention to look at actual delivery of those programs in the workplace?

Ms Pope—Yes. We would expect that to be part of the deliberations of the committee.

Senator HURLEY—The IDC met on 4 May?

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—Is there any reporting time line?

Ms Pope—We expect to report to government in the third quarter of 2007, so some time from September onwards.

Senator HURLEY—I will put the rest of those questions on notice. That finishes the AMEP component.

Ms Pope—We have a couple of pieces of information that you requested. I can advise that the amount of money expended on the special preparatory program in 2005-06 was \$14.3 million and that the expectation this financial year is estimated at \$14.6 million. Ms Kansky has figures on the number of clients participating in that program.

Ms Kansky—Senator, your question was how many clients were involved in the different streams. For the special preparatory program, in 2006 there were 7,931 clients. In the same year there were 41,000 clients for the distance learning, rural and regional classrooms and the intensive language classes. Those are the figures for the two groups.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Senator Hurley. We appreciate that and the advice and feedback from the departmental representatives regarding output 2.1, Settlement services.

[2.47 pm]

CHAIR—We move to output 2.2, Translating and interpreting services.

Senator HURLEY—I want to examine on-site interpreters. I will go back to the health providers because this seems to be an ongoing issue and I am aware that medical practitioners have access to the telephone interpreter service and also to on-site interpreters. There seems to be a continual tension there because a lot of people think that on-site interpreting, particularly for sensitive medical issues, is by far the best way to handle things, but there seems to be a reluctance by medical practitioners to actually take the trouble to organise it. There seem to be some allegations that the budget may not be available for on-site interpreters at all times. Indeed, we have a specific complaint from a medical practitioner who alleges that on several occasions the application was refused on the grounds that the budget available had been exceeded.

The minister's office responded to a written complaint and the minister stated that there would be no reduction in funding available for on-site interpreting. But this medical practitioner feels that in recent times there has been unusual difficulty in getting on-site interpreters. There is some feeling among some practitioners that the department is really pushing people to use the over-the-phone interpreter service. The department's most recent annual report stated that on-site interpreting decreased from 46,575 in 2004-05 to 43,473 in 2005-06. It stated that the continuing decline in the demand for on-site interpreting can be attributed to clients moving towards telephone interpreting and lower demand for on-site services associated with the processing of applications for protection by asylum seekers.

Each year, the department has consistently set a target of 85 per cent of requests to result in a confirmed appointment within three working days. The department's table shows that telephone interpreting funding has increased but apparently at the expense of on-site interpreting. The website for DIAC states:

When telephone interpreting is not suitable, TIS can arrange, in most situations, for an interpreter to attend a location of your choice.

When the department says ‘most situations’ what exactly does that mean? In what situations would on-site interpreters be allowed? Is there any screening of that?

Ms Pope—There are a number of issues running through your question. The first thing that is important to clarify is that in some instances we are talking about TIS fee free and funding for free interpreting services, and some of the rest of it is on a fee-for-service basis. In relation to GPs, access to GPs who are not in the public system is fee free. That is the doctors priority line that we talked about earlier, and there is the option of on-site interpreting for doctors. There are various schools of thought, as you outlined, about the pros and cons of on-site interpreters as opposed to telephone interpreters. There are obviously logistical issues involved in the provision of on-site interpreters as opposed to telephone interpreter servicing; but there is the issue of privacy as well. There is a greater degree of privacy afforded to a patient if the interpreter is on the phone rather than there in person. Issues of embarrassment and privacy and confidentiality when you have somebody sitting there doing the interpreting for you, as opposed to interpreting by phone, is an issue that we certainly take into account. But priority is given to phone interpreting over on-site interpreting. The details around the split of funding for on-site and telephone interpreting in the fee-free area I would need to take on notice, but the remainder of your questions in relation to the on-site interpreting are around fee for service, and my colleague, Mr Greateorex, can address those elements.

Mr Greateorex—With respect to the issues that you raised in relation to on-site interpreting, in most instances TIS is able to provide interpreters. There are times when the available funding is exhausted on a particular day, and we would advise the medical practitioner that there may be another day that they are able to make an appointment and we will endeavour to make that appointment on the day that suits the medical practitioner and their patient.

Senator HURLEY—Is this for the on-site interpreting or telephone?

Mr Greateorex—It is for on site. Then, if that does not suit, obviously the telephone interpreting service is available as an alternative.

Senator HURLEY—I freely admit to being confused about when it is fee free and when there is a fee involved. Obviously practitioners in the field have a better idea than I have, but I find it very confusing.

Ms Pope—It is largely whether the doctor is part of the system and receiving government funding or whether they are in private practice. Ms Ellis can confirm if I am on the wrong track. Doctors in private practice have access to TIS fee free, whereas those in the public sector do not. That is broadly the split.

Senator HURLEY—Why is there that split?

Ms Pope—Because public health providers are expected to budget for interpreting services as part of putting their service together, so it would be double dipping, in effect.

Senator HURLEY—What about the on-site interpreting?

Ms Pope—The same, if I am not mistaken. This bit also moved from one branch to another.

Senator HURLEY—Further confusing me, anyway.

Ms Ellis—Senator, the issue with on site is that there is a quota system in place in terms of managing the funds to ensure that there are funds available throughout the year. At one point, there had been a significant increase in the use of on-site interpreting and there were concerns that that would mean that funds were not available later in the year for the telephone interpreting service. So, in terms of managing the demand for on-site interpreting to ensure that there were funds available for the important safety net that telephone interpreting is in the fee-free area, a quota system was introduced. As Mr Greatorex has mentioned, there are some times when a medical practitioner will call and the quota for that particular state on that day has been filled. It is not to say that an on-site interpreter could not be provided, but it is about when the on-site interpreter could be provided.

Senator HURLEY—Do I understand that to mean that there is a pool of funding, the proportion of which is on site and which is telephone is flexible?

Ms Ellis—To a degree, yes, because there is the quota system to ensure that there is funding available for the telephone interpreting requests to meet that demand. If there were not management arrangements in place, we would run the risk of funds not being available for the telephone interpreting service because they had been used disproportionately for on-site interpreting.

Senator HURLEY—Who does that management? Is that the TIS server?

Ms Ellis—The quota system is managed from national office, so TIS National then operate within that quota arrangement.

Senator HURLEY—I appreciate your point that in some senses the telephone interpreter service does ensure privacy in one respect: you cannot see the person. But there is another aspect that, if you ask for an interpreter on site, it is more easy to specify, as I understand it, whether you want a female interpreter and perhaps someone of a particular religion or culture or background, and that sometimes people feel that telephone interpreters might not have quite the same commitment that someone on site does to the welfare of the patient. So a lot of people do prefer on-site interpreting for those reasons. Could you comment on that?

Mr Greatorex—Another factor that is often taken into consideration is the fact that the interpreter in small communities may well be known and telephone does then provide another alternative and, in some cases, a preferable alternative in the fact that the interpreter is not then known to the patient. So, as well as the factor that Ms Pope mentioned, I think there is also that advantage of telephone interpreting.

Ms Pope—I think you are right, Senator. It is to a degree a matter of personal preference as to whether you want someone sitting next to you whom you might then see in the street, as Chris says, or whether you want the anonymity of a telephone interpreter.

Senator HURLEY—Although the telephone interpreter would know the person's name.

Ms Pope—Yes, but they will not see them face to face, because the interpreter could be anywhere in Australia, so there is a very slim likelihood they would ever encounter one another. I should add that this issue of face to face versus on site is a matter that we discuss in the refugee working group on health with the departments in other jurisdictions. To a large

extent the jury is still really out in that group as well as to the relative merits of one means or another.

Senator HURLEY—Yet the funding seems to be skewing towards the telephone interpreter service.

Ms Pope—It is, because it is more efficient.

Senator HURLEY—More efficient and cost-effective?

Ms Pope—Yes.

Ms Ellis—It is not always going to be possible to provide an on-site interpreter because of the location of where the service is required. That geographic isolation is not an issue with the telephone interpreting. It may be that, at times, on-site interpreting cannot be provided simply because there is not an interpreter in the language that is required within a reasonable distance of where the service is to be provided.

Senator HURLEY—It may be reasonably esoteric, but what happens if there is some legal dispute about medical advice? Is there a logging of which interpreter is used? How is that managed?

Mr Greatorex—Is this for on site?

Senator HURLEY—For on site, clearly, you would know which interpreter is there, as that person is actually in the surgery. So it is relatively easy for them to be asked to give evidence if required. But if it is a telephone interpreter how is that managed?

Mr Greatorex—That is managed in that each interpreter has an identity number and that is logged so that we are able to ascertain which interpreter did each particular job.

Senator HURLEY—I think the remainder of the questions which are more detailed can probably be put on notice. I want to turn to the issue of advising people who are using medical services of their rights. There are a number of cases of people using relatives or children to provide the interpretation with a medical practitioner, which many feel is inappropriate. To what extent, and how, are people are advised of their rights if the medical practitioner does not do it? How are they are advised of their rights relative to telephone, on-site or private payment?

Ms Pope—We advertise the Doctors Priority Line so that GPs are aware that that service is available. I cannot really speak for individual GPs, although I would have a general expectation that they would offer that service in preference to using a relative or whatever else, particularly as—and Chris will correct me if I am wrong—I believe that the interpreters that work for the Doctors Priority Line have some additional knowledge of medical terms.

Mr Greatorex—No.

Ms Pope—It looks like they do not, then! I should have had a quiet conversation about that before I said it. In any case, they are better qualified to undertake that service than the person. It would be the individual's free choice as to whether they wanted to use a relative or a friend, as opposed to an officially offered service.

Senator HURLEY—How are doctors advised of the availability of the service? Is the telephone interpreter service given the priority? Are doctors told about the telephone

interpreter service and they only know about the on-site interpreting if they are asked, or is it given equal weight when advising doctors of the services available?

Mr Greatorex—There has been a fairly extensive promotional campaign over a number of years for the Doctors Priority Line, so doctors, through their areas of general practice, receive the detail of that promotional activity. Also, when people are settling in Australia they are provided with advice about the translating and interpreting service, the services that are provided and how to contact TIS. So there is a duality of promotion in that sense, in that we promote both with the potential patient and with the medical practitioners.

Senator HURLEY—So if a medical practitioner rings TIS, are they asked whether they want the telephone interpreter service or the on-site service, or is it up to the medical practitioner to ask?

Mr Greatorex—It is up to the medical practitioner to choose the particular channel because there are different lines for telephone, the Doctors Priority Line and the on-site interpreting.

Senator HURLEY—You mentioned earlier that doctors might be given an alternative day if management dictates that. Is it possible to give any figures on how often that happens?

Mr Greatorex—I will take that on notice and see what we can come up with. If those figures are available, we will make sure to get them to you. Alternatively, would a sample of a particular day be indicative and helpful for you?

Senator HURLEY—Yes: perhaps a quarterly figure throughout the year and as we get towards the end of the year and things get a bit tight.

Ms Pope—If you want to provide details of the complaint you mentioned, we would be happy to look into that particular instance.

Senator HURLEY—I think you might have done already. I understand that the minister's office was contacted and responded to a written complaint from the practitioner.

Ms Pope—Okay. I am not aware of it myself.

Senator HURLEY—But I will pass that on. Thank you.

[5.06 pm]

CHAIR—As that concludes output 2.2, we will proceed to output 2.3.

Senator HURLEY—This is obviously quite an important area. There was quite a lot of money provided in this year's budget to fund the new citizenship test and the associated costs involved with it. It is not only for the test but also for the Australian way of life booklet and value statements and so on, so I am very keen to explore this particular area. The department has budgeted \$69.6 million for decisions on citizenship status for 2007-08, and the department anticipates the number of decisions will be 139,000 for the coming year. Are there any other forward estimates for these figures for 2008-09 or 2009-10?

Mr Metcalfe—I am advised that there are no figures for the out years.

Senator HURLEY—Is there expected to be an increase or a decrease in the number of citizenship decisions in the future? Is there any feeling about how that will go?

Mr Metcalfe—Moving aside from the resourcing as such to the anticipated numbers of decisions?

Senator HURLEY—Perhaps I will give a bit of background. There is some speculation in the citizenship ceremonies I go to. There are large numbers of people taking out citizenship in the first half of the year, according to people I have talked to, and there is speculation that large numbers of people are making the jump now in order to avoid the test.

CHAIR—You can go directly to the department and ask for answers, and I am sure the department will do their best to answer any specific questions you have. I do not think they need to deal with the speculation, but I am sure they will do the best they can to answer your specific questions.

Mr Metcalfe—Senator, we see spikes in applications from time to time. I can check and see if we are experiencing one at the moment. If it is occurring, it would be a pretty short-lived sort of thing. Longer term, though, as you would be aware, the migration program has been growing over the last few years and there usually appears to be a fairly direct correlation between the level of the migration program and the levels of applications for citizenship, with a three- or four-year lag factor associated with it. So the future will bring what the future brings.

I do note that it is anticipated that the citizenship test itself will be something that a person can sit and, if they do not pass it, they can sit it again and, if they do not pass it, they can sit it again. It is something that also I think is expected to be—I think the minister has talked about this in the last few days—quite realistic in its expectations, and speculation that it is going to be a particularly difficult or hard thing is quite misinformed.

Senator HURLEY—Let us jump to the revenue measures. The department's summary of revenue measures indicates an increase in total revenue from the citizenship test. In 2007-08 the forward estimate for expected revenue is \$5,453,000. In 2008-09 this figure almost doubles to \$9,364,000. In 2009-10 it goes up to \$9.665 million and in 2010-11, \$9.966 million. That does seem to indicate that you expect an increase in the number of people applying for citizenship.

Ms Ellis—The revenue formulas take account of the announcement in the budget that, in relation to applications post the introduction of citizenship testing, the application fee will rise for those who are required to satisfactorily complete the test. In the budget it was announced that it would be a fee of \$240. So the revenue estimates take account of that and I think are based on what we know of application rates at the moment, taking account of the changes in application fee increases.

Senator HURLEY—Yes. The fee will rise from the current \$120 to \$240. That would, I presume, account for the doubling for the next year but not the consistent rise through the following year. So, if someone applies for citizenship and they pay their \$240 and they take the test and fail it, will they have to start the process again and pay the full \$240?

Mr Metcalfe—You take the test before you make an application and pay a fee. We will explain precisely what is envisaged in relation to that process.

Mr Vardos—The requirement will be that you must have passed the test before you can submit your application. There will be no fee payable at the time that you sit the test; there will only be a consolidated fee payable at the time you lodge your application. If you sit the test and pass it, you can then progress to the next stage. If you fail the test, I think the minister has indicated publicly that there will be unlimited re-sits. If you fail you can sit the test again. Theoretically, if there were a slot available at the testing centre within the next hour or two and you were prepared to wait, you could do it then, or you could make another booking for a week or a month later. There will not be an additional fee for each time you sit the test. You can sit the test five times and you will only pay once, when you lodge your application.

Senator HURLEY—I see. Why then, in 2009-10 and 2010-11, is the revenue going up?

Mr Metcalfe—I will correct this on notice if I am wrong, but I suspect that the estimates take account of the increase in the migration program over the last couple of years and an expected increase in application numbers into the out years.

Senator HURLEY—The media widely reported on the citizenship test, and the minister was widely quoted last Friday. Many of the media outlets were giving examples of the test questions. They were printing 20 questions. The questions that they quoted were remarkably similar, if not identical. The minister has been quoted as saying that those questions were not necessarily the questions that would be asked. Was it that nearly everyone in the media made up identical questions? Was any information given to the media prior to those stories appearing?

Mr Metcalfe—I certainly think the minister has spoken publicly on a number of occasions about the sorts of issues that would be the subject of information provided to prospective citizens about the Australian way of life, our history, our geography, our national symbols and our political system, and I think those particular articles followed a speech made by the minister in which he talked about the importance of the citizenship test.

Senator HURLEY—When was that speech given?

Mr Metcalfe—It was a speech to CEDA on 17 May. From what I saw in the media, there was a fairly similar mock test published in the *Herald Sun* and the *Daily Telegraph*, which I think are related newspapers. So I suspect that there were not lots of people making up the same test. I suspect that the same person made up the same mock test and it was published in Sydney and in Melbourne. The information I have is that the test that was published in the newspapers was entirely invented by the media, but it was clearly based—following some research—on statements that had been made by the minister about the topic.

Senator HURLEY—So the remarkable similarity between the questions in the Murdoch and Fairfax press and on radio was purely coincidence.

Mr Metcalfe—I think that there was a similar test in News Ltd tabloid media in Melbourne and Sydney, and I suspect that what then emerged were questions being asked on radio, derived from that. I think that it could all be traced back to someone sitting down and saying, ‘The minister has talked about certain things; what would a test look like?’ and it moved on from there. But, as far as I know, what has appeared in the media does not represent the questions that would actually be asked in the test itself. Why do I know that? Because those questions have not yet been framed.

Senator HURLEY—I have a copy of the *Adelaide Advertiser*; so they somehow contacted the papers in Melbourne and Sydney. What were the papers you mentioned?

Mr Metcalfe—The ones I saw were the *Herald Sun* and the *Daily Telegraph* but it may have appeared elsewhere. I cannot offer an explanation as to why similar things were asked in different newspapers. The test questions have not been framed but it would not be particularly difficult for someone to have a go at deriving some test questions, because the government has been quite up front. Going back to the discussion paper framed by the former parliamentary secretary Mr Robb and released last year on the possibility of a test, there has been quite a lot of discussion about the sorts of issues that a test would be about. What we do know is the minister has indicated that the test questions will be based upon a resource book. It is likely that there will be a large number of questions, possibly around 200 or so, which would be utilised as the basis for randomly generating around 20 questions for the particular applicant as they come in to sit the test. As Mr Vardos has indicated, there is the potential to sit the test a number of times if necessary. The minister has also talked about a likely pass mark and that sort of thing. These issues, of course, will be the subject of further consideration, I suspect, by the parliament in due course when legislation and other consideration of the issues occurs.

Senator HURLEY—When will that legislation be introduced?

Mr Metcalfe—I do not have a firm date at this stage. I am sure the minister will let you know when he plans to introduce it.

Senator HURLEY—So there is no proposed start-up date for the citizenship test at this stage?

Mr Metcalfe—I think we are looking at some time later this year, but it obviously depends upon the passage of legislation.

Senator HURLEY—Is that legislation complete at this stage?

Mr Metcalfe—I think that the drafting is more or less complete.

Senator HURLEY—You did indicate that there would be 20 questions in the test. Would what appeared in the media be a reasonable example of what might be in the test?

Mr Metcalfe—I do not think it is fair for me to speculate on what might be in something that has not yet been written. As I have said already, the minister has indicated the types of areas of information—about life in Australia, about Australia, who we are, and Australian values. I think there has been some commentary by the minister as to whether certain things might be included. There has been some speculation about whether something as detailed as Don Bradman's batting average might be included—I saw that in one question in a mock test today. I am sure all of this will become apparent in due course. The minister has been quite clear and quite transparent in talking about the sorts of issues that would be the subject of the test.

Senator HURLEY—If the draft legislation is in place, what about the document on which the questions will be derived—is that complete?

Mr Metcalfe—No; it is currently being worked on.

Senator HURLEY—So the legislation will come up without members being given access to the kind of material that the questions will be drawn from.

Mr Metcalfe—I think you would have to ask the minister as to when he proposed to make that material available.

Senator HURLEY—We are talking about the booklets on which it would be based.

Mr Metcalfe—It has always been intended that there would be a body of information, a booklet of resource material, which would provide information from which the test questions would be drawn.

Senator HURLEY—Is that completed?

Mr Metcalfe—It is being worked on.

Senator HURLEY—What is the completion date for that?

Mr Metcalfe—I do not have a completion date. It will be completed when it is completed, I think.

Senator HURLEY—Will that go out for consultation by groups other than the media?

Mr Metcalfe—You are suggesting that might be the subject of consultation by groups other than the media, therefore by inference that it would be the subject of consultation with the media. The issue of what consultation process might occur is a matter for the minister.

Senator LUDWIG—Has your department been requested or required to produce a sample of questions for the minister's office?

Mr Metcalfe—No, not to my knowledge. We are still working on the resource book, and it would be putting the cart before the horse to start deriving questions about something you are still working on.

Senator LUDWIG—It is just a simple question; yes or no would suffice.

Mr Metcalfe—No.

CHAIR—Mr Metcalfe can answer it as he sees appropriate.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the process itself, has any of the detail been worked out? The questions that arise are, of course, areas that the test might deal with—I know you have indicated that there is a speech that might suggest some of the areas—the weighting of each question; the mechanics of how the test would be administered; whether the people could take the study book with them into the test or whether they would sit without the study book—that sort of detail. Is there a working group that has been working on that type of material?

Mr Metcalfe—I will get Mr Vardos to provide what detail we can, noting that ultimately some of these issues do go to policy and we will obviously be mindful of that in our response.

Mr Vardos—As Mr Metcalfe has said, it is a work in progress and decisions are being made progressively. Just to confirm in a consolidated format what has been decided and put out—20 questions; 60 per cent pass mark; unlimited resits; indefinite validity of the test results, so it does not have an expiry or use-by date; it is not proposed that it be an open-book exam; the resource book would be made available to everybody who intends sitting the test for them to study at their leisure. As I mentioned earlier on, there will be no charge for the

book. You would obtain it perhaps as part of your citizenship pack or in some other form, or download it from the web.

Senator LUDWIG—Would you get a certificate on successful completion?

Mr Vardos—There will be a formal test result that is generated by the system. Upon completion of the test you will know your result and, if you fail, the software will indicate the general areas where you were weakest, perhaps to help you prepare for the next time you sit the test. At this stage there is no contemplation of weighting questions, but again this is something that is under consideration. The general areas that will be covered are, in broad terms: history, geography, Australian culture, society, national symbols—the sort of thing that you would expect to find in a citizenship test. That is the breadth of the material that the resource book intends to cover.

Senator LUDWIG—Is it multiple choice?

Mr Vardos—As we mentioned in estimates in February, when I was outlining the concept, I can confirm it will be a computer based multiple-choice test.

Senator HURLEY—You are saying that there is no weighting and there will be, as is in some tests in other countries, no questions that you must pass in order to pass the whole test.

Mr Vardos—If we take the Canadian test as an example, there is the possibility of introducing two or three mandatory questions on the specific rights and responsibilities of citizenship which could be included as part of any test. That is not particular weighting in terms of the Canadian model that I just referred to. There are three mandatory questions that must be passed as part of the total number of questions that you must pass to get your pass mark, in this case 60 per cent. That has not been finally decided as yet; it is part of the current contemplation. The short answer to your question is: at the moment, I cannot confirm that there will be a weighting of any sort across the questions.

Senator HURLEY—So just to recap: there will not be a weighting but there will be three mandatory questions.

Mr Vardos—No, what I am saying is that there is a possibility, as part of the models that we are looking at, of including some mandatory questions that must be passed, but that has not been finally determined. In the concept I outlined in February, I think that was part of it. I did not reread the transcript in the last 24 hours, so I cannot remember whether I put that on the table at that time or not. It is certainly part of the model that could be finally determined, but at the moment I cannot confirm to you that there will be any sort of weighting.

Senator HURLEY—You have mentioned a number of areas: history, geography, culture, national symbols. There have been suggestions that national values come into it. Are those areas designated now or is that still to come as well?

Mr Metcalfe—That is still ahead of us. Final decisions on those matters have yet to be made. I am sure they will be the subject of announcements by the government when the government is ready to announce them.

CHAIR—It being 3.30 pm, we will suspend the committee. I advise that Senator Marise Payne will be the acting chair if I am a bit late for the resumption.

Proceedings suspended from 3.30 pm to 3.44 pm

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Payne)—We will resume. We are continuing with output 2.3. Senator Bartlett?

Senator BARTLETT—I would like to recap a little bit of what has already happened. I missed the start of the earlier questions, having been at a different committee. I understand that Senator Hurley was asking about the derivation of these 20 questions that have appeared. I just want to get it totally clear, having asked a bit about the answers during the break. I would not want to unfairly criticise government for things that it does not deserve criticism for; there are always others that I can pick from. The statement that was made in the media that put these questions out there said that these sample citizenship questions were devised by the federal government. I just want to get it categorically, I suppose, that, wherever these came from, they were not devised by the federal government.

Senator Ellison—Madam Chair, there are no better people than ministers to ask. When the minister was asked about these questions—and this is a direct quote—he said:

Well again, can I remind you these are questions which have been constructed by the newspaper and we haven't yet even constructed the questions – we're working on the resource booklet.

That is what he said when he was asked about it. That is the final answer; there is no more to it than that.

Senator BARTLETT—So I can safely say that the statement that the questions were devised by the federal government is wrong.

Senator Ellison—Absolutely.

Senator BARTLETT—Okay. Put in your complaint to the Press Council now, if you wish.

ACTING CHAIR—That would be really useful! It must be part of the News Ltd conspiracy between the *Adelaide Advertiser*, the *Herald Sun* and the *Daily Telegraph*! Do go on, Senator Bartlett. It is all right; you were not here for that.

Senator BARTLETT—Thank you. I wanted to make that as clear as possible. The other aspect which flows on from what I asked yesterday about not just the citizenship test but the Australian values pledge, for want of a better term—which I understand is also being devised by the same group here—is that the budget statements or the media release on the night said that there was \$10 million being set aside for that. How much work is involved in that and why would that would cost much money at all? From my understanding of the NDS answer yesterday, it seems it would be part of the application form that people would sign, stating, 'I respect Australia's way of life and agree to abide by its laws,' or something like that. It sounds like you have pretty much got it written already. What is the \$10 million for?

Mr Vardos—There are a variety of elements that go to making up that \$10 million. A large part of it is staff costs, but a lot of that also involves additional time that will be required by our own processing officers to explain to people what it involves before they sign. They need to understand what it is they are signing. So we have factored into the interview an extended period of time to accommodate that. There is a considerable amount of form printing,

electronic form changes and general IT costs. So it is not as straightforward—I wish it were—as you have suggested. There are a range of things that have to happen to put that into place.

Senator BARTLETT—So it is going to be for most long-term residency visas, a number of which are applied through online these days, as I understand it. You will not need people to explain it to those people online; you will not be able to. You will need some other resource or page to direct them to which states what an Australian way of life means or that sort of thing. Is that the type of resource that you are talking about?

Mr Hughes—For humanitarian entrants, for example—all of whom are interviewed—it would need to be explained to them at the time of the interview. But you are quite right: other forms of visas might not involve an interview; some might be applied for electronically. So the costs there are in changing the documentation and changing the systems.

Senator BARTLETT—Are you able to give us a rough idea of how much of it will be extra staff places or time?

Mr Vardos—In rough terms, it will be approximately \$5 million for staffing costs. There is a bit under \$2 million allocated for additional processing time during the interview process, around \$2 million for the paper and electronic form change—including design, printing, distribution, storage and that sort of thing—and a general amount of about half a million for IT costs.

Senator BARTLETT—So the part that says \$10 million for Australian values statements, all of that is not going to be—

Mr Vardos—Everything.

Senator BARTLETT—All of that is not going to be for a separate thing to wave around, saying, ‘This is an Australian values statement.’

Mr Vardos—The statements themselves are built into the visa application forms.

Senator BARTLETT—And it is only going to be a couple of sentences, is it?

Mr Vardos—That is still to be finally resolved. That is within government’s contemplation at the moment.

Senator BARTLETT—I have my own views about how desirable and necessary this is, but I am trying not to go to that point. It has actually given me slight alarm bells, given some of the things that we went through yesterday about the length of time and processing et cetera, that we are putting another thing in place that is going to need more staff time and more processing time. How much time could it take to explain? I suppose, in one sense, given the debates we are having about Australian values and the Australian way of life, you could spend all year explaining what is and is not the Australian way of life. But, in terms of the context of signing a visa application, it seems like a lot of rigmarole to explain what signing it means.

Mr Vardos—As Mr Hughes has pointed out, the large part of that explaining will involve the refugee and humanitarian cohort. That is where we have built it into the process maps. The additional time to explain—

Senator BARTLETT—I am sure it is not the implication but, knowing how some of this stuff is perceived out in the wider community, I presume that does not mean that we think the

refugee cohort are a particular problem in terms of not following the Australian way of life or anything; it just means that, given their background, it might need further explanation?

Mr Metcalfe—That is correct. By definition, the refugees in the humanitarian program are amongst the world's most disadvantaged people. Education levels are very low in many circumstances and also the cultural dislocation, I suspect, is far greater when coming from the situations that some of them come from. From that point of view, in order to give people every opportunity to settle well in Australia and to integrate into Australian society, in addition to all of the measures that we were talking about with Senator Hurley earlier on in relation to settlement we think that some additional assistance in explaining this aspect of Australian values is a worthwhile investment.

Senator BARTLETT—And are the Australian way of life booklets a separate explanatory resource?

Mr Vardos—A bit over \$6 million has been allocated. Most of that is for the production, printing and distribution, and there is a small component for staffing costs. But it will effectively be a settlement resource more specifically focused on the migration program than, for example, the documents that you are probably well aware of, which we prepare under the refugee and humanitarian program. So we have a full suite of material that is specifically targeted at the refugee and humanitarian cohort in terms of settling in Australia, settlement information. This book will fill the gap for the broader migrant intake.

Senator BARTLETT—It will obviously be a new booklet, but it is a new booklet to provide for people who currently are not getting that information.

Mr Vardos—It is a consolidated approach to providing settlement information: a description of the country they are coming to as a migrant.

Senator BARTLETT—Is it also for long-term temporary visa applicants?

Mr Vardos—It will be provided to all permanent visa applicants and it will be made available to long-term temporary visa applicants. There is a slight distinction there. People who are coming out on a permanent visa have the intent to come to start a new life, become citizens, so there is an obligation to make sure that they get it. It will be available for the long-term temporaries who may or may not stay. They may go home at some point. But it will effectively be available to the entire migrant cohort.

Senator BARTLETT—Will the long-term temporaries also have to sign the statement?

Mr Vardos—A similar statement, a shorter version for selected visa categories. Do not ask me what the visa categories are, because I cannot reel them off.

Senator BARTLETT—I think I got most of that yesterday on the visa categories, so that is fine. So you will possibly have slightly different Australian value statements for permanent visa applicants and long-term temporaries?

Mr Metcalfe—I would not want to you think that the values that the statement is about are different. We envisage that it would be a more condensed version of the acknowledgement of the statements for the long-term temporary categories, with the long version for the permanent entry categories.

Senator HURLEY—To go back to this question of media access to and media printing of the citizenship questions, I have just had an opportunity to look at the minister's speech to which Mr Metcalfe referred. As far as I can see, the only information he gave about the possible test is that he said, 'The material which will form the basis of the test will highlight the common values we share as well as something of our history and background'. That obviously does not give much information to the media to base those 20 questions on. Can I confirm, Minister Ellison, that the minister's or the department's media unit did not provide more information than that to the media?

Senator Ellison—I advise what the minister said, and I refer again to the interview of 18 May. It was just a few days ago. He said that the questions were:

... constructed by the newspaper ... we haven't yet even constructed the questions.

I think that makes it very clear. I would make an observation that the media does not generally need a great deal to rely on to write a story and that maybe even a few comments, throwaway lines, are enough to excite a story. That has been my experience. But one thing is very clear: those questions did not come from the government.

Senator HURLEY—Or from the government's media unit?

Mr Metcalfe—I can confirm that our media unit did not talk to the media about any of those issues. I have already said that there are no questions that currently exist, so this would appear to be an interesting attempt at devising what the test questions might be like. Referring to what the minister said, the term 'journalistic license' presumably exists for a reason.

Senator HURLEY—To go back to the details of the question, I understand that the department did have a look at a number of tests that are held overseas, particularly the one in the United Kingdom. Although testing officially started on 1 November 2005 in the United Kingdom, test centres in fact took bookings some months prior to that and allowed any applicants to take a test before the official date. In those months, 451 applicants took the test. Of those, 349 passed and 102 failed, which gives a pass rate of 77.4 per cent. The Home Office, who are responsible for the testing, said that they had anticipated a pass rate of around 80 per cent from piloting the tests, so they regarded that as in line with expectations. Has DIAC any plans to pilot the test in that way or a similar way before it begins operation?

Mr Vardos—That is a matter for government to decide. There are a number of matters before government at the moment.

Senator HURLEY—Similarly, is there no anticipated pass rate that has been set?

Mr Vardos—No. I would be pleased if we had a 100 per cent pass rate, but we have no planned built-in failure rate or anticipated failure rate. It is impossible to determine that in advance.

Senator HURLEY—Obviously there will be people who do not pass the test. You have said that potential citizens will be allowed to sit the test as many times as they need to and you have mentioned that the computer program will indicate to the person in which particular areas they have been unsuccessful, if that is the case. Are there any ways to assist clients who do not pass the test?

Mr Vardos—As you know, the Let's Participate course is already being run in AMEP centres. The original concept around the resource book was built around the Let's Participate material. Once the test gets up and running and the resource book is finalised, we will then make it available to the AMEP providers to see whether there can be any enhancement or improvements to the current Let's Participate course to make it more directly relevant to the resource book and hence the test. But that is work in progress.

Senator HURLEY—Let us turn to the Let's Participate course. Is that carried out within the department's AMEP funding, or is that a separate funding?

Mr Vardos—My understanding is that the contracts we have with each service provider and the fees we pay them under that contract cover the delivery of the Let's Participate course, but I stand to be corrected on that.

Ms Ellis—That is correct. The Let's Participate course was developed to be delivered as part of the curriculum that is used by the AMEP service providers.

Senator HURLEY—What was the budget for that course? Was there a separate budget in 2006-07, a separate item that could be identified?

Ms Ellis—The course was actually developed, from recollection, in 2000-01 and it was developed under the contract that the department had with the AMEP Research Centre to develop curriculum materials for the AMEP.

Senator HURLEY—So it is largely unchanged since then?

Ms Ellis—That is correct. I think the only changes that there have been since then have really been in the levels of English. It was initially developed for delivery at the Certificate in Spoken and Written English 3, and subsequently materials were developed covering the same content at the lower levels of English.

Senator HURLEY—Which lower levels of English?

Ms Ellis—The CSWE 2 and possibly even the CSWE 1. They are the different levels of ability in English.

Senator HURLEY—Does the definition of functional English bear any relationship to any of those levels?

Ms Ellis—Yes. I think we covered this at estimates either in February or last year. Functional English is regarded as the equivalent of CSWE 3. So, someone who has successfully completed all of the modules across the levels of CSWE 3 is regarded as having functional English.

Senator HURLEY—At what level of English is the proposed citizenship test set? I understand it is meant to indicate functional English.

Ms Forster—No. There is no concept of it being at the functional level of English. It is in the legislation as at a basic knowledge of English for citizenship purposes.

Senator HURLEY—It is currently, but will that be the same under the new legislation?

Ms Forster—The legislation is not before parliament at the moment. However, we are not at this stage looking at any significant change to that component of the requirements.

Senator HURLEY—Is there any definition of what basic English means?

Ms Forster—There has not been and there is not.

Senator HURLEY—Given that there may be modifications to the Let's Participate program once the citizenship test starts, how will that be funded from under the citizenship program as outlined in the budget or under the AMEP program?

Mr Vardos—I would envisage—and this is work still to be completed—that it would form part of the AMEP budget process and be covered under the contracts we have with service providers. It would be an enhancement to an existing function that they have been paid for or changes to an existing function that they are being paid for.

Senator HURLEY—And the research that goes into that?

Mr Vardos—As currently structured. I don't envisage any changes, but that is not to say there will not be; I just do not anticipate any at this point in time.

Senator HURLEY—Is it only the AMEP service providers that offer the Let's Participate course?

Mr Vardos—My understanding is that is the case.

Ms Ellis—I am aware of a couple of other organisations, a couple of council libraries, that use the Let's Participate course materials to deliver a course; but, for the most part, yes, it is the AMEP service providers.

Senator HURLEY—Do all AMEP clients do the Let's Participate course?

Ms Ellis—No, it is up to the individuals to determine which parts of the curriculum, which courses, they will attend.

Senator HURLEY—What percentage of current participants do the Let's Participate course?

Ms Ellis—We would need to take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Similarly, is there any assessment of whether participants pass the course or achieve an understanding of that level? Is that assessed in any way?

Ms Ellis—When the course was first introduced it was about substantial completion or participation in the course, but there has been work undertaken over the last 12 to 18 months to develop assessment tasks as part of the course to establish whether people had actually acquired the knowledge.

Senator HURLEY—What is the feedback from that? Has it shown that most people have or not?

Ms Ellis—It is my understanding—and I would need to confirm this—that those assessment tasks are only in the final stages of being completed.

Senator HURLEY—Who developed those assessment tasks? Was it done within the department or was it the AMEP providers?

Ms Ellis—It was the AMEP Research Centre that was asked to develop the assessment tasks.

Senator HURLEY—Is that is within DIAC?

Ms Ellis—No, the AMEP Research Centre is a service provider to the department. It is Macquarie University and La Trobe University.

Senator HURLEY—How are they funded?

Ms Ellis—They are one of the service providers to the department as part of the framework to support the AMEP program.

Senator HURLEY—But they do not actually provide hands-on language service—AMEP courses—to clients?

Ms Ellis—They do not provide the tuition. They provide a number of services. Part of it is the development of curriculum materials that can be used by the service providers. They also undertake research on behalf of the department which can then be made available to the service providers on aspects of adult English language tuition.

Senator HURLEY—How is their funding determined? It is not part of the AMEP tender, I take it?

Ms Ellis—Sorry, Senator, I do not understand your question.

Senator HURLEY—It is not part of the normal AMEP tender, I take it, because that is for tuition. So on what basis is that centre funded?

Ms Ellis—There is a contract in place with the AMEP Research Centre.

Senator HURLEY—Is that reviewed from year to year?

Ms Ellis—My recollection is that it was a five-year contract. I do not recall when that contract will cease, but I suspect it was aligned to the AMEP contracts. We would need to confirm that for you.

Senator HURLEY—If you could also advise me what that contract is worth.

Ms Ellis—Certainly.

Mr Vardos—I will just add a postscript to your original question about level of assistance to help people prepare for the test. Because we are taking an integrated approach to this, we have also opened up a dialogue with our colleagues in the Settlement Branch to explore avenues for the Settlement Grants Program providers being used in some way to provide assistance to perhaps the refugee and humanitarian cohort to help them prepare. So our focus is not just on the AMEP; we are exploring alternative avenues as well.

Senator HURLEY—Will they be expected to do that within their current programs, or will they be funded to do that?

Mr Vardos—I cannot give you a definitive answer to that. I would expect that one approach we could take would be to open up eligibility for them to put in applications to provide courses, or whatever, to help prepare people for the test. So they could put in a project application. As to whether there might be additional funds or not, I could not comment at this point in time.

Senator HURLEY—The budget has provided funds for the implementation of this course, so you would not expect further funding; you would expect it to come within this existing funding, wouldn't you? It has been costed.

Mr Vardos—The funding we have been provided is to deliver the test. The thing that you are talking about—providing assistance to people to prepare for the test—is a separate activity. I would see it as sitting in the broader view of settlement services for eligible clients. As I said, we are exploring that option and engaging with our colleagues, and Settlement Branch is talking about it.

Senator HURLEY—So the total cost may be significantly higher once you take into account those supporting services.

Mr Vardos—There could be additional costs funded from other programs that have the common cause of helping deliver the citizenship test.

Ms Ellis—I have some figures for you on participation in the Let's Participate course. Across the country, in 2005-06, the average is 18 per cent of clients enrolled in the AMEP participated in the Let's Participate course, and there was a completion rate of 92 per cent.

Senator HURLEY—Given the citizenship testing requirements, you would expect that level of participation to rise considerably, I would expect.

Ms Ellis—I would not want to speculate. We can only report on what has happened to date. I do not know what might happen in the future.

Senator HURLEY—There must have been some discussion of not only the implementation of this test but also what take-up there would be of these other programs that support it. One would think there would be a discussion of how people would be helped particularly. As I understand it, most of the migrants who come to this country would be in the skilled work category or some other category that would require a certain level of English. Basically what we are talking about here is people who come in on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program whose level of English might make passing the citizenship test very difficult. There must have been some consideration as to how they would be supported through a citizenship test, because it is precisely that group of people to whom a passport means most, because a permanent roots in another country would mean most. They are often the people who are most keen to take up citizenship.

Ms Forster—Perhaps I can just point out that it is on the public record—and the minister and, I believe, the Prime Minister have also stated—that those who have literacy issues, or are illiterate or have very literacy needs, will have a different pathway to a test. We are looking at some options for how we may assist certain people to be in a position to do the test in a different way from possibly others who would need to do the computer based test. I think that has actually been looked at. It is not necessarily just about the Let's Participate course; that is one aspect. Other aspects are being looked at in terms of how we actually administer the test as well as the sort of resource material that is available and will be available to people who are wanting to become citizens. So there will be the resource book, plus the minister is on record as having said that there will be audiovisual material available as well. Those things add up to a package of assistance that will be available. So I do not think it is only about the

Let's Participate course, but that is obviously going to be an important part in terms of the participation.

Senator HURLEY—Let's talk about those other options for people who may have difficulty with English or literacy. What options are there?

Ms Forster—They are under consideration by government at the moment.

Senator HURLEY—Under what area will they be funded?

Ms Forster—As part of the citizenship test development, we have been given \$107.4 million over the period of five years, and that is part of that money.

Senator HURLEY—The test is due to be implemented possibly sometime later this year—

Ms Forster—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—but we are not yet certain about what options are available for people with—

Ms Forster—They are being considered by government.

Senator HURLEY—So the options are there, but they are being considered by government.

Ms Forster—They are being considered by government.

Senator HURLEY—And you are not able to say what kinds of options they could be?

Mr Metcalfe—That goes to policy, I am afraid, and we really cannot go there.

Senator HURLEY—You cannot advise what alternative form a test could take in other jurisdictions or other areas?

Mr Metcalfe—I really think that that is just trying to ask the same question in a different way.

CHAIR—That is a very hypothetical question, I think, Senator, and I think Mr Metcalfe has answered the question quite well.

Senator HURLEY—I fail to see why it is such a secret. Anyway, I am happy to move on.

Mr Metcalfe—I am sure that all will be advised in due course.

Senator HURLEY—Going back to the United Kingdom experience, Sir Bernard Crick—who was chair of the advisory group reporting on their test—said:

My committee ... did recommend that as well as taking the machine-readable test, people should either have some community work in an English-speaking environment or they should have some sort of adult education classes in citizenship. But the government turned that one down because of money and resources.

Was there anything put forward along those lines for the Australian test? Or was the machine test the only one contemplated?

Senator Ellison—Mr Chair, that is advice to government, which we do not disclose. I do not think that can be answered. If there is anything I can add to that, I will.

CHAIR—Thank you, Minister.

Senator HURLEY—I want to go back perhaps to the question Senator Murray addressed about resource booklets and audiovisual materials. Will the ‘Australian way of life’ booklet complement the Let’s Participate course? How will that all work together?

Mr Vardos—The ‘Australian way of life’ booklet is a composite of material from a range of sources. Whilst I could not swear on a Bible at this point, there clearly will be overlap between what is in that booklet and what is in a range of other materials. For example, if you were to go into the PM&C website on national symbols, you would find material there that might find its way into the test resource book and the ‘Australian way of life’ book. The objective is to make sure that they are all complementary and not contradictory.

Senator HURLEY—What about the level of English? We have just heard that the Let’s Participate course has been adjusted to account for a lower level of English knowledge. What about the ‘Australian way of life’ material?

Mr Vardos—All I can say is that it is being drafted in a way that is as easy to read as possible.

Senator HURLEY—How will that be trialled? Will that be tested?

Mr Vardos—I cannot answer that question at the moment because I am not entirely sure. The project actually sits in another part of the organisation. I will need to take advice on that and perhaps get back to you on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. In terms of the implementation of the test, I think it was at the last estimates that we were being advised that additional staff would be taken on by DIAC and that it would be DIAC staff who would administer the test at all times. Is that still the proposal?

Mr Vardos—Yes, that has been firmed up. All of our national network, all of our offices, are being geared up to be able to administer the test to provide a venue for running the test. It will be staff of our department who will be the test administrators. Including where we might use the premises of third parties to get broader coverage beyond our own network, in the initial period at least—and I cannot put a definitive time frame on it—it will be our departmental staff who will be travelling to those other locations to get broad national coverage.

Mr Metcalfe—Senator Crossin asked us a bit about this yesterday in general questions as well, so there is some information there.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you. Can you confirm that it would be 109 extra staff for this task?

Mr Vardos—Yes, 109. We are working on the basis of approximately 80 additional staff being recruited for our national network—our state and territory office network—and the other 19 are various positions in the national office, including in the task force that I oversee.

Senator HURLEY—I presume that those staff will be put in areas of most need. I presume that most of those would go to the areas of high immigration, like New South Wales and Victoria.

Mr Vardos—Yes. We are obviously looking at business levels, and, wherever there is the highest volume of business, they will get more staff. So Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane will have a higher proportion of those staff than, say, Darwin, Hobart and Canberra. My colleague points out that 80 and 19 only makes 99 and not 109. There are obviously another 10 staff in various other positions—

Senator HURLEY—Floating about.

Mr Vardos—other than my task force.

Senator HURLEY—There are no plans to set up additional regional centres?

Mr Metcalfe—No. As I am sure you are aware, essentially we have staff in two major locations in Sydney at Parramatta and in the CBD, two in Melbourne in the city and at Dandenong, and then in the other state capital cities and in Darwin and the ACT. We also have staff also in Cairns and Thursday Island. We are not planning on opening any new offices but rather securing some additional floor space. In particular, in Sydney we are looking at Parramatta where we are moving to a new building. We have been able to take on some extra space there as part of that.

Mr Vardos—It will be a dedicated facility and Parramatta will be our largest facility for testing in our national network.

Senator HURLEY—There will obviously be some travelling required from those centres to regional areas where people want to take a citizenship test. Will that be to whatever small country town or outback station is required, or will people be required to travel to regional centres or the nearest large town?

Mr Vardos—We have mapped business levels over the last couple of years, and we have identified 47 locations around the country, including the DIAC network where we will need to have a test venue facility. We have approximately 13 DIAC offices, and the rest to make up that 47 will be other regional locations mapped according to current business levels. That is where we are looking to establish a facility using third parties to provide the physical facilities for people to come to do the test, but our staff will travel to those locations to administer the test.

Senator HURLEY—So apart from Parramatta, there is no new office space or new property being acquired as part of—

Mr Vardos—No new DIAC office space. Beyond the existing DIAC network, we are looking at using the facilities of third parties.

Mr Metcalfe—Just so that we are absolutely clear, we are looking at taking out some additional space not only in Parramatta and some of our other offices, but we are not establishing a sort of separate office. In Melbourne, for example, I think we will take out some additional floor space. We have approximately 80 to 90 staff Australia-wide and we will need to provide them with facilities; and, of course, they will need interview rooms and that sort of thing. But we are not going to open up an office in Toowoomba, where we do not have that office, but that is an example, I suspect, of one of the centres where we would have facilities that we would use on a regular basis with travelling officers.

Mr Vardos—Mr Metcalfe is right. Some of our offices are at capacity in terms of utilisation of space and we cannot squeeze in a test centre; so in that case, yes, we may be leasing some more office space, but it will be under the aegis of the existing state office network.

Senator HURLEY—For the other centres where you are going to be operating out of third party offices, how will they be acquired?

Mr Vardos—That is currently before government. We are negotiating to come up with the other 34 venues.

Senator HURLEY—Will rent be payable at those sites?

Mr Vardos—That is all under negotiation.

Senator HURLEY—So there is no budget at this stage; it would be all under the delivery of the citizenship test?

Ms Forster—Yes, it is. I have not got the exact amount in front of me, but certainly we did budget for some travel for regional test centres and also an assumption that we would need to potentially lease some space or enter into negotiations, in some instances, around the country. I do not have that detail in front of me. That was in terms of ensuring that we were adequately covered with that area.

Senator HURLEY—Currently, of course, I think the majority of citizenship tests and citizenship ceremonies are conducted by local government in their council offices. Then there is a provision for public ceremonies between those times for people to take out citizenship. How is it envisaged that these tests will be done? Will they be done like that, generally speaking, in a certain block of time, or will it be on demand?

Mr Vardos—Just to be absolutely clear about this, local government is not involved now in conducting interviews and will not be involved in testing, but the conferral ceremonies that local government has traditionally been involved with will continue. There has been no change to that: test, apply, grant, conferral. There is no change to that. We estimate that 87 per cent of current business levels are conducted in DIAC offices, and the balance of 13 per cent—that is the interview—takes place in Australia Post offices. We expect that the same proportion will be maintained under the new framework. Across our DIAC office network we will be covering 87 per cent of the business case load, so we are looking at only 13 per cent of the case load, the test, being conducted in a third party's premises somewhere outside metropolitan Australia.

Senator HURLEY—But the 87 per cent can walk into a DIAC office and—

Mr Vardos—Sorry. The second part to your question: there will be a booking system. There will be a national number that a prospective test taker will phone and make a booking at their nearest test facility. It will be not done in blocks, but on a rolling basis, so that we maximise the use of the workstations that we have available. So, if someone finishes their test in 35 minutes, it does not mean that that workstation is then blocked off for the balance of the hour. Someone else can come in as soon as they leave. So it is a rolling basis but on an appointment system. As I said earlier on, with an appointment system, theoretically all the slots are taken. But if someone fails the test and there is an opportunity for them to sit it again

in an hour in that test venue, there is nothing to prevent them doing so if there is a cubicle and a computer available.

Senator HURLEY—Let me just use an example perhaps to make it easier for me to understand. In South Australia a number of migrant workers have gone to Naracoorte for a couple of reasons: one because of the meat processing facility there and one because of the vineyards there. Say there was a family, three or four people, who wanted to take the citizenship test and they were living in Naracoorte. If they rang up to make a booking, how would that work? Would they go into Mount Gambier, a couple of hours away? Or would someone come to Naracoorte? What kind of length of time would they be looking at?

Ms Forster—Perhaps I can clarify something here. At the moment we are looking at having a contact centre arrangement so that people will be able to make bookings at a time suitable to them. We are definitely looking to negotiate facilities in as many regional areas as is reasonable based on the current spread of migrants and the settlement patterns that we have seen as well as the citizenship locations at the moment.

Obviously, we cannot be in every single place at every single time. But if there were to emerge, over time, a higher settlement pattern in a particular area then obviously we would be very interested in that and keen to look, at that point, at whether or not there was something else that could be done in a particular location, if it were indeed a location in which we had not already been able to negotiate facilities.

Mr Vardos—By way of example, to complete the loop: if there were an increase in migrant settlement in Naracoorte and we did not have an office there, leased or whatever, in which to do a citizenship test and, if the business levels were there and the nearest test centre were maybe two or three hours away, we could say, for example, that on the first Tuesday of the month DIAC would come to do a test there. We could accommodate that growing demand in that way, rather than have a permanent facility there with the on-costs that that would attract.

Senator HURLEY—But, assuming that we stay at the present modest number of immigrants in Naracoorte, would my family be able to go to the local post office, say, and wait for the DIAC person to come and do the test there? Is that how it would work?

Mr Metcalfe—I think that is what we are saying. In those circumstances, beyond the 34 or so regional centres—which take us up to pretty well 100 per cent of our case load—we will certainly be wanting to find ways to ensure we provide reasonable access for people who might be living in more remote or isolated communities. We do that at the moment. Our state offices have regional outreach arrangements whereby officers travel and undertake a range of work on a regular basis in regional Australia. To take your example of the family in Naracoorte, if we had officers who were going through that region then we would make an arrangement so that the family could be interviewed, whether that were at the post office, the local shire council chambers or wherever. We are very mindful of the need to ensure that this particular experience is accessible in a reasonable way to people anywhere in Australia.

Senator HURLEY—I think that is a reasonable plan, and I do not expect anyone would imagine that they would be seen the next day or whenever they wanted. But in those regional areas a problem might arise if someone failed the citizenship test and wanted to repeat it,

particularly where the rest of their family, say, had passed the test and had gone to have the citizenship ceremony. In that circumstance they might get a bit more impatient about opportunities to take the test. That is where the department may run into difficulties, from that kind of demand.

Mr Metcalfe—I think you make a fair point but I would like to think that we would not run into difficulties and that our planning would be such that we would be able to provide a flexible range of options for someone. We might do that either by providing some flexibility for when they might expect to next be travelling to a capital city or to a regional centre where there was a more permanent facility. Or we might come to them—though, realistically, that would only be a few times a year, depending on the location and whatever. We will design, in our contact and other arrangements, ways of ensuring that those exceptional cases—and I think we are probably talking about less than one per cent of our case load—are able to be accommodated and the arrangements are not made too difficult. So we share your concern, and I am sure that we will come up with arrangements that will cover it.

Senator HURLEY—Because the DIAC official will be there for the interview and the testing, in terms of the actual program and the computer setup, I take it that the computer program will not need to be networked in any way and will just be a stand-alone thing. How would that work?

Ms Forster—I do not claim to be an expert in the IT area—far from it, in fact. However, I do know that we have IT security concerns if it were networked in any way into a whole variety of systems. At the same time, while it needs to be a stand-alone product, we do obviously want to ensure that the results are passed back to us and that over time we can have a management system in place that allows those records to be available to us and to the client in terms of their application for citizenship. It has to be a stand-alone product in terms of the computer program for the test itself, but obviously we also need to ensure, for management reporting purposes and administration purposes, that we have indeed married citizenship test results with citizenship applications.

Senator HURLEY—How is that going to work with a stand-alone system?

Ms Forster—The stand-alone system is the program itself, the actual test. We certainly will not have it networked in any way, shape or form while the person is actually doing that test. In terms of a systems administration function—ensuring that those results are consolidated, are stored appropriately and are available to us at the time of the person's application—it needs to be fully compatible with our current systems and networks. There are two components.

Senator HURLEY—I understand that. Will the DIAC officer enter the results?

Ms Forster—The results will be available. If a person answers the questions correctly, then that will automatically show up as a pass mark. The information about the person will be entered at the time that they register for the test in terms of walking in or talking to the test administrator, and that information needs to be linked up down the track with any citizenship application that is subsequently lodged.

Senator HURLEY—Has that connection been devised?

Ms Forster—We certainly have a whole team of IT experts—as I said I am not one of them—dedicated to looking at those issues at the moment, and that is indeed a substantial part of the budget allocation.

Mr Vardos—There will not be a certificate that the citizenship applicant brings along from the test to lodge with the test application. It will be a systems-based result that we can verify when the application is lodged.

Senator HURLEY—I understand that, and that brings up a whole set of problems with it, as does a certificate, because you do have to be careful about matching the right results to the right application and it has the potential to go awry.

Ms Forster—Identity is very important. We are certainly at pains to ensure that the identity of the person is established prior to them actually doing the test and that that is matched up later with the application for citizenship itself. That is a critical component.

Senator HURLEY—Will that be one of the roles of the DIAC officer to establish correct—

Ms Forster—Indeed.

Senator HURLEY—Will that be a photo identification? How will that operate?

Ms Forster—The full details of that are being worked out at the moment but we anticipate at this stage that photo identity will be part of the identity verification procedure.

Senator HURLEY—I guess that would be a drivers licence or something like that.

Ms Forster—That could well form part of the suite of requirements for establishing identity.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of establishing identity, have you discussed any of those proposals with the Attorney-General's Department about the framework that you might employ?

Ms Forster—The framework would certainly need to fit in with the whole national framework for identity, so yes.

Senator LUDWIG—No. Have you? That is the question.

Mr Metcalfe—I think what we are saying is that the Attorney-General's Department has provided a national identity verification framework which basically sets the standard and the advice that we have is that we will comply with that framework. But I think you are asking whether we have consulted directly with AG's—

Senator LUDWIG—Yes, consulted with the Attorney-General's Department about the framework and how you will then—

Mr Metcalfe—If we haven't, we will.

Senator LUDWIG—So you have not at this point?

Mr Metcalfe—I said 'if we haven't'. I am not sure if it has occurred or not. If it hasn't, that is a useful suggestion, thank you.

Ms Forster—We will need to take that on notice.

Senator LUDWIG—So you do not know whether you have consulted the Attorney-General's Department?

Ms Forster—I do not know off-hand.

Senator HURLEY—Can you advise me what kind of public information activity is planned for publicising the new scheme.

Ms van den Heuvel—We are at the preliminary stages of developing some communication activity. It is very much at the developmental stage.

Senator HURLEY—So you have no idea at this stage of the scope of the promotional program?

Ms van den Heuvel—No, we will undertake developmental research and that will then inform the communication strategy from there.

Senator HURLEY—What kind of developmental research?

Ms van den Heuvel—As with any government campaign, we would be going out and testing awareness—what people actually know about the test at this stage, perceptions, the sort of information that they are seeking—and then we would tailor information accordingly.

Senator HURLEY—Who will do that research? Who will it be done by?

Ms van den Heuvel—We have contracted Blue Moon.

Senator HURLEY—How much will that cost?

Ms van den Heuvel—We have allocated \$100,000 for the initial developmental research.

Senator HURLEY—And the cost of the total project?

Ms van den Heuvel—The total project over five years has been allocated approximately \$29 million.

Senator HURLEY—Just for the communication part of it?

Ms van den Heuvel—For the communication component. But we have not allocated any funding across that. All we have done so far are the developmentals.

Senator HURLEY—You would have to assume that a lot of that will be in the front end as people are gearing up for the program. That is a considerable amount of money so I assume that would include television advertising and that kind of promotional work.

Ms van den Heuvel—That would certainly be something that we would be considering.

Senator HURLEY—Parliament has recently passed the Australian Citizenship Bill, which has substantial changes as to the way that citizenship operates, including a lot of changes to the way dual citizenship works and to eligibility for citizenship, plus changes as to the requirement for the amount of time people spend in Australia before they become eligible. Is there a publicity program to disseminate that information? First of all, when will that become law? Secondly, what kind of publicity is proposed for that?

Ms Ellis—The expectation at this stage is that the legislation will commence on 1 July this year. There has already been considerable publicity given to the policy changes since the first policy changes were announced in 2004. The expectation is that there will be advertisements

in national media to draw to people's attention that the legislation will commence on 1 July, if that is what is confirmed but that is certainly our expectation, and to draw to their attention the major changes that will impact on people. As you have mentioned, the most significant impact will be from the residence changes.

Senator HURLEY—What about overseas? It will particularly impact on people who have lost their Australian citizenship and are now eligible to take it up again.

Ms Ellis—There will be information available on the citizenship website and information has been progressively given to our overseas posts and embassies. We will certainly provide that information to those embassies.

Senator HURLEY—What is the budget for that component?

Ms Ellis—There is no particular budget for that. That is part of our overall provision of information to overseas posts about changes to the legislation.

Senator HURLEY—So that will be done by the communications branch within DIAC?

Ms Ellis—That is actually going to be undertaken by my branch, being the provision of information to the embassies. As you may be aware, there has already been a considerable amount of attention, certainly overseas, and also through the Southern Cross Group in terms of drawing attention to the lifting of the age limit for the resumption of citizenship by people who have renounced their citizenship and the new provisions for access to citizenship by people whose parents were born in Australia.

Senator HURLEY—Just to clarify: the new citizenship testing information will be provided by the communications branch of DIAC and that will be administered by—

Ms van den Heuvel—Working with the task force.

Senator HURLEY—How many people are there within the communications branch?

Ms van den Heuvel—Within the communications branch proper there are 39, but for this particular activity at the moment there are five non-ongoing staff working on the project and also on the Life in Australia project.

Senator HURLEY—Non-ongoing, as in contractors specifically for this task?

Ms van den Heuvel—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—What is the duration of their contracts? Is it five years as well?

Ms van den Heuvel—It will taper off. I think we have five in the first year, then we are tapering off to four, then we go down to two, 1.5 and 1.5.

CHAIR—Having paused for a short break, we will resume.

Mr Metcalfe—Mr Chair, if I could ask Senator Hurley, through you: you mentioned a couple of questions on 2.5, Systems for People—the IT component of outcome 2. I have not got an officer here who is able to specifically talk about that issue. I could ask that person to come over from the department now or alternatively I could talk in general terms or we could take the questions on notice. I just wanted to alert you to that.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, I do not think it would take a specialist. I think it would be on a more general level.

Mr Metcalfe—Okay, thank you.

Senator HURLEY—If not, I am happy for it to be taken on notice. It is much more a general question.

[4.51 pm]

CHAIR—We will now move to outcome 2.4. Is that correct?

Senator HURLEY—Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR—Thank you again to officers for advice in outcome 2.3.

Senator HURLEY—There are a number of developments in this area—Promoting the benefits of a united and diverse society. We have had some months for the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship to get into the job. One area in particular that I wanted to explore was the actual role of multiculturalism in our society. In a speech to the Islamic Council of Victoria and the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in Melbourne on 23 February this year, the assistant minister shared her thoughts about the concept of multicultural affairs and talked a bit about the change in the department's name. She said as part of that speech:

Rumours of the 'death' of multiculturalism are greatly exaggerated. But multiculturalism—as a term—has become redundant ...

She repeats later:

In my view, I think multiculturalism as a label, is past its use-by date.

I think there was some discussion earlier about multiculturalism and the concepts of assimilation and integration. Can we just clarify whether the instruction of the department is now that 'multiculturalism' is a redundant term and that it is past its use-by date?

Mr Metcalfe—No.

Senator HURLEY—As far as the department is concerned, multiculturalism—it is a part of its title—is still the policy?

Mr Metcalfe—As I explained yesterday morning, I think in response to questions from Senator Ludwig, the administrative arrangements orders which describe the role of the department continue to refer to the term 'multicultural affairs' and it is for that reason that the department continues to have a citizenship, settlement and multicultural affairs division and a multicultural affairs branch.

Senator HURLEY—I have asked this next question previously at a couple of estimates as we have gone through ministers and parliamentary secretaries and assistant ministers. It is about the status of the Australian multicultural policy which was based on a policy that was developed for 2003 that had a three-year life through to 2006. In October 2006 I asked a question about that policy and was told that it was at that time in the in-tray of the then parliamentary secretary, Mr Andrew Robb. I followed up that question in February this year and asked whose in-tray it happened to be in at the moment. When I asked if it had been moved to Ms Gambaro's in-tray or if some action had been taken, Mr Metcalfe said, 'You're absolutely right; it has moved in-trays.' Therefore I take it that it was in Ms Gambaro's in-

tray. Can you give me a follow-up on the status of that policy and whether it is being developed? What has happened to it?

Mr Metcalfe—The latest advice I have is the government is currently considering that document.

Senator HURLEY—It is still considering that document.

Mr Metcalfe—That is correct.

Senator HURLEY—The department's website says under the heading 'Australian government policy':

The current policy ... *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* ... is the ... Government's key statement on cultural diversity policy.

As I said, it was designed for a three-year period; it expired in 2003. That it is still under consideration does indicate, certainly if the term 'multiculturalism' has passed its use-by date in the government's eyes, that it is certainly down the pecking order. Can I ask if the new assistant minister has requested any policy advice on this area from the department.

Mr Metcalfe—Sorry, in relation to precisely what?

Senator HURLEY—To multicultural policy and, as it is described, that 'key statement on cultural diversity policy'.

Mr Metcalfe—I can confirm that *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* was a policy that was stated to be in effect between 2003 and 2006 and, as I indicated earlier, the question of a new policy statement is currently with the government.

Senator LUDWIG—What are we operating under now? If the other one was to 2006 and we have got one under consideration, what are we operating under now?

Mr Metcalfe—As I indicated earlier to Senator Hurley, the department does have responsibility for both multicultural affairs and ethnic affairs. It has a number of cultural diversity programs such as the Living in Harmony program and the national action plan. Funding for those was announced last year. It was four-year funding, and we continue to operate those programs.

Senator LUDWIG—But in terms of an overall policy framework, you have now got a policy vacuum. You have got a policy that went through to 2006 and now you have got one sitting on a parliamentary secretary's desk. Therefore in terms of an overall policy direction you are bereft of one.

Mr Metcalfe—I think we are fairly clear on what our policy directions are. The PBS talks about our portfolio responsibilities and major areas of responsibility. The assistant minister and the minister provide daily direction to the department in administering our programs. So I think we are quite clear on the direction of those programs.

Senator LUDWIG—So are you saying you do not need a policy?

Mr Metcalfe—No, I am saying that it is a matter for the government as to when it wishes to issue a policy statement in relation to a particular matter. But in the meantime there are funded policies administered by the department and those provide services every day.

Senator HURLEY—I think there is considerable discussion among stakeholder groups as to where they are going with multicultural affairs and what the status of the policy of multiculturalism is, but I appreciate that you cannot respond any further on that but you can respond more on what your department is actually doing. I would like to clarify what is happening with the multicultural supporting programs. The website lists those multicultural support programs. Living in Harmony is certainly receiving continuing funding and the website talks about building relationships between people and addressing intolerance. I want to explore the Living in Harmony proposal a bit. I am not too sure where this fits but I understand that the Muslim Community Reference Group, which was initiated by the Prime Minister and then came under the focus of the department of immigration, is not operating. It has put in its final report and is no longer meeting. Is that so?

Ms Pope—That is correct.

Senator HURLEY—I understand the final report that it put in, *Building on social cohesion, harmony and security: an action plan by the Muslim Community Reference Group*, was designed to give direction in this particular area.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Certainly the report by the Muslim Community Reference Group was part of the community consultation that the department conducted and it informed the development of the national action plan to build on social cohesion, harmony and security.

Senator HURLEY—Where does the responsibility for whether or not these recommendations are implemented rest now?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—It rests with us. It contains 48 recommendations, and government projects since about September 2005 have responded to about 42 recommendations. We are, under the implementation of the national action plan, still looking at the remaining six recommendations.

Senator HURLEY—For which of the recommendations has the decision been made to implement them?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The report itself does have a section under each area of focus like employment, education, leadership capacity. It talks about government responses to those.

Senator HURLEY—Let us go through the government response to those. For ‘Volunteering and Leadership’ it says:

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed ... A literature search and possible extension to the National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds will support the enhancement of the current recommendations of the National Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities Survey and include the development of a train the trainer programme ...

What area of the department is responsible for that?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The national action plan is coordinated by my branch.

Senator HURLEY—Has that literature search been done?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I will have to take that on notice. My recollection is that it was part of our MOU with FaCSIA and we are working with Volunteering Australia to progress that. I am not clear on whether that has been completed or is still ongoing.

Senator HURLEY—The next one is ‘Muslim Community Volunteering in Emergency Management’, and the response is that this has been:

Addressed through the Emergency Management Australia (EMA) initiative to develop strategies for encouraging members of Muslim and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities to participate in volunteer emergency services activities within their communities.

In what way has this been addressed?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—It has been addressed by Emergency Management Australia, which is part of the Attorney-General’s Department.

Senator HURLEY—And ‘Helping Law Enforcement to Address Discrimination’ has been addressed through HREOC?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—‘Helping Young People to Deal with Discrimination’—again through HREOC?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—‘Registration of Imams and Benchmarking of Religious Leadership Skills’—is that part of the national action plan?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—Has the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, which was part of that, now been funded and announced?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The national centre of excellence is rested with the Department of Education, Science and Training, and the \$8 million over four years has been allocated. The tendering process was commissioned a few months ago and then after that there was an announcement that the University of Melbourne was a successful tenderer along with the Griffith University and the University of Western Sydney. But the responsibility for that national centre of excellence is with the Department of Education, Science and Training.

Senator HURLEY—Was ‘Registration of Imams’ proceeded with?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We held the first conference of Australian imams in September last year. I think it was the first one ever held in Australia and 100 imams attended. After that there was a council of Australian imams being set up. The government facilitated that conference for imams to come together to see how they could be trained in the Australian context, but the matter of registration and standards and so on would be a matter for them.

Senator HURLEY—So that will not be a matter that the government will be pursuing?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—No, not at this stage, but we are keeping a watching brief because I think women and young people in particular are very interested in the role of imams because imams are highly regarded by their stakeholders. The way that they operate or the way that they preach would be of great interest to us, so we are working with the communities to ensure that the standards are acceptable. Ultimately it is a matter for their own board.

Senator HURLEY—‘Produce a Booklet Outlining the Role, Position and Rights of Muslim Women’—that is through the national action plan as well. Has the project themed ‘Building Identity and Resisting Radicalisation’ begun?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I may have to take that on notice. My recollection is that this was part of the funding in 2005-06, so it would have been completed. In 2005-06 our department received \$5.9 million to develop and implement the national action plan, and we commissioned some 58 projects. I may have to take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—The project description says:

It will be based on the research and development of educational material to explain Islam’s history and community-building role in civic life. It will also cover the theological and political counter-extremist material and a counter-extremist handbook, for radio, internet and print publishing.

If those documents could be tabled for the committee, I would be interested to see them.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I will have to take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—We have ‘International Literature on Rigid Thinking’, where it says:

This project incorporates, as a subcomponent of the first phase of the project, an international literature review. Furthermore, a small Research Unit has been established within the Multicultural Affairs Branch of DIMA whose work includes scanning international publications and policies for information on understanding rigid thinking and how to counter it.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—As part of the development of the national action plan, we commissioned preliminary research and community consultation through the MCRG, for example, in order to inform us as to how we should develop the plan and how we should commission projects. So we have commissioned a number of research proposals, part of which is to understand for what reason young people become radicalised and what grievances they may have in terms of their functions in our society. A number of research projects that we have commissioned seem to indicate that second generation Muslims in particular have some identity crisis. They do not feel that they are accepted in this country of birth—33 per cent of Muslims were born in Australia. They do have a number of issues which we are trying to address through, for example, some mentoring projects—leadership, building capacity and all those things. Part of the research is also to see what other countries are doing. The UK has established a number of departments and agencies to deal with the social policy of radicalisation, and we are learning from their research findings as well, so it is not just research in Australia but internationally. That is part of the way that we are moving forward.

Senator HURLEY—Has that research unit been established?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator HURLEY—How many staff are—

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—It is part of my branch. Currently it has two people under the director of the national action plan. We have been given \$500,000 each year between now and 2009-10 for research under the national action plan, but we also have \$100,000 for research under cultural diversity. So it is a fairly significant amount of money and we want to build on what we have gained in the last 18 months or so.

Senator HURLEY—It says here: ‘Scanning international publications and policies for information on understanding rigid thinking’. Can you give me a definition of ‘rigid thinking’? What does that mean? Is that from the Muslim point of view or the Australian point of view?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Some Muslim Australians have told us through community consultation that there are various models of Islam—some moderate and some extremist—and I think that for ‘rigid thinking’ we would use the term ‘extremist’ rather than ‘moderate’.

Senator HURLEY—So you are scanning information for extremist policies and how to counter it?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—How are you sourcing that information in Australia? Are you looking specifically and are you working with security people?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We do have a number of ways of approaching it. Perhaps I can say that there is a hard way and a soft way. Through our multicultural affairs programs over the years, for example through the Living in Harmony project, we have focused on young people and how they feel affected and how we can help them through employment, education and leadership building. Through the national action plan we focus more sharply on Muslim young people in particular, to see what reason they may have for feeling attracted to extremism or radicalisation. We do it in a number of ways. We work with some youth groups—for example, forums for Islamic studies—and also through employment and workers. For example, we have a partnership with the Queensland government to employ young Muslim workers in order to reach out to youth at risk and to try to understand the reason that they are still at the margin. So there are a few ways that we are approaching the issue.

Senator HURLEY—Are you sourcing literature that young people read or internet sites? How are you going about that kind of research?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We have one project in Sydney where we have commissioned some literature review or theological understanding of Islam and also to look at how certain views can be outlined for us so that we can understand further what the issues are. This is ongoing and long-term work and we are still at the beginning of that process.

Senator HURLEY—As I understand it, a lot of the information is coming over the internet rather than through published literature. Is that part of the research program?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—As I mentioned earlier, we approach it in a different way. We look at the literature review domestically, because there are a number of Australian academics who have been working in this area. We have held some lunchtime seminars in the last few months, inviting academics to come and talk to us about some of their work in this field. Overseas, this is an area of interest of many countries—Canada, the UK, the US and even Japan and Thailand. We are looking at various issues, mechanisms and ways to see if we can better understand moderate Islam, or extremism and radicalisation processes—all those things together.

Senator HURLEY—In the unit you have, do you have Arabic speaking people?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Not in my branch at the moment, but we do have a number of community liaison officers in our state offices, a number of whom speak Arabic, and they are the link between us and ethnic communities, including Muslim communities.

Senator HURLEY—Do they translate any literature in Arabic that is coming into Australia?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—It is not their role and it is not their core business but, if necessary, they can.

Ms Pope—Senator, I think there might be a slight misunderstanding. I think you might be asking, ‘Are we watching what is available on the net and what young people might be accessing in Australia?’ Is that it?

Senator HURLEY—I do not expect you to monitor everything that is coming in. The stated role is to scan publications for information on understanding rigid thinking and how to counter it. I am just wondering how you access that.

Ms Pope—I think Dr Nguyen-Hoan has answered that question.

Senator HURLEY—According to this report, the first of the Crisis Management Workshops, which are aimed at improving crisis management for the Muslim community, was held in Darwin in 2006 and a Sydney workshop was foreshadowed.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That workshop was held by the Attorney-General’s Department. When we received funding in 2006-06, we also provided money to a number of Commonwealth agencies, so that was a matter for A-G’s to develop. They held the workshops in Darwin and in Sydney.

Senator HURLEY—Were they the only two locations?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—The report says that the Security in Government Conference was completed and that a final report was due in October 2006. Was that report finalised?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That conference was also held and organised by the Attorney-General’s Department. I am sure that under the MOU they would have provided us with the report, which would have basically said that a conference was held and a number of speakers, including our former deputy secretary, Mr Abul Rizvi, spoke about the relevant issues.

Senator HURLEY—The report says under ‘Emergency Management’ that there was to be research and development for case studies and learning material for a national training program. It also said that pilot workshops took place. What has been the progress there?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—If it said that that it did take place, it would have.

Senator HURLEY—What does ‘emergency management’ mean in that context?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I do not have a copy of the report with me, so I will have to take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—That is fine. Thank you.

Mr Metcalfe—I think Emergency Management Australia will probably be appearing before the committee tomorrow. They might be able to update you on that. I suspect it includes programs around volunteer and emergency services workers and that sort of thing.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is right. I think that that would be part of it.

Senator HURLEY—Among the outstanding issues highlighted in the report was ‘working with converts to Islam’. The report says:

Members’ feedback is that converts to Islam can feel isolated from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. This may increase the risk of their developing a distorted view of Islam and being vulnerable to radicalisation.

The report goes on to say:

Research and other strategies to support this group need to be considered for funding as soon as possible.

Have there been any developments on that issue?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is one of the recommendations that we have not been able to take up. As I mentioned earlier, there are 48 recommendations and we have responded to only 42—mainly because we wanted to get on with some other issues first. But that does not mean that we are not going to visit that.

Senator HURLEY—A number of groups of areas are covered in the report—things like community engagement and education and training. Apart from those ones that have been addressed already, are there any priorities for addressing any particular area?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The areas of focus in that report by the MCRG are very similar to the areas of focus of the national action plan itself—that is, education, employment, leaders, capacity building and enhancing national security. They are the major areas.

Senator HURLEY—It just seems to me that some of these areas are perhaps a little woolly—that they do not really have much focus—

CHAIR—Senator, could you try and be specific with your questions.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, I am trying to be, thank you, Chair, and I will give a specific example in illustration of my way of thinking. There is, under the heading ‘Community Engagement’, in addition to ‘Mentoring’, a proposal called:

Connectedness—Interdependence—Regard—Commitment—Love—Empathy (CIRCLE)

The report says:

The Australian Government, through the national action plan, funded the Islamic Women’s Welfare Council of Victoria to undertake a brief research and scoping project to ensure a best practice approach to implementing a series of CIRCLE workshops.

I do understand of course that putting something in summary like that may not do justice to the actual work being done there. Obviously this was a proposal coming out of the MCRG under the auspices of the national action plan. What kind of process do projects have to go through to get approval? Are they sent out to wider groups, for instance?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—There are a number of elements whereby national action plan projects get approval. The first element is Commonwealth-state partnerships, and we go through the

usual process of getting state and territory governments to put proposals to us and then we seek ministerial approval. The second one is community projects, and we are going through that process now for the next financial year. Based on research, previous projects and community consultation, including through the MCRG report, we set our criteria and areas of focus—for example, at-risk young people, and once again leadership building seems to be a major issue among mostly young people. And then, through our community liaison officers, who have regular contacts with community groups, we invite community groups to put in applications. So, last year we had eight MOUs with all state and territory governments in 2006-07 and, from my recollection, we had about 15 community projects. For research projects, we also base our proposals on suggestions from academics who are working in the field. But all those go through ministerial approval. And they have to align with the national action plan areas of focus, which were agreed to by the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in July last year.

Senator HURLEY—So it goes through all those consultation processes, it goes through the ministerial council and it goes through the minister?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—No. The national action plan itself was approved by the ministerial council, which set a general direction and areas of focus. Then we have three or four elements of the program: research, community projects in partnership with states and territories and community consultation—like the youth forums that we hold across the country, so that we understand what young people are thinking. Then, once we have crystallised the projects, we submit them to our minister for approval.

Senator HURLEY—So now the Muslim Community Reference Group has gone, it does not go through any other reference group before it goes to the minister?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—No.

Senator LUDWIG—The Muslim Community Reference Group has completed its work and provided this report—is that what has happened?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—And when you go through the report, some of the outcomes talk about the perceived conflict between Muslim and Australian identity. One of the points under ‘Solutions’ on page 36 is:

A more proactive approach to promoting multiculturalism should be taken in schools.

Would you agree with that?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Those are words by the MCRG.

Senator LUDWIG—Yes, but I am asking you. In your position would you agree with that?

Mr Metcalfe—I think that asking a public servant whether they agree with a statement by a reference group is not really something that is appropriate.

Senator LUDWIG—All right. Then more broadly, does the role that you work in agree with that statement? I mean you, Mr Metcalfe, as the secretary of your department. Does your department agree with that outcome?

Mr Metcalfe—I think the comment I just applied to Dr Nguyen-Hoan applies equally to me. I do not think it is my role to express an opinion about an advisory group report. Our job is to provide advice to government and to implement government policy and programs.

Senator LUDWIG—All right.

CHAIR—That point is noted, Mr Metcalfe.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of looking at the outcomes from the Muslim youth summit, have any of those solutions been put forward to be undertaken by the department?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes. The national youth summit was held in December 2005 and 51 recommendations were put forward. We have held state based summits since then and similar issues have been raised as well. We have taken them into account, as I mentioned earlier, in commissioning projects for us to implement. In 2006-07 we have a number of projects focusing on young people. Some of them focus on their employment, because some of them said that they have experienced discrimination based on their names or the wearing of their headscarves. We work with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to hold a number of Better Connection workshops for employers to be aware of those issues. What I am saying is that the recommendations from the youth summits have been taken into account in us commissioning the national action plan projects.

Senator LUDWIG—Do any of them include the solutions that have been highlighted in the National Muslim Youth Summit communique under the heading ‘The perceived conflict between Muslim and Australian identity’? They have put out solutions such as:

- Government sponsored education for the public on what Islam is.
- Media campaigns promoting anti-discrimination including TV ads ...
- Grass roots communication between Muslims and non-Muslims through social groups ...
- Better education for Muslims about Islam.
- Better education about the compatibility between Australian law and Islamic values.
- School and university based interfaith activities.
- A more proactive approach to promoting multiculturalism should be taken in schools.

And it goes on. Can you identify whether any of those have been picked up and been pursued?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I can say that several of those have been taken up in 2005-06 and 2006-07 by the projects that I mentioned and future projects as well.

Senator LUDWIG—Which ones are they? Are you able to say?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I will have to look at your list. I can comment on the first one: ‘Government sponsored education for the public on what Islam is.’ Currently our department is working with the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to hold a number of symposiums and expos across Australia. Symposiums and expos were held in Melbourne in February, where our assistant minister spoke; in Brisbane; in Canberra; and also in Adelaide last weekend. The purpose was to bring Muslims and non-Muslims together to explain what Islam is. So that is part of that.

As for a media campaign, including TV ads, promoting anti-discrimination measures: through our Living in Harmony program we found that a major media campaign would not be

the best way of doing so, especially in terms of our limited budget, so that is not happening. As for No. 3, we have sponsored a number of sporting groups' activities, youth camps and so on. I can say that most of these have been taken into account and addressed.

Senator LUDWIG—What about promoting multiculturalism in schools?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—As the secretary said earlier, while we may use a different term the fundamental framework is the same. We are talking about promoting the benefits of cultural diversity and unity in our diverse society.

Senator LUDWIG—I will show you another document. It is a transcript of 3AW's Neil Mitchell show and part of it is highlighted.

CHAIR—Senator, I think there may be merit in having this tabled if it is being passed around.

Senator LUDWIG—I am happy to table it. That is why I gave it to the clerk.

Mr Metcalfe—Senator, do you want it back for it to be tabled?

Senator LUDWIG—I did not want to read it to you without you having the opportunity to have a look at it. It is always difficult when you read this things out loud as people do not appreciate the statement.

Mr Metcalfe—I have now read it, Senator.

CHAIR—Mr Metcalfe, do you have a response to the question?

Senator LUDWIG—Chair, I have not actually provided the question yet.

Mr Metcalfe—What I have been given, Mr Chairman, is a transcript of an interview between the Prime Minister and Neil Mitchell on radio 3AW on 11 May 2007.

CHAIR—I think Senator Ludwig is aware of the policy.

Senator LUDWIG—I am aware of the content and I am sure Mr Metcalfe is aware of the question that I am going to put next. Have you had the opportunity to look at it, Dr Nguyen-Hoan?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan —Yes, I have.

Senator LUDWIG—Have you seen it before?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan —Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—When did you see it before?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan —I saw it through a media clip about 10 days ago.

Senator LUDWIG—Is that one of the assimilation policies that the Prime Minister outlined in terms of the Muslim community? Is that one of the issues that you can pursue?

CHAIR—Senator, can you be more specific with your question. It is putting words in the mouth of the officer, in my view, so I would like you to rephrase the question.

Senator LUDWIG—I do not think it was.

CHAIR—Well, I interpreted it as such.

Senator LUDWIG—I am happy for you to rephrase it if you want, but I do not think it was; I do not think it needs to be rephrased.

CHAIR—Would you again ask the question of the department, please?

Senator LUDWIG—Is it one of the assimilation policies that is being pursued in the Muslim community as part of building on social cohesion, harmony and security?

Mr Metcalfe—I do not think that what I have been given here actually allows me to answer that. It is simply a statement or an answer that the Prime Minister gives in relation to a comment by Neil Mitchell which suggested that there was \$461 million in the budget for ‘Muslim assimilation’. The Prime Minister then gets into a conversation with Neil Mitchell about whether there is that amount of money and he says, ‘I’m sure there are some programs. I don’t think they amount to that. I’ll have to check it.’ I do not really see where that takes us.

Senator LUDWIG—If you had listened to the question that I asked—and I am sure you are capable of answering it—you would know that is the background I gave so that you are not in the dark about it. I asked if there is an assimilation policy that you are pursuing as part of building on social cohesion, harmony and security, which the Prime Minister mentioned there. If so can you identify it?

Mr Metcalfe—What I have said, including yesterday morning, is that the department is administering programs which have a number of outcomes and outputs and that is something that we are doing. I think that trying to draw me into a conversation about that is not going to be something I can really respond to.

Senator LUDWIG—It is in respect of a specific policy, an assimilation policy that is being referred to there. The question still is—and you can answer it or you can’t answer it or you don’t know—is it a policy that is being pursued and, if so, which one is it as part of building on social cohesion, harmony and security? That seems reasonably plain.

CHAIR—Senator, you cannot direct the secretary of the department to answer in a certain way—

Senator LUDWIG—I gave him a choice.

CHAIR—The secretary will answer in a way that he sees fit.

Mr Metcalfe—Senator, I will try and help you as much as I can. The Prime Minister was involved in a conversation on radio on a question about whether there are certain programs and whether people should assimilate and become part of what I think he described as ‘the Australian mainstream’. We administer a range of programs—and Dr Nguyen-Hoan has been discussing those at some length—which go to issues associated with integration into the Australian community, noting that we are living in a culturally diverse society. I am quite confident that our programs and policies are quite consistent with government direction in this area.

Senator LUDWIG—Thank you, but the question is whether you are pursuing one as part of that building on social cohesion, harmony and security. It is whether there is an assimilation policy contained within that which you are pursuing, and whether you are capable of identifying it if you are.

Mr Metcalfe—I do not think I can add to what I have said, Chair.

Senator Ellison—I think the Prime Minister's words said that. He was asked about the \$461 million in the budget for Muslim assimilation. He said:

I'm not sure there's \$461 million in total for Muslim assimilation. I think there are some programs—

which have subsequently been referred to by officials, but the Prime Minister did not name them. He said, 'I do not think they amount to \$461 million.' So that is straightforward. He was asked: 'What is the reason?' and he said:

Well there's every reason to try and assimilate, and I unapologetically use that word, assimilate a section of the community, a tiny minority of whose members have caused concern.

That is what the Prime Minister said, and he said that there are some programs which do just that.

Senator LUDWIG—Yes, that is the point of the question. I am trying to identify which programs do that. It is a simple question.

Senator Ellison—I think that there have been a number of programs which go towards that. All of the ones that I have heard mentioned tend to go towards that.

Mr Metcalfe—Sorry, Minister, I think I can assist here. We are on outcome 2 of the department's outcome area. If it would assist, I can read it on to the record as to what outcome 2 does. It is to contribute to:

... a society which values Australian citizenship, appreciates cultural diversity and enables migrants to participate equitably. Activities under this outcome include the provision of settlement services, including adult English language tuition and translating and interpreting services; implementation of the government's multicultural policy; the promotion of the value of Australian citizenship; decisions on applications for citizenship and on citizenship status; and promotion of the benefits of a united and diverse Australian society through implementation of the government's cultural diversity policy and programmes.

Senator Ellison—The officials have been giving evidence on programs in that outcome which do that very thing, which goes to what the Prime Minister was saying.

Mr Metcalfe—To put this in context, Senator, I am sure you will recall that the national action plan was developed and devised after a meeting that the Prime Minister had with Premiers in September 2005, from memory. That of course followed on from the events of July 2005, when a small number of young men of Muslim background killed over 50 of their fellow citizens in the United Kingdom in a series of bomb blasts in the tube and on a bus. There was a great deal of national and international reflection as to how young men born in that country could be so distanced and so detached from mainstream society that they would not only become radicalised but also seek to murder many of their fellow citizens. It was in that context that the national action plan was developed. It was in that context that the programs and arrangements that Dr Nguyen-Hoan has been describing have been developed, and I think it was in that context that the Prime Minister was talking on Neil Mitchell's program.

Senator LUDWIG—Precisely. I was trying to identify which programs reflect the policy of assimilation within this framework. It is a simple question, and I do not know why we seem to be beating about the bush about it.

CHAIR—Senator, some people might think your line of questioning is a little semantic, but you are entitled to ask that question and the secretary and the minister are entitled to respond as they see fit.

Senator LUDWIG—I am still trying to get an answer because it is part of financial accountability. Can you identify which program tries to achieve that assimilation policy within the context of this outcome, and how much is it?

Mr Metcalfe—I think I have given significant information. The government spends hundreds of millions of dollars on outcome 2 and I think I have described the background and context. I think I have been more than helpful in that regard.

Senator LUDWIG—You are not saying then that the entire outcome is designed for Muslim assimilation, are you?

Mr Metcalfe—No, what I described to you was what outcome 2 is about. It is about the fact that—as I think I said yesterday in our conversation—one in four Australians was born overseas; 18 per cent of us, in addition to that, have a parent who was born overseas; compared to marker countries we have the most diverse society in the Western developed world; and the department administers a range of programs. The national action program was developed specifically in consultation with the Muslim community and with the state and territory governments to provide a range of responses because of the concerns which arose not only in July 2005 in London but in earlier tragic events.

Senator LUDWIG—Yesterday you talked about it being a philosophy but I do not think it is a philosophy; in fact it seems to be a methodology used. If you go back to May 1999, the National Multicultural Advisory Council report outlined the policy evolution between assimilation, integration and then multiculturalism as we understand it today. I can read what assimilation means but I am sure you understand in the context of that 1999 report what in fact it does say. So I will ask one last time whether or not there are policies here that you are pursuing in terms of assimilation that the Prime Minister has referred to in this output through this social cohesion document.

Mr Metcalfe—Mr Chair, I really do not think I can add to what I have said. I think I have spent quite a long time talking about this issue.

CHAIR—Senator Ludwig has asked that question and I think you have answered it, Mr Metcalfe, as you see fit. I think we will proceed and continue the hearing.

Senator LUDWIG—Thank you, Chair, but I would note that I did not get a response to the question. I asked for what the output was, whether there was a program in place that dealt with that, and what the expenditure was for it. As far as I am aware I have not received a response to that. Chair, you could ask as well, on my behalf, if you thought that I deserved an answer to it.

CHAIR—I think the question has been asked more than several times in different forms and formats, so I appreciate—

Senator LUDWIG—Have you heard an answer, Chair?

CHAIR—I have. Mr Metcalfe has answered it, and I think the minister has made a contribution as well.

Mr Metcalfe—Mr Chair, I will examine the *Hansard* and, if I believe I can usefully add to my answer, I will.

CHAIR—I appreciate your willingness to do that.

Senator LUDWIG—Thank you, Chair.

Senator HURLEY—I want to refer to a media release on 16 July 2006 by Mr Andrew Robb, the former Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, talking about key initiatives for the national action plan. I want to briefly run through and see what progress has been made on each of those areas. The key initiatives were:

Programmes, including pilots, involving: A new values based education initiative; Employment coordinators; Employment workshops for young job seekers; A sporting programme to increase the participation of children in local sporting clubs; A mentoring programme to increase participation of young people in work, education, training and community life.

I think that is pretty much a united program, but if you like I can go through it separately.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—This is a three-year pilot program. They are being implemented by a number of departments, such as the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Australian Sports Commission, FaCSIA and DEST. We are working with them. Some of them are off the ground. In fact, there will be a meeting in Sydney in early June where we will meet with people who have been working on this pilot program to learn about the progress. We are mindful that this is a three-year program and there is a need for us to make progress, and they are making some progress.

Senator HURLEY—I am particular interested in the employment coordinators and employment workshops for young jobseekers. Feedback I have indicates that this is still a real problem and that young people across the range are finding difficulty in connecting with jobs in many instances. What particular action is being taken there? How successful were those employment workshops?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—From the reports that we have received from DEWR, they are fairly successful in terms of trying to explain to employers what are some of the issues faced by Muslim young people in seeking employment. They have brought together employment service providers, local chambers of commerce and industry and also representatives of local employers. We have not run them ourselves, but DEWR have told us that the workshops have been successful in connecting young people with employers.

Senator HURLEY—The second dot point is about the creation of a world-class centre of research in educational excellence, which we have dealt with—that has been established. Then there is something about interfaith dialogue projects.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That must be part of our DIAC program. We have commissioned a number of projects in schools in which there are three faiths, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, so that the young people can talk to one another about their faith. Project Abraham went to a

number of schools and reached a number of students in order to create a better understanding between the three faiths.

Senator HURLEY—Is that in a particular state or region?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We have focused on New South Wales in particular, but they are also trying to reach out to Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Senator HURLEY—Would you be able to advise us of the cost of that project? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I will take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—Another dot point is about the continuation of a Muslim advisory group. Given that the Muslim Community Reference Group is now concluded, is there another advisory group in its place?

Ms Pope—That is under current government consideration.

Senator HURLEY—The next one is about a volunteer staffed counselling and support helpline for the Muslim community based on the very successful UK project.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We did a feasibility study of that and found that it may be more difficult than it was first thought. We are still working on that one.

Senator HURLEY—Who is working on that? Is that within your section?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—It is part of the DIAC program.

Senator HURLEY—How are you working on that? Are you doing costings or surveys?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We had to look at the UK experience. When we looked at that we saw the funding was much higher than we anticipated. Also we had to see whether a number of helplines already in operation could cater for that. Work is ongoing to see whether a helpline is the best way of proceeding.

Senator HURLEY—Next is:

- Specialist training, educational materials and forums to bring law enforcement agencies and Muslim communities together to resolve issues;

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I think that work is being done to progress that as well.

Senator HURLEY—Is that a DIAC funded one or does that involve other agencies as well?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I think that may be part of DIAC. I need to confirm that.

Senator HURLEY—If you would take that on notice that would be fine as well as this: if so, what the funding level is for that?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes, that is fine.

Senator HURLEY—We have dealt previously with crisis management training to empower the Muslim community.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I think that is part of the responsibility of the Attorney-General's Department.

Senator HURLEY—My next question probably harks back to what I was saying previously about accountability and whether the projects are such that they have defined outcomes and conform to goals. What kind of evaluation is there of the national action plan projects? Is that evaluation reported on in any way?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan —We are doing it in a number of ways. The national action plan has two parts: the three-year pilot programs and the four-year national programs by a number of departments and agencies. Each department and agency that is responsible for those programs has to do their own evaluation. They will need to report to DIAC, which is the coordinating agency, in order for us to have some sort of evaluation. We are preparing the first report to the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, for its meeting in July. That first report will be talking about what outcomes we have been able to achieve in the last 18 months or so. There are several ways of evaluation. Firstly, each project would have an evaluation plan to see whether the outcomes are meeting the proposed objectives for each of them. Take areas of focus like employment. It is about what kinds of outcomes we have been able to achieve through partnership projects, community projects and DEWR projects themselves. It is similar for other areas like education, leadership building and enhancing, and national security. Evaluation could be done project wise or area of focus wise and as to the whole national action plan together annually and after three years and after four years.

Senator HURLEY—A great deal of money is being spent on these projects. Because it is split up between other agencies and because part of it is sent out to individual groups who apply for it, it seems to me that you can get kinds of pet projects coming forward without a proper critical evaluation. In what kind of detail will the ministerial council be looking at these? Is the ministerial council a detailed enough body to look at those kinds of outcomes?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan —This report is fairly detailed. It is based on 10 outcomes of the national action plan. I believe that at the strategic level we can probably, all together using indicators, make some sort of assessment of where we are going in terms of the national action plan.

Senator HURLEY—Because so much of the projects and the money involved is directed to Muslim groups or to address issues around the Muslim community, which is a reasonably small proportion of the Australian population, is there any timeline for the formation of that Muslim advisory group? It seems to me that is a critical part of any evaluation.

Ms Pope—I have been advised that it is under current consideration.

Senator HURLEY—Apart from the Muslim advisory group, because the Muslim group is not the only group that is experiencing problems and because Muslims are a subset of wider groups like many of the Asian and Indonesian immigrants, is there a wider group that is able to look at some of those projects and determine whether they are priority areas? Is that the ministerial advisory group that does that?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—States and territories also have their own reference groups and we are connecting with some of them. In fact I visited Brisbane not so long ago and I addressed the Muslim Community Reference Group set up by the Queensland government. While the MCRG at the Commonwealth level has finished its work and produced a report, we continue to consult with community groups through all the reference groups set up by state

governments through our community liaison officer network. Our offices at the state and territory levels are regularly in contact with community groups, including Muslim communities. We do hear from them with their concerns and feedback on our projects, so the consultations are ongoing.

Senator HURLEY—The national action plan was described as part of a strategy to reduce the risk of extremism gaining a foothold in Australia and to work against promotion of violence and intolerance in our society but also to help some disadvantaged members of the community to better integrate into Australian society. Is there scope within the national action plan to significantly vary the balance of activities? Is there enough flexibility within the plan to do that over that four-year funding period?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—There is significant flexibility for us to vary the program in terms of focus within the areas. The national action plan was developed using significant community consultation: there were roundtable discussions held across the country; the setting-up of the MCRG; youth summits; and other forums. We have a wealth of information from community input and we also conducted research. So the action plan was developed in that context and we are optimistic that we have the areas of focus fairly right. If the findings of the project between now and the foreseeable future seem to indicate to us that we have to refocus some of our attention to certain areas, I am sure that there is flexibility there for us to modify it.

Senator LUDWIG—Which is the latest access and equity report? What is your latest?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We are preparing the 2006 report based on input from departments and agencies and we hope to table it in the next few months or so.

Senator LUDWIG—The web only had the access and equity report for 2005.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is right.

Senator LUDWIG—So is that the current access and equity report?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—And then you will table the 2006 report in the next couple of months?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is right.

Mr Metcalfe—I wrote a couple of months ago to many agency heads seeking input and quite a lot of that input has been received. We are putting that together at the moment.

Senator LUDWIG—Is the direction taken from the 2005 access and equity review currently being reviewed, or is a similar type of report going to be produced again?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The report would be similar in format. Recently, the department held consultations with Commonwealth agencies. We looked at the Public Service charter in the context of a culturally diverse society and we found that, while the charter has served us well over the last few years, there have been some community feedback and comments about the words ‘access and equity’ and some of the principles, so we streamlined the charter. Now we are calling it ‘accessible government services for all’, because the term ‘access and equity’ had become jargon and people were not paying a lot of attention to those principles and the performance indicators underneath them. There are four principles under the new framework

of accessible government services for all: responsiveness, communication, accountability and leadership. We have a lot fewer indicators underneath so that we can focus on the main ones. You will find that when the report is tabled it will be a lot simpler and more streamlined. We have received very positive comments from all departments and agencies who contributed to that revision.

Senator LUDWIG—I look forward to that. On page 13, it says the following:

A key aspect of the coordination of the government's response was the establishment of an Interdepartmental Committee (IDC), chaired by DIMIA and consisting of representatives from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Attorney-General's Department ...

And so on and so forth. It then goes on to say:

The IDC met on several occasions to develop across-government initiatives to be included in the National Action Plan.

Has that been finalised?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is part of the national action plan which we talked about earlier. Because the national action plan is being seen as a whole-of-government plan, our department chaired that IDC. As I mentioned earlier, a number of departments are contributing to the implementation of this—DWER, FaCSIA, DEST, AGs, the Sports Commission, HREOC and so on. That IDC was necessary in order to have a coordinated approach. The IDC is still ongoing.

Senator LUDWIG—Is there a national action plan?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Ms Pope—We have been discussing the national action plan.

Senator LUDWIG—The one that no-one has seen.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The national action plan was signed off by the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in July last year. But there is a communication protocol which we have to follow before we release it. States are working with us towards that end.

Ms Pope—MCIMA is still to decide whether the report will be publicly released.

Senator LUDWIG—I see. This is not the one sitting on Ms Gambaro's table?

Ms Pope—No.

Senator LUDWIG—So we have another national action plan that is not public.

Ms Pope—It is the national action plan that we have been discussing. The report has not been made public.

Senator LUDWIG—The report is not public. Is it going to be made public?

Ms Pope—As I said, MCIMA, the ministerial council is still to decide whether to make it public or not.

Senator LUDWIG—Do we know what their time line for the decision making is?

Ms Pope—We expect there will be a discussion at the meeting in July.

Senator LUDWIG—That is the report, but is there a plan?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—It is the plan that we are talking about.

Ms Pope—The plan is what we are talking about, yes.

Senator LUDWIG—So there is not a report; there is a plan.

Ms Pope—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—It says it is an action plan. Does it embody or require funding to effect it, or is it simply an overview or a statement? Are you able to say—I know it is not public yet, so you may be limited as to what you can say—if there are attached funding requirements with it?

Ms Pope—All the projects that we have been discussing come under of the auspices of the plan.

Senator LUDWIG—So we are doing the programs without a plan.

Ms Pope—We have the plan. The plan has just not been made public yet.

Senator LUDWIG—You have got the plan. You have got the programs in place, but we do not know what the plan looks like.

Ms Pope—That is right. It has not been made public.

Senator LUDWIG—That makes sense, doesn't it! In terms of the access and equity report, I just went to the table in it. Do you not have a copy of it?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I do not have a copy.

Senator LUDWIG—We might be challenged as to how we do this, but maybe we can ask the secretariat to provide a copy and I will ask some more general questions. I will need it as well; that is the problem. If we could get a copy of that, I will ask some more general questions while we wait for that.

CHAIR—We will proceed and then come back to that, Senator Ludwig.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the overall way the access and equity report provides a snapshot of various departments, can you explain how they then participate? As I understand it, there are performance trends in which an agency's input is rated at not met, met or met well. Can you explain how that process works? Some people may not have benefited from this before. Has there been any change to the system?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I think there will be a change in this year's report, the 2006 report. As we said, in the 2005 report the rating was subjective—both in terms of input by Commonwealth departments and agencies and in us trying to decide, based on the examples that they gave us, whether to say that they were meeting certain criteria well or not. So we are moving away from that now because we feel that it is too subjective to be of great value.

Senator LUDWIG—How would the departments go about providing the statement? Would they self-rate themselves or provide a statement?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We would simply use the indicators in the new framework and they would provide input based on the indicators. We would include their examples or approaches in addressing the criteria.

Senator LUDWIG—Could you give an example of that so that I understand what you are talking about.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The national action plan is one example.

Senator LUDWIG—It is probably a challenge to talk about that, since I have not seen it—unless you are going to provide me with the same courtesy of providing a copy so that I can look at it.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—All I was going to say was that the national action plan is a whole of government approach and—

Senator LUDWIG—How does that differ from any other approach that you have had in the past, or have they all been Howard government approaches?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Employment, for example, is a matter for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, and education is a matter for DEST. This is a number of departments and agencies working together in order to find outcomes for Muslim Australians. That is what I am talking about under the national action plan. A number of agencies are working together.

Senator LUDWIG—In terms of the number of agencies working together, and in coming back to this report, the performance trends are not met, met or met well. Who assessed that in terms of this report?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We will not be assessing—

Senator LUDWIG—No, I want to talk about the 2005 report.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The way that we assessed it was that, if an agency gave us two good examples in meeting certain criteria, we said it was well met. If there is only one example then we said it was met. It was a simple criteria that we used.

Senator LUDWIG—Is it correct that a range of departments were requested to provide two examples of how they met access and equity?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We asked them to provide as many examples as they could, because that would show that they had implemented some innovative ways of addressing access and equity.

Senator LUDWIG—And then you or a committee chose two out of those to see whether they had met—

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes, my branch prepared the report based on the input and we decided how they would meet the criteria in the way that I described to you.

Senator LUDWIG—And that was a subjective decision by your section?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes. That is why we said in the report that it was subjective and it may not be of great value. In the 2006 report we will move away from it.

Senator LUDWIG—Before we get to the 2006 report, which we also have not seen, I want to take you to the couple of pages I have photocopied. At the top of page 86 there is a comparison between 2004 and 2005 in the columns across the top. The percentage of relevant performance indicators met in 2005 was, by and large, 100 per cent; the percentage of

relevant performance indicators met well in 2004 is, to say the least, patchy and, similarly, 2005 is patchy. But if you then compare that with 2004-05, where those departments were performing admirably, they seem to be significantly achieving 100 per cent. That has not been reflected in the 2004-05 'well met category'. Why is that?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The table compares indicators met and well met. So it is different. I do not know what—

CHAIR—Senator, can you clarify whether you are referring to a particular agency? Can you be a bit more specific?

Senator LUDWIG—We can pick one. Let us take the ComSuper CSS Board. If you look at the figures you see that, under 'Number of Performance Indicators Assessed', it had two in 2004 and two in 2005. So they were the two choices that were chosen.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Yes.

Senator LUDWIG—Under 'Percentage of Relevant Performance Indicators Met', it got 100 per cent in 2004 and 100 per cent in 2005. So that means that, against your criteria—which is that agency input was rated as not met, met or met well—the two that were provided were met and then in 2004-05 the ComSuper CSS Board got zero per cent and zero per cent.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—There is no inconsistency in that at all because—

Senator LUDWIG—They just did not do very well.

Mr Metcalfe—They met them in both years but they did not meet them well in either year.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The ratings are 'met' or 'met well'. So there are two separate issues there.

Senator LUDWIG—So, when you look down the column headed 'Percentage of Relevant Performance Indicators Met Well' is it fair to say that the outcome is patchy for 2004 and 2005?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—That is right.

Mr Metcalfe—To compare apples and apples, if you want to compare whether the agencies met them well, you obviously compare the two right-hand columns for 2004 and 2005. For example, our department—then called Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs—had 11 indicators assessed in both years and was assessed as meeting them in both years and meeting them well in both years. It was an excellent outcome.

Senator LUDWIG—I would have been disappointed if it was anything else.

Mr Metcalfe—I would be very disappointed if it was anything else. If you were to go to immediately below that, you would see that DITR had eight in 2004, seven in 2005, met them in both years and marginally increased their 'met well' percentage from 63 to 71. So those are the figures you compare.

Senator LUDWIG—If you look at the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, it had four and five. It did well in terms of meeting, but then—

Mr Metcalfe—it went up to 60 from 25.

Senator LUDWIG—Yes, it obviously recognised it had a problem.

Mr Metcalfe—Yes. So hopefully that does assist agencies in examining this sort of issue and striving to do better.

Senator LUDWIG—In the 2006 report you are going to move away from this—why is that? If it was helping agencies to improve, what was your assessment? It was helping agencies or it was helping them but not as well as it could? Not that I want to put words in your mouth.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—As I said earlier, because it is so subjective it may not be as helpful. We try to give some self-assessment to encourage agencies to improve their performance. But at the end of the day it is their input and we use that to assess it, so I think that we probably need to find another way of having a more objective assessment.

Senator LUDWIG—Have you settled on a more objective assessment yet?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—No.

Ms Pope—We are still working through those issues and receiving the input towards the development of the 2006 report.

Senator LUDWIG—From memory I think the last report was a self-assessment process—was it?—where they self-assessed themselves.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—In 2005, yes.

Mr Metcalfe—I have not looked at this report for some time, but I see in the notes right at the bottom of that table over on page 88 there is this note:

See Reporting Overview for assessment process

That may assist you if you want to look at that in more detail.

Senator LUDWIG—What I also want to understand in terms of the access and equity report concerns the types of statements they put up. Were they assessed as to their veracity or were these matters that were simply put up by the various departments for assessment? In other words, could you check whether or not the statements they were making were accurate?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—We have no capacity to check and we do not have any reason to check a report from departments and agencies.

Senator LUDWIG—Take the terms of the statements they are putting. For example, some put up 11, some put up five and some put up seven. Was there a maximum they could put up?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Some indicators are not relevant to certain agencies. For example, if it is a policy agency any indicators to do with service delivery may not be applicable so they vary depending on the responsibilities of agencies.

Senator LUDWIG—Was there a framework or a number that they could choose from?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Sorry, I did not hear that.

Ms Pope—I apologise. I was just seeking clarification. As for the table and the numbers, that is not about the number of examples they gave us. It is about the number of indicators under the plan that were relevant to that agency. I think you may have been reading it as this: if it said two, they had put two examples; if it was 11, they had put 11. It was actually the number of indicators they were assessed against.

Senator LUDWIG—I tried to get an example of one earlier just to see if I could correct that, but I invite you, if you could, to give me an example of what one of the performance indicators is.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—One example that comes to mind is if they put out a multilingual pamphlet, for example, to communicate. It is if they have a new policy or campaign and if they do that and then we count it as a good example of meeting the criteria or indicators on communication.

Senator LUDWIG—I can see how I can get confused. In terms of the performance indicators, how many are there?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I would have to take that on notice. I do not recall the total number of indicators.

Senator LUDWIG—So there is a number of indicators. How do they meet the performance indicators? What would you require each department or agency to do?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—Let us say a department delivers programs and they have a number of indicators. If they provide us with their report addressing all of those indicators with examples of how they deliver against each of the indicators, then we would report them as meeting all of them.

Senator PAYNE—So this goes back to the numbers, Senator. If we have got two examples that would be ‘well met’ and one example would be ‘met’. So for each of the indicators that assessment that we have already discussed would apply.

Senator LUDWIG—But what I am trying to understand is that they get a form—I presume it is a form; governments do have forms?

Mr Metcalfe—Would it assist you if we were to have a look at whether we could give you a copy of the guidelines that we actually provide to agencies?

Senator LUDWIG—Or even one of the responses if that is possible.

Mr Metcalfe—We would obviously need to discuss that with the agency involved.

Senator LUDWIG—It could be your agency.

Mr Metcalfe—Well, if you wanted an excellent result! That might assist because I think where you are trying to get to is this—what were they actually asked to do, how was the process of their assessment done—and I suspect—

Senator LUDWIG—I knew you would be able to summarise it, Mr Metcalfe. What I am trying to understand is this: what the department or agency is in fact required to do, by what form or manner they fulfil the obligation, then how it is assessed as a consequence of that or whether it is a self-assessment process. In other words, it is whether they say, ‘We have two examples of what we do in terms of providing a multilingual brochure, therefore in terms of that performance indicator we can tick that one, provide the report and then achieve 100 per cent’ or as the case may be.

Mr Metcalfe—So it is whether it is a self assessment or whether there is some analysis of that. Perhaps we could take that on notice and see if we can provide you with the guidelines for the 2005 report as well as the 2006 report that is currently in preparation so that you can

understand what we have asked of departments. We could provide advice to you about the assessment process. But, as Dr Nguyen-Hoan has indicated, it appears that there is some consideration underway in relation to the 2006 report as to whether this summary reporting method is the best way of in fact providing that advice.

Senator LUDWIG—That would be particularly helpful. I have got a couple of general questions about the national action plan as I sit here and contemplate it. Are the programs that are underneath it all the programs that are currently being done or are there others that are under the plan which have not been announced? You do not have to tell me about them—they have not been announced—but what I am trying to understand is whether all of the programs are in place.

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—The announcement by Mr Robb in July last year talked about funding for the next three years for pilot programs under the national action plan, and also four years under the same plan. So funding for the next three and four years has been announced. Specific details are being implemented using the funding.

Senator LUDWIG—So there aren't any other programs that are in the pipeline under the national action plan that will be announced in the next funding cycle? They were announced by Mr Robb—I am trying to get the language precise.

Mr Metcalfe—I think that the funding that was provided for in the budget last year is all that we are expecting. Those programs have been announced. It is not contemplated that any other programs would be announced and there is no funding in this budget, for example, for any further programs.

Senator LUDWIG—That was my understanding. Thank you.

Senator HURLEY—As part of this discussion, I want to comment on the access and equity report.

CHAIR—If you frame it in the form of a question, that would be appropriate.

Senator HURLEY—Yes, that is right. I went into a Medicare office in Adelaide that was around the corner from the department of immigration and in the same block as the Migrant Resource Centre, and it had no literature in any language other than English, which I found quite astonishing. I am not quite sure how people manage. Is it expected that departments like that would have at least an indication that interpreter services or brochures in other languages could be available?

Ms Pope—That is probably really a question that you would need to address to Medicare themselves.

Senator Ellison—Or to the minister. Give me the address of that office and I will make sure they have something there.

Senator HURLEY—Thank you.

Senator Ellison—But I have seen—especially at Centrelink—a number of multilingual brochures and publications. They are often targeted to a particular ethnic group that is numerous in that area. For instance, one Centrelink office I visited had a special emphasis on African humanitarian visa entrants and particularly on people who could speak the relevant

languages. But I am surprised by that; I will check into it. If you could give me the address of that office, I will chase it up.

Senator HURLEY—I will, thank you. I want to ask a few specific questions about the portfolio statement.

CHAIR—Are we on output 2.4?

Senator HURLEY—Yes—still. I have a couple of questions remaining. Page 34 of the portfolio statement, in reference to the Living in Harmony grants, says:

Funds provided to the administered item Grants for Living in Harmony (Outcome 2) in 2006-07 have been moved to 2007-08 due to minor delays by some contracted grant recipients in the finalisation of agreed outcomes.

On page 78, on the performance information for outcome 2 and under grants for Living in Harmony, the quality headline says:

Funding agreements meet agreed milestones.

There is no reference to that minor delay. Is that due to a different year being under consideration or is that a different issue?

Ms Pope—The item on page 78 is the outcome statement for that output and is a comment about the movement of funding on page 34.

Senator HURLEY—So the outcome has not been achieved because it has not been agreed. So why isn't it noted?

Ms Pope—It is the performance indicator for 2007-08 that is listed on page 78 for the Grants for Living in Harmony.

Senator HURLEY—That is the forward.

Ms Pope—That is right.

Senator HURLEY—I see.

Ms Pope—It is not a performance report; it is a statement of what the performance indicator is for 2007-08.

Senator HURLEY—On that same one, could you advise what the agreed performance indicators are for the multicultural affairs grant to FECCA?

Dr Nguyen-Hoan—I will have to take that on notice.

Senator HURLEY—I am finished with output 2.4

[6.36 pm]

CHAIR—We will move to output 2.5. I think you had a couple of questions on Systems For People.

Senator HURLEY—Yes. On output 2.5, Systems For People, there is a new one, I believe, and it deals with the establishment of a department that will provide staff with access to information and tools principally by means of IT, I take it.

Mr Metcalfe—That is correct.

Senator HURLEY—It is a five-year, \$495 million program. Can you advise how many staff will be involved in that program?

Mr Metcalfe—As I indicated earlier, the officer with expertise on this matter was here yesterday because there is also output 1.8 on Systems For People. Because we were not asked about it then, we did not expect to be asked about it today. I can take the question on notice and simply advise you that the program will involve quite a significant number of departmental staff as well as contractors through our service partner—particularly our strategic partner, IBM, as well as other contractors.

Senator HURLEY—Are the people involved with this program involved in a single unit or are they distributed among the various sections?

Mr Metcalfe—Essentially, one of our two information technology divisions has primary carriage of the Systems For People program, but I am quite sure that the other division will also have people working in this area as well. In addition to that, the policy and program divisions will also have staff involved. As you can see from the cost, it is a massive program involving business transformation. It has already commenced. The first releases of portals occurred last month and there will be quite an aggressive roll-out of new technology and new ways of doing things through various parts of the department over the next four years or so. We would expect that usually about every three months another series of portals will be released, and at any one time we will be focused on the immediate next portal and its release. Beyond that, we will be ensuring that the portal previously released has been well bedded down. But if, at some stage, you would like to have a broader briefing about it, we could certainly arrange that, I am sure, with the agreement of the minister.

Senator HURLEY—So this will establish, via the portal, consistency in work processes and effective record keeping. We did discuss as part of the citizenship testing that this is the kind of thing where those results and that record keeping would be part of this system.

Mr Metcalfe—That is correct. We would expect the actual IT support for the citizenship test arrangements to be initially developed as a separate IT project and then be integrated into the citizenship portal when it becomes available at a later stage. The overall objective, though, is to move the department from a series of legacy systems which have limited interoperability and in which it is possible for us to have multiple records relating to the one client to what we call a clientcentric system, where there is one record relating to the client. You would appreciate that in a department like ours where we issue millions of visas every year, where many millions of people cross the border each year and where we have 100,000 citizenship applications, we have a huge number of records and the potential for multiple entries and incorrect entries is significant, particularly as we have them in various legacy systems. That, in fact, was not the only but one of the issues around the proper identification of Ms Solon. She was known to the department, I think, under 15 or 20 different identities. So, proper identity management, client focused systems, are a key objective here.

Senator HURLEY—With these portals, a lot of the information will be confidential, so they will be internal. I presume access will be limited in some way.

Mr Metcalfe—Certainly, as with our current IT, our expectation is that the vast majority of users would be internal departmental officers, and there are appropriate security arrangements

around passwords and other protections. However, we of course do have relationships with a range of other agencies, so interconnectability with other agencies will be an important part of it. For example, with citizenship, we check police databases to see if there is a criminal record. So that sort of interoperability will be an important part of bringing that to modern best practice as well. It is also intended that we will explore the potential for trusted users and for migration agents and others to be able to access systems to enable them to get updates as to where a particular client's case might be up to, for example. This is not dissimilar to other modernisation programs that are occurring in the tax office and whatever, and it is important to stress that this is not simply an IT program where we are replacing old systems with new systems. We are using the opportunity to genuinely look at our businesses processes—at how we process an application and how we interact with a client—to see how we can better support our staff and better serve our clients in providing modern, streamlined processes which provide the benefits that you are already aware of.

Senator HURLEY—I presume that, like the tax office, there will be a logging of who accesses records to ensure that privacy is maintained and there is not inappropriate access.

Mr Metcalfe—Certainly. Audit trails and other security measures are crucial. They are at the moment with our systems, and we would obviously want to ensure that we have the best possible arrangements into the future.

CHAIR—I thank the secretary and the departmental officers for your attendance and your advice. I thank the minister for his attendance and also committee members and the secretariat.

Committee adjourned at 6.44 pm