



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE
RELATIONS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Estimates

THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2011

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SENATE
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
Thursday, 20 October 2011

Senators in attendance: Senators Abetz, Back, Bilyk, Collins, Edwards, Evans, Fisher, Furner, Gallacher, Marshall, Mason, McKenzie, Rhiannon, Scullion, Siewert and Thistlethwaite

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS PORTFOLIO

In Attendance

Senator Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations
Senator Collins, Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary

Mr Michael Manthorpe, Deputy Secretary

Ms Jennifer Taylor, Deputy Secretary, Executive

Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary

Ms Catherine Wall, Acting Deputy Secretary, Executive

Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary

Ms Sandra Parker, Deputy Secretary

Mr John Kovacic, Deputy Secretary

Corporate and Network

Mr Michael Manthorpe, Deputy Secretary

Ms Robyn Kingston, Chief Internal Auditor, Internal Audit

Mr Craig Storen, Chief Finance Officer, Corporate—Finance and Business Services

Mr George Kriz, Chief Lawyer and Group Manager, Investigations, Corporate—Legal and Investigations

Ms Vicki Rundle, Group Manager, People and Organisational Development

Mr Benjamin Wyers, Branch Manager, People and Organisational Development

Ms Susan Monkley, Group Manager, Technology Solutions

Ms Kylie Emery, Acting Group Manager, Communication and Parliamentary

Ms Meredith Fairweather, Branch Manager, Communication and Parliamentary

Ms Deb Rollings, Branch Manager, Communication and Parliamentary

Mr Brant Trim, Branch Manager, Communication and Parliamentary

Mr Tim Pigot, Branch Manager, Communication and Parliamentary

Ms Helen McCormack, Branch Manager, Office of Regional Education Skills and Jobs

Outcome 1—Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care

Ms Jennifer Taylor, Deputy Secretary, Executive

Mr David De Silva, Acting Group Manager, Early Childhood Quality and Workforce

Ms Joanna Stanion, Branch Manager, Early Childhood Quality and Workforce

Ms Joan ten Brummelaar, Branch Manager, Early Childhood Quality and Workforce

Ms Lisbeth Kelly, Branch Manager, Early Childhood Quality and Workforce

Ms Ngaire Hosking, Group Manager, Early Learning Childcare Services and Indigenous Support

Ms Robyn Priddle, Branch Manager, Early Learning Childcare Services and Indigenous Support

Mr Matthew Hardy, Branch Manager, Early Learning Childcare Services and Indigenous Support

Dr Russell Ayres, Branch Manager, Early Learning Childcare Services and Indigenous Support

Ms Jo Caldwell, Group Manager, Strategy and Family Payments

Ms Robyn Shannon, Branch Manager, Strategy and Family Payments

Mr Murray Kimber, Branch Manager, Strategy and Family Payments

Ms Gillian Mitchell, Branch Manager, Strategy and Family Payments

Outcome 2—Schools and Youth

Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary

Ms Catherine Wall, Acting Deputy Secretary, Executive

Ms Janet Davy, Group Manager, Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching

Mr Tony Zanderigo, Branch Manager, Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching

Ms Margaret Banks, Branch Manager, Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching

Mr Tim Kinder, Branch Manager, Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching

Ms Alex Gordon, Branch Manager, Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching

Mr Matt Davies, Acting Group Manager, Engagement and Wellbeing

Mr Stephen Goodwin, Branch Manager, Engagement and Wellbeing

Mr Joey Baker, Acting Branch Manager, Engagement and Wellbeing

Mr Chris Sheedy, Branch Manager, Engagement and Wellbeing

Mr Anthony Fernando, Branch Manager, Engagement and Wellbeing

Ms Susan Smith, Group Manager, Infrastructure and Funding

Ms Hilary Riggs, Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Funding

Ms Oon Ying Chin, Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Funding

Mr Alan Edwards, Acting Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Funding

Dr Evan Arthur, Group Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnerships

Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Branch Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnerships

Ms Rhyan Bloor, Branch Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnerships

Ms Robyn Bergin, Acting Branch Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnerships

Mr Patrick Burford, Acting Branch Manager, National Schools and Youth Partnerships

Ms Louise Hanlon, Branch Manager, Review of Funding for Schooling Secretariat

Mr John Kovacic, Deputy Secretary

Mr Anthony Parsons, Group Manager, Building the Education Revolution Program Management

Mr Stewart Thomas, Branch Manager, Building the Education Revolution

Ms Margaret Sykes, Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Training, Schools

Outcome 3—Tertiary, Skills and International

Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary

Mr David de Carvalho, Group Manager, Higher Education Group

Dr James Hart, Acting Group Manager, Higher Education Group

Mr Mark Warburton, Branch Manager, Higher Education Group

Dr Andrew Taylor, Branch Manager, Higher Education Group

Ms Susan Hewlett, Branch Manager, Higher Education Group

Mr Terry Bowditch, Acting Branch Manager, Higher Education Group

Ms Lisa Schofield, Acting Branch Manager, Higher Education Group

Mr Phil Aungles, Director, Performance and Analysis Unit, Higher Education Group

Mr Colin Walters, Group Manager, International

Mr Jason Coutts, Branch Manager, International

Mr Vipin Mahajan, Branch Manager, International

Mr Di Weddell, Branch Manager, International

Ms Saloni Varma, Acting Branch Manager, International

Mr Daniel Owen, Acting Group Manager, Skills

Ms Janice Anderson, Acting Branch Manager, Skills

Ms Borka Buseska, Acting Branch Manager, Skills

Ms Kathryn Shugg, Branch Manager, Skills

Mr Neil McAuslan, Branch Manager, Skills

Ms Julie Yeend, Branch Manager, Skills

Dr Melissa McEwen, Acting Branch Manager, Skills

Ms Mary-Anne Sakkara, Acting Group Manager, Skills Reform

Ms Chris Woodgate, Branch Manager, Skills Reform

Mr Martin Graham, Branch Manager, Skills Reform

Ms Linda White, Branch Manager, Skills Reform

Ms Maryann Quagliata, Branch Manager, Skills Reform

Ms Christiana Knapman, Acting Branch Manager, Skills Reform

Ms Kate Driver, Branch Manager, Cluster Coordination

Mr Robin Shreeve, Chief Executive Officer, Skills Australia

Ms Sue Beitz, Head of Secretariat, Skills Australia

Outcome 4—Employment

Ms Sandra Parker, Deputy Secretary

Mr Anthony Parsons, Group Manager, Employment Services Management, Procurement

Mr Stephen Moore, Group Manager, Employment Systems

Ms Marsha Milliken, Group Manager, Income Support
Mr David Pattie, Branch Manager, Income Support
Mr Derek Stiller, Branch Manager, Income Support
Ms Margaret McKinnon, Group Manager, Job Services Australia
Ms Fiona Buffinton, Group Manager, Specialist Employment Services
Ms Sharon Stuart, Branch Manager, Specialist Employment Services
Ms Suzie Northcott, Branch Manager, Specialist Employment Services
Ms Margaret Kidd, Group Manager, Labour Market Strategy
Mr John Kovacic, Deputy Secretary
Dr Alison Morehead, Group Manager, Social Policy and Economic Strategy
Mr Mark Roddam, Branch Manager, Social Policy and Economic Strategy
Ms Rose Verspaandonk, Branch Manager, Social Policy and Economic Strategy
Mr Scott Matheson, Branch Manager, Social Policy and Economic Strategy
Ms Joanne Skinner, Acting Branch Manager, Social Policy and Economic Strategy

Outcome 5—Workplace Relations and Economic Strategy

Mr John Kovacic, Deputy Secretary
Ms Michelle Baxter, Group Manager, Workplace Relations Implementation and Safety
Ms Flora Carapellucci, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Implementation and Safety
Mr Peter Cully, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Implementation and Safety
Ms Sarah Sullivan, Acting Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Implementation and Safety
Mr Jeff Willing, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Implementation and Safety
Ms Kay Millican, Acting Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Implementation and Safety
Mr Jeremy O'Sullivan, Chief Counsel, Workplace Relations Legal
Mr Henry Lis, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Legal
Mr David Bohn, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Legal
Mr David Bell, Acting Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Legal
Ms Susan Devereux, Group Manager, Workplace Relations Policy
Ms Colette Shelley, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Policy
Ms Shannon Madden, Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Policy
Ms Michelle Boundy, Acting Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Policy
Ms Yvonne Dunlop, Acting Branch Manager, Workplace Relations Policy

Safe Work Australia

Mr Rex Hoy, Chief Executive Officer
Mr Drew Wagner, Branch Manager, Corporate Services Branch
Ms Amanda Grey, Branch Manager, Strategic Policy Branch

Mr Wayne Creaser, Branch Manager, Work Health and Safety Branch
Ms Justine Ross, Branch Manager, Harmonisation and Legal Services Branch
Mr Andrew Craig, Chief Financial Officer

Fair Work Ombudsman

Mr Nicholas Wilson, Fair Work Ombudsman
Mr Steven Ronson, Executive Director, Regional Services and Targeting
Mr Karsten Lehn, Executive Director, Complex Investigations and Innovation
Mr Alfred Bongi, Group Manager Customer Service
Ms Janine Webster, Chief Counsel
Mr Mark Scully, Group Manager Nexus Development
Ms Leanne Fry, Executive Director, Workplace Relations Communications and Solutions
Mr Tom O'Shea, Executive Director, Workplace Relations Policy and Education

Fair Work Australia

The Hon. Geoff Giudice, President
Ms Bernadette O'Neill, Acting General Manager
Mr Terry Nassios, Director
Ms Pauline Burke, Director
Mr Brendan Hower, Director
Mr Dennis Mihelyi, Director

Comcare

Mr Paul O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer
Mr Steve Kibble, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Office of the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner

Mr Leigh Johns, Commissioner
Mr Brian Corney, Deputy Commissioner (Legal)
Mr Clifford Pettit, Executive Director, Legal (Central/West)
Ms Heather Hausler, Group Manager, Corporate Services and Governance
Mr John Casey, Chief Financial Officer
Mr Michael Campbell, Deputy Commissioner (Field Operations)

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer
Mr Robert Randall, General Manager, Curriculum and Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Mr Peter Adams, General Manager

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Ms Margery Evans, Chief Executive Officer
Ms Keren Caple, General Manager, Corporate and Standards

Ms Madeleine Scully, Company Secretary

Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency

Dr Carol Nicoll, Chief Commissioner

Mr Ian Hawke, Commissioner

Australian Skills Quality Authority

Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner

Ms Dianne Orr, Commissioner

Mr Justin Napier, National Manager, Corporate

Australian Learning and Teaching Council

Mr Indhi Emmanuel, General Manager, Corporate Services and Company Secretary

Committee met at 09:00

CHAIR (Senator Marshall): I open this public hearing of the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee. I think all officers appearing today are familiar with the rules of estimates, so I will not go through the full opening statement but simply welcome you again, Ms Paul, Mr Manthorpe and Minister, and ask if there is anyone who wishes to make an opening prior to us commencing questions.

Ms Paul: No.

CHAIR: Then we will go straight to questions and will kick off with Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: I want to ask about SEAM. So that I have it clear in my head for next time, could you outline where I should be asking these questions.

Ms Paul: It is somewhere on the—no, it is not on the program.

Senator SIEWERT: No, it is not, and it has always perplexed me. When I have put questions on notice on this issue—because often I cannot get in here because I am at the Community Affairs hearing—they have come back under outcome 2, which is where I assumed we would be asking about it.

Ms Paul: Yes, that is what I was going to say, because of the link to schools.

Senator SIEWERT: That is why I assumed it would be there.

Ms Paul: But it is not listed, is it? I would suggest outcome 2 in the future.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay, but for today if we could do it here that would be great. How many people have had their income support suspended and where?

Dr Morehead: There have been 380 parents across both the Northern Territory and Queensland who have had their income support suspended, which of course is different to having it cancelled. It is suspended in that it is not given to them at the time it is due and then the parent has to engage with Centrelink in order to get the money given to them and be paid back for the days they missed out. There have been 380 in total since SEAM began in 2009. There have been more suspensions on the enrolment side of SEAM as opposed to the attendance side of SEAM. There are two components to the measure.

Senator SIEWERT: Are we able to break that down?

Dr Morehead: Yes. There have been 133 parents in the Northern Territory who have been suspended under the enrolment component and 151 parents in Queensland under that

enrolment component. For attendance, it is 93 parents in the Northern Territory and three parents in Queensland.

Senator SIEWERT: How long was the average suspension?

Dr Morehead: The average suspension on the enrolment side of the measure is 10 days and on the attendance side is 20 days. On the enrolment side of it, if Centrelink says, 'We've asked you to provide evidence of enrolling your child in school; you haven't actually provided it to us and we know that your child isn't enrolled,' then the parent would generally make sure that the child was then enrolled, which would take place over that 10-day period. Centrelink would then be satisfied that, yes, they had enrolled their child.

On the attendance side, for which the average is 20 days, Centrelink would need to be assured by the educational authorities of the Northern Territory or Queensland governments that the child actually had gone back to school more than once; that the child had actually attended. That is why that is a little longer.

Senator SIEWERT: Has anybody had their income support permanently cut?

Dr Morehead: Yes, there has been one. What that means is that over a 13-week period where Centrelink has tried to engage with the parent et cetera the parent either has not engaged or does not need the income support anymore. Under those circumstances it would be 'Stuff it; I don't need that income support anymore' or the parent simply could not be contacted. The child is not at school. There is no contact. We do not really know what has happened. Those are the situations under which it would be cancelled.

Senator SIEWERT: So we have had one since 2009.

Dr Morehead: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Do we know if it is Queensland or NT?

Dr Morehead: It is in the Northern Territory. What can happen when someone does get cancelled off income support is that they are technically off the Centrelink system. One of the reasons we have a 13-week period is that during that 13 weeks they are not getting paid but are still in the Centrelink system, so they can be easily reactivated. If after 13 weeks you have not engaged with Centrelink or whatever then you drop out of the system administratively. Then, when you come back in, you have to start from scratch in terms of proving who you are, showing your identity et cetera. So that is technically what a cancellation means.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay. So we are not able to find out whether that particular family has dropped off income support and has no support or whether they have gone back onto the system subsequently?

Dr Morehead: Our understanding is that there is an attempt to reapply for some sort of income support. Whether it is the same one they were on—often in these situations you find they were not on the right income support.

Senator SIEWERT: So you are in contact with that particular family?

Dr Morehead: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. How many of those that have both the enrolment side of things and also the attendance of those 96 are cycling on and off? In other words, they have had their child at school, the child has been in attendance for a while and then they have dropped off again.

Dr Morehead: We track the children who are involved with SEAM. We monitor their attendance over time. Of the 96 who have had their income support suspended and come back on once the child is reattending, we know that their attendance has picked up enough to get the income support back again. What that means is that, if it then drops off again, the parent would possibly get suspended again.

Senator SIEWERT: That is what I am trying to find out. I am trying to find out the effectiveness of this measure.

Mr Kovacic: We will take on notice the extent to which there are repeat offenders.

Dr Morehead: We do have people who are repeat offenders, so we do have situations where the income support comes back, the attendance goes okay and then it drops off again.

Senator SIEWERT: Is there any discussion about why the children are like that in those particular families? The children are going, dropping off again and going again. What is done to talk to those families to find out why?

Dr Morehead: This is what SEAM and many of the other, more modern measures are about in terms of truancy. As we know, the Northern Territory government has introduced a fairly sophisticated new program—Every Child, Every Day—and, like SEAM, what the programs do is trigger a lot of dialogue with a family. That is the first point to note about these programs. With SEAM the parents get a warning letter where the education authority has advised Centrelink it wishes to use SEAM. It is important to note that SEAM is a voluntary tool for the Northern Territory or Queensland governments to use. It is not a Centrelink tool. Under the legislation Centrelink cannot start SEAM of itself. So what happens is the education authority has notified Centrelink that SEAM might be an appropriate pathway for this particular family. Centrelink, once it has assurance that it is the case that the child might benefit from SEAM, then sends a warning letter to the parents.

During the 28-day period that follows from the warning letter until a possible suspension, there is the offer of social work support to the family and the schools engage in a dialogue with the family. That is where the dialogue and engagement comes in. If we talk about the attendance side of it here—which I assume you are more interested in than the enrolment—the child's attendance is charted over the 28 days. At the end of that period Centrelink asks the education authority again to tell them what has happened with that child. We are not allowed to suspend the income support until they can tell us that the parents have not been making reasonable steps. So the first test is whether the attendance has improved. If it has, Centrelink cannot suspend income support. If the attendance has not improved, Centrelink still cannot suspend income support. Centrelink has to talk to the education authority and say: 'Is the parent taking any reasonable steps? What has happened over the last 28 days? Have they come and spoken to you? Have they responded to a request for a meeting? Have you had some engagement with the parents?' If the school says they have not been taking reasonable steps then Centrelink makes a determination on that family. It is only at that stage that Centrelink is able to say to the family, 'Your income support will be suspended.'

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. How many schools are now involved in the process? Could you break it down into the Northern Territory and Queensland?

Dr Morehead: There are 14 locations in SEAM. In terms of the actual school numbers I think there are around 43.

Mr Kovacic: There are 14 schools in the Northern Territory and 30 in Queensland since October 2009.

Senator SIEWERT: Can you give me a list of those groups?

Dr Morehead: Yes, we can.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of each of those schools, what is the attendance overall?

Dr Morehead: The attendance rates vary between those schools. That was the intention through the trial nature of SEAM. They are generally not fabulous overall attendance rates, but they vary. But the important thing to note about SEAM is that SEAM is about individual families at school. Even if you had a school with an average attendance rate of 98 per cent, there could well be three or four families whose children are not going to school regularly. So SEAM would still be a lever for those three or four families. It is not a school-level lever; it is an individual family lever. It is not designed to lift the average attendance rate of a school unless every single child at the school is attending in an extremely low fashion.

Senator SIEWERT: I understand the concept. Where you have it in the Northern Territory this is being applied in areas where you essentially have Aboriginal students. Have we seen a significant overall improvement in attendance in those schools?

Dr Morehead: No, because it is not designed to lift the overall attendance. What we do see on an individual level is the effect of SEAM on individual families. That is the impact that we can see with SEAM, not overall attendance rates. For example, say a school did get a lift in the overall attendance rate and SEAM was present. We would not be able to say SEAM contributed to that.

Senator SIEWERT: Has there been any evaluation of its effectiveness?

Dr Morehead: Yes. We are constantly monitoring it because it is a trial. In this trial fashion, not only are we constantly monitoring it but it has also changed over the life of the trial. It is sort of an action research trial where we listen to what is happening on the ground and then modify our processes within the legislative framework that has already been set for the trial.

Senator SIEWERT: Are those evaluations publicly available?

Dr Morehead: There is not a publicly available report as such yet. The agreement with the trial was to have an overall evaluation report at the end of it, which at this stage would be towards the end of next year, once the trial is finished. As with any trial, early results are not robust, so we have to chart it. Because we are also changing it because it is an action research trial and we change things as we go, we need to wait and say at the end of it, 'Under these conditions, this is what happened.' But we do have monitoring data as to how it is going.

Senator SIEWERT: That is not publicly available, though?

Dr Morehead: The monitoring data is not publicly available.

Senator SIEWERT: It is not publicly available. What does it measure?

Dr Morehead: A few things. We measure what people think about SEAM. We have done qualitative research on what people—for example, parents and teachers—think about it now.

Senator SIEWERT: Why isn't that publicly available?

Dr Morehead: We probably could make that publicly available.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could, that would be good.

Ms Paul: I suggest we take that on notice. The thing is that of course it is not an evaluation report, because the evaluation comes at the end of it. But I think it would be helpful to you if we spell out the sorts of things we have noticed through monitoring which have then led us to change the program over time, as Dr Morehead said. If we make those things clearer for you I think that will probably answer what you want.

Senator SIEWERT: That would be appreciated. Are you measuring education outcomes?

Dr Morehead: Yes, we are. As I said, the sorts of things we monitor are some qualitative research and what people are thinking about SEAM. Some of that qualitative research was done quite early on in the program, as soon as it commenced. Then we look at the individual children. For SEAM children we look at how they are going. It is important to note here that what SEAM is not is Centrelink coming in as a lever and suspending people's income support based on data. It is not that. I know that people sometimes think that that is what SEAM is—that it is Centrelink coming in and suspending someone's income support based on data given to Centrelink. As I hope I have explained, that is not what SEAM is. It is not that type of lever. Centrelink can never suspend someone's income support in isolation from a full understanding of the situation of the family, and it is only used as an absolute last resort. That is what SEAM is.

In terms of what happens when a child is under that SEAM process, what we find is that sending out the warning letter has a bit of an effect. When a parent receives the warning letter it explains: 'Your child is not going to school enough and if you don't do your best—'. It does not say, 'Your child's attendance has to improve.' It is: 'If you don't do your best to try and get your child to school then in 28 days time Centrelink could suspend your income support if you are still not doing your best.' That has some effect. You would then see the child—generally; not in every case—going back to school. For the parents whose child does not go back to school—they have had a letter but at the end of that 28-day period and after all the discussion between the authorities the parent's income support is suspended—in the majority of cases you actually see a lift in the attendance of the child. However, what we are interested in is how sustained the lift in attendance is. What we find is that the attendance goes up but then it can drop back.

Senator SIEWERT: That is why I asked about the cycling in and out. What I am interested in is their educational outcomes. Fair enough, they are attending; they can be attending school. We already know that there are a lot of kids, particularly in the Northern Territory, who are attending school but still not achieving good educational outcomes. What I want to know is: are you tracing through those kids who are attending to see if we are actually attaining better educational outcomes?

Dr Morehead: Just like we would never from a research or a technical perspective be able to claim that SEAM has had an effect on an average school attendance rate, SEAM would never be able to claim that it has had an effect on the content of the education that the child has received. It would be completely wrong to think that SEAM could possibly contribute to that. The aim of SEAM, as I said, is to trigger the higher level of attendance. Then there is all the debate about what a higher level of attendance means. If you have an Indigenous child, or any child, who has not been attending school very regularly and then they attend school regularly, I would imagine it is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to achieve a quality

education outcome. As you are probably aware, DEEWR spends an awful lot of effort and money on ensuring quality education. That is the main game. The main game is the extremely high level of input that the government is putting into quality education because that is what gives an education outcome. Attendance is merely a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition.

One of the things that SEAM tries to achieve is the creation of a habit. 'Can SEAM achieve the creation of a habit of attendance?' is probably a more appropriate question to ask in terms of what SEAM is capable of doing. That is what we would hope that SEAM could achieve but, as I say, there are mixed results. It is not a measure that can easily achieve that, because you do get a small spike in attendance. The issue is: how sustainable is it?

What we have found is that where the attendance does increase after an intervention, if a social worker is engaged with that family the attendance will stay up a bit higher for a bit longer.

Senator SIEWERT: In other words, if you have case management?

Dr Morehead: Yes—putting the support around the family is what works.

Senator SIEWERT: Exactly. How much is it costing? I will have to ask Centrelink. I presume you only have figures for what DEEWR spends.

Mr Roddham: We do have the figure for the total cost of SEAM. Since it commenced as part of the 2008-09 budget, funding has been \$31.2 million; \$6.4 million of that was allocated in the most recent budget to extend the trial.

Senator SIEWERT: Can you tell me how much DEEWR got out of that?

Mr Roddham: Out of the total cost, DEEWR has received \$3.8 million.

Senator SIEWERT: The rest goes to Centrelink?

Mr Roddham: A very small amount went to FaHCSIA earlier in the trial.

Senator SIEWERT: Presumably, I need to ask Centrelink for their expenditure?

Mr Roddham: Their allocation has been \$27.1 million.

Senator SIEWERT: Was the \$6.4 million overall to the overall budget, not to DEEWR, presumably?

Mr Roddham: For this most recent year, that is correct.

Mr Kovacic: That is broken down to \$800,000 for DEEWR for this financial year and \$5.6 million for DHS-Centrelink.

Senator SIEWERT: Does that include the budget for the evaluation?

Mr Roddham: It does.

Senator SIEWERT: It comes of your DEEWR money?

Mr Roddham: That is correct.

Senator GALLACHER: You said in your statement that you write to the parents. Given that in traditional Aboriginal society the children are the responsibility of the entire community not just the parents, if the kids are not turning up at school, the problem might be with the parents. I am not sure I saw any postboxes at the last Aboriginal settlement that I went to. Writing to someone who might be challenged with alcohol or other problems and giving them 28 days to respond may be totally ineffectual. Do you look at the extended family

and perhaps source role models in that family who are doing the right thing and interact with them?

Dr Morehead: There are two aspects to SEAM—the rules and the relationship. The rules part of SEAM include the letter, the suspension of the income support and the administrative role of Centrelink. The relationship part is going out during the 28-day period and making sure that we check that the parents are taking reasonable steps. That cannot be done just by sending out a letter and then 28 days later suspending the income support. That has never happened. Legislatively, it cannot happen under SEAM. It is not done centrally. Many of the parents get the letter read and hand-delivered to them. With Centrelink's very long history and experience with these very remote communities and with people who are not literate, Centrelink is probably the best resource in that regard. Centrelink is very used to dealing with the families in that way.

Senator GALLACHER: I was on the wrong track. I thought you were sending a letter and 28 days later when there no response you have an interaction. That is the protocol.

Dr Morehead: That is right. Also, it is not just Centrelink; it is the schools. The schools are in constant contact with their families and the community, even where children are not enrolled in the school. All the schoolteachers know all the children who live in the area because the schoolteachers live there as well. They are all part of the same community.

Senator GALLACHER: I read in a report that there are children who are not enrolled at all and are therefore not in your system. Is that prevalent or is that an unusual thing?

Dr Morehead: On the aspect of who is illegally not enrolled in Australia, obviously there is some homeschooling that goes on that is allowed. But in terms of non-enrolment various figures are created. The best one, or the one that gets used the most, is around 20,000 non-enrolled children Australia-wide. It is hard to know. Centrelink has done a lot of work, with that money that we read out earlier, in matching the parent who is receiving the income support for a child with a child. This has really been one of the first times and one of the great things, from our perspective. A lot of people would probably not find it that interesting, but we find it really interesting that now Centrelink can actually ask: 'Is the child of this parent actually enrolled in school at a young age?' not just for the purposes of when children are older and having to prove that the child is still at school. We are doing that.

You noted that there were some suspensions on the enrolment side. SEAM has been able to get those children enrolled. The benefit of SEAM is when Centrelink goes out and asks the parent: 'Can you please show us where your child is enrolled? Can you tell us?' Our process is that where there is not a match Centrelink says, 'We can't find where the child is enrolled.' Then Centrelink will go and say, 'We can't find where your child is enrolled. Could you please tell us?' The parent could just tell them or the parent could say, 'I haven't actually enrolled the child' or 'I'm not sure about school.' Then Centrelink will say, 'You need to enrol your child.' That was the intention of SEAM—to be a trigger for the enrolment of non-enrolled children.

We have found that it has worked to some extent. We do not think it has picked up all non-enrolled children. It is very hard to know how many children we have picked up that way, but from the ones we have picked up we know that they then do enrol. Obviously the question then is: do they attend?

Senator SIEWERT: Regarding the issue around whether the parent responds, has anybody been suspended because they have failed to respond? Could you take that on notice?

Dr Morehead: We will take that on notice, yes.

Senator ABETZ: I have two quick questions regarding questions on notice from last time, questions EW0037_12 and EW0115_12. I will deal with No. 37 first. It dealt with staff cuts and other matters. We were told that you would be having a staff cut of approximately 200 but that things were still in progress. Can you give us an update and, if things are still in progress, how much has progressed since last time?

Ms Paul: Yes, I certainly can. In fact I said to all DEEWR people in one of my all-staff addresses that once the budget closed and we actually knew what the result was and so on it was the same; we were still looking at a reduction of about 200 for this financial year. At the time that I went out to all DEEWR people recently, we had already achieved about 35 per cent of that. So at the current time we are on track to achieve what we need to achieve.

Senator ABETZ: What number of those is via natural attrition?

Ms Paul: We are hoping to achieve all of it by natural attrition if we can, and that is the course we have taken so far. We did use voluntary redundancy in the last financial year, when the number was higher and the requirement to reduce was greater. This year we are hoping not to have to do that.

Senator ABETZ: You tell us you are at 35 per cent of 200. Does that mean about 70 positions?

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator ABETZ: If it is not too much work, are you able to tell us what level of staff and in what areas?

Ms Paul: I think that might be a bit hard to know, given that it is natural attrition. I could certainly have done that if it was by way of voluntary redundancy, where we process every one. But I will give it a go on notice, if I may.

Senator ABETZ: But you have not replaced them, and that must be a conscious decision.

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator ABETZ: If Joe Bloggs at level X retires and you do not replace him, surely that must be known within the department—

Ms Paul: Yes, we will have a look.

Senator ABETZ: and you can tell us that level in whatever area.

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator ABETZ: I do like the wording 'and strengthened focus on internal mobility'. Does that mean that if you churn people around enough internally they will finally leave?

Ms Paul: It means the opposite actually, Senator.

Senator ABETZ: No, I know what you meant; it is just a—

Ms Paul: It means that we look after our own people first.

Senator ABETZ: Yes. It is nice terminology. In that answer you also told me about 'certain state offices'. Does the 200 include the state offices?

Ms Paul: It does.

Senator Chris Evans: Promise me you haven't cut Tasmania or we will be here all morning.

Senator ABETZ: The minister is absolutely right. He knows that I am a strong advocate for my home state of Tasmania. Could you take on notice for us what states have suffered what cuts.

Ms Paul: Sure. Just to clarify your question, I think what you probably want is how many voluntary redundancies by state. Is that what you want?

Senator ABETZ: And not replacements.

Ms Paul: They would not have been replaced.

Senator ABETZ: No, but through natural attrition. So voluntary redundancies and natural attrition—that is, if there used to be 20 in a state office and there are now only 18—and what positions.

Turning quickly to EW0115_12, I could not help but notice that we continue to fund from all sorts of areas the government's carbon tax cheer squad, but the real question I want to ask is about the funding for the ACTU of around \$3.8 million. We were given 'The nature of the payments is as follows:'. Thank you for that detail. Could I be given a split up of that on notice please.

Ms Paul: Sure. A split up of activity?

Senator ABETZ: I was told that the \$3,794,565.86 was 'attendance of ACTU staff at various committees, forums and International Labour Organisation meetings'. If you could just categorise it and say how much for 'meeting obligations for Safe Work Australia and the provision of services to advance the National Occupational Health and Safety Strategy'.

Ms Paul: All right. We will take that on notice.

Senator Chris Evans: For completeness I will give you the ARG and ACCI as well, because most of those are tripartite functions, like occ. health and safety, where we have funded those organisations.

Senator ABETZ: Well I trust nobody will ever complain again about the number of questions I ask, when the minister adds supplementaries to them. Thank you very much

Senator MASON: Good morning, Ms Paul and officers. Ms Paul, can I offer my congratulations on your Order of Australia award. It is a really significant honour, so my sincere congratulations—although I was just thinking this morning as I came here that perhaps nothing is sufficient honour to justify the horror of estimates. However, congratulations at any rate.

Ms Paul: That is very gracious of you. Thank you.

Senator Chris Evans: In the old days we would have made her a dame.

Senator MASON: You know my view on those things, Minister. I am hoping, Ms Paul, this morning the Queen is watching us. I know she takes a great interest in the proceedings of the Senate.

Ms Paul: Were it her honours I would, as the minister said, be a dame. Thank you very much, Senator; that is very kind.

Senator MASON: Could we commence with a question on notice. I have to admit it was a lengthy question on notice, EW0163_12, which I lodged in writing on 2 June 2011. It is in similar terms to the one Senator Abetz lodged a couple of months later. Mine is slightly more comprehensive and adds about three things to Senator Abetz's question—that is, in addition to what Senator Abetz asked, I requested identification of the appropriation source for each program, the date each program was announced and started, and the details of any Audit Office performance audits for DEEWR programs. You were good enough to let me know that the department was looking at that. I was just wondering when you think you could answer my question from June in full.

Ms Paul: First of all, let me apologise for us not having been able to do it to date. A long time has elapsed. For us it is a large task, obviously because of the number of programs. But thank you for clarifying that, and that is extremely helpful to me. I certainly will undertake to offer you the update of the question which Senator Abetz has asked with the additions of the appropriations source, the date announced and started and the details of ANAO performance audits as soon as we possibly can. I am sure we can do that before the end of this sitting session and we would aim for the beginning to the middle of November, if that suits you.

Senator MASON: Thank you. I now move to cross-portfolio issues. I do not always read the *Sydney Morning Herald* but on 19 September there was an article 'Fraud probe snares top bureaucrats'. It does not relate to DEEWR; it relates to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Have any DEEWR departmental officials been investigated internally for fraud in the past two financial years?

Ms Paul: We can give you the statistics on that.

Senator MASON: And can you provide the levels of seniority of those departmental employees?

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator MASON: Is it also possible to know whether any DEEWR employees have been disciplined, demoted or terminated in the past two financial years as a result of fraud investigation?

Ms Paul: Yes, we can give you that.

Senator MASON: Does DEEWR regularly monitor and/or conduct periodic reviews of departmental contract tendering processes? Does that happen as a matter of course?

Ms Paul: Regarding your words on fraud and what we have undertaken to do—

Senator MASON: I am not saying there is any in DEEWR.

Ms Paul: What I was going to say is that we have offered numbers in the past and the numbers are very small, although we have an active investigations branch staffed by people with very high qualifications, particularly ex-police and detective qualifications and so on. Regarding internal fraud, we would normally not have more than a case a year—fewer, actually. We will give you all those details. Your question on contracts was?

Senator MASON: Do you review tendering processes?

Ms Paul: From a probity et cetera point of view?

Senator MASON: Yes. Regularly?

Ms Paul: Yes, we always do it. We do it as we prepare for a tender. We do it during a tender. We do it after a tender. The bigger the tender, the more heavy-duty the probity activity gets. For example, yesterday here we discussed the upcoming tenders for some Job Services Australia providers and for some disability employment services providers. Whilst they are not as big as they have been in the past, they are significant and sensitive. As part of planning, they will have external probity advisers who physically sit during the entirety of the decision-making process by the teams in the department. Then the probity advisers will sign off afterwards that all was well. Yesterday under outcome 4, we discussed that sometimes if, say, a tenderer is unhappy with a result and makes a complaint to us about process, we will actually offer them the discussion with the probity adviser. We went through better that yesterday.

Senator MASON: Have the probity advisers ever uncovered any malfeasance in DEEWR?

Ms Paul: No. Because we have them with us the whole time, if there is anything that even starts to look that way they pick it up before it is under way. So, no, we have never had any issue that way.

Senator MASON: That is good news. Not in relation to DEEWR but in relation to other state government departments and elsewhere, is the issue sometimes that tenders have been split so as to avoid publication and open tender? Often there are ceilings above which tenders have to be open or subject to certain public ventilation and accountability. Has there ever been a sense in the department that people have tried to avoid an open tendering process by coming under a certain amount of money?

Ms Paul: Not within DEEWR. Our statistics on open tender and meeting the requirements are very good.

Mr Storen: Part of our regular internal audit process works through looking for those very types of instances you are talking about. At the margins we do detect small amounts sometimes. Usually it is not the \$80,000 threshold around tendering; often it is the \$10,000 Austender threshold. At the very margins, in very isolated instances, internal audit processes will sometimes throw up those occurrences. They are dealt with through internal audit recommendations and follow-up and management action.

Senator MASON: Have there been any cases in DEEWR let us say during the last two financial years of corporate credit cards being misused by officers of the department?

Mr Storen: Yes, there have been a very small number of instances of that occurring. We have quite robust acquittal processes where they are picked up quite quickly, and then we have different processes for any that require what we would call a code of conduct discussion with a staff member or a referral to a full fraud investigation.

Senator MASON: I know we have to be careful with names here, but is it possible to let the committee know the levels of seniority of the employees and what the nature of the misuse was, what reimbursement was sought and so forth?

Mr Storen: Yes.

Mr Kriz: Only subject to this proviso—in relation to current investigations, or if in answering something we would reveal some sort of operational details which might prejudice the investigation, that would be of concern to us.

CHAIR: I think the information should only encompass concluded investigations. You might also advise us how many investigations are on foot in that instance, but no details about them until they are concluded.

Senator MASON: You might also outline the monitoring processes that DEEWR undertake. Are there any instances of DEEWR employees travelling without approval over the last two financial years?

Mr Storen: None that I can recollect, but we will look at our records. Our travel approval process is pretty robust as well, but we will see what we can find for you.

Senator MASON: Are there any issues with DEEWR overpaying salaries in the last two financial years?

Mr Storen: Undoubtedly, with over 6,000 employees, there would be instances of that occurring, and there are processes in place for recovery. We can collect that information for you.

Senator MASON: I turn to contact numbers. I think the secretariat has flagged these particular contracts. The first one concerns facilitation of focus groups—CEN401301.

Mr Storen: That was the one with John Robinson Consulting Services.

Senator MASON: That is it. Why were the focus groups established?

Mr Storen: This is part of the refresh of the department's strategic plan. The original strategic plan for DEEWR was 2008 to 2011, so this year we have been working on a new strategic plan. Part of the strategic plan process is engaging our people and having discussions around the strategic plan, our business priorities and how we work. So we engaged an external facilitator to facilitate the discussions with our people across the country and to gather information to inform the development of a new strategic plan.

Senator MASON: What specific questions did the facilitator ask? What is the role of John Robinson Consulting? Do they compile the focus groups and devise the questions or does the department do that?

Mr Storen: The provider works with the team in my area to devise a half-day session working through the strategic plan with people. The plan covers off the department's vision, objectives and goals. It also works through how the department would like to work and the approaches in the department relationships. It tests people's views on the existing strategic plan, the direction we would like to take it in and how best that is communicated to people. It gathers a wide range of views from across the department. The provider also synthesises a lot of those views. It is a lot easier for somebody external to the department to present back to us the information on quite divergent views on the direction of the new plan.

Senator MASON: There are focus groups for the strategic plan and other issues.

Mr Storen: That is correct.

Senator MASON: We never use them politics.

Ms Paul: It is really important to me that the strategic plan be built as much from the people in the department as possible. You can do a strategic plan in a couple of ways. It is a three-year plan. We all have our strategic plans. You could do it top-down or you could do it with me saying: 'This is the plan; here are the words.' That is not my preferred approach and never has been. I prefer to engage our people in the creation and development of a strategic

plan as much as I possibly can. The important thing about a strategic plan is the ownership of it. That is what this goes to.

Senator MASON: Are only departmental officers involved or are members of the public involved?

Mr Storen: This is the departmental officers.

Senator MASON: In a way it is formalising feedback as well.

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator MASON: I go to CN435911, construction of early learning and childcare centres in Queensland. This is a large contract for over \$4.6 million. Where does this fit?

Mr Manthorpe: This is a contract associated with the implementation of a budget measure that the government entered into in the 2010 budget. This budget measure relates to refurbishments or new constructions of what are generally referred to as budget based funded services. When I worked in the early childhood part of the department, you asked me and my colleagues a series of questions about children and family centres and early learning and care centres. This is neither of those. This is a further budget measure about services which the Commonwealth funds and has funded for many, many years. Many of these services are in remote communities and, in varying degrees, they are in need of refurbishment. This is a contract that relates to the design of, consultation about, management of and construction of the services.

Senator MASON: Just in Queensland?

Mr Manthorpe: No, although there is a contract for Queensland. You have listed two contracts about this general topic, one in Queensland and one in the Northern Territory, but there are budget based services in a number of states and territories, certainly some in the WA, Queensland and New South Wales. I am not sure whether they are in every state and territory, off the top of my head, but we are focusing quite a lot of our efforts on services in remote parts of Queensland and the Northern Territory at the moment.

Senator MASON: If you add the contracts together they come to over \$10½ million. I wonder why I have not been asking questions about this. I could not work out where it fitted in within what I have been pursuing in the past. It does not, does it?

Ms Paul: Not really. It is a capital works issue.

Mr Manthorpe: It is another measure. It was published as part of the budget last year. We are working our way through the process of getting the work done.

Senator MASON: How much has been paid out of the \$4.6 million so far in Queensland?

Mr Manthorpe: Approximately \$1.6 million, I believe.

Senator MASON: Where in Queensland are these centres?

Mr Manthorpe: The ones that are the focus of this work are in Badu Island, Bamaga, Aurukun and New Mapoon.

Senator MASON: When are they expected to be completed? You mentioned they were refurbishments.

Mr Manthorpe: A couple of them are refurbishments and a couple of them are new builds. We are working to complete the building and refurbishment of those and several others services by 2015.

Senator MASON: I have not been asking about this. I have obviously missed this amidst all my trawling through estimates papers. Where can I find out more about it?

Senator Chris Evans: If you are well behaved today, I will not report that to Tony Abbott.

Senator MASON: Or Senator Abetz.

Mr Manthorpe: You can find it in last year's budget papers.

Senator MASON: I have further questions later today about other issues I have pursued in the past, and you can guess what they will be. There is a \$6.2 million contract for the Northern Territory.

Mr Manthorpe: Yes.

Senator MASON: How much has been paid out so far?

Mr Manthorpe: On this contract, \$2.2 million has been paid.

Senator MASON: How many centres have been constructed or refurbished?

Mr Manthorpe: The services that are the focus of that contract are in Apatula, Lajamanu, Yuelamu, Minjilang and Jilkminggan.

Senator MASON: Are they being built from the ground up?

Mr Manthorpe: Some of them are new builds and some are refurbishments.

Senator MASON: Do we have any ideas when they are going to be open?

Mr Manthorpe: Again, I do not want to put a date on when specific ones are going to be finished. They are subject to community consultation, approvals and other matters.

Senator MASON: In other contexts there have been a range of problems. I know it is a problem for the government.

Mr Manthorpe: Yes. What I would say about those, just as I said about the other, is that we anticipate that through the measure the building of those will occur through to 2015. Hopefully some of these will be finished well in advance of that, but I do not want to put a date on it.

Senator MASON: Will they replace existing centres or are they additional centres? Some are new and some are refurbished—you mentioned that.

Mr Manthorpe: The new ones are replacing existing buildings. A bit of history: the Commonwealth has for many years essentially directly funded a number of childcare centres in remote communities that are otherwise not commercial. You will appreciate that in child care generally we pay childcare benefit, childcare rebate and so on to assist parents with affordability in commercial circumstances. These services are not like that. They are services where the Commonwealth has for many years very substantially contributed to the direct running of the services through funding. Over time, some of these services have got various forms of maintenance issues, are rundown and what have you. The measure goes not just to infrastructure but also to improving the quality of the childcare service.

Senator MASON: We might pursue this at a later stage, perhaps at the next estimates in February. Now I have alerted myself to it, I might pursue it later.

I go down to CN410106 and CN410106-A1, which are for 'the impact of student contribution levels and repayment thresholds on demand for higher education'—an interesting issue. There are two: one for Access Economics and one for Deloitte Access Economics. On who's initiative was this research undertaken?

Mr Storen: This research is part of the higher education funding base review set of work.

Senator MASON: Lomax-Smith.. Yes. I thought it may have been.

Mr Storen: It is one piece of research, but Access and Deloitte Access changed company composition through the contract.

Senator MASON: So it is the same contract for the same amount of money but they have changed the name of the company.

Mr Storen: That is correct. They changed the composition during the course of the contract. This was a piece of work undertaken to feed into the base funding review considerations.

Senator MASON: It is right within the core issues for Dr Lomax-Smith, isn't it? Will this report be publicly released?

Mr Storen: That is part of the process of the public announcement of the outcomes of the review and it will be considered by government in that process. It will be dependent on the government's decision when they release the—

Senator MASON: It is a government decision and it may be integrated with the Lomax-Smith review.

Senator Chris Evans: The answer is it has not come to me yet but it was done for that review. One general approach is to publish and be damned, but we will make a decision when we get to that point.

Senator MASON: It is a very interesting empirical question. I will be interested to know what the answer is. Do you know from what stakeholder groups information was sought? Do you know about all those empirical issues, Mr Storen, about randomly selected undergraduate students?

Mr Storen: I do not have that information with me. A lot of the work undertaken was part of examining a lot of the data, regression analysis and changes to demand based on different decisions over time. It was quite a statistical analysis of a lot of data rather than a qualitative type thing I think you were referring to.

Senator MASON: So it was not so much focus groups and so forth. It was a look at past behavioural responses to changes in fees and so forth.

Mr Storen: Correct, also a review of Australian and international literature in this space as well.

Senator MASON: Yes, of which there is quite a bit now. The contract was amended on 13 October 2011. Is that again related to the change of the company?

Mr Storen: I do not have that precise timing.

Senator MASON: Could you check that?

Mr Storen: Yes.

Senator MASON: Next is CN409886, on the development of the university experience survey. I am wondering if this is part of the base funding Lomax-Smith review.

Mr Manthorpe: I think this one is linked to the question of higher education performance funding. The task that ACER has been contracted to perform following an open tender is essentially the design, development and then the administration of a pilot survey to test the experience of university students.

Senator MASON: University students?

Mr Manthorpe: Yes.

Senator MASON: University experience is a pretty broad thing to assess. What specifically is being sought to investigate there? It is a fairly broad category.

Mr Manthorpe: That might be a point that you might wish to take up with higher education colleagues later in the day. I do not have the details.

Senator Chris Evans: You would probably have a much more informed discussion when the higher education people are here. It is related to the performance funding measures as we try and develop those.

Ms Paul: Basically this is about developing empirical ways of measuring things which are important components of overall performance. What the specifics of the student experiences are that might be measured I think we should get colleagues to answer this afternoon.

Senator MASON: They are important but they are obviously difficult to measure, Ms Paul. I am not a sociologist—I find it very hard to measure.

Ms Paul: That is right. So it was important to get some expertise into this to make it as robust as possible, obviously.

Senator Chris Evans: And clearly, if we are going to link funding decisions to it, it will be something that will be contested.

Senator MASON: I appreciate that. Senator Carr gave me a lecture about that yesterday.

Senator Chris Evans: Did he?

Senator MASON: Oh yes—as you would expect.

Senator Chris Evans: I am sorry I missed it.

Senator MASON: I refer to CN416936, 'survey personalisation and mailing services'. I think Salmat was supplying those. What does this contract involve. It is for half a million dollars, so it is quite a—

Mr Manthorpe: Sure. Salmat is contracted to us to undertake what we call the Post-Program Monitoring survey, the PPM survey, in the employment part of the department. This is a long-running piece of the way we gather evidence and, indeed, have strong administrative data and evaluation evidence of the efficacy of the department's contracted employment service arrangements. These arrangements have been in place for a number of years.

Senator MASON: So this contract is nothing new; it is ongoing?

Mr Manthorpe: Yes. It may not be technically an extension but it is essentially a continuation of work that Salmat has done for us before. We are also in the process of testing members of Centrelink's panel on personalisation and mailing services to test who, after this

contract has run its course, may undertake the work into the future. It is a long-running activity.

Senator MASON: How many personalised surveys are sent out?

Mr Manthorpe: There are around 400,000 each year. It is pretty big.

Ms Paul: To job seekers.

Senator MASON: I see. Are they mailed electronically or in hard copy? Hard copy I suppose.

Mr Manthorpe: From memory—and I had some involvement in this some years ago—it was through a mailing house arrangement. Whether things have moved on a bit in the last few years, which is conceivable, and we do it by email now, I am not sure. I think it is a mailing house arrangement.

Senator MASON: They collect, analyse, report and do all those administrative and intelligence-gathering activities?

Mr Manthorpe: That is right.

Senator MASON: I have three contracts here: CN417009, CN417016 and CN417068. They are very large contracts and they have just now been transferred to DEEWR. Why is that?

Mr Storen: These contracts are for Australian Apprenticeships support services. They relate to the Australian Apprenticeships centres, who broker apprenticeship places between prospective apprentices and employers and manage the administrative arrangements around those. This is a longstanding arrangement. The previous contracts were established pre-MOG under the previous Department of Education, Science and Training.

Senator MASON: DEST, yes. I worked with them.

Mr Storen: The contracts were extended for nine months and that required the republication on AusTender of the contracts.

Senator MASON: Okay. But what about CN417009-A1? That is about property management services. Is that related to apprenticeships as well?

Mr Storen: No, that one is related to one of our data centres. The department operates a number of data centres. We are in the process of rationalising our data centres. This is the contract extension for one of the centres where we have increased the floor space. The department started off with four data centres about three years ago. We are on our way to reducing that to two. This is one of the data centres we will be retaining, and we have increased the floor space and extended the contract to continue this data centre.

Senator MASON: For \$7.3 million?

Mr Storen: It is over a number of years.

Senator MASON: Whereabouts is this located?

Mr Storen: It is in Dickson, Canberra. The new floor space is about 680 square metres of data centre space.

Senator MASON: Is it possible to provide, in table form, a list of the car parking spaces owned, leased or rented by the department in Queensland? Is that possible?

Mr Manthorpe: I would think so.

Senator MASON: How much do they cost to purchase or rent and who are they allocated to? Is that possible?

Mr Storen: We could provide the information by town or city, how many car parks and what we are paying for them.

Ms Paul: Do you want it for everywhere or just in Brisbane?

Senator MASON: In particular, Brisbane. This is from a constituent about a certain issue. I am not sure what it is but it is a high-policy issue, Mr Manthorpe!

Senator Chris Evans: I make a note of warning that I am happy to be open about what it is costing the department but we might have to be a bit careful about commercial-in-confidence where we have negotiated deals with commercial operators. We are happy to reveal the cost to the Commonwealth.

Ms Paul: It would mainly be in Brisbane.

Senator MASON: And how many are there?

Mr Manthorpe: You also asked who occupies the car spaces. I am not sure we would want to name the officers.

Senator MASON: You are right. I do not need the names of particular officers.

Ms Paul: We can say what our rules are for access; that is fine.

Senator Chris Evans: I understand it is the biggest issue in tertiary education too, as a couple of the vice-chancellors have told me after they have tried to alter the parking entitlements of staff.

Senator MASON: It is a huge issue.

Ms Paul: It is indeed.

Australian Learning and Teaching Council

[10:08]

Senator MASON: During the budget estimates, Dr Nicoll mentioned that the ALTC was going to have to break their lease and that they were hoping the premises could be re-leased by October 2011. If this did not happen, Dr Nicoll mentioned that the estimated cost would be about \$3 million. As it is now October, I was wondering whether a new lessee had been found for the premises?

Mr Emmanuel: We have assigned the lease to Cancer Australia from 30 September. That cost has come down to \$451,000, being a lease incentive payment that we have paid for them.

Senator MASON: So you have a new lessee from September?

Mr Emmanuel: From 1 October.

Senator MASON: How much has it cost the department to break the lease?

Mr Emmanuel: For the company it cost \$451,118. But since it is a Commonwealth agency, we believe the cost to the Commonwealth is zero.

Senator MASON: What was the cost of not being able to find a lessee before 1 October?

Mr Emmanuel: It would have been \$3.253 million.

Senator MASON: A cost of \$3.25 million?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes.

Senator MASON: So you had to wait until 1 October to find a new lessee—is that right?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes.

Senator Chris Evans: I think Mr Emmanuel's answer was that would have been the cost if they had not got out of the lease. Because they got out of the lease, the cost is now \$451,000.

Senator MASON: Okay.

Senator Chris Evans: That was the projected cost if they could not break the lease.

Senator MASON: So, because you found a lessee as of 1 October, the cost is \$450,000.

Senator Chris Evans: Yes.

Senator MASON: Dr Nicoll also spoke of staff redundancy payments. As at 1 June this year, two ALTC staff had been made redundant, with another 16 redundancies to occur at the end of September this year and five more at the end of December this year. Given that 18 of the expected 23 redundancies have now occurred, could you please provide a breakdown of costs incurred thus far relating to redundancy payments, payment of staff benefits and any other associated costs? If you cannot do it here and now, you can do it on notice. But, if you can do it now, that is wonderful.

Mr Emmanuel: I can provide that information.

Senator MASON: Can you do it now?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes.

Senator MASON: Please go ahead.

Mr Emmanuel: So far the cost of redundancies has been \$1.01 million—annual leave, \$166,000; long-service leave, \$15,000; terminating contracts, \$541,000; and superannuation payments, \$295,000.

Senator MASON: What does that add up to? I have not got my calculator.

Mr Emmanuel: It adds up to \$2.03 million.

Senator MASON: They are the full costs, in effect, of the redundancies and associated costs—about \$2 million?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes.

Senator MASON: I think we had a discussion last time with Dr Nicoll about Ms Alison Johns, who was appointed as a consultant—I think that is right. Ms Paul, I think you indicated that Ms Johns would be working for DEEWR between July and September this year. Is that still accurate?

Ms Paul: Yes, I believe so. I think we have got her work in. We can go into more detail this afternoon if you like with the higher education people, but basically that is right. She came here, went out and about and consulted broadly, and I think we have now got the results of her work.

Senator MASON: She was a consultant, and I think her fee had yet to be negotiated at the last estimates.

Ms Paul: We can certainly give it to you on notice now.

Senator MASON: Can you give me what her overall fee is?

Ms Paul: Of course.

Senator MASON: You mentioned that her overall work would be discussed more fruitfully later today in higher education?

Ms Paul: If you wish to, certainly.

Senator MASON: Where would it be best to discuss that?

Ms Paul: Anywhere under program 3.1.

Senator Chris Evans: When the higher ed people are at the table. It just means we will have the right people here; that is all.

Senator MASON: I understand that. How is the transition of the ALTC's functions to DEEWR progressing?

Mr Emmanuel: The functions were transferred to DEEWR on 16 September. All of the program contracts, the systems and the funding have now been transferred to DEEWR to meet ongoing commitments. We currently have only four staff remaining with ALTC to wind up the company.

Senator MASON: Just four left?

Mr Emmanuel: Just four left.

Senator MASON: What is your job there, Mr Emmanuel?

Mr Emmanuel: I am the company secretary and also the General Manager, Corporate Services.

Senator MASON: Until the end of the ALTC?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes.

Senator MASON: Have any changes been made to the five programs—grants, fellowships awards, learning and teaching, academic standards and engagements?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes, that is all.

Senator MASON: They have all gone across to DEEWR?

Mr Emmanuel: They have all gone to DEEWR.

Senator MASON: Finally, Minister, I think Dr Nicoll has taken up an appointment with TEQSA.

Senator Chris Evans: Yes, she was successful in the merit selection process to be the Chief Commissioner of TEQSA.

Senator MASON: Is Dr Nicoll over today? I cannot remember.

Senator Chris Evans: Either she is on leave or she is here.

Dr Nicoll: She is here.

Senator MASON: We will see you later today in a different context—in a different iteration.

Senator Chris Evans: I did not see her, but it sounded like her voice, so she is obviously here.

Senator MASON: So in a sense, Mr Emmanuel, you have taken over, in essence, the lead role at the ALTC until it winds down?

Mr Emmanuel: Yes.

Senator MASON: When did Dr Nicoll start in her new capacity at TEQSA?

Mr Emmanuel: I believe on 3 October.

Senator MASON: Just the other day.

Mr Emmanuel: Yes. She was with the ALTC until 30 September.

Senator MASON: I think I saw a press release to that effect. That is all I have for ALTC.

Proceedings suspended from 10:16 to 10:31

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

CHAIR: We will resume with questions for ACARA. I welcome Dr Hill, Mr Randall and Mr Adams. Do you have any opening remarks you would like to make to the committee before we commence with questions?

Dr Hill: No thank you, Chairman.

Senator MASON: Perhaps we can start with the national curriculum. We had a chat about this in the budget estimates. I understand there was a meeting of teachers in June this year to provide feedback on the national curriculum's implementation. How did that go?

Dr Hill: Probably the key meetings we have had with teachers have related to an aspect of the curriculum, namely the achievement standards. That is what we have been focusing on. The brief we were given was to ensure that the achievement standards are pitched correctly, aligned with the curriculum, clear to teachers and can be used for reporting purposes. So we held forums with teachers drawn from all the states and territories, nationally and also in each of the jurisdictions. At those meetings they gave us feedback on our achievement standards and pointed out issues that they thought we could improve on. We then went away and worked on those achievement standards and brought them all back again. That was in August. They then repeated the exercise and rated the achievement standards again. The result of that exercise was that they universally agreed that the achievement standards were ready to be implemented, so last Friday the ministers met in council and received the report of that exercise and unanimously endorsed those achievement standards, which was the final piece in approving the curriculum for the first four subjects for implementation across years F to 10.

Senator MASON: So those achievement standards have now been endorsed nationwide?

Dr Hill: They have.

Senator MASON: That is great oral feedback but is there any documentation that would flesh that out for the committee?

Dr Hill: Absolutely. On our website we have details of all of that, but we can send you the report of that validation exercise, and we will be happy to do so.

Senator MASON: You referred to it last time as the validation exercise.

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: Did you discuss the national curriculum more broadly or was it really just about the achievement standards?

Dr Hill: Yes, we did. We also discussed a revision to a paper that describes the whole of the curriculum. We call this our shape paper. This paper sets out the vision for the whole of the curriculum not just the First World subjects but also in all the key learning areas and how they will be structured, how they will be assessed and how they will be reported. That revised shape paper was quite a significant statement. A lot of people have been concerned that we are not going to attend to some of the other subjects. That is not true. All of the subjects will be attended to over time and there are plans to proceed for full implementation of all the key learning areas.

Senator MASON: Were any concerns expressed that the content was unrealistically high or too low for students they were teaching?

Dr Hill: No.

Senator MASON: Was there universal endorsement and euphoria?

Dr Hill: There was endorsement with a claim. The chair of the ministerial council said we had a very productive meeting and that was echoed by other ministers too at the end of the process—and it was. The content had actually been signed off last December, of course. So those issues of whether there was too much content and so on had been resolved last year. This was just finalising the link between the content and how teachers will have to report achievement, which are the achievement standards.

Senator MASON: Any reservations expressed on any part of the national curriculum?

Dr Hill: No. The concern expressed was, 'Now we have to get on and do the implementation.' Of course, jurisdictions have different time lines, depending on their local requirements. Some are moving ahead quite quickly, others have to go through a process of developing syllabuses and other documentation so they will come on a little later.

Senator MASON: You say no reservations were expressed, so there were no reservations expressed at least on the aspect of the achievement standards. I understand that Principals Australia have released a poll of their membership, which shows a majority of principals do not feel sufficiently consulted in relation to the national curriculum. Do you feel ACARA has done enough to consult? Do you agree with that poll and that finding?

Dr Hill: I do meet regularly with principals groups. Of course one could always meet more. If they are feeling that way then we need to attend to those feelings. We will reach out to make sure that we are consulting more with them. Certainly in all our processes, we make sure that we are consulting with all the key stakeholder groups.

Senator MASON: You must be aware of these reservations, surely, if I am. I get all sorts of emails from around the country on all sorts of issues. When you have 50 per cent of 1,600 respondents saying that they did not feel they had been consulted sufficiently on the development of the national curriculum, that strikes me as being an issue. I am not suggesting it is a terminal issue, but it is a big issue.

Dr Hill: Our feelings are that this was particularly an issue last year at the time at which we were going through some rather difficult processes in terms of finalising that first draft of the curriculum. We have since taken quite a lot of steps to improve our approaches to stakeholder consultation and we believe it is less a current issue than it was last year.

Senator MASON: The media release from Principals Australia is dated 14 September 2011, just a month ago. Clearly there are still concerns out there. You are aware of those concerns and you are working on them? What do I tell people who continue to email me?

Dr Hill: There are a number of issues that principals want to address when it comes to the curriculum. Some of them relate to the content of the curriculum but, generally, for principals that is not really the issue. It is much more to do with implementing the curriculum. The teachers want to know about the curriculum. For the principals, it is: what have I got to do in this school to implement it? I think what the principals are saying is there is a lot of information they need. A part of that comes from us and a part of it comes from the jurisdictions. It is the case that principals are a group that we all need to target and keep well in the loop in terms of the different approaches to implementation that are being adopted in each of the jurisdictions.

Senator MASON: We now have the curriculum and we now have the achievement standards, and I understand that. Over the next little while it will be implemented, so the concerns of principals in Australia will become critical, won't they? Principals have to know how it is going to be implemented.

Dr Hill: Indeed.

Senator MASON: Will that be the top focus for ACARA? Is that right?

Dr Hill: Implementation is something that will be a focus for ACARA, particularly for the jurisdictions because they have the prime responsibility for implementation. We will be working with them on that.

Senator MASON: Are the states and territories the jurisdictions?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: What is the timetable for implementation?

Dr Hill: The agreed timetable is we will aim for substantial implementation by the end of 2013. This was something that was agreed to by all ministers.

Senator MASON: Will it be by the start of 2013?

Dr Hill: There will be substantial implementation by the end of 2013. That has always been the timeline. Almost all of the individual jurisdictions have announced plans to their schools as to what will happen in each jurisdiction. For example, ACT is already fairly well into it.

Senator MASON: You mentioned that.

Dr Hill: Queensland, your own state, is very well advanced in its planning. All the states have developed significant plans. Indeed, on our website we provide a link so you can see each jurisdiction's implementation plan.

Senator MASON: Last time we both agreed that ACARA is subject to the vagaries of federalism. I know my state of Queensland has a very different view about assessment, as you know, to New South Wales. We have discussed that in the past. It is a problem that has to be overcome. Clearly you are aware of it, Doctor. I keep getting feedback all the time about the difficulties. You say you are aware of them and that by the end of 2013 it will be substantially implemented throughout the nation.

Dr Hill: I am sure it will be. The exceptions have been well publicised and there are good reasons for them. It does not mean to say that planning is not going on. New South Wales have said that they will not expect all schools to implement it until 2014. That relates to their processes, which require the development of syllabuses, other notice to people and the provision of training. There is a commitment to make sure that schools can be ready to implement this. While we hear the problems, as you do, the good news is we also hear the stories of schools that are already moving forward with some enthusiasm.

Senator MASON: I trust that you read my contribution to the Schools Assistance Amendment Bill 2011? Did you read that?

Dr Hill: Indeed, I did.

Senator MASON: You do not need to comment. You may not agree with anything I said but at least grant me that I was consistent in my concerns about the overarching themes and so forth. Are you aware of them?

Dr Hill: Absolutely.

Senator MASON: I will move to the My School website. Could you tell the committee what additions are currently under discussion for the My School website.

Dr Hill: Not too many, actually, but there are some fairly significant ones. On the minus side, we are proving accessibility, useability and functionality. These are small but critical changes. For example, for people who are colourblind we have various ways of changing colours. We have better navigation and so on. These are small changes but the sorts of things you would expect. The key thing will be that we will be introducing a new page of detailed information about VET outcomes in senior secondary schools that will allow one to see the enrolments and completions of VET units broken down into the area of study.

Senator MASON: That is VET study on the My School website?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: So we have them and we have facilities for colourblind students and so forth. Is there anything else?

Dr Hill: We will also have additional information on student gain. Currently you can compare student gain with the gain in other schools that have students from similar backgrounds. We are adding one now which is students with the same starting scores. We think this is very important—

Senator MASON: Mr Paul and officers will recall—we will not get into this now because it will come up later in the day. How do you assess, for example, the excellence of teachers? Do you do it from the total school or the improvement? Perhaps it is improvement because that adds to the intellectual capital. Without going into that now, will that be on the website?

Dr Hill: The gain will be on the website, yes, in relation to students with the same starting scores.

Senator MASON: Is there anything else?

Dr Hill: They are the two main ones. The only other detail this changes is that there are four years of achievement data rather than three, which is simply because we are into our fourth year, so you see a longer trend, which I think is important. But when it comes to writing we cannot show a four-year trend because we have had to break the scale, given the

change from narrative writing to persuasive writing. You have probably heard that, when it came to assessing persuasive writing, we were unable to scale the scores and equate the scores on persuasive writing which students took this year with the previous three years of narrative writing. It turns out that students respond differently at different age levels to narrative writing and persuasive writing. The year 3s are quite good at narrative but they are not so good at persuasive writing. That makes sense, I suppose, because younger kids—by the time they get to year 9 they learn how to be very persuasive.

Senator MASON: I will take your word for it. When will these new initiatives be launched?

Dr Hill: The new website will be launched sometime in late February 2012.

Senator MASON: Do you know how much it will cost?

Dr Hill: Yes, we do have data on that, which I can locate for you. I think we provided it to you in a written response, but the total cost of the development and construction of the My School website up to its launch to the end of January 2010 was \$2.1 million. That was to develop it from scratch up to January 2010. The cost per month now that it is pretty well developed is about \$78,000 a month. That is including hosting and the salaries of the staff.

Senator MASON: At the last estimates you said 'obviously there will be a national survey' when speaking about measures of satisfaction. Is there a discussion amongst state and territory education ministers as to if and when they will end their individual surveys of satisfaction? What is happening there?

Dr Hill: We decided it was necessary to have a pilot of these surveys, so we have done a lot of work to develop instruments for students and for parents. Those instruments have been prepared and they are being piloted over the period October to November. It is a national sample of schools. Actually, your department hosted the environment in which they can do this online, although we also have paper and pencil versions. We will then be analysing the results of this in terms of, first of all, the psychometric properties of the instruments and then in terms of all the logistical issues involved, of which we know there will be many. As a result of that, we will go back to ministers with the results of the pilot and recommendations for the way forward in February of next year.

Senator MASON: In February of next year, the outcomes of the pilot will be completed and analysed, and this will be another way of overcoming the vagaries of federalism—is that right?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: I think you also mentioned a scoping paper at the budget estimates about future activities that might be included on the My School website, or is this the same thing? In other words, are you consulting about what may be included in the future on the My School website?

Dr Hill: In terms of what we were initially asked to do, I believe there are only two remaining matters to address. One is this matter of the surveys and the other is the matter of teacher readiness and qualifications. That is something which, through AITSL, they are working on developing more consistent measures, approaches and classifications of teachers and so on. I think that is in the future. It is more details about the teaching levels and standards of the teachers that has been put in our charter as something to address in the future.

Senator MASON: I have a question on assessment and we talked about achievement standards first thing this morning. How are the national curriculum and ACARA going to overcome the different assessments used in different states? You would be aware that quite strong opinions are held about forms of assessment—Queensland against New South Wales and against Victoria. Senator McKenzie knows a lot more about these issues than I do. This is a big issue with schools as to how you assess kids. How are you going to unify it? It has always worried me how you have a national curriculum without a common national testing and assessment approach? I have raised this before but have never been satisfied with your answer.

Dr Hill: I doubt my answer will help but let me try. We have all realised now that we have standards that the important thing is that those standards are interpreted and applied consistently, so that whatever assessment method is used, nonetheless, the standard that we are talking about is the same standard and is applied consistently. We know now that teachers use many different approaches to assessment within their own classroom and will continue to do so. We know that jurisdictions also have different approaches to assessment. But is the standard itself different? That is something which the agencies responsible at the 11 and 12 level for all of this have done some work on.

Senator MASON: To be fair, the particular issue is with year 12 and thinking of going to university or to do a trade.

Dr Hill: Exactly, and that is where it becomes critical. They have done the work to say, 'Let's take some of these subjects and let's get teachers in the different jurisdictions under the different approaches to assessment to rate this work.' They found that it does not actually matter too much whether you are under the Queensland system, which is school based and moderated, or other systems which have statistically moderated exams or other approaches. Nonetheless, an A is an A and a B is a B and so on. There is a lot of evidence that it is possible, particularly with the right sort of support, to get the consistency.

Senator MASON: You still have not convinced me, to be honest.

Dr Hill: Our thinking is that as long as we can guarantee the consistency of the standards then we have made a great advance.

Senator MASON: I accept that but when you have school based assessment versus an external examination as in some states—we have school based assessment in Queensland—it is very hard to say there is a common national standard. I know you can moderate; I appreciate all that but I am not quite satisfied yet. I will continue to ask questions about this, so beware. As you know, I have never been satisfied that there is sufficient commonality.

I will move onto an issue about which I have received so many emails. You are probably aware of this. It has caused some stir in the media too, I notice, in some of the media. I know in the past I have spoken about the overarching themes that we have had vigorous debates about. I do not agree with what the national curriculum has done. I said that in a recent speech, you will recall. But there is another issue now that has raised its head—that is, the extinguishing of the terms 'AD' and 'BC' in dates. I have received all these emails in relation to that. To link it back to where we have been in the past, ACARA has decided to emphasise or indeed privilege three cross-cultural perspectives: the Indigenous perspective, a commitment to sustainable patterns of living, and an emphasis on Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. You know I thought there were other ones like a commitment to

liberal democracy, a commitment to science and technology and so forth that were equally as important. Apparently, the educationalists do not agree with me. I think they are wrong and I am happy to debate them but nobody wants to publicly debate me on it.

These are very sensitive cultural issues. What concerned me at the time—I said this in estimates and, indeed, in the Senate—was that those perspectives that are being emphasised, and I used the word 'privileged', seemed to me to make it clear that other perspectives such as the Judaeo-Christian heritage of our nation and indeed of our civilisation were not as important when looking at our history. My question is: is the dropping of the BC and AD designations from the history curriculum a consequence of that decision?

Dr Hill: I will ask Mr Randall to respond to that. He has been very much on top of this issue.

Mr Randall: The short answer is no. I will elaborate. The history curriculum where that reference comes up has the intention for young people to learn—and this is what we want young Australians to learn—to use historical terms and concepts.

Senator MASON: I agree with that.

Mr Randall: That is what we have got there. In our curriculum we then have elaborations—some additional explanatory material. In an elaboration, we have used the 'BC' as an example of historical terms. So we used it as an example. People do not have to do what is there. It is an example of a historical term. We have not extinguished the use of BC and AD. They continue to be historical terms that should be used. We are well aware of the interpretation and the concern. To the extent that that has had that unintended consequence, we will add an elaboration back in to say 'put AD and BC alongside' so there is no doubt because it was not the intention to extinguish those. We think they are well and commonly used and there is no debate there. To the extent there is any concern, we will redress that and include AD and BC as examples of historical terms that we continue to want young people to learn about in school.

Senator MASON: Did anyone ever complain about the terms BC and AD? Did a Buddhist, Muslim, Jew, Confucian or any other citizen ever complain about those terms?

Dr Hill: One of the Christian theologians we asked about this said, 'For the last 30 years I don't think there has been a single published in journal article in Christian theology that has used the terms AD and BC; it has always been these other terms.' In fact going back 30 years, she could not recall a time when in academic circles it has been used. We know in common usage, we all use AD and BC, and it is important that students do that. It was almost taken for granted that they would. But I think the intention was to point to the fact that scholars are using these other terms and they should be aware of these as well. We need to correct the balance. We do not want to send wrong signals, but we do want students to know that the terminology that historians are using.

Senator MASON: Okay, we have a Christian theologian but did anyone else complain of the use of BC or AD, or say that they were inappropriate?

Dr Hill: The complaints came at the time that you saw them in the media. We did not hear of things before that.

Senator MASON: No-one was saying that the use of AD and BC were inappropriate?

Dr Hill: No.

Senator MASON: As the minister knows, I read a lot of history. Before coming along today, I had a look at the historians I have read recently, including Manning Clark, Geoffrey Blainey, Niall Ferguson, Simon Sharma, David McCulloch, the great Robert Conquest and Barbara Tuchman—some are conservatives and some liberals, in the American sense. They all use BC and AD. Niall Ferguson is probably the most pre-eminent historian in the world at the moment and he does not use those terms. In fact, I find them confusing. When I see BCE, I thought it was before the Christian era or something. I find those terms confusing. Does anyone know any popular historian who uses the terms BCE and CE? I do not know any.

Mr Randall: We could provide more detail about that. I agree with the issue you have raised. It has been raised with us. We are responding to issues people have raised. The intention of the curriculum is that young people learn to use historical terms and concepts. We had maybe taken that for granted that they would continue to use BC and AD. We will now address that and make that more explicit. Assuming they would continue to be used has had some unintended consequences and we will address that through the elaborations as examples to reinforce the point that you are making.

Senator MASON: Good. Clearly there are various sensitive and cultural religious issues, and you would be aware of them. I am aware of them because I receive emails. There is also the issue of confusion. This morning the question came to my mind: why change the methods of dates that are commonly and universally understood where no religion is offended, yet some people are offended by its removal?

Senator Chris Evans: Am I missing something or are you not at odds? My sense of it is that you and the agency are not at odds, but you seem to be still flailing against something.

Senator MASON: What concerns me is that it is a very sensitive cultural issue. You would be aware of that and I think we would all agree on that. It worries me that this was introduced without the appropriate sensitivity. That is one issue. The second issue is that I find it very confusing. No-one is saying we should change the calendar. We are not going back to a Gregorian calendar; we are staying with the modern Julian calendar.

I find the use of these terms, irrespective of the sensitive cultural issues, actually very confusing. I read a lot of history and biography, perhaps not as much as Senator Carr, my friend. I just want to make you aware of that. I have received all these emails about the sensitive cultural issues and now the fact that it is confusing. What can I tell everyone who has been sending me these emails?

Mr Randall: That we will add the example of BC and AD as ongoing historical terms and concepts that we continue to want young people to learn in school.

Senator MASON: So what is going to happen to BCE and CE?

Mr Randall: They would be there, because they continue to be terms that are used. On your point about references, I would be happy to provide to you a follow-up about the sources that will support the use of those terms. We want young people to learn both because, though the more common use for many young people is BC and AD, as they read texts they will see these other things and, from early on, understand that they are used for different purposes, which will avoid the confusion.

Senator MASON: So they are not confused by the use of the terms. I take your point because I can honestly say that when I first read them—I read them a few years ago—they

actually confused me, because BCE does sound like 'before Christian era'. I did not know it meant that, so I am obviously learning something as we go as well. So I can tell all the people who wrote to me that BC and AD will be restored?

Mr Randall: Yes.

CHAIR: That was the first answer.

Senator MASON: There is another issue: BP, or 'before present'. Maybe I am just not up with things, but I thought that something that happened 8,000 years ago would be roughly 6,000 BC. What does BP mean? It sounds like a petrol company.

Mr Randall: The process we have draws on experts in the field of history. This is the history discipline. These materials were subject to national consultation last year, so I am happy to provide some further justification and explanation as to why they are there. Again, I go back to the key point, as you have raised, that an unintended consequence has arisen and we will put back into those elaborations the other terms that people commonly use.

Senator Chris Evans: Am I the only one who has missed this? What is BP?

Senator MASON: 'Before present'. I did not know either. I thought it was a petrol company.

Senator Chris Evans: You said 'before present' but what does that mean?

Mr Randall: Again, we could get into a discussion now to explain it; I am happy to provide further detail. But the notion—

Senator Chris Evans: We have been having it debated.

Mr Randall: It is the equivalent of BC. It is used in terms of historical periods and their markings. Various bits of history will use these terms. Our intention is that young people learning history understand that they are used, why they are used in certain circumstances and who uses them. That is the educational outcome.

Senator Chris Evans: I understand, but you were talking about BCE before.

Mr Randall: Yes. I have the curriculum in front of me. The use of historical terms and concepts is what we are focusing on. We then have what we call an elaboration example, which says:

1. defining and using terms such as BCE (Before Common Era), BP (Before Present) and CE (Common Era);

So we have listed some examples of those. Senator Mason has asked for, and I am happy to provide, additional detail as to why those are there and the basis for including those as examples for young people.

Senator Chris Evans: I got that. Like Senator Mason, I was educated in another era and I had not been exposed to 'BP'. But then I made the point I do not use Twitter but apparently I do, because the department does it for me. I also think in feet and inches. So it is the fact that I am a dinosaur rather than anything else.

Senator MASON: My objections would be fewer if this added to precision. I do not see it adding to precision. It simply adds to confusion. The only argument, Mr Randall—with the greatest respect—I concede is that if young children understand the use of these concepts and what they mean—

CHAIR: Yes, which is exactly what Mr Randall said.

Senator MASON: And I accept that, because that may diminish the confusion so long as AD and BC are understood to be not only mainstream but overwhelming in popular history. I read popular history all time.

CHAIR: This has also been emphasised, so can we move on.

Senator MASON: All right, but I just wanted to make that point because I have received literally dozens of emails on this, and you would be aware of that.

Senator MASON: That is all I have for ACARA.

CHAIR: I am sure it is not, because I have not heard you ask anything about NAPLAN.

Senator MASON: That comes up later.

CHAIR: I do not think so. I think if you ask later about NAPLAN the department will refer you back to ACARA, so maybe you should try asking them here.

Senator MASON: I do have something on NAPLAN. Can I try these questions with you and I am sure Ms Paul will correct me if this should be directed to the department. Correct me if I am wrong, Dr Hill. You said 'NAPLAN is conducted on a common scale.' So you can compare year with year—year 3 and 5. Is that right?

Dr Hill: Absolutely.

Senator MASON: There was a conversation about common scale and absolute gain measures, is that right?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: These questions may need to be taken on notice. I am not a statistician, you might recall, Dr Hill, but we will see how we go. In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of students in year 9 fell within the bottom quarter of achievement on the year 7 scale?

Dr Hill: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator MASON: Can I read these out—and I suspect you may have to take the lot on notice. Now that there is a common scale, I am starting to understand how NAPLAN works. I think the committee will find this very interesting information. In the last NAPLAN, what percentage of year 9 students fell within the bottom quarter of achievement on the year 5 scale? In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 9 students fell within the bottom quarter of achievement on the year 3 scale? With respect to year 7 students, in the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 7 students fell within the bottom quarter of achievement on the year 5 scale? And in the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 7 students fell within the bottom quarter of achievement on the year 3 scale? In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 5 students fell within the bottom quarter of achievement on the year 3 scale? Do you see what I am doing?

Dr Hill: Yes, looking at the overlap.

Senator MASON: I will ask these questions and I suspect they will have to be taken on notice. In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 9 students are falling below the national minimum standards for year 3? It is a different question.

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 9 students are falling below the national minimum standards for year 5? And in the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 9 students are falling below the national minimum standards for year 7? In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 7 students are falling below the national minimum standards for year 3? In the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 7 students are falling below the national minimum standards for year 5? And finally, in the last NAPLAN results what percentage of year 5 students are falling below the national minimum standards for year 3?

There were other issues—I suspect this is what the chair may be referring to. Again, there has been recent press about students in certain states being more likely to be absent. We discussed this last time, you might recall. But you are aware of that and are doing everything you can to make allowances for that, is that right?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: I could ask you that again but I am not sure if it will be productive, Chair.

Senator BACK: I am keen to know what equalisation process you do have in place to try and establish some national uniformity.

Dr Hill: National uniformity and participation in NAPLAN.

Senator BACK: It would appear to be almost state based, wouldn't it, from the reports we saw?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator BACK: An unfair skewing would be the allegation made by those who felt that there was a higher participation by students in their schools than in other states.

Dr Hill: Yes. It is the case that in terms of participation in NAPLAN rates overall have always been very high—in fact, often higher than average state attendance rates. Overall we would have to say we have very good participation rates, but over the four years they have fallen at all year levels by less than one per cent. Actually the change between this year and last year was very minimal, just a tiny fraction of a per cent at each year level, so it has not been a great change. However, any change in a negative direction is not welcome.

Ministers have all agreed that full participation by all students is the expectation of all ministers in this and they will make that very clear within their jurisdictions. They have asked that there be full reporting on absence and withdrawal rates by jurisdiction so that we can see exactly where the issues are. They have asked ACARA to do additional breakdowns of these data so that we can be very clear and try to target where we have the problems or where we can perhaps improve it a little bit. But we are talking about only a fraction of a per cent here and there, really, in the difference separating the jurisdictions. They have asked the senior officials to consider any additional reporting elements that we might include in national reports that might give better indications of this and to advise on steps to ensure maximum participation of all students in all schools. I would not say it is a major issue at this stage. I think the levels of participation are very high, but of course we want them to keep high.

Senator BACK: I wonder if it is possible to take on notice for us a number of things for the last round of NAPLAN scores, if in fact your data sets allow you to do this: firstly, the performance of students who are homeschooled vis-a-vis the entire population with regard to

NAPLAN; secondly, School of the Air students; thirdly, if it is possible, an understanding of the difference in the performance of students in cities and major regional towns as opposed to smaller rural schools, schools in rural communities; finally—I refer to Steiner schools, but what term do you use for boutique or exotic schools?

Senator Chris Evans: Be careful there, Senator. You are digging a very big hole.

Senator BACK: I know. I have been at the AD and BC stuff. I just want to know: is there a term that is actually used for schools that are not in the mainstream?

Dr Hill: Some of them fall under systems, and where they fall under systems they are fairly readily identified.

Senator BACK: But the students must complete the NAPLAN test, mustn't they? Everybody must do that.

Dr Hill: Yes, if they are in a registered school—and of course the home students are not.

Senator BACK: They do not sit the NAPLAN test?

Dr Hill: If they are not in a registered school we do not have their data.

Senator BACK: But do they sit the NAPLAN test?

Dr Hill: No.

Senator BACK: Not compulsorily.

Dr Hill: No. We had better take that on notice.

Senator BACK: And I still do not know what term you want me to use for schools such as Steiner schools.

Mr Randall: The Steiner schools, the Montessori schools and others are certainly in the broader independent sector. I guess there are some schools with particular philosophical approaches. Steiner is one and Montessori is another, and in fact there is an association of Steiner schools. There are some schools talking about a particular philosophical approach to organising their learning, but students in those schools will be undertaking NAPLAN. Your question was asking 'if possible'. It would be a matter of the data that we are getting back through the testing authorities to break that down in the way that you have asked.

Senator THISTLETHWAITE: Would that also include an international school that might be only offering the International Baccalaureate?

Dr Hill: It would be hard for us to identify such schools unless they had it in the title. If a school happens to be running the International Baccalaureate program, we do not have in our database that indicator or who is doing it.

Senator THISTLETHWAITE: But if they are not offering domestic courses as such, if they are only offering those courses, they would not be subject to NAPLAN?

Dr Hill: Yes, if they were a registered school they would still do NAPLAN.

Senator BACK: So it would be interesting if we can as a group receive data on those as well.

Dr Hill: We will take it on notice and we will see what we can do in terms of breakdown.

CHAIR: So what conclusions have we come to as a consequence of the last NAPLAN round?

Mr Adams: We have addressed participation. An analysis of the performance of students demonstrates figures that are very consistent with previous years. There are some minor variations, some of which are statistically significant and others which are not, between year levels and between domains. Overall the performance of students shows a similar pattern, and that is largely a function of the size of the population—with such a large population that is not an unexpected outcome. There are no discernible or notable statistically significant trends up or down by year level or by domain over the four years of testing we have undertaken.

Dr Hill: I think there has also been for a couple of the jurisdictions some significant improvements. Those jurisdictions have already drawn attention to that. Queensland, in particular, has shown some gains over the three years. So at a more micro level we are seeing a few more changes, but when you are looking at the big picture stuff you do not tend to see trends. The real trends come when you come down to individual schools. That is where you really see the changes happening.

Senator BACK: Is that a function of the fact that those schools are actually now spending unreasonable periods of time in training students for the NAPLAN test? If that is the case, to what extent is that detracting from what would otherwise have been their normal curriculum?

Dr Hill: The advice we give about that is that, yes, a certain amount of preparation for NAPLAN tests is important; however, undue drilling and focus on the test is not going to improve their performance. If you want to be literate and numerate, you really have to study English and math and do well in them, across the full range. It is not possible to anticipate all the questions you are going to get—you really do need a broad-rich curriculum, and literacy and numeracy are not just in English; they are across the curriculum. We do say to schools that, yes, two to three weeks beforehand you might put a bit of a focus on the tests but to be focusing narrowly on just these areas is anti-educational, and research evidence does not point to the fact that this will improve test scores much.

Senator BACK: Does this point to the fact that they are doing it, though, beyond that two or three weeks?

Dr Hill: We do not have that evidence; we only have anecdotal information of claims that this could be happening. We do not have hard data that that is happening.

CHAIR: There is still some criticism about the need to participate in the test. I am just looking for some reassurance that the conduct of the test actually adds value to the education system and therefore is actually worth undertaking. I invite you to comment on that.

Dr Hill: I think almost every one of the advanced nations has introduced literacy and numeracy testing because we realise how fundamental it is to learning across all of the disciplines. Not only that, but we need to know how we go internationally too—not just comparing ourselves but looking outside at the rest of the world. As you know, when we look internationally we see trends happening that we need to be aware of. It is a very critical area of education that we do need to monitor, and we do need to ensure that we have a consistent basis for doing this, which we did not have in the past. We have now for three years got consistent information about this and we are starting to learn. As we move forward, however, we can have richer information and perhaps about a wider areas of the curriculum. But until we have that national curriculum in place we cannot really move there with the assessment. However, we have already made a start in areas such as science and civics and citizenship, and also ICT. I think that in the future as we move forward, perhaps into a world where

testing will be done online, we can ensure a broader range of outcomes are assessed and make sure that the testing per se is not narrowing the focus of what is going on in classrooms.

Part of the problem we run into is that we do not want testing to take over what is happening in schools, so we limit the amount of testing that occurs and, by definition, that limits what is assessed. In the future I think we are going to see many more assessment materials made available to teachers, which will enable them to assess a broader range of outcomes in a more consistent way using tools that are available nationally. In the future we can move into a situation where we build on what has been achieved. It is a very significant achievement that we now have this national testing and this information. We can build on it to ensure we are assessing a broader range of outcomes.

CHAIR: What do the results tell us about our comparative standing with comparable countries?

Dr Hill: In performance, Australia has consistently been in the top nations. In performance in reading, it appears that other nations that are coming into the testing program are showing that they can do better than us—nations such as Korea, for example. Shanghai, China have blitzed us all in mathematics—not unsurprisingly, but it is a wake-up call for us all that we need always to seek ways to improve our outcomes. With Australia, where we are seeing a little bit of slippage is not at the bottom tail of the achievement but at the top. That is a somewhat surprising outcome but it reflects the fact that we have been very focused on trying to lift the achievement of our lower performing students, and we are clearly not going backwards in that area. Now we have to make sure that the students at the top also are being stretched. I hope in future versions of NAPLAN we can make sure that we are assessing that full range. Right now there is a bit of a ceiling effect at the top of that test because it was not designed to test at the very top, but now we are seeing it is important that we can test at that top range too.

CHAIR: Was there no other way to get this information or understanding without doing the NAPLAN testing?

Dr Hill: It was tried. We had state-wide testing in each of the states and territories before the national testing. It proved that it was not generating data that was as comparable as people would wish. So it was the states and territories themselves who agreed the time had come to move to a national approach to get rid of inconsistent data.

Senator MASON: You are referring to the PISA results and so forth?

Dr Hill: Yes.

Senator MASON: You mentioned before the implementation of a national curriculum and that it would be widely implemented by the end of 2013. I have just been looking at the Australian Curriculum Implementation Survey dated August 2011. I cannot see any reference to New South Wales and Western Australia. If we are going to have implementation by the end of 2013, we need New South Wales and WA in it. Where are they—or have I missed it?

Mr Randall: There are two parts of the implementation website. You referred to the survey. If you got back to August—and I need to get the dates clear in my head—New South Wales was clarifying where it was because of its syllabus development process, so that date is not there. If you went back one step on our website, where you go to that table, on the page before that you can also go straight into New South Wales information. We link into the

Board of Studies in New South Wales and other things. That is where you find more detailed information about it. Our table was just meant to provide a snapshot summary. At that time New South Wales had not resolved it because there was some discussion about where they were with things. That is why it is not there. You can find the New South Wales information by going to the Board of Studies, which is the authority leading implementation in New South Wales.

Senator MASON: As of August 2011, you were not quite confident enough to include WA and New South Wales.

Mr Randall: That is right.

Senator MASON: But you are telling the committee now that by the end of 2013 both Western Australia and New South Wales will have largely implemented.

Mr Randall: As Dr Hill said earlier, with New South Wales that was at that point. Since then, because of its syllabus development process, New South Wales has said 2014 is their time frame and Western Australia has made similar announcements.

Senator MASON: 2014 for WA and New South Wales?

Mr Randall: They are the time lines that they have.

Senator MASON: The rest of the country is 2013. That is all I have on NAPLAN.

CHAIR: Does that conclude ACARA as well?

Senator MASON: Yes. I might add though, I received, just while we have been talking, further emails about the issue of the calendar.

CHAIR: Well, I wish they were listening—

Senator MASON: You know you have a lot of fans. We have overseas fans and we are hoping Government House is watching this morning. I know that a lot of people are listening. It is true. I have received emails right now, Minister, saying nice things about the Chair—never about me. Why is that?

CHAIR: We know why; it is obvious to everybody. Thank you again, Dr Hill. You have brought a very calming influence again to these issues for us.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

[11:32]

CHAIR: Welcome, Dr Nicoll and Mr Hawke. Congratulations on your appointments. Do you have an opening remark you would like to make to the committee before we commence?

Dr Nicoll: No, Chair.

Senator MASON: Congratulations, Dr Nicoll. It is good to see you back in a different guise in a different role.

Dr Nicoll: Thank you.

Senator MASON: It is good to see you, Mr Hawke, again.

Mr Hawke: Thank you.

Senator MASON: I will ask some preliminary questions. In setting up an office, has a lease been signed and so forth? Do you have an office yet? What has happened?

Dr Nicoll: I have been in the role for two-and-a-half weeks and so I can give a comprehensive analysis of that issue. We are currently operating under a DEEWR lease with a property in Collins Street in Melbourne.

Senator MASON: In Melbourne?

Dr Nicoll: Correct.

Senator MASON: Very nice. How long does TEQSA envisage being there?

Dr Nicoll: We are looking into that at the moment because ASQA and TEQSA are currently co-located. We are looking at how we are going to be able to locate in a way that allows us to expand to our anticipated size. TEQSA has a planned staffing within the allocated budget of up to 80 and we need to look at where we are in terms of that. DEEWR, as I understand it—and Mr Hawke might be able to elaborate, and certainly the higher education group will be able to later today—set up this lease arrangement originally in the interim stages of the agencies. We have existed only since August, when we commenced operations on 1 August, but we have had an arrangement in these premises for some time. The permanent arrangements are yet to be finalised. We may stay where we are, we may not.

Senator MASON: That is fair enough. Mr Hawke, you are a part-time commissioner?

Mr Hawke: That is correct.

Senator MASON: What does 'part-time commissioner' mean?

Mr Hawke: It involves a fractional commitment to the work of TEQSA as a commissioner—as a statutory officer, a member of the commission and a part of the decision-making group that assumes responsibility for the agency's work. I do have another position, again on a fraction, with the Queensland government in the Department of Education and Training.

Senator MASON: Dr Nicoll is the chief commissioner?

Dr Nicoll: I am chief commissioner and chief executive officer.

Senator MASON: With four commissioners, two full time and two part time.

Dr Nicoll: Correct.

Senator MASON: Dr Nicoll, is there any indication of when the Higher Education Standards Panel will be appointed?

Dr Nicoll: That is not for me to comment on. The minister may have something to say about that.

Senator Chris Evans: That will happen very shortly. The nominations are before government.

Senator MASON: You have only been there a very short time, Dr Nicoll. This may be unfair—but that has never stopped me from asking a question before. Has there been any discussion between TEQSA and the skills quality agency, ASQA, about how you will go about regulating dual sector providers?

Dr Nicoll: Yes, indeed.

Senator MASON: As you know, it is a growing phenomenon in higher education in this country.

Dr Nicoll: I think it is fair to say that it is considered to be a priority in terms of streamlining for both agencies. The two chief commissioners met in the first week that I was on the job, and from there we have formed a working group where work will be undertaken to do everything we can to streamline the processes for all dual sector providers where there is that intersection. There are a number of areas where we think we can do that fairly quickly in coming up with approaches and the requests for information in particular ways. We are looking at it. We take it seriously. As the Chief Commissioner of ASQA, I am sure we will agree it is an issue for us, and we have started work. It was sufficiently important for us for me to take the time to have a meeting about it in my first week.

Senator Chris Evans: Of course the longer term vision was that the two organisations become one. I have made the point previously that the priority for us is to get it both up and running and meeting their obligations. While that is the longer term plan, I am very much focused on both organisations operating efficiently as quickly as possible. So these sorts of joint arrangements are clearly the priority rather than waiting for any longer term legislative changes.

Senator MASON: Dr Nicoll, will there be an MOU or something between the two organisations?

Dr Nicoll: Yes. We will look at how we will formalise that arrangement.

Senator MASON: It is complicated because many of those dual sector universities are in Victoria. There has been no referral of powers, and it is potentially quite a difficult issue, isn't it? I am just thinking of administratively. I am not an administrator. I am just thinking constitutionally. The Commonwealth largely funds universities and, as you know, the state governments largely fund VET. The regulation thereof is complicated.

Dr Nicoll: All of these things are complicated, but I think that the parameters that are set out for TEQSA are very clear in the legislation. We have the task of taking over the state and territory regulatory functions at the end of January next year and we are on target to do that and to achieve that. Whether they are universities or other higher education providers—and it is not just the universities when we are talking about dual sector providers—and whether they are in Victoria or the Northern Territory, or indeed in Queensland, we will be looking at how we can streamline processes for all of the dual sector institutions.

Senator MASON: TEQSA commences its regulatory functions by the end of January next year?

Dr Nicoll: That is correct.

Senator MASON: I read in the *Higher Education Supplement* in the *Australian* yesterday about a new university in South Australia. I think it was on one of Mr Rann's last days in office that he put forward the proposal for a new university to be allowed to operate in Adelaide. There was some comment about this being approved before TEQSA's regulatory arm commenced in late January next year. I think President Clinton might be the chancellor, in effect, of that as I think it was raised with him, so it will have all sorts of interesting people behind it. But TEQSA will run its ruler over that university; is that right?

Dr Nicoll: The South Australian government have written to me and outlined their decision that they have made. There are a number of conditions attached to the decision that they have made that relate to TEQSA's assessment processes of certain things over the next

year before they are to be operating. Their planned operation is in 2013. We will certainly be applying the regulatory principles that we have in place and the threshold standards against those particular conditions and the appropriateness of the provider.

Senator Chris Evans: Dr Nicoll's answer is obviously appropriate and reflects the intent and the effect of the legislation but I just want to correct the suggestion that might have arisen from some of the newspaper coverage that somehow this was snuck through. The South Australian government has kept us informed all along. In fact, Premier Rann has briefed me a number of times including as late as last week, so there is no sense of that. I am sure Premier Rann was keen to get the announcement formally done before he finished, but there is no sense of there being any attempt to bypass regulation and Dr Nicoll and TEQSA will do their job as the process continues. But, as you know, it is a quite reputable organisation with some very high profile backers.

Senator MASON: Indeed. TEQSA is integral to the government's new higher education framework and we have got qualification standards and they have been released in draft form. Taking the provider standards and the teaching and learning standards and the information standards and the research standards, where we are with them? What is the situation?

Dr Nicoll: DEEWR have taken the leadership on the development and consultation in relation to the threshold standards, the provider and qualification standards. They will be best placed to provide you with an answer in relation to those.

Senator MASON: Ms Paul, where or when do I ask you about them?

Ms Paul: At 3.1.

Senator MASON: Dr Nicoll and Ms Paul, thank you.

CHAIR: I thank the witnesses. We will now move to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

[11:45]

CHAIR: Welcome, Ms Evans. Do you have any opening remarks you would like to make to the committee before we proceed with questions?

Ms Evans: No.

Senator MASON: When will the Australian teacher performance management principles and procedures be released? Will they be released in draft form for comment before being formally introduced?

Ms Evans: The ministerial council approved AITSL to begin introductory work on the performance development framework. We have just commenced thinking through how that consultation process would be undertaken and what the product of that will be. But the ministers were very clear that that information needs to come back to them and that a progress report needs to come back to them at their first meeting next year.

Senator MASON: When is that first meeting?

Ms Evans: As far as I know, that date has not yet been set.

Ms Paul: The date for what?

Ms Evans: The first ministerial council meeting.

Ms Paul: No, I do not think it is settled.

Senator MASON: There is no draft you can show the committee?

Ms Evans: No, we only received that work on Friday.

Senator MASON: You cannot tell me anything about the criteria thus far?

Ms Evans: No, unfortunately.

Senator MASON: What about the sorts of criteria there will be—anything about that? Can you tell us whether or not the criteria will be independently assessable, with the results, say, going through standardised tests? Or will there be less tangible things such as effectiveness of teaching style? You cannot discuss that as yet? It is a little bit early?

Ms Evans: AITSL is committed to undertake a thorough consultation process. It could involve all or none of those things. One would expect that it would involve information about student performance, observation, multiple sources of evidence and so on, but at this stage there is no detail around any of that.

Senator MASON: The receipt of emails is not a bad way to determine what is on the mind of the public, or at least members of the concerned public, and this is quite an issue—the criteria you use to assess teachers. What I was going to ask you is clearly a bit premature because the criteria have yet to be established.

Ms Evans: There are, potentially, two areas you are talking about. There is the general performance management and development of teachers. This work came to AITSL, as a result of the ministerial council, on the 14th. But there is also work about identifying and certifying highly accomplished and lead teachers. AITSL has commenced that work.

Senator MASON: That is the Rewards for Great Teachers initiative?

Ms Evans: No, it is the certification of highly accomplished and lead teachers. 'Highly accomplished' and 'lead' are career stages within the standards and, as part of the remit to AITSL, we were asked to come up with a nationally agreed process for the certification of those teachers.

Senator MASON: Before we go there, I might just go back. The criteria will not be developed until next year—for the previous issue; not for the lead teachers—and a meeting date still has to be set. I understand that. Is it the intention of government to include that information or the criteria on the My School website?

Ms Evans: That has not been determined.

Senator MASON: Highly accomplished and lead teachers—what are the criteria there?

Ms Evans: Again, there is a consultation process involved. What we presented to the ministerial council last Friday was that there would be a range of elements involved in a process for identifying highly accomplished and lead teachers and those elements are—let me just refer to the paper—

Senator MASON: Is that a publicly available document?

Ms Evans: It most certainly is. We can make it available to you. The various elements are that there would be some sort of self-assessment process to assess chances of success. There would need to be evidence put forward by the candidate against the standards. There would be some observation of practice. There would be an element of external assessment and then,

because this is not just an assessment process but a development and improvement process, they would need to be comprehensive feedback to applicants regardless of whether or not they are successful.

Senator MASON: I personally am not against rewarding excellence of highly accomplished and lead teachers but I know it is going to be a difficult task because I have had some experience in my former life of being assessed as a lecturer. Everyone thinks they are good, but most are not. How you do it, what matrix you use—

Senator Chris Evans: I am fascinated for you to share your assessment, Senator.

Senator MASON: That is why I went into politics!

Senator Chris Evans: The bottom line conclusion was that you ought to look for an alternative career, was it?

Senator MASON: I got the message. Seriously, it is an issue. I am not just suggesting, 'Don't do it!' That is not what I am saying. It is hard enough to assess research—Senator Carr talks about this all the time—to get a matrix. You would be aware of this, Ms Paul—how to get a matrix to assess research output. It is a lot harder again in terms of whether you are a lead teacher and so forth. This is not a criticism at all of the idea of rewards for excellence; to the contrary, it is just that a lot of the feedback I have received is critical of the entire process. You would have received this. Some people say it is a bad idea, that it sets up competition rather than cooperation and so forth. It still strikes me as being a bit early before I start to analyse the criteria. I want to flag to you that I will be asking questions about this and I speak for myself not for the opposition: I am not against it at all, but I fear your task is a difficult one.

Ms Evans: That is one of the reasons why it is so important to have full and comprehensive consultation. Also, AITSL is a very active about looking at what happens overseas to assess teacher effectiveness and measurement. Yes, it is a difficult task.

Senator MASON: I spoke to some teachers the other day in public schools in disadvantaged areas of Brisbane who said that they added more to the intellectual and social capital than many teachers in more privileged non-government schools—and I am not having a go at them—because the kids actually benefited proportionately far more from their efforts. Does that make sense? It is quite a difficult assessment.

Ms Evans: There are issues of value add, there are issues of rigour as opposed to do-ability, there are a range of issues about credibility and validity that we are very conscious of but it does not make the task easier. There are examples overseas and here in Australia where people are able to feel confident about assessment of highly accomplished and excellent teachers and so we will build on and use those and come back early next year with a proposition.

Senator MASON: Well, good luck. Senator McKenzie and I will no doubt next year be asking questions on this topic. I just thought I would flag that with you.

CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes our questions, Ms Evans and Ms Caple.

Australian Skills Quality Authority

[11:55]

CHAIR: Mr Robinson, would you like to make any opening remarks to the committee before we proceed with questions.

Mr Robinson: No, thank you.

Senator MASON: I do not have any questions for the Australian Skills Quality Authority.

CHAIR: As there are no questions, I thank you for your attendance today.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

[12:00]

CHAIR: We will now commence with questioning in outcome 2.

Senator MASON: What is the progress of the school funding review, commonly called the Gonski review? I understand that the school funding review commissioned several reports from the Australian Council for Educational Research, Allen Consulting Group, Access Economics and the Nous Group in relation to several issues. Those reports have now been released and I have had a bit of a look at them. They are publicly available. At the last estimates I was told that a second emerging issues paper would be released by the Gonski committee, probably in August. It is now October. Will that be released? Is there one on the way?

Ms Hanlon: There is no second emerging issues paper. But a paper was release by the panel with the four commission research papers.

Senator MASON: But that was not an emerging issues paper, was it?

Ms Hanlon: No. It presented the commissioned reports and asked for submissions on those reports.

Senator MASON: I was told there would be one. Is there a reason it was not done?

Ms Hanlon: I do not think the panel were considering a second issues paper. They were anticipating a paper to accompany the four commissioned research reports.

Senator MASON: Really? Maybe I misunderstood the evidence. There has been no scrapping of any paper that was—

Ms Hanlon: I think the word is 'issues'. There is the second paper, but it was the paper that was the companion to the commissioned research.

Senator MASON: These papers are very comprehensive. The paper you are talking about is called a 'Paper on Commissioned Research', is it not?

Ms Hanlon: That is correct.

Senator MASON: A communique nearly? I would like to go specifically to one of the reports commissioned. The Allen's report *Feasibility of a national schooling recurrent research standard* was commissioned by the funding review committee. It concluded that it is possible to design an appropriate national schooling recurrent resource standard. Has work commenced on developing an NSRRS model within the department?

Ms Paul: As I understand it that work is being done. I am not fully across what the review is doing. That is a matter for the review panel. We are not doubling up on their work.

Senator MASON: I am not suggesting that. It is more that the Allen report said that it is possible to design an appropriate national schooling recurrent resource standard model. It says

it is possible to design one; that is the conceptual conclusion. Is there work on developing such a model within the department?

Ms Paul: Within the department we have not been trying to duplicate or whatever the potential work of the panel. As I understand it, the review panel under David Gonski commissioned that research and it will be the panel which will pick up on that report and adopt it, extend it, change it, whatever. It is actually the panel that is doing that work.

Senator MASON: So the department is not actually developing a model itself, independently. I understand. We touched on this with ACARA before. Has anyone prepared to characterise Australia's school system in terms of its quality, performance and equity compared to those in other developed countries. I am taking an interest in this at the moment, Ms Paul. As you know, I have a very varied interest in education.

Ms Paul: What perspective are you interested in? There is a lot we can say on this. It depends which perspective you are interested in.

Senator MASON: I was wondering if you had had a look at the 2009 PISA results. They were implicitly referred to before in an earlier context. I note there that Australia has above average reading performance—that is, quality—and below average impact of socioeconomic background—in other words, high equity as well. Would you like to comment on that?

Ms Paul: I am sure there are people here who can go into more detail but Australia continues to do well in the main international OECD led tests. So PISA is the test at age 15 of reading and other literacies. TIMSS is the test of maths and science and so on. Now you have got me started. It is quite interesting, but I will not take too much of your time.

Senator MASON: Senator Scullion is breathing heavily all of a sudden. I raise it because it is a critical issue in the current education debate.

Ms Paul: It is critical. ACARA raised the issue of a slip in our performance at the top end. That is of great interest. We continue to do really well. We, do better than many other developed nations. Interestingly though, the nations passing us at the moment in some of these international tests are some of the Asian nations. We recently had an interaction with some of those countries. It is interesting to see the sort of work they are doing. A lot of it has picked up on our work historically in teaching children how to think critically and creatively, not just rote learning.

Senator MASON: Have you had a good look at the table? It is actually quite fascinating. I am not an expert in the field of education at all but the results are fascinating. Australia has a very high quality—above the OECD average—and is more equitable on the equity reading than countries like Denmark, New Zealand, the United States, France, Belgium and Germany. It is quite extraordinary.

Ms Paul: We are seen as a leader. We have international engagements with some of these top rated countries like Finland and now, increasingly, some of our Asian neighbours—for example, Korea.

Senator MASON: That is true.

Dr Arthur: On that very issue, the OECD itself has carried out analysis and one of the points that has been made is that in the case of Australia there is a higher correlation between low SES background and achievement than in some key comparison countries, most notably Canada.

Senator MASON: Good.

Dr Arthur: No, that is the reverse. The fact is that the lower the SES background of the student, the more that has an effect, or the higher the SES background the more that has an effect on results than in certain key comparison countries and, as I say, most notably Canada.

Senator MASON: That is true, because Canada is here, but not Denmark, New Zealand, France, Belgium, or Germany.

Dr Arthur: That is correct.

Ms Paul: We continue to do well.

Senator MASON: There is often the issue about how well we look after immigrants to this country and whether that has an enormous impact on their learning outcomes. How does Australia compare with other developed countries in ensuring that immigrant children and the Australian born children of immigrants achieve as well as other Australian children?

Ms Paul: That is something Dr Arthur may want to comment on, too. It is harder to make a comparison, I should imagine, internationally on this because each country has very different migration policies. As you know, we take people from more source countries than many other nations that have active migration programs. A range of things are done at every level in terms of migrants, in particular refugees, of course, for whom this is quite an issue. If you are thinking about particular vulnerabilities, there are a range of particular programs that are run in particular places that have high refugee populations—so, particular schools, particular school areas and particular systems. ACARA would probably tell you the impact that migration—

Senator MASON: It is difficult sometimes to follow the program. It is not someone's fault.

Ms Paul: ACARA can tell you the impact that migration status has on outcomes and it is mixed, basically, depending on where you come from and what your status is and so on. At the minute, I would say most educationalists would be most concerned right now about refugee children and how those are dealt with as they are introduced into our schools.

Senator MASON: I accept that. I looked at the PISA results and you are right—refugees per se are not a group.

Ms Paul: No, they cannot be split out.

Senator MASON: You are right, they cannot be disaggregated. But looking at that, students with an immigrant background in Australia perform quite significantly better than the children born here—between 15 and 30 per cent better. So we do alright.

Ms Paul: As I said a minute ago, the results are quite mixed and ACARA has done work on that.

Senator MASON: It is very interesting that Australia does quite well.

Dr Arthur: That is not a new phenomenon—although the ACARA data is new—in general for students in either of the two categories that apply—that is, where they are from non-English speaking backgrounds or one or more of their parents are born overseas. It has generally been the case for some considerable time that in academic terms the performance of those students can as a whole group exceed those of persons who do not have those characteristics. However, as Ms Paul indicates, that masks the performance of specific groups.

People of refugees, particularly those who have had disrupted schooling, have always been regarded as a particularly vulnerable group, and there are groups within the non-English speaking background population who have reverse of that experience. It has been said that normally this is associated with the nature of the Australian immigration program, which has traditionally focused very heavily on selecting people with a skills background for employment related activity. The composition of the program in terms of the countries which it draws from and the educational background of those countries is also significantly different in the Australian case from many comparison countries.

Senator MASON: I agree, but it bespeaks success rather than failure, doesn't it? It certainly does. I wanted to ask about that. It is a more positive story than I thought. When I see immigrant kids doing much better than native born ones that always worries me a bit, Ms Paul. Perhaps it is a debate for another time.

Ms Paul: It is very a interesting average, as you point to, particularly when you think of the diverse nature of our migration program over time.

Senator MASON: Chair, I have no further questions on 2.1. My next questions are on program 2.3.

[12.16]

CHAIR: We will just bounce around, apart from BER in program 2. Senator Scullion told me that he wants to ask a single question.

Senator SCULLION: I was going to ask a question on the Indigenous Mobility Program. As I understand it, between July 2009 and December 2012, the youth mobility program has a published target of engaging up to 324 young Indigenous people at any point in time across the apprenticeship vocational education and training in university courses. How many individuals have been assisted through that program? And can you break it down more than what I have been able to get access to?

Mr Baker: I will start with a figure. The number of individuals assisted since July 2009 is 830.

Senator SCULLION: Do you have that broken down annually since 2009 rather than as a lump figure?

Mr Baker: No, I do not have that information handy. I have got the course completions.

Mr Davies: We could get that figure broken down by the year. It is a cumulative one because the students, as you know, undertake courses of different lengths. That figure is in total, but we could break it down. In 2010, we had 399 participants achieving at least 128 course completions. That rate is considerably higher than the national vocational education and training completion rate in this program.

Senator SCULLION: When you talk about courses, you are talking about an entire course rather than units.

Mr Davies: Correct.

Senator SCULLION: So that is the assumption. I want to get the figures year by year. When you talk about the total budget for the program, it is an annual budget. Again, it is an assumption because a lot of it is spent over time. I understand that somebody is in a course for

a period of time and also that these things have to be recurrent, but in terms of annual budgets would you be able to give me an annual expenditure?

Mr Davies: Yes, we would.

Senator SCULLION: Can I take the expenditures on that for each year from July 2009 until now?

Mr Davies: Yes, we can give you that.

Senator SCULLION: Will I be able to get it today at some stage?

Mr Davies: Yes, we can do that.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you for that. Are you able to give us the total budget for the program?

Mr Davies: Yes, we also have that available.

Senator SCULLION: I am making the assumption that, because you are able to give me these figures, the only reason I can find numbers over a period is because they have to go over a number of years. They are participating over a number of years, but from a financial perspective you can provide and work things out on an annual basis in any event.

Mr Davies: Yes. As you know there is a reward element as well—an element for achievement—so there is a success component as well. I can read them now quickly for you, if you like.

Senator SCULLION: Yes, if you can.

Mr Davies: In 2009, the funds expensed were \$3.965 million, in 2010 \$6 353 million, and in 2011 \$6.093 million. There is a further \$2.5 million committed and, as you are probably aware, that is based on our projections of at least achieving between 250 and 324 young people participating on a daily basis. We have been able to achieve the performance target that is in the PBS since last year. It ramped up. You will recall it took a while to get going but it is operating at the target range now.

Senator SCULLION: The \$2.5 million you would see as representative of that line with the expectation that it will eventually get to around the \$6 million mark that we achieved for the last couple of years.

Mr Davies: No, it will be higher. About \$6.093 million expensed and \$2.5 million more, because this year again the rate is higher and the completions also continue to trend upwards, so we anticipate greater expenditure.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you. Could you just briefly indicate what percentage—and not for a specific year but to give me an understanding about the reward element—of the cost that would be, and, if you can, a brief about exactly how that works? If you are not able to do so now, I am happy to take it on notice—as long as I can get it today, it will be useful.

Mr Davies: I will definitely get it today. I would just prefer to check my facts on that.

Senator SCULLION: That is fine. Perhaps with the assistance of the committee, when I am asking questions later on some other matters later in the afternoon I can come back to talk to you about that.

Senator BACK: I go to capital grants for non government schools. I want to go back to an answer you gave earlier with regard to the number of schools assisted with capital support. In

2011-12 the figure is 245 and I understand the figure you have given us for the following year, 2012-13, is 127. Was that correct at budget estimates?

Ms Paul: Was that a question on notice, or was that in our evidence? What is it you are looking at there?

Senator BACK: That was the information you gave us. You then went on to say, I believe, that there would be, as an extension to the act, a further funding round enabled, planned to take place in September. First of all, has there been a change upwards from that 127 as a result of the September round? If there has not been, could you explain to me why the drop-off from 245 in the last financial year, 2011-12, down to 127 schools assisted with capital grants in 2012-13?

Ms Paul: Sure.

Ms Chin: I have some advice for you on a question on notice. The rate of 125 at the time was contingent on the fact that the Schools Assistance Act was to finish in the current quadrennium and was then subsequently extended. When the extension took place, in the act the numbers were resumed, and we are tracking as we expected we would based on the advice to you, Senator. The September round is now in place. We are currently underway. Therefore we expect to have numbers tracking back up as we would normally in a typical year.

Senator BACK: Do I take 'September' to mean that that further round has now concluded, or is it actually still open?

Ms Chin: It is underway at the moment. Typically what happens in September is that the applications are called for from non-government schools to the BGAs. The BGAs then do the assessments and come back with a list of recommendations to the department for approval. That is what we are looking at at the moment.

Senator BACK: What is the budget allocated for that purpose and what is the time frame for when schools will be informed of the success or otherwise of their applications?

Ms Chin: In 2011, including supplementation, which is now placed down, we have set aside \$131.8 million. In relation to the second half of your question, I am, even as we are speaking now, receiving those recommendations for approval. We are processing them at this particular stage. The advice as they are coming through is being sent back formally to the BGAs themselves, and the BGAs in turn will advise the schools of the outcomes of those assessments. So it is imminent.

Senator BACK: For those who are successful, when would those funds actually become available? Is it progressively as they are informed, or is it 1 January, or when?

Ms Chin: The money is made available to the BGAs, and in turn the BGAs make the funds available as the projects are rolled out.

Senator BACK: Thank you. That was my only question in that area.

Proceedings suspended from 12:28 to 13:30

CHAIR: We will now have questions on outcome 2.

Senator SIEWERT: I have a question around funding and I have questions around training and curriculum. You will have to excuse me because I am a bit of a novice in education and the curriculum and I am really only engaging from an Indigenous education perspective. Obviously you will be aware of the concerns that have been raised around how the

issues around the stolen generations are included in the curriculum. Have you had any engagement with the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority on those issues or is it not appropriate that you engage in this stage on those issues?

Ms Wall: I will ask Ms Davy to speak to that, but I think the issues you are raising are probably more for ACARA, who were here a bit earlier. We might need to take your questions on notice for them.

Ms Davy: We do engage with ACARA. I am an observer on the ACARA board. We work closely with ACARA around these matters and I am aware that ACARA is totally aware of the issues around the stolen generation and have been liaising with the right people around that issue. As to what they have actually done as a result of those discussions, that is a matter for ACARA to be able to inform the committee about. I am sure that if we took that on notice we would follow up with them about that.

Senator SIEWERT: I will make sure I put that on notice. I find it hard to be in two places at once sometimes. This question may be for you, though. Which states and territories are planning to delay the rollout of the new history curriculum? I understand Queensland has indicated they are not going to be starting with history until 2013. Is that a question for you or for them?

Ms Davy: I am happy to answer the question. Some of these questions around the implementation date for the Australian Curriculum were answered this morning by Dr Hill from ACARA. Just to reinforce his response from this morning, all states and territories have a different timetable for implementing the Australian Curriculum and a different timetable for the different subjects. There is no specific delay in the implementation of history, for example. It is just that some states and territories are starting with English and maths and then moving to history the next year and other states and territories, such as the ACT, are starting with the whole lot of the subjects. If you go onto the ACARA website there is an implementation schedule for the states and territories around each of the subjects.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of the process from here, will phase 1 be signed off by ministers meeting?

Ms Davy: Phase 1 for the foundation to year 10 curriculum is English, mathematics, science and history. Ministers have already endorsed the content for that. They did that in December 2010, and last week ministers endorsed the validated achievement standards in relation to that content for phase 1. So phase 1 has been out there since December last year.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I ask about teacher training here?

Ms Wall: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: I am specifically asking about the stolen generations issues around training. I understand there has been some allocation of funding to develop training for teachers on stolen generation issues and that there are three projects. You are looking a bit blank.

Ms Wall: Do you know about the three projects?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I know about the three projects. There is the one for the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, in partnership with the committee of university deans, to improve preservice training. There is another project, I understand, on in-service training and there is another one which is to support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander educators. So I know about the projects; what I am after is some detail around the three projects. You might want to take that on notice, but also what is the timetable for each project and what involvement has there been or will there be with consulting the stolen generation bodies that are obviously very interested in these issues?

Ms Davy: They are contracts which we have provided to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, as you indicated, so it would be appropriate for them to respond to those questions so we would need to take that on notice and ask for those details from AITSL.

Senator SIEWERT: That would be appreciated. Have you provided any guidance to them about some of the key things that you want to ensure are key parts of those projects?

Ms Davy: There will be in our funding agreements and scope of services some specifics about that. I have not got those details with me but I am happy to take it on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: If I could be provided with those, that would be appreciated. How many focus schools are there nationally under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan?

Mr Goodwin: Last count there were 887 focus schools nationally. I believe in the last few weeks some of the authorities have added a couple, so it is probably closer to 890 at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT: Is it possible to get a breakdown state-by-state? I know my own state but I do not always know the regions in the state. Can we also break that down into regions?

Mr Goodwin: Certainly. The state-by-state breakdown is actually up on the MCEECDYA website but we can break it down into regions for you as well.

Senator SIEWERT: I would appreciate that. What is the total school population of those 887 schools?

Mr Goodwin: I have a coverage of the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids, not the actual number.

Senator SIEWERT: Give me the percentage and you can take the numbers on notice.

Mr Goodwin: The focus schools cover approximately 47 per cent of the total Aboriginal primary school population and 35 per cent of total enrolments, because there are some focus schools that are secondary schools.

Senator SIEWERT: Can you tell me how many of the focus schools have completed their school and community partnership action plans?

Mr Goodwin: Not at this stage but I can certainly take that on notice for you.

Senator SIEWERT: I know this has been traversed previously and I am aware of the answers that have been given previously. What I am interested in knowing is: are there any non-government schools that have had a reduction in Indigenous-specific funding per capita based on 2008 funding figures as a result of the changes that started in 2009?

Ms Wall: We will just check that for you. Would you mind repeating the question.

Senator SIEWERT: What I am after is: are there any non-government schools that have had a reduction in their Indigenous-specific funding on a per capita basis compared to 2008

funding figures as a result of the changes in the funding arrangements that commenced in 2009?

Ms Smith: If the intent of your question is to ask whether any individual school have received less funding, that answer is no, but if I could clarify—

Senator SIEWERT: I have read that answer before. To tell you the truth I have been trying look at the figures and it does my head in because it looks as if there has been a reduction in per capita funding. I know there was a commitment not to, but I think it depends on what you count and what you do not count. What is the background to you saying, "No, there has not been"? Have you done the actual comparison for all the schools and is it possible to get that so I can look at it and do my head in further?

Ms Smith: I think we would all agree it is complicated. We are really referring to Indigenous Supplementary Assistance and that is what is guaranteed through the Indigenous Funding Guarantee so that schools adjustments from 2008 to the new quadrennial arrangements did not reduce. We can give an assurance—and we have had our figures checked and double-checked to see whether any schools lost any money—that they did not lose money. I think at the last estimates, Ms Paul talked about how we had reviewed our own calculations of entitlements and so on. We have significantly checked those things and we would say that no school has lost any money. However, there are differences in the stream of funding that schools receive and that is often confusing. People can look at figures and think that they are receiving less.

Ms Paul: This was an issue with the independent schools and I took it up myself. We had it reviewed again and I satisfied myself that we had done the right thing and that the per-enrolment figures had not gone down because of the Indigenous Funding Guarantee. Although I would have to refresh my memory, knowing how complicated it was, I noted at the time that in the public debate on it, you often found that not all sources of funding were counted. Once you put in all the sources of funding and made it apples to apples, then you can see that the per-enrolment amount has been maintained. There was also a complication—

Senator SIEWERT: That is per Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student?

Ms Paul: Yes, for schools that were most concerned, which are these schools focusing on Indigenous students. There were also some complications because of the interaction with falling enrolments, for example. Sometimes the presentation was the whole school amount, which had gone down because enrolments had gone down. But we genuinely and truly did satisfy ourselves that the funding guarantee had worked as was intended.

Senator SIEWERT: I am wondering if it is possible to get a briefing on it.

Ms Paul: Absolutely.

Senator SIEWERT: I keep hearing two different stories. I am not saying you are not telling me what the facts are, but I would really appreciate being walked through it so I can get it straight. As I said, it is very confusing. Is that possible?

Ms Paul: Of course it is. It would be a pleasure.

Senator SIEWERT: One of the many issues which has been raised with me, and I know it is a problem, is that of when student numbers are counted. I am wondering whether you have looked at it. I am sure you have, but have you thought of a better way of doing it? The

issue is about getting kids back into school after school term begins—I think the count is done three weeks after the beginning of term in August.

Ms Chin: The annual census for the Commonwealth takes place in August of each year. If my understanding is right, that is the third term for most schools. Your question goes to whether or not there is an alternative way of doing this. It is a slightly complicated process to hit a time which works for counting these kids. There is a reference period around the census period, which we take as being a typical period of time. As you know, all the jurisdictions have slightly different term timetables and so forth. We have to find a time which fits everyone. It goes through MCEECDYA to make sure that all states agree that the reference period is reasonable. We try to identify a reference period which we can treat as representing a time of the school year which is typical with respect to attendance. The requirement for the census is that the kids are attending on a daily basis—so the reference period is intended to be a typical period. The intention is that we are capturing a window which is a typical period. The alternative to that would be to track attendance right through the year, which would, I suspect, be quite onerous for most schools. I also suspect it would be more difficult for schools with large Indigenous populations, because there are a lot of kids who go home for cultural reasons and so forth. Schools are good, by and large, at accommodating those things. But it does make it more difficult to track attendance.

Senator SIEWERT: That is what has been raised with me—getting kids, particularly Aboriginal kids, back from the community and kids being taken out of school for cultural reasons.

Ms Chin: It might also be worth noting that, if the census reference period for a particular school happens to fall at a time when a group of the kids are back in their communities for cultural reasons, there is provision in the legislation for the school to apply to the department for those special circumstances to be taken into account. What we are essentially looking for in determining the funding arrangements for a school is that the kids would typically have been at school.

Senator MASON: I have some questions on program 2.3, under the heading 'Rewards for School improvements'. I asked some questions before about teachers and measuring their improvement and value. Now we are on to schools. I suspect there are similar problems. The department will recall that, during the 2010 federal election, the government announced the Reward for School Improvement program. The initial policy was for primary schools to receive a certain amount of money if they displayed the most improvement—and similarly for high schools. There were about four areas which would be tested. I think I discussed this last time with Dr Bruniges—I think she has gone to New South Wales?

Ms Paul: Yes, she has indeed. She is the director-general in New South Wales.

Senator MASON: She would be very busy there, I think.

Ms Paul: She apparently is—not that she was not busy here, I hasten to say.

Senator MASON: I recall that our conversation was about this same issue of how to measure school improvement. Dr Bruniges characterised the problem like this: how do you reward schools which continually improve in a steady and sustainable way rather than schools which improve in a quick and unsustainable way? You might recall that conversation from last time. There were difficulties in identifying the appropriate criteria. Do we have an update

on the progress of the national school improvement framework and the establishment of the Office of National School Evaluation?

Ms Davy: Yes, we do. However, we do not have the details that I would be able to share with you today. Essentially we are still in discussions with states and territories about the nature of the National School Performance Improvement Frameworks and we are seeking agreement about what the role of an Office of National School Evaluation would be. We have been talking and discussing both of these elements for some time over the last few months within our senior officials group. The minister has also been discussing these within his election commitment working group of states and territories. We are yet to come to agreement around those positions, so we are still doing work in that area.

Senator MASON: Do we have a timeframe for both those issues?

Ms Davy: The timeframe is such that we have agreement from ministerial council for us to progress this work and we have agreement from ministerial council to set up a steering committee which will have all the stakeholders and measurement experts around that.

Senator MASON: Would you call that a timeframe?

Ms Davy: We are hoping to set up that steering committee by the end of the year. The election commitment timeframe talks about a draft framework to be consulted this year into next year. We are still on track to develop a framework and consult on that next year. The election commitment also talks about the first payments to schools not being made until 2013, so we still have time in which to work with states and territories on that matter.

Senator MASON: I hesitate to ask of course, but can you inform the committee of any work that has been done about the criteria to assess the school improvement? Do we have the answer to that yet? I know it is a very difficult issue and I accept that. Again, I am not against rewarding schools for improvement; that is not what I am saying. The matrices to indicate that are complex. Can you share any answers yet or any progress with the committee?

Ms Davy: I cannot share any answers because as I said states and territories are still discussing the details of these. Certainly the nature of those discussions are similar to the nature of lessons learned internationally. You need to look at factors which are related to student outcomes and there is a range of those, as we have talked about before, in terms of the test data, as well as student engagement, well-being data and student post destination data.

Senator MASON: Value add versus—

Ms Davy: Value add versus gain, growth et cetera. There is a whole set of school practices data. So there is a whole set of those practices which have shown that, if schools focus in on them, they will make the greatest difference to student outcomes. You will see those in some state and territory accountability and improvement frameworks across the country. Queensland at the moment has a great one, if you would like to have a look at it.

Senator MASON: Very good. So there are already state and territory based systems?

Ms Davy: Yes.

Senator MASON: Are there any internationally that the Commonwealth is thinking of borrowing?

Ms Davy: No, there are none internationally that we would want to borrow.

Senator MASON: There may be templates.

Ms Davy: Yes, certainly the discussions are around those two groups of things; student outcome data, school practices data, self-assessment of those two elements, and we will continue in discussions to have a look at those things.

Senator MASON: So at estimates next February what do you hope to inform the committee about? Will there be sufficient gain that I can start asking sensible questions or will I still be flaying in the dark?

Ms Davy: I would imagine by next estimates we would have agreement with states and territories around the approach to implementation of the initiative and we would at least have a draft of some of the thinking around what might be the measures under the school improvement framework.

Senator MASON: That you would potentially share with the committee?

Ms Davy: I would hope so. That is up to where we end up and how long it takes us to gain agreement with our states and territory colleagues.

Senator MASON: So in her new role the doctor will not be able to escape this issue, will she?

Ms Davy: She will not.

Ms Paul: We expect her assistance.

Senator MASON: Her assistance, yes indeed. That is all I have on rewards for school improvement. Can I move to Empowering Local Schools. The Prime Minister was campaigning in the seat of Lindsay and she announced that state schools will get greater control over their budgets in selecting and employing teachers and identifying funding priorities. I understand the program will initially be targeted at government schools but will be rolled out nationally by 2018. The government has predicted it will cost around \$480 million. I also understand that the funds will have to be put into place—new school governance arrangements which allow for more local school autonomy. That is the background. At the last estimates, Ms Paul, I think you undertook to update the committee if there were any developments. Have the states and territories started putting into place their plans to access these funds?

Ms Davy: Senator, I will answer that question. Where we are up to with this election commitment is that we have state and territory agreement to participate in phase 1. When you mentioned that we were initially focusing on government schools and by 2018, I just remind you that we are talking about two phases. Phase 1 is 2012 and 2013, with 1,000 schools, government and non-government. Phase 2 will be from 2015 on, in terms of a greater national rollout. What we are talking about is agreement to participate in phase 1 at this stage. That is the work that we have at the moment.

Senator MASON: That is to select 1,000 schools, government and non-government, nationwide. How is that going? Have we got a thousand schools?

Ms Davy: As I said, we have got states and territories to agree to participate in phase 1.

Senator MASON: That is a start.

Ms Davy: That is step 1. We are in the process of finalising a national partnership agreement which would allow states and territory government sectors to participate and funding agreements which would allow the non-government sector to participate. Those

national partnership agreements and the funding agreement will obviously detail elements of the proposal. We are pretty close to finalising those. We hope to have a national partnership out for first minister signature by the end of this month.

Senator MASON: You have the administrative architecture but do you have, in effect, the criteria upon which the funding will be distributed?

Ms Davy: Yes. We have agreement, which we got with ministers in the initial stages, around a number of things. We have agreement that states and territories will be responsible for their own selection assessment process, but that will be on the basis of some national criteria such as schools having to show that they are ready and have the capacity to take on some greater local decision making.

Senator MASON: Have those national criteria been set?

Ms Davy: They will be set as part of the national partnership agreement.

Senator MASON: When is that due?

Ms Davy: As I said, we are hoping to finalise that and have that circulated by the end of this month for state and territory first ministers to formally sign up to.

Senator MASON: I have got that. So what is next?

Ms Davy: Next will be states and territories developing implementation plans. We know states and territories have started to do that anyway. They are starting to consult with their stakeholders around how they will go through a number of things—how they will go through the selection assessment process, what areas of autonomy they will focus in on. We are talking about focusing on about three areas: greater governance/school planning, greater funding of infrastructure management and greater HR staffing, and local decision making. In their implementation plan, states and territories will come back to us and say which of those three areas they may wish to focus in on with their schools, or it may be all of those. States and territories will also determine how they allocate the start-up grants to schools so there is money to schools to participate in this.

Senator MASON: This is Groundhog Day. Later this month the criteria will be set for the initial stage in terms of the national criteria, so I can ask you about that in February.

Ms Paul: Yes because by then what we would anticipate is that if, first, ministers have agreed to the national partnership then it will all be spelled out in the national partnership and we can be referring to that in February.

Senator MASON: I have not got far on the last few issues at all, because it is all still under development. I do know it is fair to say that traditionally Western Australia has had greater autonomy in their government schools. How are they being treated in this process? Is any allowance being made for the greater autonomy they have already established, I think over several years now?

Ms Davy: All states and territories are at different starting points. In the case of Western Australia, for example, yes they have a number of schools involved in their independent public school program, and part of this program will allow them to extend the number of schools that they will have within that initiative as independent public schools. Currently their independent public schools are addressing a similar criteria and they have a similar assessment process and they are looking at devolution in the three areas we have talked about

within this initiative, and that is similar to what they are currently doing under the independent public schools. This will allow them to expand their participation in the program.

Senator MASON: I can already think of questions for February, because the states are not common in terms of their standards of autonomy. I understand that some might argue Tasmania has gone backwards in terms of school autonomy. That is a debate we can have. I think it is fair to say that not all states have consistent or common standards of autonomy. Will Western Australia be held to a common standard or a standard applicable only to Western Australia, or is that still to be determined?

Ms Paul: We have not sought to achieve a common standard. There is a common framework but we have sought, as you might expect from a commonsense perspective, to start from where they are starting from, basically, and to look at what enhancements each of them can make. Western Australia will not be disadvantaged, which is probably where you are heading, by the fact that they have already taken some initiative. Rather, this Commonwealth initiative will help them, as Ms Davy explained, expand what they have already got.

Senator MASON: Will Tasmania be disadvantaged at all by their regressive behaviour?

Ms Paul: No because, as I just said, commonsense would suggest that you have to start with wherever they are starting from.

Senator MASON: Perhaps in February we can traverse this territory with greater productivity. I am afraid I cannot take it any further; I will wait till later this month. I turn to the National Schools Chaplaincy Program. Before I get into this, is it right that the High Court challenge is currently being heard and is under consideration? Is that where we are up to?

Ms Paul: They have reserved their decision.

Senator MASON: The justices of the High Court have given no indication of when they will rule?

Ms Paul: No

Senator MASON: We will leave that there. Am I right in saying that the National Schools Chaplaincy Program has been rebadged—the name of it?

Ms Wall: Yes, the government has announced changes to the program which will take place from January next year.

Senator MASON: I understand it is no longer the National Schools Chaplaincy Program; it is now known as the National Schools Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program.

Ms Wall: That is right.

Senator MASON: I note, and I could be wrong, in looking at some newspaper reports that the Prime Minister had a conversation with Jim Wallace of the Australian Christian Lobby during the last election campaign and the Prime Minister is cited and quoted as promising that the National Schools Chaplaincy Program 'would continue as a chaplaincy program with everything that implies'. Mr Wallace was, of course, talking about it and said that the National Schools Chaplaincy Program would be 'tethered to the Christian faith'. So what has happened between the election and September?

Ms Paul: For starters, we cannot comment on the thing you are referring to. It sounds like it was some sort of media report during an election campaign which I simply am not aware of.

Senator MASON: Yes, a media report.

Ms Paul: We can, though, go to the second part of your point, which is what has happened in between. Perhaps we will start from there.

Ms Wall: You would be aware, Senator, that there has been a national consultation process which concluded earlier this year. In the second stage of that process the government asked for views on a particular number of policy questions. After considering the results of that consultation the government subsequently—

Senator MASON: I am sorry to interrupt and I do not mean to be rude. I know the chaplaincy program has already been evaluated because we discussed that last time—I am sure we did, or maybe the time before that—so this issue has been around for a while, Ms Wall, and it is one of my favourite issues, as you know.

Ms Paul: I think the program has been around since 2006 so, yes, it has been around for a while.

Senator MASON: Yes, and I always enjoy the issue, Ms Paul, as you know.

Ms Paul: Indeed.

Senator MASON: I know this program was evaluated. Are you saying there has been another evaluation?

Ms Wall: No.

Senator MASON: Okay, sorry.

Ms Wall: I would not use the word 'evaluation'. There was a consultation process late last year and early this year.

Senator MASON: But has there been an evaluation? I thought the program had been subject to an evaluation in the past.

Mr Sheedy: There was an evaluation commissioned by the National School Chaplaincy Association, not by the department, and that has been cited a little bit in public.

Senator MASON: So in discussions. I think from memory, Mr Sheedy, it is true to say that the results of that survey or evaluation were very positive.

Mr Sheedy: Yes, they were.

CHAIR: They evaluated themselves, Senator.

Senator MASON: I do not think there was any dispute when I was discussing this with officers last time that that was the case.

CHAIR: I could come up with good marks when I evaluate my performance too!

Senator MASON: We all would, Chair. I know you love this issue. I do know you love it. But is it right that the evaluation was largely positive?

Mr Sheedy: It was, yes.

Senator MASON: Sorry, Ms Hall, so we have had the evaluation and now we have got your—

Ms Paul: That is an evaluation by the provider.

Senator MASON: Yes.

Ms Wall: It was not ours.

Senator MASON: But when we discussed it before I do not think anyone attacked or questioned the integrity of that, Ms Paul.

Ms Paul: But I note that it was an evaluation by the provider. It is just to clarify who is doing what evaluation.

Senator MASON: And I never heard any reservations about the integrity of it. Now, Ms Hall, we have had that before and now what is your evidence?

Ms Wall: That evaluation was not our evaluation. It was done by a provider and it had nothing to do with us. The government asked us to undertake a consultation, which was undertaken in two stages late last year and early this year. The views expressed by the community and stakeholders informed government's consideration about changes to the program.

Ms Paul: Senator, you would recall we have talked before about this. I am pretty sure we have talked before about this. There was a discussion paper put out and that informed it. Then we had a big consultation. I forget how many were involved.

Mr Sheedy: It had two stages, as Ms Wall has mentioned. One involved some targeted conversations with key stakeholders and as a result of those conversations we constructed a discussion paper which went out on 11 February this year for public comment. That process closed on 18 March and we had nearly 7,000 responses to the process.

Senator MASON: As a result of that, what did you find?

Mr Sheedy: There is a summary of that consultation process on the website, and has been for a while now. We found that, for instance, a majority of organisations representing a majority of stakeholders supported greater choice of worker within the program, that the majority of respondents supported minimum qualifications for workers under the program, and standards for funding recipients or providers. They are the sort of things that came back.

Senator MASON: As well, it is right to say that one of the outcomes from that process is a change of name.

Ms Wall: The change of name reflects the choice of worker which is now available to schools. Indeed, the government's response to that was informed by those consultations which Mr Sheedy just mentioned.

Senator MASON: Yes, I am just trying to draw the line.

Ms Wall: The line is about to be drawn through the consultations to the government's response, which includes the change of name.

Senator MASON: Right. I know in the past we have had discussions about God in this committee and, perhaps it is not appropriate today, but the fact now that, in effect, there is a choice between a student welfare officer—is that the right word?

Mr Sheedy: Yes.

Senator MASON: --and a chaplain, in a sense schools can exercise a deliberate choice between one or the other, is it to be expected then that chaplains will give a greater religious or spiritual aspect to their role, given that now there is a deliberate choice?

CHAIR: Greater than what they already do?

Senator MASON: Greater than would be provided by a student welfare officer, given that it is now a deliberate choice?

Mr Sheedy: Yes, you would expect that to be the case. A similar role is performed but a chaplain as opposed to a student welfare worker would be more likely to be able to respond to faith-based or spiritual matters that arose in the school community.

Senator MASON: So thus far, how have schools responded? Are many more student welfare officers being chosen or are schools staying with chaplains?

Mr Sheedy: It is too early to say because the process is for continuation for existing schools and for applying for additional schools if only recently opened. We have not processed any of those applications.

Senator MASON: I can see there is plenty of fruit on this topic for further estimates, Mr Sheedy. I of course will enjoy it.

Ms Paul: The changes take place from 1 January—for the new school year, really. By February, when we are here, we will hopefully have a bit more information.

Senator MASON: It might be a bit early. By budget estimates, Ms Paul, I think it will be well under way.

Ms Paul: Yes, that is right.

Senator MASON: I will have a bit of fun then. That year will be quite good. In the report that I got, Mr Wallace was concerned that chaplaincy would remain tethered to the Christian faith. The Prime Minister, according to this report, said that the program would continue as a chaplaincy program and everything that that implies. To me, that implies that chaplaincy will mean it will remain tethered to faith and spirituality, but you are saying that that was not the result of the department's evaluation.

Ms Paul: I do not think we can comment on the report that you referred to. I am not familiar with it and, if it was something during the election campaign I would not have attended—

Senator MASON: Politicians say all sorts of things in election campaigns, Ms Paul.

Ms Paul: But the chaplaincy aspect does remain in its full account. It is a broadening of the program, not a diminution of the program. Yes, as you were saying, there is a line to be drawn through the results of the consultation process to the government's response to this change as well.

Senator MASON: I suppose the most important part is that schools will have a choice.

Ms Wall: That is right. And there is strong support for choice. The new policy allows that decision to be made by the individual school community, depending upon their views and values.

Senator MASON: Good. This will apply from January next year.

Ms Wall: That is right.

Senator MASON: Perhaps we might have some indicators by the middle of next year or so.

Ms Paul: I would think so, and certainly by budget estimates.

Senator MASON: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: I have a couple of questions. Is there a minimum age of a chaplain? How old does a chaplain have to be?

Mr Sheedy: There is no minimum.

Ms Paul: But of course the changes require certain qualifications and, therefore—

CHAIR: They are the changes. But what about now? How many chaplains do we have who are under 18?

Ms Paul: Under 18 years old, I do not know.

Mr Sheedy: I do not know. I would assume none or a very small number.

CHAIR: How many are under 16?

Mr Sheedy: I do not know.

CHAIR: Can we find out?

Mr Sheedy: Yes, we can.

CHAIR: I am wondering why you do not know. You are aware of the *7.30 Report* program that talked about school chaplaincy some time ago.

Mr Sheedy: Yes.

CHAIR: One of the issues it raised was a concern about what might be loosely described as children being chaplains. Do you recall that issue?

Mr Sheedy: I recall there being a young chaplain interviewed on the program.

CHAIR: Let us ask the broader question: what action did you take in response to the issues that were raised in the *7.30 Report* about this program?

Mr Sheedy: They mostly related to Scripture Union Queensland's administration of the program, so we were in close contact with Scripture Union Queensland about some of the issues that were raised. One of them was the issue of homophobia, which you raised at the last estimates. We have been given adequate reassurances, strong reassurances, on that matter for the way in which they deal with those matters.

CHAIR: What about the other issues?

Mr Sheedy: The issue with the young chaplain was that he appeared to be not well trained to deal with the sort of work that a chaplain might encounter.

CHAIR: He was not trained at all.

Mr Sheedy: It appeared that he was not well trained to deal with that, but that is certainly not the case with chaplains throughout the country. It is certainly not a general description of the way in which chaplains are trained under this program, as a matter of fact, especially through the major chaplaincy providers. They have quite comprehensive training and induction programs. That one did surprise me. I would have thought that that chaplain would have been better placed to deal with that situation.

CHAIR: What about the counselling that the chaplains were required to do, according to the *7.30 Report*? I am still not clear what action you actually took as a consequence of the *7.30 Report*, so we will come back to that.

Mr Sheedy: One of the controls we have on the program—and they have been strengthened in the new guidelines—is to ensure that chaplains are working as part of the

school wellbeing team so that they know where the line is between the things that they are able to deal with and those where they need to pass it on to another professional support worker. We continually check with both the funding recipients, like Scripture Union Queensland, and individual schools as we do our monitoring on the adequacy of the arrangements for the broader school support team. The new guidelines are very clear. The minimum qualifications we have in the new guidelines are designed to strengthen those controls by ensuring that people will have the capacity to refer appropriately.

CHAIR: Sure, but the new guidelines are not in place yet, but the program is still ongoing. Again, so I am clear: what did you specifically do to investigate the concerns raised in the *7.30 Report*?

Ms Paul: I think Mr Sheedy has already said that he was in close contact with Scripture Union Queensland. I understand that we had not been aware of any other complaints about young or undertrained chaplains. We discussed here last time the extensive monitoring of complaints that Mr Sheedy's team do. Mr Sheedy may want to add to that.

CHAIR: Was the survey referred to by Senator Mason earlier done by Scripture Union, the one which said the program had been well received?

Mr Sheedy: By the National School Chaplaincy Association of which Scripture Union Queensland is a member, and a number of other scripture unions around the country and other similar organisations.

CHAIR: Are they the ones who said they are doing a good job? You actually asked the people who say that they are doing a good job whether they thought there was any concern with their program?

Ms Paul: No, we did not. In our evidence before we said that we did not have anything to do with that evaluation. That was an evaluation prompted by themselves, I gather.

CHAIR: From what I understand and Mr Sheedy's information to the committee, the action he took was to ask the providers of the chaplaincy service to reassure him that everything was in order. Is it wrong of me to assume that that is all you did?

Mr Sheedy: In relation to that particular program, we took no additional action. When examining specific complaints, we do make inquiries of a number of parties to make sure that there is nothing that is not as it should be.

CHAIR: Will you be able to find out if there are age categories? Could you find out how many chaplains are under 21 and then of those how old they are?

Mr Sheedy: Yes. Can I add though that what a number of schools find to be a real benefit of the program is that they do have relatively young people in these positions and they are able to relate well to students. In itself, being under 21—

CHAIR: I was not making that suggestion. I am just trying to get a feel for the age of the chaplains. Age may not be a problem but I would be interested to know. Let us start with 21 because that is a nice number to work back from. Could the chaplain be a student at the school that they are a chaplain for?

Ms Paul: I think that is speculation. I have not heard of it.

CHAIR: I am just asking whether it is possible.

Mr Davies: It would be difficult under the new program.

CHAIR: In the new program, but let us talk about now.

Mr Davies: It is theoretically possible but I have certainly never heard of it.

CHAIR: Could you find out if that is the case with any chaplains?

Ms Paul: It is extremely unlikely. We will take on notice whether we know of any instances.

CHAIR: I accept your answer that it would be extremely unlikely but I must say I just assumed that chaplains would be older than obviously the *7.30 Report* found. Mr Sheedy is saying that one of the benefits of the chaplains may be their age; the fact that they are younger and able to relate to people. I was also concerned that it would appear that principals—at least in one case which is the case examined on the *7.30 Report*—were actually asking someone very young to actually take on some very serious counselling issues over family bereavement and such. That was one of the complaints, was it not?

Mr Sheedy: Yes, it was.

CHAIR: Was there any direct investigation about counselling? How was that followed up?

Mr Sheedy: I did not follow up that particular element of the program.

Ms Paul: Perhaps in answering the question about whether we know if there are any of school age—the age question—and picking up on a particular complaint situated in the sweep of complaints too, because that might help, what sorts of issues there have been—I think you will probably be interested in that also.

Senator MASON: The chair raises an interesting point. Is there any minimum age specified for chaplains or for that matter for student welfare officers?

Mr Sheedy: No, there is not.

Senator MASON: What are the qualifications for student welfare officers? You mentioned training and induction programs that are extensive for the chaplains. I assume there are equally stringent processes in the new program for student welfare officers.

Mr Sheedy: Yes, there will be. The minimum qualification will be a certificate IV in youth work or pastoral care. It is a common minimum qualification for both chaplains and student welfare workers.

Mr Davies: On the logic of ability to complete a certificate IV, it is extremely unlikely that there will be many below 20 years old from early next year.

Senator MASON: Thank you.

Senator BACK: I will go to students with other special needs. In previous estimates we have investigated occupational and speech therapy services in the schools. What is the provision of therapist support in primary schools other than those identified with special needs, children with disabilities et cetera—perhaps identifying children with emerging educational or other needs?

Ms Wall: Every system and every school would have their own approach to the provision of allied health supports for students with disabilities. So there is not an answer or data that I can give you on that.

Senator BACK: It would rest with the state departments or the independent Catholic school suppliers?

Ms Wall: Yes. They would all have their own approach to providing those support services.

Senator BACK: Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme payments rest within this portfolio. During the various hearings we had into the live cattle export problems, there were several issues identified by families who were severely affected. So much so I think the Isolated Children's Parents Association wrote to Minister Garrett requesting assistance. Are you aware of that correspondence?

Mr Baker: Yes.

Senator BACK: What response, if any, has emerged from that correspondence from the ICPA to Minister Garret?

Mr Baker: I understand a response is still pending on that correspondence.

Senator BACK: One of the issues raised in evidence to our committee meeting in Broome related to the home tutor allowance which, as this particular witness said, is needed more than ever in remote Australia. As part of the development of that response, is anything being addressed in terms of assisting with home tutor allowance?

Mr Baker: Not that I am aware of.

Mr Davies: ICPA has raised that with the minister and there has not been a response at this stage.

Senator BACK: The same witness spoke about the remote in-home care which some families can access under the childcare benefit. My understanding is, if a family finds its own carer, it helps pay their wages. The main restriction is that the places are very limited and there is a long waiting list. First of all, is the department aware of this concern? Second, is there anything in train to try to address it?

Mr Baker: I am not aware of anything.

Mr Davies: I cannot recall anything being specifically raised with us on that one.

Senator BACK: I understood it had been raised in that correspondence.

Mr Davies: We will need to check

Senator BACK: The other issue raised by that particular witness related to the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme covering kindergarten age. Apparently it is encouraged that children enrol in kindergarten in the School of the Air program to get them into the system. She said that most families in fact do enrol their children at this level because it would be to their detriment if they did not. Does the department have a plan to extend the AIC program to kindergarten-age children, especially those in remote areas?

Mr Davies: No, not at this point. I cannot recall whether that has been raised specifically with us.

Senator BACK: The concern that was raised with us was that, because of the fact that most of the pastoralists had to put paid staff off, in the particular case of this lady, and she just was one of many, the wives are now faced with the challenge of having to get out there onto

the station to help their husbands and others do the work, in which case they need the extra educational support for their children. I would ask you to take that on board.

The second and unrelated area is the Indigenous Ranger Cadetships program. I think that, in response to a question in the budget estimates, we were told that there was \$4.1 million over three years for that program. Is that correct?

Ms Paul: Yes, that is correct.

Senator BACK: At the time, it was asked how many cadetships would be on offer and the answer was that it would be known once participating schools had been identified. Can you tell us now how many schools have been identified as participants and, as a result of that, the potential number of students who will avail themselves of this cadetship?

Ms Smith: The election commitment was for six schools to be involved in a pilot in the first year and a further six schools in the second year.

Senator BACK: The same six?

Ms Smith: No, it would be 12 schools in total. But the precise design of how this is to be implemented has not been finalised. The Indigenous Ranger Cadetship initiative is being developed with advice from the National Trade Cadetship Minister's Advisory Panel, chaired by Professor Denise Bradley. The advisory panel has developed its initial advice to the minister, but the precise design of how these cadetships will be implemented is still being developed. The precise nature of the training which the young people will do and the schools which are best placed to support the young people so that they go into cultural and land heritage employment opportunities at the end of the cadetship—that is all being worked through in that design.

Senator BACK: For those schools in each of the first and second years—the six schools—can you give a prediction of, or do you actually know, the number of students that will be involved in year 1?

Ms Smith: No, we do not know the number of students. We are looking at the various criteria which the schools will have to meet in order to fully support the cadets. The community will have to support the young rangers; there needs to be a connection with other ranger programs—a whole-of-government approach; and there has to be clear support, with prospective jobs, from the community. We are looking at how to identify, out of hundreds of schools, those which might meet those criteria. We will need to work through an appropriate process which is transparent.

Senator BACK: You mentioned employment opportunities. Are we confident that there will be jobs for each of the cadets once they progress through the program?

Ms Smith: That is certainly the aspiration connected with the program, but it is likely that we will need to bring in support from other programs, such as the Indigenous Employment Program, in connection with that.

Senator BACK: What is your prediction for when we will actually have some answers about the selection of the first six schools in year 1?

Ms Smith: The aim of the panel is to have some exemplars, and some schools working on this range of cadetships, by the second semester next year. We will be going through a process of designing what the cadetships need to cover; looking at what support you would

need to put around both the cadets and the schools which are involved in the pilot; having a transparent process to choose the schools; making sure that all the connections with community, as I outlined, are there; and so on. We would expect that process to have been completed by about May next year in order for the students to be able to start in second semester.

Senator BACK: The other question I have is unrelated to Indigenous ranger cadetships. It is about helping children with autism. Again, a question was asked and the answer was given. I think the budget included \$190 million over four years for the Helping Children With Autism program. We did ask at that time how much of the funding would be allocated in the rural, remote and regional schools. At that time the data was not available. Is that data available yet? If not, when do you predict that you will be able to answer that?

Mr Davies: Senator, just to remind you, the \$190 million was for the complete package. You will recall our department manages two elements of that in terms of parental capability building workshops for parents and their knowledge and understanding, and also for teachers. Our element is a subset of the total government package. I cannot recall, were we able to get data on the rural—

Mr Baker: We have got data on the number of staff and teachers that have participated in workshops. As at 30 June, staff from a total of 670 schools in rural, regional and remote locations participated in teacher workshops.

Senator BACK: I think I do have a figure here. Out of 4,592 in total?

Mr Baker: Yes, 15 per cent. That is correct, Senator.

Senator BACK: We will assume then that the proportion of parents might reflect also the teacher numbers. Would that be a reasonable assumption or would we not know?

Mr Baker: I have not actually got the number of parent workshops that were run in the same location, Senator. So I would be careful to draw that assumption.

Mr Davies: We could take that on notice, Senator. I just cannot recall whether they do parallel or whether there is a slightly different pattern.

Senator BACK: It would be interesting to know. Thank you very much. Chairman, that is all I have in program 2.3.

Senator MASON: Indigenous education on 2.3, Chair. Senator Scullion is here, he is an expert in these things. Can we just go back. We have discussed this, I think. All these themes, Ms Paul and Ms Wall, we have discussed on several occasions. You know I enjoy traversing these issues very much. Could we just go back, just to give context to this. The original promise was from the 2007 election, when Ms Macklin announced that the government would spend about \$29 million over four years towards construction and operation of three new boarding colleges in the Northern Territory. She stated in her media release of 5 November 2007, exactly four years ago, that one 40-bed boarding facility would become operational in the 2009 school year and a 72-bed and another 40-bed facility would become active during the 2010 school year. That is from November 2007 and I have got a time line here—but I will not go through the entire time line, which I suspect might bore everyone.

In February of this year the committee was told the below-ground construction was well advanced at Wadeye. The wet season had intervened. The estimated date of completion was still late this year. That is at Wadeye. The tentative site had been selected for the East Arnhem

facility, but it had to be submitted to the Northern Land Council. While a preferred site had been identified for the Warlpiri Triangle, it had not yet been announced. The committee was advised that it was likely that two facilities would be completed by the end of the 2011 school year. It is just about that now, is it not? Or very close to it. In June the site works below-ground construction at the Wadeye site had been completed and they were waiting for the works to be signed off. The builders—a company called Wildgeese, Ms Paul—had been appointed and were setting up their camp in preparation to start building—I will ask about the wild geese chase in a minute—and the East Arnhem site at Garrthalala had been tentatively selected and surveying reports were being prepared, along with a feasibility report. The surveying report was due within the few weeks after the last budget estimates. After that was completed there would need to be at least secured through the Northern Land Council before site works could commence. I think it was Mr Goodwin who felt that it would be unreasonable to set a time frame for completion of that estimate. There is a preferred site at Warlpiri, but it has not yet been announced.

So, four years have passed. Where are we? Who wants to take that one?

Mr Goodwin: I have some very good news on the Wadeye site. The construction is proceeding apace. The block work on all of the buildings has been completed. The roofing is now on. We had a slight delay with securing roofing materials. As you can appreciate, a remote site like Wadeye does suffer challenges in those respects. Overall, we are very satisfied with the progress that Wildgeese has made, despite the name. In fact I brought along photos of the construction progress to share with you, if you would like me to table those.

Senator MASON: I know that Senator Scullion and I would be delighted if you would share those with us. Just to make it clear: it is great that the construction is well advanced. We were told that it would be completed by the end of the 2011 school year. Is that correct?

Mr Goodwin: Due to the delays in securing the roofing steel there has been a slight delay in the completion date. We have been advised that the facility will be completed by February 2012 rather than by the end of this school year.

Senator MASON: At the beginning of the 2012 school year?

Mr Goodwin: Yes.

Senator MASON: Let us get this right. That is the Wadeye site, isn't it?

Mr Goodwin: Yes.

Senator MASON: So Wadeye by February 2012. I have got the photographs. It looks alright. I do not know much about building. What about the other sites? How about Warlpiri?

Senator SCULLION: Just before you move on to that site, let me say that it is interesting. This is not your problem. The contractors have told you that roofing steel was a complete mystery to the Territory. We do not do much roofing up there. But the particular issue is that they have also advised you that things do not happen in the wet season. That is pretty much the advice you have given and we have accepted it. It is a reasonable thing to—

Ms Paul: Would you like us to stop and check that before we go on?

Senator SCULLION: That is the advice you have provided to me. I have assumed you have received it from the operators.

Mr Goodwin: Can I clarify that advice. I think the advice we received and may have passed on previously was that commencing a large building project such as this in the wet is particularly difficult on the basis that the workers simply cannot work in torrential downpours. But, having gotten to the stage now where the roofing is, as I understand it, pretty much complete, work will be able to continue now that the wet is about to commence, or is commencing—finishing the building during any wet season that ensues from this point on

Senator SCULLION: That was going to be my question. I actually had a look at it myself some two weeks ago. As you would be aware, some of those photos do not reflect some sort of a roof being on; but there is still a way to go. I am assuming that what you are telling me is correct. Given that there will be the moving of materials—things like plasterboard and those sorts of things, which are not available in Wadeye—from Darwin in the wet season along a road that was flooded by about a seven-metre causeway called the Daly River and was completely cut off for three months last year, you are still confident that somehow this will have no effect on your assertions that this will be ready to go in February.

Mr Goodwin: That is correct. Wildgeese has constructed a number of buildings in the Northern Territory. They understand the climatic variations in the Territory and how to plan their work around those climatic variations. When they tell us that they will be finished by February we are reassured. I am sure that they have contingency plans in place, as you say, for being able to store and protect, especially, things like gyprock and other moisture sensitive materials while they are reaching the stage where they start sheeting the walls and so on.

Senator SCULLION: We look forward to February. Last year you could not even get across the Daly River at Easter.

Mr Goodwin: If they do not already have materials there, I assume that they will barge them in.

Senator SCULLION: We will see in February. We are in the hands of the wild geese! We will see how we go.

Senator MASON: In the June budget estimates we were told that the site has been preferred but not yet announced. What is happening at the Warlpiri site?

Mr Goodwin: The Warlpiri site is still largely on hold. We have not been able to conduct any further consultations with the people of the Warlpiri Triangle. We hope to be able to break through on that front in the not too distant future. I do not have any further substantive progress to report on the Warlpiri site.

Senator MASON: Senator Scullion knows a lot more about this than I. Is there a particular problem there? I understand that there are issues of remoteness; but that cannot be the only problem here. What is the issue?

Mr Goodwin: The issue that has been preventing us from engaging in meaningful consultations with the Warlpiri people has been a flow-on from the community unrest that started there late last year. We take regular advice from people on the ground, whose advice we value and rely on. They tell us that the key people in the Warlpiri Triangle with whom we need to consult and negotiate are not in a position to do so at this stage.

Senator SCULLION: I thought I caught, from the thread of your previous statement, that at any moment now we expect some sort of breakthrough. Have you been given any indications as to why that might be the case?

Mr Goodwin: No.

Senator SCULLION: Is it individuals on the grounds? Are you talking about assurances from the Central Land Council, for example. Who are you getting that comfort from?

Mr Goodwin: From our staff on the ground and from government business managers.

Senator SCULLION: Did they indicate that that would be any minute now or before Christmas? Have they indicated that there is any particular—

Mr Goodwin: No, they did not put a time line on it.

Senator SCULLION: I do not share that level of confidence in the general circumstances. Most commentators and people on the ground would say that this is an ongoing issue. The term 'no end in sight' has been used a number of times. I also note that a number of other consultations and things continue to go on; the world moves on—people do things and make decisions. For example, some decisions were made by the people in the Warlpiri Triangle during the Stronger Futures consultation process that went on fairly seamlessly. I not think that there is any mischief in this, but I am not sure that these people are in particular difficulty. I understand some of the personalities in it.

I still do not understand that. Stronger Futures was comprehensive. There were 676 meetings across more than 100 communities, including all the Warlpiri communities. As I understand it, from feedback from government staff on the ground, they all went pretty seamlessly and pretty well. In any event, it would be very useful, when we next discuss this, for you to report in more detail what the blockages actually are. Given the advances you are making and the consultation on some pretty significant issues such as the intervention, one would have thought that this was perhaps a lesser tier of concern. That is just my view, but I think it would be very useful to the committee if, when you return, you have something a bit more comprehensive about the blockage.

Mr Goodwin: I am very happy to do that. I take us back to the basic principles associated with the boarding facilities. An absolute key criterion for us and the government is that we have strong, broad based community support across the region for the facility. You may be aware that a number of consultations were held with communities in the region over a sustained period. While we have an indication of levels of support, it is about the unanimity of that support and the importance of the extended community speaking with one voice on its preparedness to support a facility in a particular location.

Ms Paul: I also presume that part of it is the community's assurance that the facility would be safe for students. It has that personal safety element for young people which make the bar higher.

Senator SCULLION: Are they asking government to give assurances to them, through this consultation education process, that those safety issues are being met? Is that what you are telling me?

Ms Paul: We are asking for that.

Senator SCULLION: I am not sure I understand that. Can you explain it again?

Ms Paul: It was not a major point; it was simply to add to Mr Goodwin's evidence. Perhaps I have just confused the matter. Mr Goodwin was saying eloquently that the premise of the election commitment was to get agreement within a community for the location and so on of these facilities and for their nature. All I was adding was that part of that community sign-up has to be that the facility would offer a safe environment for young people. I do not know whether Mr Goodwin wants to add to that. I was simply making the point that there may be some other initiatives which do not have that element, whereas the bar we have to reach is that high. It was not a huge point.

Mr Goodwin: Ms Paul makes a valid point. You would be well aware of the history of Wadeye. Throughout the consultations with the people of the Wadeye region, student safety and security has been paramount. The facility was designed in close consultation with the local people of the region to ensure that safety and security of students is well catered for. It is an issue. It will no doubt be an issue for the people of the Warlpiri as well.

Senator SCULLION: So they are saying, 'What level of amenity are you providing us, across the board, that gives us the level of confidence to send our kids there?'

Mr Goodwin: Yes, that is one of the issues we face in each of the remote sites.

Senator MASON: Ms Paul, you are indeed right implicitly: the safety of children is important. But having discussed this issue on numerous occasions—often in the company of Senator Scullion—I know that the original media statement, which I have right here, spoke about one of the colleges opening in 2009 and the other two in 2010. It is explicitly said, as you would agree. What has the government learned from this experience? It is now four years after the date of the statement and still we do not have any completed—not one. What lessons have we learned?

Ms Paul: We have always understood—Mr Goodwin or others may want to add to this—that facilities such as these in these locations and communities will take the time that is required. Yes, we have been here again and again on this. Yet I would posit that we are still doing the thing by making sure that, at the end of the day, we are trading off time for success. I would have been more worried had we forced on a community a solution which ended up not working. That is just how it goes. It takes the time it takes because of the community involvement. We have explained that each time.

Senator MASON: Yes, I could not argue with that, Ms Paul. I raise it because it is a problem that government of whatever persuasion is going to have to face. There are remoteness and cultural issues, I know, but I suspect that whoever is responsible next time might take a more reticent view of respective timelines, if I could put it that way. Garrthalala was the other site; what is happening there, Mr Goodwin?

Mr Goodwin: I think last time we talked about the land survey and some other feasibility studies. I can report that the land survey has been completed. There was also a water feasibility survey to ensure that the growth in the population of the Garrthalala community is able to be catered for in terms of water, and that has been completed. The technical feasibility study has been drafted. It has not yet been finalised, but I would be more than happy to talk about that in February. A master plan has been drafted with the community and other key stakeholders, including the Northern Territory government, and that master plan has been signed off by the community, by the traditional owners. They are very happy with it and are very excited about the prospect of Garrthalala having a strong education focus. In fact, I just

happen to have a copy of the draft master plan, which I would be happy to share with you, as well as the photos.

Senator MASON: Yes, we would be delighted. Thank you, Mr Goodwin.

Mr Goodwin: Would you like one too, Senator? I have got a couple here.

Senator MASON: I am not very good at reading these things. Senator Scullion is.

Mr Goodwin: It is very easy to read.

Senator MASON: I think it is right to say, Mr Goodwin, that last time you were reluctant—I do not blame you, really—to set any time frame for completion at Garrthalala or, indeed, anywhere. Have you set some sort of time frame, or is it that one day will you come into estimates and say, 'It is all done,' and we will all be excited by that?

Mr Goodwin: I am sure that one day I will come into estimates and say it is all finished, but I stand by my last comments. I cannot put a completion date on Garrthalala yet. We clearly have the NT government as a stakeholder. We need to bring the NT government along with it. The NT government has committed to upgrade the school at Garrthalala and to build teacher accommodation for the extra teachers that they will provide as the school expands, but the NT government goes through its own processes to sign off on those things, so there are some dependencies with the project in terms of our other stakeholders. I think I mentioned also previously the fact that the current airstrip nestles right alongside the existing dwellings in the community. That must be shifted. In fact, the ABA has signed off, I am sure you would be aware, on funding to move the airstrip. The draft master plan in front of you actually resites the new airstrip above all of the development. Those things have to be worked through carefully and we have to bring those stakeholders along with us.

Senator MASON: I am sure the NT government—I should not say they are part of the problem—has to be brought along as well as everyone else. But, again, what is the main reason? After four years we have not got very far. What is the principle cause of that? It is a long time—four years. How long did the Acropolis take to build? About 10 years, wasn't it?

Mr Goodwin: That was before my time, so I could not comment.

Senator MASON: I mean, honestly—

CHAIR: Back about—

Senator MASON: I suppose my point is, Chair: where there is a will there is a way. After four years, it just seems to be like punching into aspic. What is the issue here?

Mr Goodwin: The issue that has been with us all along: the need to engage in really careful community consultations. The East Arnhem region is a big region and we have been very careful to make sure that we are bringing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in that region along with us so that they are fully brought into the process as we are putting it to them.

Senator SCULLION: So this is a 40-bed facility?

Mr Goodwin: That is correct.

Senator SCULLION: So each of the bedrooms has just two of the students in each bedroom?

Mr Goodwin: As with most of the facilities that are built like this, that will depend a bit on the age of these students. It is generally accepted that for senior students, especially those in years 11 and 12, it is ideal to have a study space allowed for in the students' rooms. So we generally look at the younger students being four to a room, as you suggest, but with the older students our preference would be for having two to a room.

Senator SCULLION: And we are not sure about the spread of the students yet in? You have not been able to provide that? I am sure you will have done some work on that. This is going to be the only boarding facility in east Arnhem Land that is planned and, as you say, it is a big place. Have you had expressions of interest from 40 or more students from around north-east Arnhem whose parents would be proposing for them to take up places at Garrthalala?

Mr Goodwin: We have not sought expressions of interest yet. We do not want to put the cart too far in front of the horse. As I said, we are working with our stakeholders to plan the facility and to get the necessary paperwork done before we can start construction. We are well on track to submit a lease application to the Northern Land Council for its November meeting and once that is done and construction is underway then, as we did with Wadeye in exactly the same process—and that is working really well—we can go out to community members and start talking about the possibility of parents sending their kids there. It is really important for us to ensure that people understand what they are committing to. For example, we ran a workshop at the Warlpiri facility in South Australia, which is recognised as a very good practice facility, in September and we took some of our Indigenous stakeholders from Wadeye and from east Arnhem Land down to that workshop and that was a real watershed moment for several of them. They were finally able to see a successful facility with strong ownership—in this case by the APY people—being run and supporting their kids to get a good education. So as a result of that workshop the word is starting to spread through both the Wadeye region and east Arnhem Land about how these things can work and what great outcomes they can deliver for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. So it is an incremental process.

Senator SCULLION: You would obviously have to be starting to think about some of the processes. I note that there is a small circumstantial difference as to those parents who, for example, reside in Garrthalala. You indicated the last time we discussed this that in Wadeye there was now access from people who live in Wadeye: 'I live here with the family so I can actually board my son or daughter in the boarding facility 20 metres away.' I am assuming as that is in Garrthalala that the process in Wadeye would be the same there. Then there will be a different demographic of people actually required to board—well, I am sure they are all required to attend a secondary school. What sorts of costs are going to be involved for the parents? Are there differentials in the costs between those parents who simply do not have a choice and those who actually reside there and have the convenience of having a perfectly good home and putting them in a boarding school 20 metres on the other side of the road? Have you considered what the schedule of fees is going to be? Are there going to be fees? How is it all going to be worked out?

Mr Goodwin: We have not finalised anything in relation to a contribution from parents, families etc for access to the facility. That is really based on knowing what the final operational costs are and whether it is appropriate—as you suggest—even to be asking

parents to make a contribution. So that is a matter for consideration over the next couple of months. We do have it under active consideration.

Senator SCULLION: Can you perhaps take it on for February, when we next meet?

Mr Goodwin: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: I will be asking about two things, firstly about the process and exactly how that is going to work and I will have an update on your considerations between now and then. As for the second thing, as it seems on the face of it that Wadey will be finished or completed in February and it will be used next year, you will then be in a position to give us the full costings including some of the incremental things like the cost of the lease and what it has cost us to actually establish a facility of this size. So I will be asking about that in February.

Mr Goodwin: Sure.

Senator MASON: We would love to be surprised by completions, Mr Goodman. Make us happy.

Mr Goodwin: Should I bring the champagne, Senator?

Senator MASON: That would be wonderful, Mr Goodman.

CHAIR: Give us plenty of notice, we will put you on last. Senator Back?

Senator BACK: Thank you, there was one other area which I wanted to draw to your attention. This is the VISE program, the Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education. Is this something that comes under the department's remit at all?

Ms Paul: We are getting blank looks. It does not ring a bell to me.

Ms Wall: I think I am familiar with that organisation, but it is an external organisation.

Senator BACK: Right. I only draw it to your attention. It is an organisation which has been going for about 20 years, by which, as the name suggests, retired teachers volunteer their time in remote station, et cetera. The reason I draw it to your attention is that—and it possibly may not come under your area of influence—legislation seems to be changing to the effect that, although they earn no funds and are paid nothing, they are to be considered as employees and not volunteers. This is going to change substantially the whole relationship in terms of insurance, especially for occupational health and safety. But it would appear not to be something under your control.

Ms Wall: No, but certainly we are happy to—

CHAIR: I think that was discussed with the workplace ombudsman yesterday.

Ms Wall: Yes. We can follow that up with our colleagues. I know that I have met with them in the past on a different issue. They were concerned about different teacher registration issues in every state, because it stopped a New South Wales trained teacher from going to the Northern Territory without going through a separate registration. Our current which was announced last week and ministers agreeing to a national approach to registration is going to help that problem, but we can have a look at it.

Senator BACK: If you could take it on because their concern is they are going to have to wind the program out because of the risks both to them and to people hosting them on stations.

CHAIR: It might be a question of outcome 5 as well.

Ms Paul: Yes, I think so. We will take it on notice.

Ms Wall: We will look at that.

Senator BACK: Thank you.

Senator MASON: Ms Paul, does DEEWR handle questions with respect to the Mathematical Olympiad and that sort of thing?

Ms Paul: We can give it our best shot, yes.

Senator MASON: All right. If you need to take this notice, let me know. This is not quite my strength, any of this. I understand the government has recently funded a review on the operations of the science and mathematics olympiads. That was conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers. Is that right? Did that conclude that the olympiads were a benefit to Australia?

Ms Davy: The review has not actually been completed yet, is my understanding. We certainly have not seen a copy of the review report yet.

Senator MASON: There is a review underway?

Ms Davy: Yes, there is a review under way.

Senator MASON: There is a review by PricewaterhouseCoopers into the operation of the science and mathematics olympiads?

Ms Davy: That is right.

Senator MASON: All right. Do you know when it is due?

Ms Davy: I am not sure because it is actually not coordinated by this department; it is actually coordinated by Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.

Senator MASON: I should have asked Senator Carr yesterday, when I had him in my sights. Perhaps you can ask Senator Carr on notice. You do not know anything about the timing of these?

Ms Davy: No.

Senator MASON: Are you aware that Australia has been granted the hosting of the UNESCO-sanctioned International Olympiad in Informatics in Brisbane, in 2013?

Ms Davy: Yes, I am. I am aware of that.

Senator MASON: Do you know, does the government plan to be providing any support to host this apparently very prestigious event?

Ms Davy: I am not aware of anything.

Senator MASON: Is there anything in the forward estimates about this—do you know?

Ms Davy: I am not aware of any approaches to DEEWR around support for that. I am sorry, I cannot answer that question. I am happy to take it on notice and find out whether there have been any such approaches.

Senator MASON: Can you do that? See if there has been any sort of forward planning for it. I understand it is about computers and those sorts of things. It is not quite my strength or my issue. I am sure it is very important for many students.

Ms Davy: Yes.

Senator MASON: If you could just take that on notice and let the committee know, we would be very grateful.

Senator Jacinta Collins: Does that include calculators, Senator Mason? Would they be covered also?

Senator MASON: The only computer I know how to use, Minister, is my calculator. It does not get much use any more, sadly. That completes my questions.

Senator BACK: Thank you for your reappearance. Can you tell me the number of trade training centres in schools that are currently operational?

Ms Smith: The number of trade training centres as at 14 October that are operational is 111. We expect another 20 to become operational shortly.

Senator BACK: By, say, the end of this year?

Ms Smith: I believe so.

Senator BACK: Those approved but where building has not yet commenced?

Ms Smith: We have 99 projects that are at various stages of construction.

Senator BACK: Does that include the 20 that you just mentioned?

Ms Smith: No. In total we have 288 projects of which 131 are already built. A subset of that 131 is the number I just gave you: 111 are operational and 20 are ready to come on stream.

Ms Paul: Just to clarify, the 288 projects cover 900 schools.

Senator BACK: I was going to get to that. Is that part of the cluster arrangement?

Ms Smith: Yes, that is right.

Ms Paul: Correct.

Senator BACK: In terms of round 4 of the trade training centres, are there any more in addition to that 288?

Ms Smith: The numbers that we just talked about are the numbers resulting from rounds 1 to 3. Round 4 was announced by the minister on 29 September, and the process is now underway for sectoral plans and project proposals to come forward to the department by 11 November.

Senator BACK: Thank you. How many schools are covered by the 288 projects?

Ms Paul: It is 900.

Ms Smith: It is actually more than 900.

Senator BACK: I guess one answers the other, does it? There are about three schools per trade training centre?

Ms Smith: It very much varies. A number of stand-alone schools are stand-alone trade training centres.

Senator BACK: Perhaps you could just take that on notice and give me a breakdown.

Ms Smith: Yes.

Senator BACK: How many of these are in non-government schools?

Ms Smith: We are just looking to see whether we have a sectoral split; otherwise, we may need to take that on notice.

Senator BACK: That would be fine if you do. Regarding the ultimate responsibility for determining where the facilities are built—these are the ones that are not yet constructed under round 4—who will have that responsibility? Is that the department?

Ms Smith: The process will be that education authorities and block grant authorities will bring forward project proposals under a sectoral plan.

Senator BACK: Yes.

Ms Smith: The minister will agree the sectoral plan and the in-principle funding for the individually named projects.

Senator BACK: So the minister will have that responsibility. Prior to the cuts that were announced in the 2011-12 budget, how many projects would have been expected to have been funded? In other words, what is the shortfall?

Ms Smith: I would like to clarify that there has been no reduction in funding.

Senator BACK: There hasn't?

Ms Smith: There has been no reduction in funding.

Senator BACK: In the 2011 budget there were no cuts announced?

Ms Smith: There was, however, a transfer to the out years. This is a 10-year program and there was a transfer in the order of \$102 million into the final two years.

Senator BACK: So it will be 2015-16 before it is completed. Is that right?

Mr Edwards: It was always over that 10-year period.

Ms Paul: It is just redistribution of funding throughout the 10 years. It is \$2½ billion over 10 years. Like any progress payment for construction, it is just the way the 10 years has been—

Senator BACK: Is provision made when there is an adjustment to the out years for what are inevitable increases in construction charges over time or is it the same gross number of dollars and therefore less projects get completed?

Ms Wall: It is the same quantity of funding.

Senator BACK: Perhaps you could advise us on notice of the year-to-year breakdown of funds until the program is completed.

Ms Smith: I have the forward estimates until 2014-15. Would you like those now?

Senator BACK: Yes.

Ms Smith: This is a 10-year program. I have it split by government and non-government if that is helpful. In the current appropriation for 2011-12 the government funding is \$158,220,000 and the non-government funding is \$98,880,000. The total there is \$257,100,000. In 2012-13 the government funding is \$164,880,000 and the non-government is \$92,020,000. The total there is \$256,900,000. The following year, 2013-14, is \$171,780,000 for government and \$80,720,000 for non-government. The total is \$252,500,000. The final year of the forward estimates is \$179,040,000 for government and \$74,860,000 for non-government. The total is \$253,900,000. I can give you the total for the entire program.

Senator BACK: Yes.

Mr Edwards: Just to complete the story, in 2015-16—this is the amount we referred to earlier that was carried over—there is a further amount of \$50,339,000 and in 2016-17 there is an amount of \$52,460,000.

Senator BACK: I wonder if you could tell me the number of students who are currently training in a trade at a trade training centre?

Ms Smith: We do not have that available.

Senator BACK: Please take it on notice. Can you also take on notice the number of hours on average that each centre is being utilised during the teaching weeks.

Ms Smith: We will take that on notice.

Senator BACK: The Tasmanian Polytechnic is advertising itself as building six trade training centres. Can you tell me the role that the Tasmanian Polytechnic plays in establishing these federally funded centres? Is it devolved or outsourced to them?

Mr Edwards: I will answer what I can. I might need to take some of it on notice. To the extent that the polytechnic is also a school that enrolls senior secondary students in years 11 and 12, they could and, as I recall, have successfully sought funding in previous rounds. If a polytechnic was involved and was not a school of the sort eligible under the program, they could still be a consortium partner, but it would not be one of the schools to which funding was provided.

Senator BACK: My understanding is that the funds will be devolved to state or territory organisations to actually undertake this program. Is that correct? Is that how it would work in the case of the Tasmanian polytechnic?

Mr Edwards: The funding flows through state government treasuries where it is a state government school.

Senator BACK: And for non-government? To block grant authorities?

Mr Edwards: For non-government schools it flows through the block grant authorities.

Senator BACK: My question, Ms Paul, is: do we need to activate Mr Orgill or a clone of Mr Orgill in terms of overall oversight, proportions of the funds to be spent on administration et cetera? Is this something that you have got under control?

Ms Paul: We have actually discussed the value for money questions about trade training centres here before.

Senator BACK: Yes.

Ms Paul: And discussed that DEEWR's approach to value to money and oversight of trade training centres has been very, very tight indeed, actually. I think we were praised by the ANAO. Is that right?

Ms Smith: That is correct.

Ms Paul: We were praised on that robustness of our value for money approach. So we are confident that we are on top of that.

Senator BACK: Good. Can you either tell me or take on notice to provide a list of the trade training centres that are currently up and running in that jurisdiction of Western Sydney and what courses they are running?

Mr Edwards: We may be able to get that for you now, Senator. Otherwise, we will take that on notice.

Ms Smith: We will need to take it on notice, I believe.

Senator BACK: Okay, thank you. Can I just go, whilst we are on this topic, to apprenticeships?

CHAIR: Yes, you may.

Senator BACK: Can I have an update on the tender progress or the process of tenders for Australian apprenticeship centres.

Ms Paul: We will take that on notice, Senator.

Senator BACK: Thank you. And in so doing, would you also—

Ms Paul: Actually, Senator, that is outcome 3. We are going on to that after outcome 2, so the people will be here.

Senator BACK: Leave it until then?

Ms Paul: Yes, I think so.

Senator BACK: And trade training cadetships, the same?

Ms Paul: No. If you are interested in National Trade Cadetships, we can answer that here, because that is a school-age, school based activity. We are more than happy to answer that now.

Senator BACK: My first question then is: when will these cadetships commence?

Ms Smith: Senator, similar to my answer in relation to the Indigenous Ranger Cadetships, there is an advisory panel chaired by Professor Denise Bradley providing advice to the minister on the design of the cadetships. It has been agreed that the cadetships will have two parts to them: foundation pathway for years nine and 10 students and a pre-apprenticeship pathway for years 11 and 12 students. Both of those pathways will involve some level of work experience. All of that has been designed. It has been agreed by the states and territories through MCEECDYA that ACARA, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, will design the content for the foundation pathway for the years nine and 10 students. It is being worked through, but consultations are about to start through the advisory panel to work out how to design the appropriate content for the pre-apprenticeship components connected with existing training packages. The panel needs to work through, again, with states and territories and relevant stakeholders, including industries skills councils, as to the most relevant industries in which to put these National Trade cadetships.

Senator BACK: Do you have a target figure for the number that you hope to attract in the first year and beyond?

Ms Smith: Similar to the Indigenous Ranger Cadetship, we are doing the design first. Then we will work through which industries and which exemplar schools and employers would like to get together in partnerships for these. Then we will work through the possible numbers from there.

Senator BACK: Is it premature to ask you how the program is or will be promoted?

Ms Smith: I think it is, Senator, but there clearly needs to be some communication and promotion that is relevant to young people, to employers and to parents.

Senator BACK: I am just wondering how it will differentiate from the school based programs.

Ms Smith: Exactly. That is one of the considerations the panel is very conscious of—that this is a clear reform in terms of what is being offered, and it is different from current VET schools offerings.

Senator BACK: The other one in the mature age area we can leave until after the schools.

Ms Paul: Correct.

Senator BACK: Thank you very much, Chair. That completes my questions on 2.4.

CHAIR: Is that it until the BER group now?

Senator BACK: Yes, except we have some in other areas than 2.7, of course.

CHAIR: Program 2.7 is the BER, isn't it?

Senator BACK: That is what I am saying: 'other than 2.7'.

CHAIR: Okay.

Senator BILYK: I have some questions relating to the Digital Education Revolution. Can you tell me how we are progressing in regard to the digital education revolution—in particular with regard to the Australian curriculum online component?

Ms Bloor: I think you are referring to an announcement that was made a few weeks ago about the Supporting the Australian Curriculum Online package, which is a \$41.3 million package, with \$31.4 million of that to be spent on additional resources to support the curriculum that the teachers can use in the classroom, on materials that will assist teachers in implementing the curriculum, and also on some national infrastructure that can be used to deliver those resources. As I mentioned, the package was only announced fairly recently. There is a funding agreement with Education Services Australia, which will be delivering it, but it is a very collaborative approach that we are seeking there with ESA to consult widely and also to engage with and partner with teacher professional associations and so on.

Senator BILYK: Is it expected that teachers in rural and remote areas will be able to access the program?

Ms Bloor: Yes.

Senator BILYK: Good. Can someone give an update on how the overall progress of the whole Digital Education Revolution program is going?

Ms Bloor: In terms of the National Secondary School Computer Fund, which is the major funding element of the DER, as at 30 June this year 589,879 computers had been installed in secondary schools with years 9 to 12, and that represents 75 per cent of the number of computers needed to reach a one-to-one student-to-computer ratio.

Senator BILYK: Are you able to tell me how many have been installed in Tasmania so far?

Ms Bloor: Yes, certainly. In Tasmania 69 per cent have been.

Senator BILYK: Are we on target to reach the one-to-one ratio for students by the end of 2012?

Ms Bloor: Installations are continuing to be made. As I said, those figures are from 30 June. The government has chosen only to report figures that follow the formal progress

reports that are required. They are continuing, and education authorities have stated publicly and repeated assurances to the department and to the government that they will meet the time frame.

Ms Wall: We are on track, so 75 per cent in the middle of this year was exactly where we projected to be at this point in the rollout.

Senator BILYK: That is good news. Just jumping around a bit, we have this program of e-learning that is going to be implemented or is in the process of being implemented. Is that correct?

Dr Arthur: No, that is additional funding. There are a number of initiatives. You could pool the entire Digital Education Revolution projects and indeed preceding initiatives all being about government trying to promote, broadly, e-learning. The elements that Ms Bloor spoke of are a strengthening of that but by no means all of it.

Senator BILYK: Is that all dependent on the rollout of NBN?

Dr Arthur: There certainly is a dependency in that: for computing technology to be used really effectively in education, one of the components you need is high-quality communications. The NBN is a crucial component of the government's overall initiatives in this space.

Senator BILYK: Is there some sort of validation program in regard to the approach to e-learning and the national curriculum?

Dr Arthur: I would defer to other colleagues who may wish to speak about the national curriculum in general, but e-learning is merely an approach whereby you use, as appropriate, technology to assist in education. It is not something separate from education; it is something where you will be using, in particular ways and at particular times, technology to do things that you would otherwise want to do.

Senator BILYK: I understand that but surely some schools especially in rural and remote areas will be more reliant on e-learning especially for their older students, I presume, and so I am wondering how we validate the links and the programs that are on there for the national curriculum.

Ms Bloor: We have developed an evaluation framework for the DER. That is a thematic evaluation, looking at the impacts on teaching and learning. We have asked education authorities to comment on those sorts of aspects in their progress reports, and they are doing it.

Senator BILYK: Are you talking about state and territory authorities and governments?

Ms Bloor: States and territories and non-government.

Senator BILYK: Are you part of the Ideal11 conference?

Dr Arthur: Yes, we are.

Senator BILYK: Are you able to briefly tell us what that is about?

Dr Arthur: It is a long-standing involvement with a conference bringing together a range of participants both from industry and from education providers in schools, in training and in higher education to discuss a range of issues about interoperability between applications used in education. It is a somewhat technical affair—there is also some strange thing called a boot camp associated with it where very technical people do very technical things, making things

actually work with each other. Then there is a slightly less technical set of sessions where people talk about the principles behind that. It is crucially important particularly, as you mentioned, when dealing with rural and remotes, trying to ensure that we get the maximum value out of education applications and that applications developed in one jurisdiction can work with the equipment and technology in other jurisdictions. Trying to deal with interoperability issues is a crucial element of getting that effective return on investment.

Ms Bloor: And this year we also have international speakers coming.

CHAIR: You say we are on track with the roll-out of computers, with 75 per cent. What about the budgetary element of that?

Ms Bloor: Yes, \$1.7 billion has been provided to education authorities to date. Overall it is a \$2.4 billion program.

CHAIR: So that actually reflects the 75 per cent of the physical roll-out?

Ms Bloor: Yes.

Dr Arthur: The expenditure covers a great deal more than just the computing. We are also providing for the costs of upgrading the environment to take advantage of the computing so that, to pick an example, in New South Wales they have completely transformed their internal school networking. All of their high schools now have extremely high capacity wireless networking, linking all those computers to the external communications. In fact, as New South Wales likes to boast, thanks to the funding they now operate the second-largest integrated network of its kind in the world. The largest one is operated by the US Navy.

CHAIR: Was that a joint funding initiative with us all did we provide the funding?

Ms Bloor: The funding for that was part of what is called the on-cost funding of the Building the Education Revolution, so it was provided by the Commonwealth.

CHAIR: Are there any outstanding issues with the other states still being negotiated in respect of the ongoing maintenance funding?

Dr Arthur: We are not engaged in any particular discussions about that. The principles associated with that were decided at the time of the COAG meeting, which signed off on the national partnership—there should be a national partnership in this space. There will be some technical discussions at some stage on how we manage the maintenance phase, but all the major elements have been settled.

CHAIR: I know there have been some concerns about electricity supply issues, or capacity. Are they all now either being undertaken by the states or been settled?

Dr Arthur: They were all part of the process of reviewing the funding for the program led by the then Deputy Secretary of the Department of Finance and Deregulation, Dr Grimes. His report was accepted by government and funding was provided in the form of some \$807 million to address those issues. All of those issues are now being addressed.

Senator McKENZIE: My question goes to the online diagnostic tools. Could you outline the sorts of things that this initiative is designed to do.

Ms Bloor: The initiative is in three parts. The first is with respect to resources and tools that assist teachers in the classroom and that provide formative assessment rather than high-stakes-type testing. The second element is to provide resources to—

Senator McKENZIE: Do you mean across a range of curriculum areas?

Ms Bloor: Yes. But of course it would make most sense for it to be targeted at Australian curriculum areas in the first instance.

Senator McKENZIE: Thank you.

Ms Bloor: The second element is to do with resources for parents and the third is consideration of online delivery of the national assessment program.

Senator McKENZIE: As an expansion on the second element, is that information about online NAPLAN and online assessment?

Ms Bloor: Information and resources that they can use in the home to better understand—

Senator McKENZIE: To support their child's education.

Ms Bloor: That is right.

Senator McKENZIE: Excellent. Because it is a tripod.

Ms Bloor: Yes.

Senator McKENZIE: I am interested in the online delivery of the NAPLAN and what influence that certain issues teachers and schools have had with the NAPLAN, and with delivering NAPLAN in classrooms in the way it had to be administered in the past, has played in the decision to try to do NAPLAN online?

Dr Arthur: This was an election announcement, so I am not really in a position to give too much detail I do not know. I am not quite sure of the origin of this. To be clear, the announcement from government was that sample assessments under the national assessment program would be trialled first as the implementation of this element of the commitment. To that extent it would not seem that the issue was particularly prominent because it was not the focus of the initial election commitment by government.

Senator McKENZIE: I just know from personal experience that sometimes in schools it is a little hard to resource the administration of the NAPLAN, given the AEU's opinion of it.

Ms Paul: My understanding is that one of the key impetuses for this commitment was the desire to empower parents as well. It was both. One the one hand it was recognising that for the first time ever there was a national curriculum—and why not back that in an online way as much as possible, because that is the way of the world? On the other hand it was very much about empowering parents for the first time with quality assured resources they could use with their own kids.

Dr Arthur: We will be working very closely on the delivery of this with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, and I have no doubt that ACARA will want to address issues such as the logistics of doing NAPLAN tests as part of this process.

Senator McKENZIE: Is it a more efficient use of resources in schools on the ground to go to an online version of NAPLAN rather than the bits of paper and the kids at the desk?

Dr Arthur: I think we will need to explore that. I think the assumption we will probably have is 'yes', but we will need to do this carefully and, indeed, find some of those things out.

Senator McKENZIE: Has a cost-benefit analysis been done?

Ms Paul: ACARA administers the National Assessment Program, and they are starting to look at that. I do not think they have finished looking at that. Probably what I would suggest

is that, because they will have done more work by the next estimates, either we can take that on notice now and ask them now—but there will be more—

Senator McKENZIE: Are they still here?

Ms Paul: No, they have been and gone. We can certainly take it on notice, or there will be more to say in February anyway, at which point you might want to ask ACARA directly.

Dr Arthur: I can give some assistance in that there have been conversations between us and ACARA on exactly that point. The point made to us by ACARA is that the technology is moving so fast in this area that looking at previous examples of how it is done to get an idea of costs is going to be misleading. I know this to be true. For example, New South Wales has already carried out one exercise whereby, in a secondary area, they carried out for their own purposes a very large-scale use of online technology to deliver secondary science assessment process. They used that in cooperation with Microsoft. Microsoft supplied what is called the 'cloud' in their general computing environment—the services and the very large numbers of computers to do that—at a price which was completely different from the price of using and creating your own technology to do that. It is that area of being able to deliver very complex computing operations in an environment where simply buying some cycles to do that at a particular price is completely transforming the economics of these activities.

Senator McKENZIE: Yes, it is a moving feast. My other questions—and I am not sure if this is the right place to ask them—go to the methodology that will be used to distribute funds committed to various programs—for instance, the online diagnostic tool. Would here be the best place to talk about that?

Dr Arthur: Yes.

Senator McKENZIE: Thank you. I am just wondering how the distributions of funds will be decided. We have a pool of national funds. It goes either to the Empowering Local Schools program, to Rewards for Great Teachers or to this online diagnostic tool. Will that be allocated per student or per school—per capita?

Ms Bloor: Online diagnostics is different from the others inasmuch as it is not envisaged to be a national partnership agreement. With respect to the three elements, we are talking extensively and using the consultation mechanisms with states and territories that are in place for some of the others. But we will be looking at potentially using existing resources but also at approaching the market, because some of these things could be delivered more efficiently and effectively that way.

Dr Arthur: To give an example, in the past this government and the previous government committed, with the states and territories, well over \$100 million to create online resources for teaching and learning purposes. Those funds did not go to particular schools on any measure; they went to the predecessor of Education Services Australia, essentially through a market mechanism to create those products and to create the tools with which those products could be accessed by a range of schools. So the question of how it is distributed to schools really does not arise in this instance.

Senator McKENZIE: No—different horses for courses, I presume. I might put my other two on notice. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Senator Mason, how long did you think you would be? If you were going to be only five minutes, we will continue on and then have the break, but if it is more then we will have a break.

Senator MASON: I have two parts on the Digital Education Revolution, as I always do.

CHAIR: The Digital Education Revolution?

Senator MASON: Yes.

CHAIR: Let us have the break. We will come back and we will continue on with the Digital Education Revolution. That then will conclude everything in outcome 2, apart from 2.7—the BER.

Proceedings suspended from 15:44 to 16:00

Senator MASON: I missed some of the information that officers gave before about the laptop computer rollout. Correct me if I am wrong: is the total of computers delivered and installed so far 590,000, as someone said?

Ms Bloor: It is 589,879 as at 30 June this year.

Senator MASON: To get to one-to-one, is it roughly 200,000 computers?

Ms Bloor: That is 75 per cent of the computers needed.

Dr Arthur: And the answer is yes, about 200,000.

Senator MASON: Let me ask about internet connections. For the past several estimates, the committee has been told that the fibre connection, to be up to 100 megabits per second, which as officers will recall is the second half of Mr Rudd's election promise, is really out of the department's hands since it has now been subsumed and rolled into the rollout of the National Broadband Network, the NBN. So, the department has not been able to tell me all that much about the timetable for connecting schools and how much the process will cost, but we did engage a little bit last time, and I have received some more information from the department. Last estimates I asked how many secondary schools in the first five release areas had been connected to the NBN. The department took that question on notice. Unless I am mistaken, it does not seem to have been answered—I cannot find it—so have any of the four secondary schools in the five first-release sites been connected to the NBN?

Dr Arthur: We can certainly help you. The question has been answered, as is our understanding—

Senator MASON: How come I cannot find it? I am usually quite good at these things.

Dr Arthur: We can probably read out the answer. I have one answer which is EW-861 and 651. My colleague has referred it to me. The number is 476 of 12.

Senator MASON: If it has been answered that is fine. Have any of the four secondary schools in the first five release sites been connected?

Ms Bloor: Four schools have been connected on mainland to the NBN and six in Tasmania.

Senator MASON: And those four secondary schools are in the first five first-release sites?

Ms Bloor: Yes, they are.

Senator MASON: Ms Bloor, when were they connected?

Ms Bloor: Those figures are as at 17 October. Those schools are connected but I cannot at this point answer when they were connected but I could take that on notice.

Senator MASON: I think at the last estimates I also asked how many secondary schools in total are situated in the first five release areas—that is, are the four secondary schools mentioned the only secondary schools in those areas, or are they the only secondary schools in the areas that will get the NBN connection at this stage?

Ms Bloor: There are nine schools in the first five release sites. At the last Senate estimates we did report that there were 10, but one of those, which was a Catholic school, has closed. Of the nine schools in first release sites on the mainland, four have been connected. One of those is a primary school and one is an independent school with a combined population—so primary and secondary.

Senator MASON: Four connected, one primary, one independent, so that is six. So three schools would be, on the surface, entitled to be connected but have yet to be—

Ms Bloor: Four schools in the first release sites also report having existing fibre connections and they have not taken up the NBN.

Senator MASON: They have chosen not to take up the NBN?

Ms Bloor: At this point.

Dr Arthur: Because they have existing connections. Just to answer the specifics of your question, to complete it: in the first five release sites the answer we gave you in answer to question EW0475_12 was that there were four secondary schools within the first five release sites. We will give you additional information as to their connections and which have taken it up, but the specific question you asked was how many secondary schools were within the release sites, and that is the answer to that question.

Senator MASON: Right. And have been connected?

Dr Arthur: No. The question you asked was how many schools were in there. Ms Bloor has separately given you the answer in terms of connections.

Senator MASON: I think I understand that, Dr Arthur. I am asking the questions. At last estimates I asked where the 19 second release sites are and how many secondary schools fall within them. In the answer to that question on notice I was provided with a list of these sites and told:

In the Department's previous response to EW0651_11, it was estimated that up to 129 schools fall within the second release locations. As NBN Co Limited is yet to publish detailed fibre footprints for the second release sites, the exact number of schools which will be located within the second release sites cannot be confirmed at this stage.

Is the department in a position now to get more information?

Ms Paul: Could you give us the number please?

Senator MASON: In the last estimates I asked where the 19 second release sites are and how many secondary schools fall within them. In the answer to my question on notice I was provided with a list of these sites—

Ms Paul: Sorry, I meant could you just give me the number of the question on notice. It does not matter. We can update it.

Senator MASON: Your answer to me was:

In the department's previous response to EW0651_11, it was estimated that up to 129 schools ...

I want to know whether the department have looked at that more closely and whether they are now in a position to give a more accurate assessment.

Ms Bloor: Yes. I should preface this by saying that the NBN is constantly making announcements about its fibre rollout, including as recently as the day before yesterday. We estimate that there are 175 schools in the second release sites. In its announcement of the day before yesterday the NBN announced variations to some of the existing second release sites and also announced a further 28 sites. Our estimate, because that is very recent, is that there could be around 138 schools in those 28 additional sites, which would give us 313 schools on the mainland in the second release sites.

Senator MASON: And the 313 are in the second release sites?

Ms Bloor: On the mainland. They do not include 115 schools that are in Tasmania.

Senator MASON: How many second release sites are there?

Ms Bloor: It is 19 I believe. but there are additional ones announced the day before yesterday.

Senator MASON: So it is not 129; it is actually 313.

Ms Bloor: We estimate 313, although our more—

Senator MASON: It is a big change from 129. What is the cause of the discrepancy?

Ms Bloor: The fibre roll out maps that the NBN releases are unsettled and are changing and expanding.

Senator MASON: It is a big change.

Dr Arthur: I think Ms Bloor said that the day before yesterday NBN announced an additional 28 new locations. Those additional 28 new locations produces the additional 138 schools.

Ms Paul: Is that not 19 plus 28 sites?

Dr Arthur: That is correct.

Ms Paul: So that is the difference between us answering on 19 and answering on 19 plus 28.

Senator MASON: Ms Paul, could you please repeat that.

Ms Paul: There were 19 sites producing our original estimate of 129 schools.

Senator MASON: That was 19 second release sites.

Ms Paul: Yes and the day before yesterday, Ms Bloor said, in addition to that 19, there is an additional 28.

Senator MASON: Is that 28 sites?

Ms Bloor: New locations.

Ms Paul: New locations.

Senator MASON: What does that different terminology mean?

Ms Bloor: To be precise I would prefer to take it on notice, Senator. It could simply be that there are additional towns being added to what are more general geographic areas.

Senator MASON: So that is 19 second release plus what did you call them?

Ms Bloor: 28 additional locations.

Ms Paul: That is how you get 313.

Senator MASON: Do you have a timetable for when those 313 or thereabouts secondary schools will be connected to the NBN?

Ms Bloor: What we have is a time line that the NBN has announced for connecting those sites, not the schools within them, and they vary up to August 2012.

Senator MASON: Can you provide the committee with the connection timetable for those sites and, I should say, additional locations?

Ms Bloor: That was released by the NBN the day before yesterday but we can certainly provide it.

Senator MASON: You can pass that on to the committee. In your evidence 16 schools were connected in Tasmania. Is that correct?

Ms Bloor: No. There are seven schools in the first communities in Tasmania. Six of those have been connected to the NBN.

Senator MASON: Are they all secondary schools?

Ms Bloor: No, they are not. One of them at least was a primary school. I do have the breakdown of all of the 115 schools in Tasmania by education level but not of those six.

Dr Arthur: We can take that on notice.

Senator MASON: Do you have the timetable for connections beyond the first and second release sites?

Ms Bloor: No.

Senator MASON: The NBN Co. has to do that.

Dr Arthur: The NBN has to make its decisions on its further release sites. That is a matter for the NBN.

Senator MASON: How many secondary schools with years 9 to 12 have so far been connected to the NBN as of now?

Ms Bloor: As I mentioned earlier, there are three secondary or combined schools that have been connected.

Senator MASON: On the mainland or in Australia?

Ms Bloor: On the mainland. There are 10 schools on the mainland and Tasmania that have been connected to the NBN with another to be connected shortly, we understand by December.

Senator MASON: Is that 10 nationwide and three on the mainland?

Ms Bloor: Four schools have been connected. One of those is a primary school.

Senator MASON: Right. That is where we are at thus far, as of today?

Ms Bloor: Yes.

Senator MASON: 15 November is the fourth anniversary of Mr Rudd's announcement about connections to fast fibre, so it is four years down the track.

Dr Arthur: I might add, Senator, that more than (*inaudible*) per cent of Australian schools are currently connected to high-speed optical fibre.

Senator MASON: Yes, but the Commonwealth did not do it, Dr Arthur. That will not save you. You have tried that before but remember you always lose that battle.

CHAIR: It is another project we are very proud of, thank you, Senator Mason. That concludes the digital revolution. Senator Back.

Senator BACK: I refer to youth support and the Australian Youth Forum receiving funding or support. In response to question EW0484 at a previous estimates, evidence was given that the Australian Youth Climate Coalition received financial support under the Australian Youth Forum program. First of all, is that correct? Can you confirm the amount of funds that the AYCC received as part of this funding?

Mr Fernando: I can confirm that we did not actually say the Australian Youth Climate Coalition received any funds, and they did not through the Australian Youth Forum.

Senator BACK: Did they receive any departmental funding at all?

Mr Fernando: I cannot speak for the department but I can certainly speak for this particular program. They have not received any funding through this program.

Senator BACK: So the information that my colleague Senator Birmingham had, that they received \$271,000, is, to your knowledge, not correct?

Mr Fernando: That is right.

Ms Paul: At least from this program unless it comes from somewhere else. Clearly, he thought it must have been from this program.

Senator BACK: Yes. It certainly is raised in the youth support element. So you are now aware of it under this program, but can you take on notice whether there are other programs under which it may have been funded?

Ms Paul: Sure.

Senator BACK: If you would advise me I would be appreciative. I will go to an unrelated matter, year 12 completion rates. This answer would be EW0195. You responded to a question on notice that the COAG target was 90 per cent by 2015 and that the most recent data for year 12 or its equivalent completions was 85.6 per cent. I think the question asked was what percentage came from rural and regional areas. Can I ask you whether or not you now have that information as to students from rural and regional areas.

Dr Arthur: No, we do not because the data source for that is a survey carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, a survey of employment and work, and the sample size is not sufficiently large to provide reliable figures for that kind of breakdown.

Senator BACK: So then for the same reason you would also not be able to identify the number or proportion of disadvantaged students who are in rural and regional Australia. Would that be the case?

Dr Arthur: That is correct.

Senator BACK: And is there any capacity for that dataset to be restructured so that you can, in fact, collate that data?

Dr Arthur: There have been conversations with the Australian Bureau of Statistics about that. The options that have been looked at have included increasing the sample size. That would be an extremely expensive option to pursue. I am not clear that even that would give you sufficient sensitivity to pick up regional and remote, certainly not by jurisdiction. But I would need to consult with the Australian Bureau of Statistics on that precisely. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is looking at techniques, particularly in terms of combining survey samples, to see if they can get a little more sensitivity out of the data. But in terms of nationally comparable data we really do not have, as far as I am aware, the ability at the moment to answer that particular question. There are other data sets that go to some of that issue, for example, administrative data sets on the number of year 12 completions within state and territory systems, which provides some of that stuff. There is also data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, NCVER, which can provide breakdowns on completions of certificate II and certificate III in some detail from those people who are picked up in the NCVER statistics. What we cannot do is put those two data sets together in a way which eliminates double counting to the same individuals. So we cannot give reliable figures, on a national level, which go to those issues.

Senator BACK: The reason behind the question is one we have canvassed in this forum before. While my anecdotal observation is in Western Australia, I suspect it would have an equivalent elsewhere. Students find themselves in three positions. One, there are those from cities and large regional centres which would have upper secondary schools regarded as being of a very high standard. The second group are those from rural regional remote areas who remain in those rural and regional areas for their upper secondary schooling. The third group is from the same geographic areas who subsequently go to boarding school, be at year 8 or at years 11 and 12. I am satisfied that at the moment I do not know that the data exists, but it would be very interesting for the department to take on board the fate of equivalent students. For example, what is the fate of the students who, at the end of year 7, year 8 or year 10, have studied in smaller high schools and then one cohort finishes their schooling in a city based or a larger regional city—when I say large regional city I am speaking about eastern states as there are not too many in the west—and the other cohort who must remain.

We know very well that the age of the teachers and the experience of teachers in those smaller schools is going to be less. We know that the competition, because of the smaller class sizes, is going to be less. We know that the range of courses offered is going to be less. It just seems to me to be something we need to be examining just to see the extent to which, if at all, this happens. A member of my family was teaching English and English literature in upper school both in the country and in the city. They subsequently became the head of the department, then subsequently were on the curriculum committee and then became an examiner. They would say continually year on year that you could immediately always tell, by the performance of the student, where they came from even though the school tried to mix them all up so that there would be no bias. I do not know if you can comment or if it is possible even to form some sort of data on that.

Dr Arthur: I certainly can comment. I would add to my previous answer, when I was answering about the existence of data sets which at a national comparable level allow us to track the performance against the 90 per cent target. We certainly do have research information which bears out exactly what you say. We have information and there are research studies which confirm that there is a strong correlation between the further you move

out from metropolitan areas, such as the lower completion rates and the lower participation rates in all forms of higher education. We have data on that and we do regard that as a key problem to be addressed in an overall policy sense. The questions you raise specifically about correlations between students who move and students who remain, and particularly the narrow top high schools that exist in many cases in regional areas, is a question we can certainly research to see if we can do things to get a better understanding of that particular issue. We will take that advice. I should say that, in a program sense and because we do recognise this, in the administration of the overall year 12 policy initiative we have Australia-wide programs—the national partnership progress program and the youth connections program—which have providers in those areas specifically tasked to address some of the issues and some of the barriers to the completion rates. We also have, as part of the overall national partnership approach, a very strong emphasis on the part of the states and territories that it is their responsibility to take steps to address those issues within their own jurisdictions.

Senator BACK: Because of time, Chair, I will go to one question in program 2.12. It relates again to Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme payments. I understand the five standard AIC allowances are basic boarding, distance education allowance, second home allowance, pensioner education supplement and the additional boarding allowance. Is it correct that, as a result of a decision in 2010-11, two supplementary allowances, the additional boarding allowance and the distance education allowance, are due to cease at the end of 2011?

Mr Baker: Yes, that is true.

Senator BACK: Are those funds reallocated elsewhere into other allowances under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme payments?

Mr Baker: No they are not.

Senator BACK: Is it \$1,000 in the additional boarding and \$1,094 in the distance education allowance? Are they the correct figures? Are they scalable?

Mr Baker: It is \$1,061 for the distance education supplement and \$1,000 for the additional boarding allowance.

Senator BACK: For a typical family, what does that \$2,061 represent as a percentage loss to what they would be enjoying currently? If you cannot tell me that now, can you take it on notice for families with one, two and three dependent children.

Mr Baker: I will take it on notice, but it would probably depend on the mix of allowances that the individuals receive.

Senator BACK: Is it possible to explain why the decision was taken or was it not one made by the department?

Mr Baker: It was a decision of government at the time.

CHAIR: I think that concludes everything in outcome 2 apart from the BER, which of course is a direct ministerial responsibility for Minister Evans. According to procedural order of continuing effect No.19, I am afraid the parliamentary secretary is unable to represent the minister for this section of outcome 2. On that basis, we will simply continue on until the portfolio minister is able to arrive. If there is a question that needs to be referred to the minister, we will simply suspend proceedings until the minister is available and is in a position to answer that question. We will now move to questions—

Ms Paul: Chair, before we do, can I correct the record?

CHAIR: Yes you can.

Ms Paul: We were asked a question about the mathematics and science olympiads. We were asked whether we had seen or received the program evaluation for that. We said earlier today that we had not, but we have checked back at the ranch and there is a DEEWR person on the steering committee for managing the evaluation and they have received a copy of the evaluation.

Senator MASON: That question was from me.

Ms Paul: Was it? There you go.

Senator MASON: You might recall that I am totally on top of that brief.

Ms Paul: As we obviously were. I am pleased, in your presence, to be able to correct the record.

Senator MASON: Can I just ask that you take this on notice: has consideration been given to funding that?

Ms Paul: We will take it on notice. I do not know.

Senator MASON: Also, is that particular report publicly available? I have not seen it.

Ms Paul: I will find out. I do not know the answer to that.

Senator MASON: If it is, could it be made available. If not, then clearly it cannot.

Ms Paul: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you. We now move to BER. Senator Mason, did you want to kick off on that?

[16:29]

Senator MASON: It could be groundhog day, Chair. We will see how we go. It may be quite quick. I will just run through, Ms Paul, as I do, the various categories of the BER. You will be pleased to know that we are really now searching through the entrails. I think it is fair to say that it is coming towards the end, Chair.

Ms Paul: I think that is true.

Senator MASON: Are you not pleased, Ms Paul? Could we start with the science and language centres for the 21st century? That is, perhaps, the least controversial aspect. It is now more than 15 months past the original deadline of 30 June 2010 to complete all 537 projects. So far, how many of the science and language centres have been completed?

Mr Parsons: Senator, 509, as at the end of August.

Senator MASON: That is out of 537?

Mr Parsons: Correct.

Senator MASON: There are still about 28 to go?

Mr Parsons: That is right; 28.

Senator MASON: Do we have any idea when the 28 still to go are going to be completed?

Mr Parsons: I expect the majority would be completed this calendar year, with a small number going into the next calendar year.

Senator MASON: All right. In an answer to question on notice EW0460_12, you told the committee:

The last approved variation date for a Science and Language Centre (SLC) project is 31 December 2011.

That is a year and a half after the original deadline. Does this timeline still stand? Or have there been any subsequent time extensions to the projects that are still under construction—that is, the other 28.

Mr Thomas: The last approved variation date for a project under SLC is 31 March 2012.

Senator MASON: We have moved beyond 31 December?

Mr Thomas: Yes.

Senator MASON: 31 March 2012.

Mr Thomas: That is right. That project is linked to a P21 project and also to a capital grants project that is going on as well.

Senator MASON: That is the project for which the most significant time extension has been given?

Mr Thomas: The approved variation; that is correct.

Senator MASON: Have any other variations for time been approved?

Mr Thomas: Beyond 31 March?

Senator MASON: At all?

Mr Thomas: There have been variations within the science and language centre element since the last estimates.

Senator MASON: How many have been given variations with respect to time?

Mr Thomas: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator MASON: But the one with the longest extension is 31 March 2012?

Mr Thomas: That is correct.

Senator MASON: You do not know how many have been given that time extension?

Mr Thomas: We will take that on notice.

Senator MASON: Can I move, Ms Paul, to P21 that you have just mentioned. Primary Schools for 21st Century. With respect to the P21 projects, at budget estimates, the committee was told that all but 14 of the 10,697 projects have commenced. Have the remaining 23 projects now commenced?

Mr Thomas: Could you ask that question again. I did not understand your question.

Senator MASON: Yes, sure. At the budget estimates the committee was told that all but 14 of the 10,697 projects had commenced. Have these remaining projects now commenced?

Mr Kovacic: As at end of August, nine projects were still yet to commence.

Senator MASON: Why are there still nine to commence? There must be some specific reasons?

Mr Thomas: There are some specific reasons and examples that I can share. There is at least one waiting on a Land and Environment Court ruling. Others are waiting on various land acquisitions and/or approvals. It is those sorts of establishment things that are holding up those projects. I might add that we have met with the education authorities concerned and have drawn to their attention the fact that you cannot wait forever for a Land and Environment Court ruling or for a zoning application to change or whatever the reason is and that there needs to be a fallback plan that would see the projects complete within the allotted time frame.

Senator MASON: Can we just go to round 1. There were 2,010 projects approved under round 1 and they were to be completed by 20 December 2010. So far, how many have been completed?

Mr Kovacic: As at the end of August, 1,919.

Senator MASON: So, roughly, 100 still to go—a bit under; 91 or something.

Mr Kovacic: My numbering puts it at about—

[Senator Evans interjecting]

Senator MASON: I do. I sometimes bring two or three, as you know, Minister, but I only have one today.

Senator Chris Evans: I think my staff are going to bring in a giant one for me to outdo you, but I did not get it organised.

Senator MASON: I am falling away with my poor old calculator, I know.

Mr Kovacic: Without a calculator, I calculate it as 38 projects that are yet to complete from round 1.

Senator MASON: The evidence in the past was 2,010.

Mr Thomas: The number of approved projects does move a little bit between our meetings with you.

Senator MASON: Does it?

Mr Thomas: Yes. As I guess projects merge, schools close and so on. The current total for round 1 projects is 1,957.

Senator MASON: So 60-odd have been reclassified and they are no longer in round 1. Is that correct?

Mr Thomas: As Mr Parsons said, those projects could be attached to schools which have closed, therefore, the project is closed. They are projects that could have been associated with amalgamated schools, therefore, they have been amalgamated. Or, indeed, some schools had more than one project at a school and during the program have combined those projects. There has been some movement in the overall project numbers.

Senator MASON: How many schools have closed after the BER project finished?

Mr Thomas: We would have to take that on notice.

Senator MASON: I would be interested.

Mr Thomas: Sure.

Senator MASON: Can you take that not just for round 1 but for the entire BER.

Mr Kovacic: Certainly.

Senator MASON: How many have closed after completion?

Mr Thomas: Yes—schools that have had BER projects, which have closed.

Senator MASON: Can I ask about round 2. Here, 4,973 projects were approved under round 2 and they were to be completed by 31 January this year. Do we know how many have been completed?

Mr Kovacic: Again, if I could start with the front-end number of the number of projects. There were 4,879 and the number of projects that have completed as at the end of August is 4,628.

Senator MASON: So there are still 250-odd to go?

Mr Kovacic: It is 251, I think.

Senator MASON: Round 3. I have 3,718 projects approved under round 3. What is the new number?

Mr Kovacic: It is 3,638.

Senator MASON: Of that 3,638, how many have been completed?

Mr Kovacic: There have been 3,152 completed.

Senator MASON: So what does that leave—less than 500?

Mr Thomas: 486.

Senator MASON: It has dropped. If you add them all up—

Mr Kovacic: They total 10,474.

Senator MASON: In the past, it added up to 10,697 across all three rounds. It has dropped by over 200. How has that happened? Is it because of amalgamations, school closure and so forth?

Mr Parsons: Yes, the three scenarios that my colleague Mr Thomas mentioned: closures, amalgamations and mergers.

Mr Kovacic: I think those amalgamations and mergers apply not just to schools but to projects in themselves.

Senator MASON: I do not know that those numbers have changed in the past, have they? In other words, I think we have been operating off those project ones for each specific round for months. Have they ever changed before? Clearly, completions and commencements have but that is a different issue. But have the project approval numbers changed in the past?

Mr Parsons: They have.

Senator MASON: They have?

Mr Parsons: Yes. My recollection of that questioning, I think, is that we focused on completions and we have not gone back. I do not think we have been asked about or stated the change in the approved projects.

Ms Paul: I think that is probably true, that we have focused more on completions.

Senator MASON: I made the ridiculous assumption, Ms Paul, that—

Ms Paul: It stayed the same.

Senator MASON: once approved it would always be approved. But apparently that is not right.

Ms Paul: It probably is right. It is probably how it is counted, particularly if a school merges and with the same projects it is just counted a bit differently.

Senator MASON: So how many projects are still to be completed?

Mr Kovacic: Seven hundred and 75 projects, the bulk of which we expect to be completed by the end of the year.

Senator MASON: What is 'the bulk of which'?

Mr Kovacic: The overwhelming majority.

Senator MASON: By the end of the calendar year?

Mr Kovacic: That is correct.

Senator MASON: Any additional changes to the timetable? What are the most significant extensions being given for time?

Mr Parsons: As we said last time, we have to be mindful that the government rephased \$500 million of BER money into this financial year. So effectively that has seen 1,122 projects being flagged, if you like, for completion within this financial year as part of the rephasing. The fact that there are only 775 of the 1,122 yet to complete clearly indicates that some of those projects that were flagged for the rephasing have, in fact, been completed as of this point in time.

Senator MASON: Yes. I think we had the debate whether the money was rephased because the projects were behind time. Wasn't that part of the debate we were having? Nonetheless I take your point. So are you suggesting that it is possible that some of these projects could be completed late this financial year?

Mr Parsons: I think there was a question on notice from last time whereby you asked us for a month-by-month tally. My recollection is that there is a progressive schedule of numbers completing month-by-month through to June 2012.

Senator MASON: Yes, there is. It has 1,023.

Mr Parsons: The question on notice is EW0463_12.

Senator MASON: Yes, I have it here. So the last are to be completed in June 2012 and there are 25 of them. Is that right?

Mr Parsons: I believe that is right.

Senator MASON: I come to the same information that I have asked for, as Ms Paul would know, for many, many months, so there is nothing unusual about this. I have the update on financial commitment and spend, which I think we have been asking for for years. Clearly, the committee needs the information. What is the latest figure you can provide to the committee as to the amount of BER money paid? We are doing it by paid commitment and spend, so remember that it is paid by the Commonwealth to education authorities. How much?

Mr Thomas: The latest paid figure, as of 7 September, is \$16.074 billion.

Senator MASON: How much have the education authorities committed so far?

Mr Thomas: This is a figure as at the end of August and it is the product of our reporting arrangements with the education authorities.

Senator MASON: So it is 30 August, is it?

Mr Kovacic: It is 31 August.

Senator MASON: You are quite right. As at 31 August, what is the commitment figure?

Mr Thomas: As at the end of August the committed and spent—

Senator MASON: Can I have commitment first and then spent? What is commitment?

Mr Thomas: Maybe I will give you the spent figure and then the commitment, and the two will—

Senator MASON: Okay, go on.

Mr Thomas: The spent figure is \$14.9 billion and the committed figure is an additional \$0.8 billion. The total spent/committed is \$15.7 billion

Senator MASON: Can you give the committee the figures on moneys paid, committed and spent with respect to just the P21 component of the BER?

Mr Thomas: I do not have a grand total for just P21. That \$16 billion figure I gave you earlier included all elements of the BER and also the administrative moneys paid to the education authorities to help administer the scheme. As at the end of August, \$13.7 billion has been paid in project funds with regard to P21. Of that, \$12.9 billion has been spent, with the spent/committed figure being \$13.6 billion. So an additional \$400 million has been committed.

Senator MASON: So \$13.6 billion has been committed?

Mr Thomas: No, \$13.6 billion has been spent and committed.

Senator MASON: Can I ask a question that relates to an article in the *Sunday Age*—and I rarely read the *Sunday Age*, Ms Paul. I tend to read the *Weekend Australian*, although I occasionally read the *Age* when it attracts me. There was an article on 18 September which reported that dozens of Victorian schools have lost playgrounds and basketball courts as a result of the BER. It is alleged that these schools allowed their playground and basketball courts to be used to construct the new buildings under the BER with an understanding that the old buildings that were being replaced would be torn down, and playgrounds and basketball courts built in their place. These schools have been told that there is no money left in the BER program for demolition.

Senator Chris Evans: This is a good reason for not reading the *Age*, Senator. We need an explanation.

Senator MASON: I usually do not. Much as I know it is a very sophisticated paper, it is far too sophisticated for us Queenslanders. Are you aware of that issue, gentlemen?

Mr Kovacic: Yes, we are aware of the issue.

Senator MASON: Have you received any direct representations regarding the problems?

Mr Kovacic: We are not aware of any representations having been received.

Senator MASON: Do you have any idea how many schools are affected?

Mr Kovacic: No, we will have to take that on notice.

Senator MASON: Could you take that on notice?

Mr Kovacic: Yes.

Senator Chris Evans: There are arrangements with the Victorian government about rectification of sites et cetera. I think it would be useful for one of the officers to take you through that.

Senator MASON: Certainly.

Senator Chris Evans: Our commitments were in terms of the building, and as you know the management of state schools remains with the state education authorities or, in the case of independent schools, with those other authorities. I think it is important for the officers to describe for you what the Commonwealth was responsible for and what the undertakings were from the other authorities about those issues you raise. That will answer your question.

Senator MASON: In fact, I was going to ask that next. We are compulsively looking at federalism and its many different guises in this committee. Minister, is that right that, in effect, the Commonwealth argues that this is the states' issue now.

Senator Chris Evans: I will let the officer explain and take you through it. That will help answer the series of questions. As you know, we funded the state education authorities and other education authorities to manage the program. We gave them the money. They were supposed to manage the projects.

Senator MASON: Sure; I understand that.

Senator Chris Evans: That is the basis from which you should understand this issue.

Mr Kovacic: The program has funded the demolition of buildings where demolition was necessary to build the BER facility. I highlight that the BER guidelines clearly state that any cost associated with the demolition of existing buildings may be included as part of the project costs. In light of the article, we have spoken with the Victorian education department. They have advised that it has elected not to unnecessarily demolish buildings on the basis that it maximises the BER funding available for projects. In addition, the Victorian government has a multiyear program for funding the demolition of buildings which are old and surplus to requirements. School building demolitions will be undertaken as part of that program.

Senator MASON: That is a great answer--

Mr Parsons: Senator Mason, I would like to add that I understand the Victorian government has announced its own program with, I believe, \$5 million worth of funding for restitution or construction of playgrounds.

Senator MASON: Yes, it says that in the article: the Victorian government allocated—you are quite right—\$5 million. The argument is that that will not be anywhere near sufficient. It is not worth debating the point because it is not relevant to the committee. But you are aware of the problem. I take it from your answer that it is an issue of state government management of the projects. Is that right?

Mr Kovacic: That is correct.

Ms Paul: After this article we did go to them to find out what their plan was. They have given us their plan.

Senator MASON: Should the Commonwealth have foreseen this or taken greater oversight?

Mr Kovacic: The program guidelines very explicitly indicate that there are circumstances in which costs associated with the demolition of existing buildings can be included in project costs.

Senator MASON: It can be included?

Mr Kovacic: Yes, it can. We have a deliberate decision of the Victorian government department of education not to unnecessarily demolish those buildings. In the context of the issues within the Commonwealth's levers, the guidelines provide for the costings associated with demolition of buildings to be funded under the program. That is probably as far as we can take it.

Ms Paul: In other words, if schools are unhappy they really need to raise it with the Victorian department, because the Victorian department has made that explicit decision.

Senator Chris Evans: We had the same trouble in Western Australia. We had this argument. We provided for air conditioning to be provided in buildings as part of the cost. Where it was not done by decision of the education authority, people then came to us and said, 'You didn't air-condition the building.' We said, 'No. It was provided for. That's a decision taken in terms of the bill.' Subsequently the Western Australian government have decided to air-condition all of the schools.

Senator MASON: We had the same problem in Queensland.

Senator Chris Evans: We are not trying to get out of our responsibilities but, if you let them manage the project—and the guidelines provide for these things—but, if they are not done, you cannot then say: 'We took their \$2.5 million for the school. We didn't include that in the bid. Now we have a problem, but it is somehow BER's fault.' They took responsibility for management of the project.

Senator MASON: I understand. The difficulty is that many schools may be satisfied with leaving the buildings there—it is quite difficult to disaggregate the concerns—some clearly are not. When many, many schools are being dealt with by the Victorian department under a centrally planned model, it is not totally unforeseeable that some schools will feel as though their needs have not been catered for. I suppose that is the issue, isn't it?

Ms Paul: We would always encourage these government—

Senator MASON: I am not suggesting that. We remember, Chair, as the Prime Minister now says, we are moving towards greater autonomy for state schools. That is probably the point. That is, I think, a good direction as you know. Rather than being centrally control by state governments or state departments.

Senator Chris Evans: I think it is true to say, Senator, that one of the conclusions from the BER is that those arrangements and education authorities where there was more local input to the design and more engagement of the project were probably—

Senator MASON: More successful.

Senator Chris Evans: were probably more successful in some ways.

Senator MASON: I agree.

Senator Chris Evans: Of course they also took longer, because of that consultation process. So you pay a price one way or the other, as it were.

Senator MASON: I accept that. Just one last question, if I might Chair. I have asked and I received answers about projects that were completed. I have used that term, but is there a term 'acquitted' that is somehow different. Completed means structurally complete, I am told. Whereas acquitted means ready for use. Gentlemen, do you understand the difference and is that a difference that you can cater for in your statistics?

Mr Parsons: Yes, it is.

Senator MASON: All right. Could you let me know with respect to where we were, the acquittal, i.e. ready for use.

Mr Parsons: You are actually, with respect, not quite correct in your understanding of the terms.

Senator MASON: Well, okay. Explain to me what completion means and what acquittal means, will you?

Mr Parsons: I will put three terms of the table, if I may.

Senator MASON: Yes.

Mr Parsons: There is 'practical completion', which means the building is fit for purpose and able to be occupied and used. There may still be some of the ancillary works, landscaping et cetera outstanding. When all of the construction work is complete and the builder vacates the site, that is when we move to the status of 'work complete'. Then when the education authorities receive final invoices and pay all bills associated with the school project, the project moves to the acquitted stage.

Senator MASON: Now, with respect to round 1, 2 and 3 of the Primary Schools for 21st Century, I asked, as you will recall, for the completion figures. Can you provide the committee with the partial completion—I have got completion figures—and the acquittal figures?

Mr Parsons: Yes.

Senator MASON: For round 1, 2 and 3. And then the totals, if you can.

Mr Parsons: All right. So the figures for practical work complete, work complete and financially acquitted?

Senator MASON: Yes.

Mr Parsons: For round 1 there are 296 practical work complete, 1,082 are at work complete and 541 are financially acquitted.

Senator MASON: Right, that is round 1. What about for round 2?

Mr Parsons: For round 2 there are 1,379 practical work complete, 2,267 work complete and 982 are financially acquitted.

Senator MASON: And round 3?

Mr Parsons: For round 3 there are 870 practical work complete, 1,803 work complete and 479 financially acquitted.

Mr Kovacic: I think it is important, Senator, just to emphasise again, the first stage 'practical work completed' is when the buildings, the structures, can be actually occupied and used. So be used for purpose.

Senator MASON: At the practical completion stage?

Mr Kovacic: That is correct.

Ms Paul: That is when the students get in there and start using them.

Mr Kovacic: Exactly, so in terms of being able to use the facility, for practical purposes there is no distinction in terms of no value in breaking up that sort of total completed projects, because it is really the first of those three categories in which the premise can actually be occupied and start being used by the students and teachers.

Senator MASON: Of P21 money that has been spent, was that \$12.9 or \$13.6 billion?

Mr Kovacic: \$12.9 million.

Senator MASON: And \$13.6 million committed?

Mr Kovacic: That is correct.

Senator MASON: And \$13.7 million paid?

Mr Kovacic: That is correct.

Senator MASON: As at 31 August?

Mr Kovacic: Those numbers are rounded up. So, if—

Senator MASON: I understand; dollar for dollar. Thank you. That is all the questions I have on BER.

CHAIR: Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I have an organisation in WA that has been approved but has been delayed. They have been delayed for two reasons: they have managed to turn it into a bit of a bigger project, and they have come into some problems with building approvals because of some environmental issues. They have had their tranche 1; they will get their second one once they start building. But it will not be completed until after the program is finished. What happens to them?

Mr Parsons: After 30 June next year?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes.

Mr Parsons: But the project is effectively underway?

Senator SIEWERT: It is just about to get underway. They are building on land where there used to be a tip and that has delayed their approvals process. So it is not all their fault that it has been delayed.

Mr Parsons: I can maybe say what we will not do: on 30 June next year we will not be coming out demanding they stop work and asking for money back.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, but they are worried about getting their third tranche. They do not want to find out they are not going to get—

Senator Chris Evans: Senator, I have adopted a policy position that, even where we have had difficulties, we are trying to make sure that every school in Australia benefits from the program. We have attempted to finish projects and allow for late starts and all those sorts of things. Occasionally I have been criticised by the opposition for delaying those projects, and I have said, 'Well, it is better that we get a good result than no result for that school.' We have had to make accommodations; we have had floods; we have had decisions taken about the land, all those things. If you want to give us the example—either today or afterwards—I have

someone in my office in Perth who manages BER concerns. She can work with Mr Parsons to talk to them and work through it if it is a particular issue. But there is no sense in us penalising people provided it is a legitimate project and—

Senator SIEWERT: Okay. Maybe I will talk to you afterwards. I know that they are a very good organisation and very sincere. It has been a process that to a certain extent has been beyond their control.

Ms Paul: They need to seek a project variation. They need to actually front up, say what the story is and seek a formal project variation.

Senator Chris Evans: I think when we finish this section, if you pull Mr Parsons aside, he will probably know about it, and, if not, he will be able to find out or else my office is happy to get involved.

CHAIR: Don't go yet, Mr Parsons. The esteemed Senator Furner has some questions for you.

Senator FURNER: I have some basic questions about the BER project. I have done well in excess of 100 openings and not received one complaint at any of those openings throughout Queensland. I am wondering whether you have a breakdown with respect to the number of complaints you may have received through the 332 out of Queensland, and what was the nature in general of those complaints?

Mr Thomas: I do not have with me a breakdown of complaints by state. But at the time of the last task force report there were 332 complaints in respect of schools across the BER program.

Senator FURNER: That is right.

Mr Thomas: Since the department took on the complaints function from the task force, we have received a further 12 complaints, which brings the percentage to about 3.6 per cent of schools involved in the program.

Mr Kovacic: In raw numbers, it is 343 complaints out of a total of 9,486 schools. So it is a small proportion.

Senator FURNER: About two weeks I did an opening close to my office and there was nothing wrong with the project—the project was excellent; the teachers were happy; the principal was happy the P&C and everyone was overwhelmed by it—but a couple of the neighbours had complained. There was a new hall, a refurbishment to the library—just changes in the structure next to their residence. Is that a feature of or an example of what you have heard elsewhere in regard to some of these complaints?

Mr Parsons: That is one of the categories of complaint that I recognise. Many state governments changed some of their local government planning rules and regulations as part of the economic stimulus to make sure that there was no delay in the buildings being started. That did truncate some of the consultation with neighbours and so on. My feeling is that that would be one of the categories but a small number of the complaints.

Ms Paul: It is my recollection and feeling about it, having tracked these issues school by school throughout the life of the whole program, would be—without having the examples in front of me—that most issues that came through the life of the program were within schools, something that some member of the school community was worried about. And so we tracked

things, and then Mr Orgill of course tracked what happened with those complaints. They have been resolved. That is the main point of course. Each of those complaints was resolved in some way or other. Often quite quickly in terms of reassurances or more consultation or whatever it took. All those things were monitored and investigated thoroughly by the task force. We continue to do so as necessary. But all up it still only adds up to that 3.6 per cent.

Senator FURNER: Probably the only other complaint I was made aware of was from a neighbour who did not like the colour of the shades or something like that on the building. I found some of the complaints coming from some of the neighbourhoods to be very vexatious. They reside near schools and they knew schools do not always remain the same size or the same volume.

Ms Paul: My judgment would be that the vast bulk of complaints were resolved quickly, often through more consultation. Then Mr Orgill and the task force focused on some of the more fundamental issues and resolved those too.

Senator FURNER: Thank you.

Ms Paul: I have just a quick response for Senator Scullion. Senator Scullion, you asked if we could provide to you Indigenous youth and mobility program breakdown of course completions by calendar year and outcome payments for the current contract period, and I have it here to table for you.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you. I just have one more question on outcome 2, on Abstudy. This is secondary Abstudy—I understand if you cannot regurgitate it immediately; I am sure you will find it pretty soon afterwards.

Ms Paul: I will phone a friend, Senator Scullion.

Senator SCULLION: Could I have the total Abstudy secondary budget?

Ms Paul: I will take it on notice.

Senator SCULLION: And could I get a breakdown of the Abstudy payments by student age and location.

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: I not sure what location you break them down into—

Ms Paul: No, I am not either.

Senator SCULLION: so if you could give them to me according to whatever the smallest region is I would appreciate that.

Ms Paul: All right.

Senator SCULLION: Currently, does any means test apply to any area of Abstudy?

Ms Paul: Yes, I think so. We have a nice fact sheet, actually, on what the rules on means testing are. Why don't I provide that to you.

Senator SCULLION: This is specifically secondary. They are actually in three different outcomes, so I am asking similar questions for each.

Ms Paul: If you are going to ask this against all the different types of Abstudy we will just answer it all at once but we will break it down into the three different types.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you. So in terms of the means test do you have anything at this stage?

Ms Paul: I will give you the different rules. We have a good fact sheet, so just to make sure we get it absolutely correct I would prefer to give you that.

Senator SCULLION: What reporting or auditing mechanisms are in place to determine whether a recipient is in fact attending a specified course in secondary school? One would have thought that that is pretty elementary. Do you audit those arrangements?

Ms Paul: I suspect that that may be done through Centrelink but I will confirm that for you as well.

Senator SCULLION: Could you also provide the total payments per student per year—and there is a direct and an indirect component of that that is actually paid to the educational institution—which a student from a remote community with parents on welfare would be entitled to. That is a slightly separate element of Abstudy but it is still directed to secondary schools.

Ms Paul: Yes. I understand that.

Senator SCULLION: As I said, I have questions on that same area in the Abstudy component of tertiary and higher education. If you could point me to some of those in the break or point me towards the officer with those fact sheets I might be able to glean some of that material.

Mr Griew: Tertiary Abstudy is under one of the programs under outcome 3.

Ms Paul: The officer is here. Shall we roll it all up in outcome 3?

Senator SCULLION: Yes, I am happy to do that.

[17:12]

CHAIR: All right. We have now concluded outcome 2. Senator Siewert, I will go to you for some outcome 3 questions.

Senator SIEWERT: Should I ask about the Better Start program here or next door?

Ms Paul: The Better Start program being?

Senator SIEWERT: The program that provides packages for families who have a child with a disability.

Ms Paul: That would be next door.

Senator SIEWERT: I do want to ask about the new program for students with disabilities.

Ms Paul: The?

Senator SIEWERT: The new program for students with disabilities—the \$200 million program.

Ms Paul: Ah, well we have just finished outcome 2. That is an outcome 2 question. It is for school students with a disability?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes. I thought that was coming after BER.

Ms Paul: No. The BER came last.

CHAIR: I thought you said you had questions on outcome 3 after BER.

Senator SIEWERT: No, students with disabilities.

Ms Paul: Would you like to try me. I may be able to answer, or certainly I will understand what we need to find for you.

Senator SIEWERT: I am particularly keen to establish whether sound field systems will be considered eligible under that program.

Ms Paul: Yes, they probably will. The \$200 million is a two-year, time limited new program from the government to support a range of different ways to support students with a disability, including physical ways. So 'yes' is the short answer. We have had a reference group. We are working really closely with state and territory education authorities and independent and Catholic education authorities on what is most appropriate for their schools. The short answer is yes, but it could range from equipment and physical infrastructure like you are talking about through to curriculum support and professional development as well.

Senator SIEWERT: That is good. I have asked about sound fields. Would that automatically include the acoustic deafening process that you need to do in classrooms, as well?

Ms Paul: It could do. Nothing has been ruled out. This program is not one which has incredibly detailed guidelines and says, 'You can have this and you can't have this and this is in and out'. It is kind of a kick-start program. The funding review is undertaken to boost the effort on addressing needs of students with a disability, so in a way there is no restriction. In short, yes it would because if a education authority says 'that's our top priority' then that is what the money could be directed towards.

Senator SIEWERT: The reason I am asking is particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so therefore I wonder particularly bearing in mind most students, if it is being considered, will there be a program of extension out to schools and communities to let them know that they can apply for money for that particular type of thing?

Ms Paul: It is not really a schools application process. We are working more through education authorities, partly because the time is quite tight, too. It is a bit more top-down but we would hope to work incredibly closely with both the Northern Territory Education Department and the Catholic and Independent systems up there. They all support schools which focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. I think we can feel confident that those systems will have a good sense of what the priorities are. It is not a formal application process in the way that you described.

Senator SIEWERT: In the definition of a disability, what do you use there? My reason for asking is that it depends on who you talk to whether hearing is counted. Because of all the other issues that go on with Aboriginal children's hearing, it is not necessarily registered as a disability even though it would make a profound difference, as you know, to have those systems in place.

Ms Paul: This has been a long-standing really difficult issue in schooling. We have not had in this nation a single standard definition of disability, which is extremely disappointing. One of the things which the government has also given really significant impetus to is work undertaken nationally to try to settle on a national definition. That work is under way and it is good work. A lot of progress has been made and that has involved the education authorities offering their data, giving insights to how they define disability and so on. The approach that has been taken, for your interest, will offer you some comfort because it is not an approach

based on trying to define the nature of the disability, which you can imagine is extremely vexed and I would definitely defer to my colleagues next door on that, but rather on the nature of the adjustment. How significant is the adjustment? That is beaut from your perspective because you are talking about the adjustments that are needed. At the minute they are looking at a tiered approach to a definition which is based on the significance of the adjustment required.

Senator SIEWERT: Going back to your previous answer, you will be working, for example in the case of Northern Australia, the department of education in the Northern Territory and WA to develop up the criteria and to let them know what they can and cannot fund.

Ms Paul: That is basically it, although in a way we would seek their views on what they consider the top priorities to meet the needs of their students with a disability.

Senator SCULLION: Ms Paul, I would like to ask a couple of questions on the Indigenous Support Program. Could I have the current budget for the ISP?

Ms Schofield: I am just having a look for that for you now, Senator. For 2011-12 the current budget for the Indigenous Support Program is \$36.757 million.

Senator SCULLION: Can you give me an idea of the current expenditure of that?

Ms Schofield: I will double-check that.

Senator SCULLION: You do not have to provide it immediately if you have some challenges in terms of its accuracy. You can take it on notice.

Mr Griew: Do you mean the spend at this point in this financial year or at the end of the last financial year?

Senator SCULLION: The spend in the context of the answer to the previous question, which is the current budget.

Ms Schofield: We will have to take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION: How was the money paid to institutions? Was it per student or per Indigenous support centre within an institution?

Ms Schofield: Per student.

Senator SCULLION: So it is per student.

Ms Schofield: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: Do you have any audit processes in place to verify the student numbers?

Mr Griew: We will take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION: The reason for the question is that there have been some allegations put to me—I am sure you are aware of them; I know I passed some of them on—in regard to tertiary institutions or facilities and numbers. Obviously, the more numbers they have, the more funding they receive. If students leave after a period of time through a particular financial year, can the institutions still claim for them for the remainder of the time? Hopefully, this evening you will be able to explain simply what the process is. Is there a random audit that takes place? Is it an audit in response to complaints? How does it actually run, and do you conduct it yourselves? My final question is—

Mr Griew: Senator, did you indicate that you had notified us of allegations of—

Senator SCULLION: I said that I am sure you will be aware of allegations that have been in the public space.

Mr Griew: It is just that I have not heard that particular allegation.

Senator SCULLION: Does the department audit not in a financial sense but in a benefit sense how well the ISP process is going and how much it actually assists individuals? Do you visit and interview students to see how much of an effect it actually has? It has been around for a long time.

Ms Schofield: I will come back to you this evening if there is any other information that I can provide. But I will go back and talk about numbers for a second and then come to that question. On the numbers side, I would say that the funding that is distributed to institutions from the Indigenous Support Program is based on the student numbers that are in each institution, and those numbers are derived from the data that institutions provide to the department twice a year. Those data collections are validated and verified by the institutions themselves. So there is a bit of cross-checking there that takes place.

Senator SCULLION: If, for example, it is twice year, then would the institution get a benefit every six months even if some people dropped away? It is easier to say, 'If they're there for that six-month block you get paid, and if they are not you shouldn't be.' Is that pretty much it, or a part of it?

Ms Schofield: Yes, I think so; but I will take it on notice and confirm that for you. In terms of the outcomes and the benefits from the program, the government announced a review of access and outcomes for Indigenous students in higher education. One of the components of that review, which is happening now, is a bit of a review of each of the programs that the department runs to support Indigenous students in higher education, and the ISP program is certainly being looked at as part of that.

Senator SCULLION: When is that report due to be completed?

Ms Schofield: They are reporting at the end of March or by April next year.

Senator SCULLION: This may or may not be a question for you—and I am sure you will flick it to the minister if you cannot answer it: is that report going to inform the parliament and the public or just the department?

Ms Schofield: It is being carried out by a review panel, with a number of independent members. There is a consultation paper that is out at the moment and there is some information in there about what it is that the panel will be looking at. It certainly involves quite a bit of consultation across the sector with different universities and other interested groups.

Senator SCULLION: So can I expect the results of that to be public available in April?

Mr Griew: The answer to your question is this is a report commissioned by government, so it is a report to government.

Senator SCULLION: I just want to get to: is it a report that will be available to the public or is it just something to inform the department?

Mr Griew: It is a report to government that has been very publicly commissioned, so—

Senator SCULLION: So there will be a decision at that time whether the government makes it public or not?

Ms Schofield: It will be decision of the government.

Mr Griew: A decision of government—yes.

Senator SCULLION: I will await those questions you took on notice. Thank you.

CHAIR: Senator Mason, I think we are up to you on higher education?

Senator MASON: Thanks, Chair. This is an issue I touched on for the first time today. I have certainly never asked many questions about this: dual sector universities. Ms Paul, I do not really think we have touched on it, certainly in my time on this committee, except perhaps in passing. Is there someone within the department who deals specifically with dual sector universities or is it just—

Ms Paul: Not as such—no. It is just part of our overall administration of universities, and so on, but we are certainly aware that they sit in a special and particular place.

Mr Griew: There is a set of issues that dual sector universities throw up and which are thrown up about the interaction between the VET sector and the university sector. I can report to you that that is something that has been becoming increasingly in focus for us with the establishment of TEQSA and the VET regulator, for example, so it is an issue that will be in focus for us. We have, in fact, applied a branch manager to think about that set of issues. It is an issue that we think is—

Senator Chris Evans: There is also a policy issue, I think, which I have started to think about. I have spoken a bit to the department and my office about it. We have got a couple of proposals now about Central Queensland University and, potentially, Canberra University with the Canberra—

Ms Paul: CIT.

Senator Chris Evans: Both those issues throw the questions: what is the policy response; what are the benchmarks; what are the boxes you would want to tick to say that it is a good idea or not a good idea? I think we will see a few more propositions coming forward like that, particularly from regional areas. I think there is an interest in doing more of that. Obviously, there is a lot of focus on articulation from TAFE to universities and we are trying to encourage that and build better systems to support that, but there is a set of policy issues that has been thrown up that, I guess, we have just lived with for many years because of RMIT and those long-established and highly successful—

Senator MASON: Sure, and it has worked quite well. There are new players now, aren't there—

Senator Chris Evans: Yes.

Senator MASON: I have a feeling that it might become a bigger issue in the medium term.

Ms Paul: There are several reforms which encourage closer joining up, too—for example, the hugely increased incentives that the government provided to stimulate equity and participation of low-SES. That actually encourages universities to link better to vocational institutions, for example. Similarly, just the introduction of nationally harmonised arrangements for regulation for the first time, through TEQSA and ASQA, once again

highlights that joining up is desirable. I think those issues are more highlighted in a policy sense than they have been for some time.

Senator MASON: That is right. Just one issue, for example: the uncapping of student numbers for universities. You know where my question is going to go. Will that draw students from the VET sector within a particular institution? Does that make sense?

Mr Griew: Yes.

Senator MASON: That is clearly going to be something that governments are going to have to contend with over the medium term at any rate. In terms of reporting on this type of interaction between the two, student statistics for higher education but not VET are reported, I think, in the annual DEEWR higher education statistics report. Where is the line drawn in terms of classification of courses for study for dual-sector university students. Is it simply the enrolment program?

Mr Griew: It would be the nature of the qualification and the place of that qualification on the qualifications framework. I take your point but there is similar reporting through the NCVET which includes dual sector universities registered as training organisations.

Ms Paul: You know the AQF goes from one to 10 and the cut-off is basically around associate degree level. There is a recognised cut-off for it.

Senator MASON: It is six weeks—

Ms Paul: Yes, six essentially.

Senator MASON: I thought you might say that. As I understand it, some dual sector universities offer dual awards where the student gains a bachelor level degree as well as a VET qualification such as a diploma certificate IV, for example. RMIT apparently offers a Bachelor of Applied Science in Construction Management in conjunction with a Diploma of Building. For reporting purposes, are these students classified as higher education students or VET students or both?

Mr Griew: Mr Warburton will be able to expand on this. The fundamental issue is: what is the qualification accredited as? Is it accredited by the university as a higher education qualification or is it not accredited as a higher education qualification? With the establishment of TEQSA and the qualification standards there is a new degree of accountability that attaches to that accreditation. That will be the basis of the count. Would you like to expand on that?

Mr Warburton: Statistics are reported for the purposes of running our various programs, the various loans scheme and the Commonwealth Grant Scheme and so forth. The definitions of what is a higher education award is in HESA, and it is an encompassing definition. Any award which on the AQF is recognised as something that can be offered in the higher education sector can be reported. In the case of a dual-sector university, they will accredit particular awards as being higher education awards. If they are self-accrediting organisations and they offer courses leading to those awards, they report the students in those courses to us.

Senator MASON: That is sufficiently clear. Can we get back to the issue the minister mentioned before and Ms Paul about the University of Canberra merging with the Canberra Institute of Technology, CIT. There have been some recent media comment in *The Canberra Times* about this. Does the Commonwealth have a position or a role in this or is this simply for Professor Parker, CIT and the ACT government to make a decision? Does the Commonwealth have any role in this? Dual-sector stuff has caught my attention, Ms Paul, and

I am now very interested in it. Mr Warburton do you have a role in the process the University of Canberra is currently undertaking?

Mr Warburton: The Commonwealth, because it funds higher education, often gets involved. In this sort of case, it is not leading considerations about whether or not CIT and the University of Canberra will merge—those sorts of discussions are really occurring at the territory level—but we clearly have an interest—

Senator MASON: Clearly.

Mr Warburton: in what might occur, and it may well be appropriate for parties to consult us about certain things so that they are making informed decisions. Does that help?

Senator MASON: That is a very cutting answer!

Mr Warburton: I think it is a correct answer.

Mr Griew: I suspect there is also an issue where, if the new entity is formed, it may need to re-register with the registration authority.

Ms Paul: It would be one of the things that would stimulate consideration of re-registration, particularly under the new arrangements. The ACT has spoken to us on occasion about this. It has been going on for a long time, actually. But most of the considerations are theirs to make.

Senator MASON: The ACT government? There will be costs involved, won't there?

Ms Paul: It depends how they do it. That is a matter for them as much as anything. It depends how they do it. It is their legislation. But they certainly have kept us informed, which we are grateful for. But, as I say, it has been going on for quite a long time, and the considerations which make it a lengthy one are not germane to us so much; they are really more germane to the ACT, to provision of education and to the two institutions, really, about their own continued life in their own way in terms of their offerings, as I understand it. Of course, we watch it play out in the local media too.

Senator MASON: Yes, of course. Is it similar for Central Queensland University? Is that why you are keeping a sort of watching brief, in effect, on that?

Mr Griew: It is similar. Both organisations are state legislated. The state government will play a lead role in the consideration of that. But in both cases they have talked to us about the funding and regulatory settings, and in both cases there will have to be a liaison between them and the registration authorities.

Senator MASON: Clearly in the end the Commonwealth will have some part to play in it.

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator Chris Evans: Part of what is occurring in some of these propositions is rationalisation of facilities and maybe opening of new facilities. Part of the situation in Canberra is about trying to put a campus at Cooma, I think, and there are a couple of other propositions in there, so they also want to talk to us about structural adjustment funding and what have you. So, yes, we clearly have skin in the game, but technically it is a decision for the state or territory. But, yes, each of the ministers writes to me. The ACT have forwarded on the reports they have had done on the subject and those sorts of things, and they engage with the department. But I think it is right that we have no formal decision.

Ms Paul: That is right.

Senator Chris Evans: But obviously TEQSA would now have to analyse the—

Ms Paul: To consider whether to re-register.

Mr Griew: Whether to re-register, because if it is a different entity—

Senator MASON: Okay.

Ms Paul: One of the policy aims from a merger like that, you would hope, is better articulation for students.

Senator MASON: Yes.

Ms Paul: You would hope that what it is about is offering students an easier pathway through the full range of possible qualifications.

Senator MASON: You are right, Ms Paul, but of course that has ramifications for the Commonwealth budget. I am not saying it is a bad thing; I am just saying it could potentially have ramifications because the Commonwealth will pick up part of the university fee. I am not objecting to it; I am just saying that there is an implication.

Ms Paul: You are right, of course, but it also can have implications in both directions. One of the things we have seen in recent years is an increased incidence of people with a university degree subsequently doing a VET qualification, which is quite intriguing. For example, I came across an engineer who then went off and did something quite particular in their own construction area. So with something like the University of Canberra and CIT I would hope that they would make that easier in both directions for students as part of their overall ambitions. I have certainly been kept abreast of it but not so closely as to understand precisely how all those issues may play out.

Senator MASON: I think it is right to say that according to the media and Professor Parker, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, there is still a fair way to go. There are some issues, I think.

Ms Paul: You get that impression, yes, and you get the impression that the two institutions still have issues to resolve between the two of them.

Senator MASON: Thank you for that. I think I am done on dual sector because I am now starting to get across the issue. An issue that Senator Back has raised in the past and again is becoming more popular among universities is what I think you might call trimesters, where you have three, 13 or 14 trimesters a year, or summer semesters, which are becoming more popular, and sometimes now even winter semesters, which are becoming more popular. Ms Paul, how many universities currently teach on a trimester basis?

Ms Paul: I think we would. Whether we can get it now or whether we need to take it on notice, I am not sure Senator.

Senator MASON: Is there any regulation—and TEQSA may come into this—or legislation that regulates the capacity of universities to change from a semester to a trimester system? Again, it has ramifications for the Commonwealth.

Ms Paul: Not that I am aware of.

Mr Griew: It would be less a matter of regulation, I suspect, than, as with the previous examples, a clear and open channel of communication so that we understand what is happening with effective place numbers.

Mr Warburton: In respect of the funding arrangements and the Higher Education Support Act, it gives universities flexibility about how they organise their loads. I am speaking on the funding side not the accreditation side. They clearly can change their load around to make their utilisation of infrastructure more efficient, or whatever their objectives are. There are rules around how they report their load to us and the date on which transactions take place—census dates for units of study which is when Commonwealth Grant Scheme amounts become payable and loan amounts under the loan schemes become payable. Those arrangements are such as to give them flexibility.

Ms Paul: Often these are for their own commercial reasons of course to try to maximise market share and attract students and so on. We would not want to be interfering with their ability to place themselves in the marketplace.

Senator MASON: I only raise it because, again, it seems to be an emerging trend. More universities seem to be moving to this trimester system. The summer semester has been around for a while. As you say, it makes use of infrastructure and make your business model more competitive.

Ms Paul: There is a general trend towards, as in every field, more customisation, providing a broader range of choice for the student. Whether it be online delivery, after-hours delivery or the trimester, or whatever, it is about choice for students in part too, is it not?

Senator MASON: Has it had any effect on the data you collect or anything like that?

Senator Chris Evans: We will take it on notice and see what we find. I would be interested myself.

Senator MASON: Could you also take on notice how many universities operate, in effect, a trimester system? I will have to leave it with you precisely what that means because it is, I concede, is a grey area.

Senator Chris Evans: I know it is more common now, like distance learning and all those other aspects.

Ms Paul: In a technical sense, the main impact it potentially has on measurement is how we measure a full-time student. What we like to call the EFTSL, the equivalent full-time student load, is effected continuously and that is what Mr Warburton was referring to and how we count. Otherwise I would not have thought the impact would be too great.

Mr Griew: We will try and find out how many higher education providers are operating effectively on three semesters and how many students are involved, and if there is anything that particularly marks those providers out in our data.

Senator MASON: Yes. Thank you. Correct me if I am wrong, but there is base funding, clearly, with the Commonwealth supported places. But if students are doing 50 per cent more study a year by moving from a semester to a trimester, that would have funding implications. Do you see my point?

Ms Paul: Yes, because, as I say, the technical impact is on what counts.

Senator MASON: I am not having a go at anyone, I am just saying that I am not sure this is being considered more broadly.

Ms Paul: It would make a difference.

Mr Warburton: As a general point, if the university shifted from two semesters to a trimester model, it would not affect funding because one equivalent full-time student load is one year's worth of study. It would not affect the amount that was payable. If a student chose to fast-track their studies and do it at a faster than normal pace, you might pay them 1½ EFTSL in a year, but then for a three-year degree you would only pay them for two years rather than paying a one EFTSL for three years, if that makes sense.

Senator MASON: Sure. I want to nail this if I can. An arts degree is normally three years which is three times two semesters, but you could do it in two years because you would be doing two times three trimesters. I assume an EFTSL means what a student currently does in one year. Are you telling me, Mr Warburton, that if they do three trimesters in a year funding would have to increase? If it did not, therefore, it would pay the Commonwealth to run every student through to complete their degree in two years because that would cut—

Mr Griew: Mr Warburton's point is that the cost of degree does not change. What you pay for the degree does not change. You might pay it faster because the utilisation improves.

Senator MASON: Exactly. So it would have an impact on Commonwealth funding, not overall necessarily but it would from year to year.

Mr Griew: It is a more efficient utilisation of the infrastructure of the system.

Senator MASON: I am not saying it is a bad thing, I am just saying it would have an effect.

Senator Chris Evans: We are happy to have a little fish around and I am interested in the answer too, so we will see what we can get you on notice.

Senator MASON: Can I move on to equity and low-SES participation?

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator MASON: I know this is a large part of the Bradley review and it is an important goal of the government. The goal is for 20 per cent participation of low-SES students by 2020. Where does the department envisage that those additional students will come from? Is it from TAFE? What is the general sense of where they will come from?

Mr de Carvalho: I think you put this to us in a previous question on notice. If I recall it correctly, the question you asked regarded the 'where'—physically where, the demographic locations et cetera.

Senator MASON: You mean postcodes?

Mr de Carvalho: Yes.

Senator MASON: No, not this time. Are you the 'new' Mr Hazlehurst?

Mr de Carvalho: No-one can be the new Mr Hazlehurst.

Senator MASON: He used to do your job, did he not?

Mr de Carvalho: He used to, that is right.

Senator MASON: Has he gone?

Mr de Carvalho: Yes.

Ms Paul: Yes, Mr de Carvalho does replace Mr Hazlehurst. We are extremely fortunate to have attracted Mr de Carvalho to the department at level from the Department of Finance and Deregulation. We are very grateful that Mr de Carvalho has joined us. Clearly, the first name

had nothing to do with it—David succeeding David. We welcome Mr de Carvalho and he is already making a significant impact.

Senator MASON: Welcome to Senate estimates.

Mr de Carvalho: Thank you, Senator.

Senator MASON: Postcodes I understand in terms of low SES. Will it have an effect on, for example, TAFEs? Is it likely or has the department done any modelling that suggests that, by increasing low-SES participation, some of these students are likely to come from, for example, TAFE? If so, will that have an effect on TAFE enrolments?

Mr de Carvalho: I think this is—

Senator MASON: We can look at the ripple effect.

Mr de Carvalho: Yes, I think we can go somewhat back to the issues that were being covered in your previous question on dual-sector universities to some extent, because as we are looking at greater integration across the tertiary sector—and Ms Paul mentioned articulation pathways from VET, eventually, and TAFE, possibly into higher education—we would expect that some students who are currently enrolled in VET courses might make their way into higher education courses.

Senator MASON: Has any modelling been done on that? Are there any estimates?

Ms Paul: I am not sure we were able to do precise modelling of the precise source of low-SES students. We know that low-SES students are overrepresented in VET, so VET is very successful in attracting low-SES. It is perfectly possible, as Mr de Carvalho has just laid out, that students may progress through VET and then move on to a degree, or perhaps there will be students attracted into universities who may have chosen TAFE otherwise, or it will attract students who simply would not have engaged with further education at all. The overseas research would suggest that probably all of those things will be relevant. It is interesting to see that the impact of the really significant increase in funding for low-SES for equity groups, arising from the government's response to the Bradley review, has universities trying all sorts of different strategies to attract low-SES students, including outreach directly into schools, for example.

Senator MASON: In effect what I am talking about is the knock-on effect, the ripple effect. Senator McKenzie passed me an article from the *Australian* today on page eight, titled, 'La Trobe University faces funding black hole':

La Trobe University appears to be the first casualty of the federal government's new student funding system, which is not due to be introduced until next year.

What has happened is Melbourne and Monash are aggressively recruiting domestic students to compensate for a drop-off in international enrolments and La Trobe has found itself less able to attract domestic students. Effectively, there is a ripple effect.

Senator Chris Evans: If that was true, it would be right—but it is complete nonsense. Again, do not believe everything you read in the paper.

Senator MASON: I am not sure it is wrong but I think this may be right—

Senator Chris Evans: But just so we are clear, where you have raised La Trobe: since 2007 there has been a 16 per cent growth in Commonwealth supported students at La Trobe. It has added 2,374 students. Given the average long-term growth in university enrolments

used to be less than two per cent, it is a pretty good result. I would also point out that La Trobe's operating surplus in 2010 was \$99 million. When you read those reports, you have to say that it does not seem to balance with those things that are factual and on the record.

Senator RHIANNON: So you are saying the Vice-Chancellor has got his figures wrong?

Senator Chris Evans: No, if you look what the Vice-Chancellor said and what the report said, it is not quite the same thing as what the Vice-Chancellor's report is saying. If people say to me, 'La Trobe has lost students.' I do not know what their enrolments for next year look like—that may be a relevant factor—but in the last three years, since 2007, they have had a 16 per cent increase in domestic students, Commonwealth supported places, and they reported an operating surplus of \$99 million in 2010.

Mr Griew: They are projecting another five per cent increase in enrolments next year.

Senator MASON: La Trobe was not the issue; it was the flow-on. I think it is fair to say there will be a ripple effect. I am nearly certain, and I do not think that is overstating the case.

Senator CHRIS EVANS: It may not necessarily be negative. One of the things for students getting to go to university is actually doing courses that allow them to transition. We are seeing VET providers starting to offer more of those sorts of courses to allow students to bring their study techniques up et cetera. The universities are forming partnerships with them. People in Australia always strive to clutch at the negative rather than actually saying, 'This actually might allow more people from lower socioeconomic groups to go to university.' It might also encourage greater participation by vocational education training. We might actually get positive effects for both sectors.

Senator MASON: It may. All I am saying is that I am hoping that the government has looked at the potential ripple effects because there will be knock-on effects nearly certainly. I do not think that is overstating the case.

Senator Chris Evans: I know you are not in favour of social planning, so we have not tried to plan that.

Senator MASON: I am definitely not.

Senator Chris Evans: Let the market take its course.

Senator MASON: 'Market' is the right word in my case. You mentioned about the low-SES participation rates and you mentioned postcodes. There is a postcode indicator and there is a SEIFA, socioeconomic indexes for areas—is there not? According to the postcode indicator, 16.2 per cent of low-SES students go to university—is that correct?

Mr de Carvalho: Yes, there are two indicators.

Senator MASON: And 14.1 from the other one—the SEIFA.

Mr Griew: The other one is not SEIFA.

Mr de Carvalho: It is a composite indicator using a more refined locational indicator, census collector districts, and that part is coded according to SEIFA. There is also another aspect to that indicator which is Centrelink payments—students who are accessing Centrelink support. That is a composite indicator.

Senator MASON: Is that the most recent data that you have? That is from the 2009 data. Is the 2010 data available yet?

Mr de Carvalho: I will just check that for you. The 2010 figure for the postcode index, as we are calling it, is 16.5 towards the 20 per cent national target. It is the postcode indicator that is used for the national target. The interim indicator is 14.3—up from 14.2 last year.

Senator MASON: That was 2009?

Mr de Carvalho: Yes.

Senator MASON: Thank you. I yield to Senator Rhiannon.

Senator RHIANNON: Thank you very much. How will the government ensure that universities offer low-demand courses in areas such as classics and the arts in the new demand-driven funding environment?

Mr de Carvalho: I am not sure that there is anything that we can do to ensure that universities offer all these courses. Universities will make choices as to how they want to market themselves in the new environment and to tailor their courses to what they think will attract students to them. The government also has the capacity, if it wishes to, to constrain demand for certain courses as well as designate certain courses as vulnerable to promote enrolment in those courses.

Senator RHIANNON: Can you explain how that capacity would work? The first part of your answer seemed to suggest it would not happen—that you were just leaving it up to the new regime—but that there is a capacity for government to do that. Can you explain how that would work for vulnerable courses?

Mr Warburton: We have funding agreements with each institution and they outline conditions of grants—the conditions of grant for their Commonwealth Grant Scheme grant. In that, we have clauses that require universities to seek our approval before certain types of courses are closed. We try and do that in a reasonable way. If a university is opening a new course and trying something new and it is not successful, they do not have to get our approval to close something down. But long established courses in significant areas—there are some languages identified and some skill needs identified—are required to seek our approval before they close them, and we try and work through the issue.

Senator RHIANNON: There are some that have to be approved and the majority do not. Is that how it works?

Mr Warburton: That is a reasonable comment.

Senator RHIANNON: Can you give us a list of where approval has to be sought?

Mr Warburton: I could give you copies of the condition in the funding agreement.

Senator RHIANNON: Thank you. Will the Commonwealth direct any additional capital expenditure to help universities cope with the drastic expansion in student places expected under a deregulated higher education scheme?

Ms Paul: There has been a significant injection of capital funding into universities in recent years, particularly through the Education Investment Fund.

Senator RHIANNON: I meant conditional from after these current changes, considering the dramatic impact they will have.

Ms Paul: We have discussed this before. There is no limitation on what universities can use the funding for. Of course, the demand-driven funding is increasing funding to universities significantly. That trend has already been seen. That is potentially a matter for the

future but, at the minute, demand-driven funding is basically attracting really significantly increased funding to universities, which they can use for capital purposes. In addition to that, the Education Investment Fund has offered significant injection as well.

Mr Griew: The other point to make here concerns the questions that Senator Mason was asking about universities choosing to use their infrastructure over the summer, for longer hours and using information technology based teaching. If you talk to the universities, they are all active also in thinking about how they use their existing buildings. There is a huge potential in the use of their existing facilities.

Senator Chris Evans: We are asking the wrong question, Senator Rhiannon. There is a number of interesting examples where universities are actually thinking this through. Firstly, many of them currently have unused space. It is not a straight sort of question of, 'We have 2,000 more students, therefore we need 32 more tutorial rooms et cetera cetera.' Secondly, the key issue for universities is that people are learning quite differently and a lot of their infrastructure is actually no longer suitable for the way people learn.

Senator RHIANNON: Minister, I am sure you have also heard of so many lecture theatres and tutorials that are just totally overloaded with people. There is the example at Macquarie University now where they have erected a big tent, which I understand is there supposedly on a temporary basis while they do repairs. But the rumour is certainly rife at that university that that is going to become permanent. These rumours and concerns are out there and just relying on the changing education environment probably is not the best answer.

Senator Chris Evans: I do not respond to rumours about tents, Senator Rhiannon.

Senator RHIANNON: It is worth noting.

Senator Chris Evans: There are lots of rumours that circulate in this building and at universities that turn out to be complete rubbish. I will not comment on that one. If you go Adelaide University soon, you will find this new centre they call the hub and it is fascinating to see. It is full as a state school because they have actually adapted the way students learn. They made lots of open spaces and comfortable chairs, and a whole different design. It is teeming with students. It is working. It just reflects the fact that the way people study with technology etcetera is changing and the facilities you want on universities is changing. I think the biggest challenge, from what I have seen of the capital needs, is actually about adapting to new ways of learning. Your point about overcrowding in lecture theatres comes more down to class sizes and some of those developments. I share some of the concerns you are expressing, but we have put more into capital in the last few years than have gone to the universities for decades. There is more being rolled out at the moment, so I do not accept the suggestion that they have not done really well in capital funding in recent years. I think the challenge is as much about adapting to a quite different way people learn and what they are looking for out of their university.

Senator RHIANNON: I just want to move on to the issue of university academic appointments. There is increasing casualisation in this area. Could you tell the committee what the government is doing to arrest the alarming decrease in young academics planning to work long term in Australian universities?

Senator Chris Evans: In a study the other day, that was wrong.

Ms Paul: We monitor the staffing arrangements in universities, but we do not control them. We do not seek to constrain universities' decisions about their staffing complement and so on.

Senator Chris Evans: I am sure there was a recent report. It was reported in the paper in a totally misleading way that there was a crisis about young academics. I actually looked at the report and you would draw a different conclusion from that. Do we have a copy of that reference to the report?

Mr de Carvalho: We do have some research that does show that Australia is a net importer of academics in terms of migration. So the allegation or suggestion that there is an international brain drain which is sucking people out of Australia—

Senator RHIANNON: My question was actually about the casualisation. Surely, you do not deny—

Mr de Carvalho: I understand that, but part of that story is about the actual number of academics who are available to draw on. Certainly the issue of casualisation is one of concern.

Mr Aungles: The figures from the staff collection, Senator, show that in 2001 the proportion of casual staff was 15 per cent, and in the latest figures that are publicly available, 2010, show that the proportion of casual staff was marginally higher at 16 per cent. We should be releasing the 2011 staff data very shortly.

Ms Paul: That was a 10-year comparison and it has only shifted by one per cent.

Senator RHIANNON: You are saying that you do not actually see that there is a problem with regard to the casualisation of the academic staff and the implications for career paths for academics? I am trying to assess whether you see there is a problem here.

Ms Paul: That data would suggest that there is not too much to be concerned about if, in over 10 years, it has shifted one per cent from a fairly low base to a similarly low base.

Senator RHIANNON: Just to stay with the theme now, I understand that there is an ageing profile of established academic staff in our universities. I am interested in what the government is doing to offset what could be inevitable staff shortages because of this.

Mr Griew: We will take notice to find the report that the minister has referred to—

Senator Chris Evans: Unless he is going completely mad—

Mr Griew: If that academic pattern were happening, which Mr Aungles' figures suggest may not be, the most concerning impact might be to deter young academics from seeking a career. If there is research on young academics' perception of their careers ahead, then that would be a measure of the most important perception.

Mr de Carvalho: The report may be the *Australian academic profession in transition* report released on 21 September by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education.

Senator Chris Evans: That sounds about right—and I am not going mad!

Ms Paul: Something that may offer you some comfort, Senator, is that when we do our intensive compact discussions with universities, we are interested in issues in terms of their forward planning in areas like capital but also workforce. We do tend to those things in our one-on-one discussions. Those planning matters of course are ultimately a matter for the universities themselves, but we do take an interest particularly through those discussions.

Senator RHIANNON: So you are referring to those mission based compacts. I was interested in understanding where the process is up to and how it is going?

Mr Griew: The compact discussions are basically done and agreements based on those compacts are due to go to the university shortly.

Mr de Carvalho: Very shortly.

Senator RHIANNON: What does 'shortly' mean?

Mr de Carvalho: 'Shortly' would mean—

Senator RHIANNON: This year?

Mr de Carvalho: yes—before the end of the month.

Senator RHIANNON: Before the end of the month? That is pretty good—October. Thank you. How will strategies to enhance academic teaching skills in Australian universities be monitored and—you would have to say—more importantly, supported?

Mr de Carvalho: There are a few things going on in this space. This might be an issue that was touched on earlier this morning, but we do have the ongoing programs from the former Australian Learning and Teaching Council. We have a number of grant programs and award programs which are encouraging improved teaching and learning. There is \$50 million over the next three years devoted to programs to encourage improved teaching on the part of the academic workforce.

Senator RHIANNON: Thank you. I wanted to ask about the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. What steps will the agency take to ensure that students have a high-quality learning experience in all Australian universities, rather than simply in those institutions considered at risk?

Mr de Carvalho: The TEQSA, who were here this morning, have a brief to monitor quality in all universities, and there are a number of standards that are in the process of being developed or will be developed by them over the next year. I think one of those standards is a teaching standard. When the standards panel members are appointed, which will be in the relatively near future, they will be working on those standards and they will be applying those standards in their function in relation to all universities.

Mr Griew: There is probably a wider context here. You have referred to TEQSA and also to the teaching encouragement. There is also, in the new funding system, performance funding, and there is a very important piece of work being led by Professor Ian O'Connor, who is Vice-Chancellor of Griffith University, which is the development of a set of measures, including a teaching quality indicator, that will drive, over time, performance funding for universities. So there is in fact a very serious engagement with the issue of teaching quality and the validation of teaching skills.

Senator RHIANNON: So is that in place already? Because at the start of the answer the emphasis was on the agency doing monitoring. Is it just a monitoring role at the moment, but it is evolving; or have we got these teaching quality indicators already?

Mr Griew: No, sorry. What I was indicating was that there is the role of the regulator and then there is the role of the funding system and the incentives that will be provided through the funding system for a high-quality teaching and student experience. So, in addition to the role of the regulator, there are also a set of processes between the department and the

universities, through the funding system, that are about excellence as well as about regulating minimum standards, which was the gist of your question.

Senator RHIANNON: Maybe I will just ask the minister: can you provide an assurance that TEQSA's existing regulatory capacity is sufficient to achieve its legislative objectives?

Senator Chris Evans: That was certainly the view of the parliament, Senator. That is why we passed the legislation recently.

Senator RHIANNON: I just want to get it on the record that you are confident that that regulatory framework does it all.

Senator Chris Evans: We are confident that TEQSA will do the role the parliament envisages for it, and we have been lucky in that we have a very good field for the roles of chief commissioner and commissioners. I think the appointments of the five people we have appointed have been widely welcomed in the sector as being quality appointments, but they have only just started their roles, as you know, so they are just starting out on the task.

Senator Chris Evans: I think that generally standards in Australian universities are of good order and that our reputation is a strong one, but we are concerned to make sure that we maintain and improve those standards. They will be taking a risk based approach to their role as a regulator. As Mr Griew outlined, in addition to their regulatory function we are building into the system a whole range of incentives to encourage high quality teaching, high quality student experiences and, quite frankly, the pursuit of excellence—because that is important to the system too.

Senator RHIANNON: Perhaps this question goes to the Minister. Given the Commonwealth's recent move to increase the number of student enrolments from low SES, Indigenous and regional areas and backgrounds, can you guarantee an increase in income support that will ensure that these students can meet the living expenses associated with attending of university and so actually take advantage of the expansion in CSP from next year?

Senator Chris Evans: I do not think it is in this program, but if you want me to respond to a general question like that, yes—we have greatly increased the amount of support through youth allowance for people studying at tertiary level and the number of people accessing youth allowance has grown greatly as well, and the reforms we are bringing in during the parliament currently to extend eligibility further for youth allowance for people in regional areas will again increase the numbers accessing youth allowance. So we have a very good story to tell about that, and it has not been without quite serious cost to the Commonwealth budget. The numbers on youth allowance and the income earned on youth allowance have increased. While we are not at that section, I am sure officers can help with the figures if you are interested.

Mr Griew: The bottom line is that it is increasing at a faster rate. The—

Ms Paul: The last time I looked, every category in youth allowance is increasing and the expenditure on it has increased significantly, which means that the whole pool of people benefiting from youth allowance and also by the attendant scholarships which go with it is also increasing. It is all a success story, basically.

Senator RHIANNON: Do you say that confidently? I come from Sydney, and the overcrowding and housing issues are just so extreme. I would not have thought you would have used that word.

Senator Chris Evans: That is right, but, as you know, housing issues are a problem across the community at the moment in the cities and in some of regional areas. Students are facing difficulties with affordable housing because we have affordable housing issues which impact on them as they do on others. But if you are asking about the rate of youth allowance and the uptake of youth allowance, the changes this government made have seen greatly increased uptake and higher payments to students. I am happy to set all that out for you. It is probably on my website, but we will get you all the figures.

Senator RHIANNON: That is why I was just questioning the word success. It would seem that there are still real challenges and difficulties out there.

Ms Paul: It is absolutely clear from the statistics that more low socio-economic students are accessing financial support than ever before because of the changes to youth allowance. There are more students, there is more money, and the scholarships for low SES which go with the youth allowance are also clearly benefiting more students. There are many, many more students who are in receipt of a scholarship than there were before these reforms were introduced. We can get you those numbers if you would like.

Mr Griew: I can give you the number of regional students. Between March 2010 and June 2011, regional higher education youth allowance recipients increased by 26 percent—that is, 7,400 students compared to a national increase of 18 percent.

Senator MASON: During the last estimates, I asked Mr Hazlehurst about statistics relating to completion rates for low SES students, and Mr Hazlehurst indicated that they were not yet available. Yet I think we all agreed that the completion rate, as opposed to simple participation, is a very important indicium. Have we had any progress in that regard, Mr de Carvalho?

Mr de Carvalho: I will spend some time going through my index and see what I can find. I might be able to get some information for you.

Senator MASON: Mr Hazlehurst himself said, if I can find it—

Ms Paul: It depends on whether the 2010 ones are in. We might turn to Mr Aungles.

Senator Chris Evans: That is right. We get the point. We all understand with attracting more lower SES students it is not just the question of enrolments; it is also the question of them getting through the program and it is about completions and making sure they have support measures in place. It is an issue for the universities and we are seized of and are discussing it. But the officers might be able to give you some information about what statistical understanding we have.

Mr Aungles: For the 2010 data which we have recently released we have attrition rates for the sector as a whole and by institution. Currently we do not have published attrition rates by demographic characteristic but we could produce those if required. So those low SES attrition rates and retention rates are not in the published data.

Senator MASON: Why is it that they are not in the published data?

Mr Aungles: It is about the volume of information. We publish attrition rates at a fairly aggregate level.

Ms Paul: We can probably take it on notice.

Mr Aungles: We will take it on notice, Senator.

Senator MASON: I am with the minister on this. It is a signal priority of the government to increase low SES students and Professor Bradley said that in her review, and that is a good thing—and I think, Mr Hazlehurst and Ms Paul, you and I had a discussion about this last time. It is a good thing to increase participation. But, as the minister said before—and it is true—in the end it is all actually about completion. So perhaps it would be a good idea, if it were possible, to have this. Clearly, participation has been marked so therefore completion should be able to be marked in terms of the statistics available.

Ms Paul: We will take on notice the question and also the consideration of publication.

Senator Chris Evans: In a broader policy sense, Senator Mason, I have raised with some of the people in the sector, some of the vice-chancellors, that my attitude is that perhaps the fund incentives ought to be more skewed towards completions than commencements and that is something that I was giving consideration to.

Senator MASON: That might well be right.

Senator Chris Evans: Yes, you have got to make sure that the signals that are in the system are the right ones.

Senator MASON: Take the reason this is becoming an issue again. I know it is the *Higher Education Supplement*, so it is a newspaper, Minister, however there was an article recently—

Senator Chris Evans: Two out of two have been wrong so far but give this one a roll.

Senator MASON: It is 'Bradley targets threatened by high drop-out rates among disadvantaged students'. The crux of the article is that many of the universities with the highest percentages of low SES students also have very high attrition rates. So that is the concern.

Mr de Carvalho: You would be aware of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program.

Senator MASON: Yes.

Mr de Carvalho: It is designed specifically to provide resources to a university to enable them to do exactly what you are concerned about; that is, to improve the retention and completion rates of students from this cohort. So we have a competitive round and from 2011 to 2014 funding of about \$119 million is available to be allocated over two rounds, each of about \$60 million.

Senator MASON: I am aware of that. Again, we have a 20 per cent participation rate, one that the government has held up, of low SES students by 2010—and that is fine. But why not have a completion target, because that really is, as I think we all agree, a far more important target? Does the department have such targets?

Mr de Carvalho: The attainment targets are essentially completion targets. The attainment goes to the actual award of the qualification.

Senator MASON: All right. So the 20 per cent target that I mentioned is not a participation target but a completion target?

Mr de Carvalho: It is an attainment target. It is assuming that you complete your degree—you attain your degree.

Senator MASON: So the 20 per cent is to finish your degree. You can see there is a long way to go then because the figures you gave before of 16.5 per cent, which is the postcode indicator, and the 14.3, which is the SEIFA index, are both participation figures, are they not?

Mr Aungles: Mr de Carvalho is referring to the 40 per cent attainment target—that is, the completion of bachelor degrees. The 20 per cent low-SES target is an enrolment or a participation target.

Senator MASON: That is why I asked. It is 20 per cent; you are right. I understand that. Now we are getting there. So 40 per cent is the goal to have a bachelors degree by 2025, but the 20 per cent low-SES component is not a completion target, is it? It is a participation target.

Ms Paul: That is right.

Mr de Carvalho : Perhaps we are confusing you.

Senator MASON: It is not that confusing. Why do we not have a completion target for low-SES students? That would be a far more significant event, would it not?

Ms Paul: This came out of the Bradley review and I do not recall her panel's discussion about whether to go for a participation target or a completion target. They could have gone for a completion target, presumably, and maybe they discussed it and decided to go for the participation one. I do know that even as a participation target it is a highly stretching target. For 20 years it had been absolutely flat lined on 15 per cent participation. The fact—I think we said this last time we were here—that we have seen even ever so gentler a tick-up in the last year or so since the incentive structure changed is extraordinary. It is an early sign of success that probably exceeds perhaps my open expectations because it has been flat lined for so long.

The nature of the government's commitment, too, meant, if you recall, there were two major strands of new funding for equity for low SES. One was to increase the low-SES loading dramatically from about \$100 per student to \$1,000 but the second line of investment was for outreach and other supports. It is that line which, the research shows, is likely to maximise completion. We know, for example, as you are probably aware, that once you have someone attached for the first year, you have a much greater—

Senator MASON: You have said that in the past and I agree with that. My concern is this.

Ms Paul: I do need to repeat myself.

Senator MASON: I suppose speaking conceptually, I always worry about—the goal is a noble one, but speaking generally, social democratic parties like to talk about inputs. There is this great input of 20 per cent of low-SES students. You can have all these funds and that is great. But they are the inputs. The output is how many disadvantaged kids actually finish. We are talking about outputs in terms of 40 per cent of young Australians. That is an output—it is 40 per cent—but we are not talking about outputs with respect to disadvantaged kids; we are talking about inputs. Do you see the point?

Senator Chris Evans: I take your point.

Senator MASON: It is an important one, Minister, because this is one of your government's most significant goals.

Senator Chris Evans: I am not sure this is as important as you are making out. It is an important point though and there are two things to say about that. We will not make our 40 per cent targets unless we greatly increase the lower socioeconomic group participation and attainment. That is where we have traditionally had a lack of participation and attainment. So to get to the 40 per cent target, we have to do much better with the lower socioeconomic group. In terms of your point about the participation target, I think it is a fine as far as it goes, but as we have discussed here before and I agree with you, the focus has to be on completion. It has to be on whether or not the system is supporting and delivering what those people to need to have a successful attainment. I am happy for us to publish the completion figures, I am happy and have indicated I want to discuss with the university attainment results, not just inputs. We want to make sure that we are supporting them and that they are supporting their students. Of course, the first reaction of many was to say, 'If you give us more money, Minister, of course, we could do a much better job at this.'

I regard the core work of universities as supporting their students in order to allow them to graduate. I regard that as a core function. You point to the difference of one being about participation and one being about attainment—that is fair enough as far as it goes. But I want to be clear that I agree with you that we have to focus on completion and outcomes for those people. We do not want them participating for the sake of participating, although there are obviously benefits that come from that. Often people have an experience where they study for a while then go away and come back, women have children, and others have other responsibilities et cetera, so we should not look at it just through the three-year study window. But completions is the name of the game. It is about getting people that education attainment which allows them to go on and get good employment and more successful careers.

Ms Paul: The point I was making was that, in the government's response to the Bradley review, a large part of the investment inequity was to encourage completion by encouraging attachment in that first year.

CHAIR: And that is a good spot to finish for dinner.

Proceedings suspended from 18:31 to 19:30

CHAIR: We will now resume these estimates hearings. We are in outcome 3. Senator Scullion was going to be here at 7.30 to ask some questions, but he is not, so we will go to Senator Back.

Senator BACK: Ms Paul, we have received correspondence to the effect that funding for the Science and Engineering Challenge has been severely cut. Are you familiar with that, or is one of your officers familiar with the Science and Engineering Challenge?

Ms Paul: Is it for schoolchildren or university students?

Senator BACK: University. The University of Newcastle organise it, I understand.

Ms Paul: Just looking around the room, I think we probably need to take it on notice.

Senator BACK: All right. The reasons for the cut to the funding, and apparently there has been no guarantee that there will be funding beyond the end of 2012—if you could take that on board.

Ms Paul: Sure.

Senator Chris Evans: Senator, what is this for?

Senator BACK: It is a university based science and engineering challenge, as I understand it.

Mr Griew: At the University of Newcastle?

Senator BACK: Yes, coordinated through the University of Newcastle. They seem to be the coordinators. The program began in 2005, it involves over 20,000 students in 50 regions nationally and it has received federal government support through the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, but the funding will end in December of this year.

Ms Paul: One of the reasons we are probably not familiar with it is that it sounds like it is not with this department; it sounds like it is with the department of innovation.

Senator BACK: It has a relationship with education. Probably one of the questions being asked is about your department's capacity to have some financial involvement. But we will raise it with the—

Ms Paul: I have taken it on notice, but it sounds like we will be asking the other department for advice here.

Senator BACK: My second question relates to enrolments in agriculture and agribusiness in the university sector—but, through you, Chair, Senator Scullion might want to ask his questions first, if he is ready.

CHAIR: Yes. Senator Scullion.

Senator SCULLION: Thank you, Chair. My apologies. As I indicated before the break, I would like to ask some questions similar to my earlier question regarding ABSTUDY for secondary school students. I understand you were going to take these on notice or at least get someone to respond, so I am assuming—

Ms Paul: The officer is here, so we will see how we go, and then whatever we cannot do here—well, we have kind of already taken it on notice globally, haven't we?

Mr Griew: And then, Senator Back, I have some figures on agricultural enrolments when we come back to you.

Senator BACK: Excellent.

Senator SCULLION: So, in terms of secondary school student assistance, what was the total Abstudy secondary budget?

Ms Milliken: The budget for Abstudy for 2011-12 is \$204.8 million. I do not have it broken down into secondary and tertiary.

Ms Paul: We will have to take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION: Okay. I assume you are not going to have a breakdown of the payments by student age and location? I understand you will not have that now, if you do not have the previous one.

Ms Milliken: No, I do not have the information.

Senator SCULLION: I wonder if you would be able to take on notice for me.

Ms Milliken: Absolutely.

Senator SCULLION: Do any means tests apply to Abstudy secondary?

Ms Milliken: Yes, it does. The same means tests applies as applies to youth allowance. Would you like more information on that?

Senator SCULLION: It is only a confusing answer because of the status of youth allowance at the moment, I have to say.

Ms Paul: Not at all.

Senator SCULLION: You are just saying 'At the moment.' Even if you could just refer to me a specific definition of how that occurs, I will be quite happy with that.

Ms Milliken: The means tests that applied to Abstudy are the same as for youth allowance. It is a parental income test, if the young person is not independent, and one assumes a secondary Abstudy student is more likely to be a dependant student. The rate of Abstudy reduces if the parents income is over \$45,114. That amount is indexed on 1 January of each year. The rate of Abstudy reduces by 20c in every dollar over the threshold, having regard to the numbers of students in the family eligible for payment.

Senator SCULLION: That is the secondary Abstudy element. I am just asking these questions because that was the way it was broken down. This question specifically relates to Abstudy secondary?

Ms Milliken: The same rules apply to Abstudy, whether it is secondary or tertiary, in terms of dependant students. There are some circumstances where parental income and assets tests do not apply. We could probably take that on notice and give you a more full answer.

Senator SCULLION: If you just give me an indication of where to find it, I would be happy with that. How many students in receipt of Abstudy are living at home?

Ms Milliken: I do not have a home and away from home breakdown for Abstudy; I have a dependant and independent rate, which is not quite the same.

Senator SCULLION: No, I understand that. We made some general assumptions about dependants and independents, and about where they may sit in that, but you can provide me the data on dependant and independent. When you are indexing to the youth allowance and things like the youth allowance, with non-Indigenous people there is no real connection at all about whether you live at home or not in terms of these things. Are you telling me is that there is no connectivity at all between the access to Abstudy and whether you live at home or not? If the answer to that question is yes, then I do not really need to pursue it any further.

Ms Paul: It makes a difference definitely to the consideration of eligibility for dependant. Perhaps Ms Milliken can explain that, or we can spell it out for you.

Ms Milliken: It makes a difference to the rate of Abstudy which you receive, depending on whether you are living at home or away from home.

Senator SCULLION: I wonder if you could just take the at home and away from home elements on notice.

Ms Milliken: Your earlier questions specifically about secondary students, so are you interested in whether the secondary are not in relation to this question or is it just generally in respect of Abstudy?

Senator SCULLION: I am. My questions relate broadly to secondary school and to tertiary.

Ms Paul: We should be able to break it down like that.

Senator SCULLION: If you could break them into both of those, that would be very useful. I asked earlier about what reporting audit mechanisms are in place to determine an Abstudy recipient is in fact attending the specified course. I think part of the answer was in a six months sort of blocks, but that was an answer on the IPS process. What reporting audit mechanisms are in place to ensure that people are attending the secondary school?

Mr Pattie: For the secondary school attendance there is a reporting to Centrelink of the attendance on an end of term basis and then the attendance record of that student determines if they go onto an activity agreement. Depending on the amount of days, let us say, they were absent, then is a penalty applied to that person, and the more days they are absent will reach a point when they finally no longer receive the Abstudy.

Senator SCULLION: Let's say the term is 40 days and at the end of the 40 days the student has attended 10, so there are 30 days that he has received a secondary Abstudy payment. How does that rationalisation occur? There is an activity agreement at the end of that 40 days and what does that activity agreement ask of the recipient?

Mr Pattie: I am not exactly sure what is in that—

Senator SCULLION: Just in broad terms.

Mr Pattie: So in that case, 30 days absence is over and above the permissible five-day limit. Over five days absence and then there is the activity agreement. For every repeat absence after that, a penalty is applied on their rate of payment until they have three or four, I think, repeat offenses and then their penalty is 100 per cent—so, essentially, they get no payment after that.

Senator SCULLION: So they get no payment for the number of days where they received payment and did not attend—is that the broad intent, without verballing you?

Mr Pattie: Yes, that is right.

Senator SCULLION: I can understand that. Let's say, we get into day 10 and five of those days have not been attended already. Is this only amortised or rationalised at the end of every term or is there another trigger earlier to say: 'Look, they're just not turning up. They turned up for one day and we haven't seen them since'? Is there a trigger process before the end of the term? For example, they might attend for one day and think, 'School's for the crows; I'm just not coming back,' so they get a full term of payment and it is never ever able to be amortised. Is there an interim trigger, I suppose, if the five days are exceeded?

Mr Pattie: We would have to check the practical application from Centrelink's point of view. But, essentially, the school could contact Centrelink at any stage if that child was not at school and that would then trigger that situation.

Senator SCULLION: It is quite a complex area. I understand. You might not have the completeness of it. On notice, could you provide me with a brief and a flow system of what happens?

Mr Pattie: Yes, we can do that.

Senator SCULLION: I know Centrelink is never here to ask them. I would like to clearly understand the actual process of breaching or otherwise.

Ms Paul: They are on currently. I walked past them a minute ago, actually.

Senator SCULLION: Say again?

Ms Paul: They are on currently—or DHS is. I walked past them a minute ago next door.

Senator SCULLION: We should catch them tomorrow, but they are only available for some questions. It is probably just easier if you can supply that.

Senator Chris Evans: It was not a cunning plan by Ms Paul to get you to leave the room, Senator.

Ms Paul: Certainly not!

Senator Chris Evans: You have been invited to leave before.

Senator SCULLION: You are all being so helpful! What total payments would a student from a remote community with parents on welfare be entitled to per year in both direct and indirect payments paid to the educational institution?

Mr Pattie: The maximum payment a secondary boarding student would be entitled to in those circumstances was around \$23,000 per annum.

Senator SCULLION: That is the maximum? Is there a tier?

Mr Pattie: It would depend. There is the school-term allowance, there are various supplement allowances and other components in there. That \$23,000 includes the means-tested living allowance component, the school fees allowance, the under-16 boarding supplement, the rent assistance, the remote area allowance and possibly a fares allowance—but I would take out the fares because that is not in the \$23,000.

Senator SCULLION: They were the parts that would make up the maximum of \$23,000?

Mr Pattie: Yes.

Senator SCULLION: That would cover that. I will just move now to the Abstudy tertiary area, and I think we may have covered some of the questions. Are we able to get a breakdown of Abstudy payments by student number and course description, for example, the VET number of a course descriptor, perhaps undergraduate, postgraduate or PhD? Can you tell me the actual number of payments in each of the areas of VET, undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD? Is that possible to collate?

Ms Milliken: I have information on recipients of Abstudy living allowance by VET and higher education. I do not have higher education broken down into those other categories. If I can take that on notice we will be able to look into that for you.

Senator SCULLION: Excellent. Is there a maximum time that an individual doing a course can receive Abstudy payments?

Mr Pattie: Yes, there is an allowable time rule as there is with other student payments. Depending on the course it is normally six months beyond the length of the normal length of that course.

Senator SCULLION: Is there some capacity for discretion in certain circumstances where that can be extended again?

Mr Pattie: There is a possibility that it could be extended to one year beyond, depending on the type of course, but other than that that is the limit to the discretion, if you like.

Ms Milliken: It does take into account the capacity of the individual, for example, a person with a disability.

Senator SCULLION: So there would not be any discretionary capacity to extend it beyond that particular process.

Mr Pattie: No.

Senator SCULLION: I asked about the attendance regarding secondary, but what reporting audit mechanisms are in place to determine whether an Abstudy recipient in the tertiary area is, in fact, attending a specified course? How do you deal with that?

Mr Pattie: With the universities there is an IT system that is linked with Centrelink and this reports the enrolments at the university directly. That directly then affects the students' payments.

Senator SCULLION: Would that attendance be based on attending lectures and would there be a rollcall of some form for each lecture? I understand the secondary environment; I understood very clearly how that would all work. But in a tertiary environment, particularly in areas of VET, I am not sure how it would necessarily work. The problem is that in tertiary we have everything from a VET course at the rural college in Katherine through to a PhD in Melbourne. It may be necessary to help me by breaking that down on notice.

Mr Pattie: In the university sector it is the enrolment in the course. In the VET sector it is a little bit more difficult in the sense that the linkage is not automatic with Centrelink. It is a little bit tricky.

Senator SCULLION: So I have enrolled and attended day 1. Again, this is for the crows; I am not sure if I am going to continue to attend, but the cheque keeps arriving in the mail for me to attend. Let us go to the university example. I think you indicated earlier in your answer that it was a combination of enrolment and attendance, and I was curious as it is often pretty hard to round us all up in one spot anyway—it was hardly like in secondary school. Is it only enrolment or are there some other triggers along the way?

Mr Pattie: It may be easier if we give you another flow chart, if you like, to show how it works.

Senator SCULLION: I would appreciate that. If you can break that flow chart down into VET, undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD, and give us some indicators about what are the trigger points for compliance. Thank you.

[19:50]

CHAIR: We will move to 3.3.

Senator BACK: I have some questions about the independent youth allowance, particularly relating to the Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund and the deferral of the measure to

extend youth allowance eligibility for a master's degree by coursework; I think it is deferred from January 2012 to 2014. Can you give me a breakdown of the savings measures in the government's \$265 million package announced to make changes to the independent youth allowance? Is it possible to do that, either now or on notice?

Senator Chris Evans: Certainly we can help. As you know, the legislation is before the parliament.

Senator BACK: Yes.

Ms Paul: Yes, we can.

Ms Milliken: The savings to accommodate the proposed changes to youth allowance comprise the two-year deferral of the master's degree by coursework; universal availability of student payments for that, which is likely to save \$111 million; cessation of the Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund at the end of this year, with savings of \$16.3 million; resetting of the relocation scholarship values affecting students from major cities—

Senator BACK: To \$4,000 and then \$1,000?

Ms Milliken: Yes. That will involve savings of \$10.3 million. And then there is resetting of the annual value of Student Start-Up Scholarships to \$2,050 from January 2012, or \$1,025 per half year, with savings of \$134.6 million.

Senator BACK: Can you clarify the averaging of the 30-hour rule for people who are seeking to qualify for independent youth allowance through this medium? What is the flexibility in terms of the average of the 30 hours per week?

Ms Milliken: As you know, it is an average. A young person is considered to have satisfied the requirement to have worked an average of 30 hours per week, with an overall pattern of full-time employment over 18 months, if they undertake at least 30 hours of work each week in each of 78 weeks, 390 hours of work in each of six periods of 13 weeks or 120 hours of work in each of 19 periods of four weeks. When a young person applies for youth allowance, Centrelink will look to make the most advantageous calculation for the young person by considering all of those choices.

Senator BACK: Will Centrelink have any flexibility at all or any discretionary powers in terms of tolerance for people who are within one, two or three per cent of those figures you mentioned?

Ms Milliken: I think the flexibility came with the change in 2010. It is an average of 30 hours per week. Under the previous youth allowance arrangements it was actually a minimum of 30 hours per week over that period, so a change was made from July of last year.

Senator BACK: Just going to the Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund, which you said would achieve a \$16.3 million saving. How much of this figure has so far been spent? What is the take-up rate of that particular saving?

Ms Milliken: The Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund was \$20 million over the two and a half years. My calculation says \$3.7 million has been expended through the fund. 1,151 students have been awarded grants this year.

Senator BACK: In terms of the masters by coursework, do you have any figures for us on the number of students and the number of courses that are likely to be affected by this savings measure, or could you take it on notice?

Ms Milliken: We anticipate in the order of 5,267 students who would have received youth allowance or Austudy through the masters by coursework arrangement will be affected in 2012 and 2013. The department has opened a further round of approval of masters by coursework for professionally oriented masters and applications by universities to have courses approved closed last Friday under that arrangement. That will continue for the intervening two years.

Senator BACK: Would that involve both metropolitan and rural campuses?

Ms Milliken: Yes. The university makes the decision to apply for courses to be approved and we have received applications for 76 courses from 36 institutions in this round.

Senator BACK: In terms of the start-up scholarships and their reduction to 2,050 from 1 January next year, that will obviously mean less funds for scholarship assistance for students receiving the independent youth allowance. Again, can you advise the committee how many students will be impacted from these cuts to pay for that sum of money?

Ms Milliken: All higher education students undertaking an approved scholarship course who are on student income support, Austudy, Abstudy or youth allowance have access to a Student Start-Up Scholarship. The scholarship in this year is valued at \$1,097 per semester. That will be reducing to \$1,025. So in the order of 177,000 higher education students would be receiving that reduction of about \$75 per semester.

Ms Paul: It is about \$150 over the year.

Senator BACK: How are 2010 school leavers impacted by these changes?

Ms Milliken: In terms of the independent youth allowance?

Senator BACK: Yes.

Ms Milliken: The new independence arrangements will be available to young people from inner regional Australia from 1 January 2012 subject to them meeting the eligibility criteria. Where a person from inner regional Australia left school before 2012—

Senator BACK: Before 2010?

Ms Milliken: in 2010 or 2011—and they have been in the workforce, any employment undertaken since leaving school will be taken into account when assessing their eligibility against the criteria, even if it was work undertaken before 2012.

Senator BACK: Your department's website in this area states:

From 1 January 2012 the Government will extend to students from Inner Regional Australia the workforce participation independence arrangements for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY that currently apply only to students from Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia, subject to the passage of legislation.

How many students will be 18 years of age or older by the time they take up their tertiary studies? Is it likely that the majority would have reached 18 years or older, or would the majority still be under the age of 18 years?

Ms Paul: The majority of what?

Senator BACK: The majority of the students who are now affected by these changes from inner regional areas of Australia.

Ms Paul: That is a bit hard to answer. Students become eligible each year as they leave school. If they are going for independent and they have done a whole lot of work experience they are likely to be 17, 18, 19 or 20.

Senator BACK: So it would be difficult to answer that. The website says:

The extended arrangements will allow higher education and VET students from Inner Regional Australia to be considered independent for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY if:

- they are a full-time student; and
- they are required to live away from home to study; and
- they have combined parental income of less than \$150,000;

and then, as you say, there is the 'worked part-time' or the 'cumulative earnings'. With respect to my earlier question regarding 18 years of age, should they be 18 years of age or older, why does the parental income come into the equation at all, given the fact that they would have reached their majority?

Ms Paul: Perhaps I am missing it because it is a long day, but I am not sure what the crux of the age of 18 that you are getting at is.

Senator BACK: My question goes to the fact that if—

Senator Chris Evans: Are you trying to suggest that 17-year-olds are not eligible?

Senator BACK: No, it is not a question of eligibility. It is a question of: once they have reached 18 years of age they are adults. For all sorts of other reasons, parental income or parental factors fall away, don't they? When somebody is a minor there are certain relationships in terms of parental responsibility et cetera. Once they reach the age of 18 in a sense parental involvement, influence, control et cetera changes the relationship. My question is—

Senator Chris Evans: You are certainly right about the control and influence, Senator.

Senator BACK: I can assure you, Senator Evans, that as they get older it does not change; it just gets worse.

Senator Chris Evans: That is similar to my experience.

Senator BACK: What is the rationale? Once a student has reached 18 years of age, why is it that some involvement of the parent's income should influence their eligibility?

Ms Milliken: Financial support for students is generally regarded as a shared responsibility between the parents, the government and the student. Under the student income support reforms that commenced on 1 April 2010 the age of independence is progressively being reduced from 25 years to 22 years, and it will be 22 years from 1 January 2012. That recognises that young people have increasing independence as they mature and responds to calls from a range of stakeholders to recognise that. An age of independence of 22 does ensure effective targeting of payments and is broadly in line with community expectations. Also, the Bradley review found that the cost of reducing the age of independence to 18 years would be prohibitively expensive. Young people who are dependent on their parents can qualify for a higher away from home rate of youth allowance—that is, those under the age of 22, having regard to the parental income test and other means testing.

[20:04]

CHAIR: We have finished 3.3. We will now go back to 3.1.

Senator MASON: Minister and Ms Paul, can I address an issue that I know is exciting, at least at the political level in this country. Apparently, 80 per cent of a typical university's carbon footprint arises from electricity consumption. According to Adelaide University's Director of the Office of Services and Resources, Jonathan Pheasant, the carbon tax could add about \$20 million to the university sector's electricity bill. That is what he said. I was wondering, Ms Paul, whether DEEWR had undertaken any studies or modelling to explore the effects of a carbon tax on universities?

Mr Carvalho: I think we can safely say, at this point, no.

Senator MASON: No? So in the base funding review that Dr Lomax-Smith is handing down shortly, have these costs been factored in?

Mr Griew: There are two points, there. The first is that the base funding review, having been commissioned by government, will of course firstly be provided to government, so it would be inappropriate for us to be commenting there. The second point is a general point in amplification of Mr de Carvalho's answer, which is that like other institutions our view would be it is a matter for management in the higher education provider sector to make their plans to adjust to lower their carbon footprint, if the new settings provide them incentive to do so.

Senator MASON: This will sound like an unusual question but we are in unusual times, Ms Paul. Are any universities among the biggest 500 polluters and therefore subject directly to the carbon tax?

Senator Chris Evans: I think you asked me that question in the parliament.

Senator MASON: Yes, but you did not answer it.

Senator Chris Evans: I think I told you all I knew, which I think you and I both found pretty unsatisfactory. Maybe the officers have a better answer than I gave in the parliament.

Senator MASON: Ms Paul always knows the answers to these questions.

Ms Paul: I am not aware of the university being in that 500. Certainly the ones of that 500 that I have seen are big—

Senator BACK: You are ahead of us, Ms Paul, if you have seen the list.

Ms Paul: Only the reports of what the list might be.

Senator MASON: The reports of the list.

Ms Paul: The same as all of us.

Senator Chris Evans: We will take that on notice. I do not think so but it is best we take that on notice.

Ms Paul: Yes, we will take that on notice.

Senator MASON: It is a political climate full of surprises, Minister and Ms Paul. On the My University website, will the carbon footprint and alternative energy consumption be mentioned? Are there any proposals to do that on the My University website?

Mr Griew: There is nothing of active consideration. I am thinking about what is on the main university website at the moment and that has not been part of—but there are many other things to think about.

Senator MASON: What Mr Pheasant says in his article is that for Adelaide University alone—not the sector, but Adelaide uni—the carbon tax is expected to result in a \$1 million increase to their annual \$4½ million electricity bill. Does that figure sound plausible?

Ms Paul: We would not know and that sounds like one person's view, a person of whom I have never heard.

Senator Chris Evans: It does not fit with the other modelling I have seen for electricity price increases driven by the carbon price. There are huge increases in electricity prices occurring around Australia, driven by other matters, and the two tend to get confused, but that seems to me to be way in excess of any calculations I have seen on the impact on electricity prices on a carbon price. That is in the order of 20 per cent or so. It is nothing like—

Senator MASON: It is of that order, you are right. Mr Pheasant, Ms Paul, is the head of services and resources at the University of Adelaide. DEEWR has not made any official suggestions to universities regarding emissions—

Senator Chris Evans: I was there last Friday opening their new hub centre. They are very happy with that and with the Commonwealth funding. No one raised it with me.

Senator MASON: All right, I think I have the message. Thank you very much, on that issue. I note that there was a \$33 million variance 2010-11 financial year for the Commonwealth scholarship program as a result of 'Actual demand for scholarships in 2010-11 has not been in line with these assumptions about student behaviour.' What does that mean? You mentioned this before, Ms Paul, in the context of support for disadvantaged students.

Mr Griew: There are two parts to that, Senator. One part is exactly as you report, that there were some assumptions used in the modelling that was the base of the estimate that were not—

Senator MASON: What is the underspend? That is \$32 million, is it?

Mr Griew: It is \$32.953 million. The other part was that the universities also use some retained funds from the previous year in the early part of that financial year—which is a normal practice. So those two things have combined to lower the apparent expenditure, but of course that does not mean that their level of activity in that area is necessarily that much lower, because some part of that is money they have simply spent from the previous year. So you would not want to draw a percentage conclusion. There is a pipeline effect, in other words.

Senator MASON: I accept that, but to me it is slightly counterintuitive that the actual demand for scholarships in 2010-11 had not been in line with these assumptions. That is not what I would have expected, to be frank—given the current environment and the government's encouragement of low-SES students in university. That is a fair point, isn't it?

Mr Griew: Yes, except you are making an assumption that we have estimated conservatively. We might have estimated a greater increase in take-up. We do not have that information in front of us, just in these figures.

Senator MASON: I will continue to watch. Could I move quickly then to the Education Investment Fund. I ask these questions every time; I know Ms Paul is used to it. I will not labour the point but I will just get the information as quickly as I can and move on. The initial capital was \$6 billion. What capital remains?

Dr Hart: As at 30 June, the balance of the EIF was \$4.9039 billion.

Senator MASON: What is the total interest that has been earned?

Dr Hart: \$681.2 million.

Senator MASON: What is the amount spent?

Dr Hart: There has been a total of \$4.554 billion in commitments from the EIF. Of that amount, \$2.261 billion has been spent.

Senator MASON: What is the balance? What have we got left?

Dr Hart: The uncommitted balance of the fund is \$2.6109 billion.

Senator MASON: What is the amount committed but not spent?

Dr Hart: That would be the future commitments from the EIF, which would be \$2.293 billion.

Senator MASON: And you have given me the amount uncommitted. That is \$2.6 billion.

Dr Hart: That is correct.

Senator MASON: That is all I need on that. I will not labour the point. I have laboured the point many times before. Could I go to the My Uni website. I did not get to this, Ms Paul, at the budget estimates, so I thought I would spend a little bit longer this time. I just did not get the time last time to do it. Who are the intended primary users of the My Uni website? Is it potential students, their families, current students, stakeholders?

Ms Schofield: The primary intended users are domestic school-age students who are looking at making choices for university.

Senator MASON: What additional data will be collected from universities that is not already collected by DEEWR or published on the website that is not currently published and publicly available—that is, will the website be anything more than a portal that collates existing information?

Ms Schofield: There will be no additional data collection. The My University website will only use existing data that is already published in other places.

Senator MASON: Is the intention to include private higher education providers on the My University website or to restrict it to public and private universities only?

Ms Schofield: There will be a number of functions on the My University website, one of which will include—

Senator MASON: I think it is fair to say that was undecided last time.

Ms Schofield: a capacity to do a course search. There is an existing functionality on the Going to Uni website that enables students to look at potential courses and to search for courses. That course search functionality will include universities as well as other higher education providers, as is currently provided for on the Going to Uni website.

Senator MASON: Including the private higher education providers?

Ms Schofield: That is right. The other functionalities around institutional search and looking at different indicators across universities will only be for the 39 universities.

Senator MASON: It was reported in the media—I hesitate to ask questions that are based on media reports, as you know; however, I will do my best—that TEQSA would take over the operation of the My University website. Is that correct?

Mr Griew: It is the other way around. It was at one point planned and it has been agreed that the department will establish the site.

Senator MASON: Maybe I am wrong or the media is wrong again. Ms Paul; I do not know. So TEQSA was going to have it, but now it is not going to have it and the department is going to have it.

Ms Schofield: It was always the intention that the department would develop the website in the first instance. The government was conscious that TEQSA would not be in a position to develop the My University website at the same time it was starting off. But the website will now stay with the department.

Senator MASON: Maybe the minister is right about media. I assume the My University website has been through testing and so forth?

Ms Schofield: Yes—user acceptance testing, market testing and accessibility testing.

Senator MASON: Has the development process been smooth thus far?

Ms Schofield: Yes.

Senator MASON: There have been no particular problems with it. Is that right?

Ms Schofield: I think the answer to that would have to be no. Like all IT builds, it has its ups and its downs and its issues, but it is progressing as we had hoped.

Senator MASON: I certainly agree there is always a problem or a potential problem. That is very true. I have come across contract notice CN436444, which is a contract to the trustee for the Stamford Interactive Trust. It is about an accessibility review for the My University website. Do you know what that review was? It was about \$13,000.

Ms Schofield: I apologise. I do not have those details in front of me, but I can let you know that the website needs to go through a series of accessibility tests to ensure that it complies with all of the relevant protocols for visual access and the way that documents can be accessed. That was a contract that enabled the accessibility testing to be done.

Senator MASON: When can the committee expect the website to be fully operational? Will it be ready for next year's students?

Ms Schofield: The government has indicated that the website will go live by January next year.

Senator MASON: That would be a bit late for applicants, wouldn't it?

Ms Paul: It would be a bit late for applicants in 2012 but—

Senator Chris Evans: The existing site is still operating.

Ms Paul: the Going to University website is still there.

Senator MASON: What is the difference between the My University website and the Going to Uni websites? What is the rationale?

Senator Chris Evans: Ours is better. It is more funky.

Senator MASON: That is very Gen Y, Minister. There are going to be two existing websites; is that is how it is going to work?

Ms Schofield: Yes.

Senator MASON: Both will be retained?

Ms Schofield: Yes. There is a course search functionality on the Going to Uni website, as I said. It will run in profile with a similar course functionality on the My University website, at least in the first instance. Going to Uni is quite a popular site with students at the moment, so we do not necessarily want to take that away. The predominant function of the Going to Uni website is to provide information to students about student income support, the HECS system, the HELP systems—that sort of information. It is quite well used. We have got statistics that suggest that it is quite popular and performs an important function, so that will be retained. I can clarify this if I need to, but I understand that the Going to Uni website is being refreshed so that it aligns with, integrates well with and connects well with the My University website.

Senator MASON: So there will be a greater symbiosis. Is that the right word? I do not know whether that is the right word.

Mr Griew: You run into one without being denied knowledge that there is other information and then they might converge.

Senator MASON: There will be synergies and attractions between the two. In the developing of the My University website have you drawn from many experiences from the development of the MySchool website? It is a provocative question late on a Thursday, Ms Paul, but I thought I would throw it in.

Ms Paul: The MySchool website has been the most popular government website ever, so I am sure we have learnt some lessons from that.

Senator MASON: It has been popular, but you could not say it has been fault-free.

Ms Paul: No, that is certainly true. But it has been enormously successful, so I imagine we have had a look at the lessons there.

Senator MASON: Has it given you any insights?

Ms Schofield: Yes, I think so. I would agree with Ms Paul. We have been looking at the way that that site was developed and taking the lessons from that where we can. I would like to hope, but I am not sure that My University will be quite as popular as the MySchool website.

Senator MASON: According to the minister it might be. It might be 'the' site on the internet—although I doubt that. Just quickly, the latest Higher Education Report is for 2009. I assume DEEWR has the data required for the 2010 report. Is that right?

Mr de Carvalho: Yes.

Senator MASON: I asked that last time.

Mr Aungles: The 2010 student enrolment data has been released. The production of the 2010 Higher Education Report is largely dependent on that data and we are currently in the process of compiling that. We expect to reach it within the next month or two, which is in accordance with the standard time that we tend to release the report.

Senator MASON: Do you think the publication will be this year?

Mr Aungles: It is intended to be this year.

Senator MASON: That is good. The last one was a bit late.

Mr Aungles: The last one was a bit late, yes.

Senator MASON: But you think this one will be on time, in effect?

Mr Aungles: Yes.

Senator MASON: I have finished 3.1. Chair, I want to flag that I have quite a few questions on notice.

Senator BACK: Mr Griew, you said you had some figures. Can I just pre-empt my questions with an observation from the conclusion of the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture. In the context of the aspirational figure of 20 per cent lower SES and others, I think this figure is remarkable and very disappointing. In 1984, 10 per cent of the wider community in Australia had tertiary qualifications. Of those, four per cent were in fields associated with agriculture. From 1984 to 2009, the figure for those in the wider community holding tertiary qualifications went up, according to this study, from 10 per cent to just over 25 per cent—a 250 per cent increase. Of those, the proportion with some form of agricultural tertiary qualification has gone from four per cent to seven per cent. By agricultural, I mean agricultural science, agricultural business, agribusiness, horticulture and environmental science. It is in that context that you should understand the very strong concern that I have. Mr Griew, I think you indicated a few minutes ago that you said you had some student figures for me?

Mr Griew: In 2010, there were 18,464 students enrolled in agriculture, environmental and related studies. That is a 15 per cent increase from 16,080 in 2007. In 2010, 3,773 students completed courses—

Senator Chris Evans: How many completed?

Mr Griew: In 2010, 3,773 students completed courses in agriculture, environmental and related studies. That is a 10 per cent increase from 3,427 graduates in 2007.

Senator BACK: These would be graduates in agriculture, horticulture and environmental science?

Mr Griew: Yes, that is right.

Senator BACK: Would you be able to give us, on notice, that list from which you drew those figures? I would be most appreciative.

Mr Griew: Yes. Agricultural units of study received the highest rate of government funding—\$19,542 per Commonwealth supported place in 2011. The maximum student contribution in 2011 for agricultural units was \$7,756 for one equivalent full-time study load.

Senator BACK: What is that second figure of \$7,756?

Mr Griew: That is one EFTSL—one equivalent full-time study load. That is saying that the amount of revenue the universities can attract to provide those courses of study is nearly as high as it could be. The other comment I would make—not just figures—is that we are actively engaged with that group. You referred to the agricultural deans. I, on the minister's behalf, have attended a group with the acronym PICSE—I cannot remember exactly what it

stands for—but it is the agriculture deans and representatives of agribusiness from rural communities.

Mr de Carvalho: It is the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education.

Mr Griew: PICSE has some government funding in order to encourage rural kids to pursue a tertiary qualification which might equip them for a professional career in agriculture.

Senator BACK: Is veterinary science included in those figures of 3,773?

Mr Griew: No.

Senator BACK: Is that all of the information on students?

Mr Griew: Yes.

Senator BACK: I know the government's national food plan falls within Minister Ludwig's area of responsibility, but I understand the department did contribute to the development of an issues paper?

Mr Griew: Yes, that is right.

Senator BACK: Where, if anywhere, has that issues paper now gone? I am particularly interested in the education issue.

Mr Griew: I am sorry; I need to correct the answer I just gave you. It may seem pedantic, but the group I am thinking of was an interdepartmental committee chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. It was about a paper being prepared for government. I am not sure of the status of the paper. It may have been simply a paper for government on the issue food security and—

Senator BACK: Minister, I wonder if you have had any communication with Minister Ludwig on the national food plan draft document?

Senator Chris Evans: We have had a chat about it privately but I want to take the discussion papers on notice because there have been some cabinet discussions on it. I have certainly had a chat to Senator Ludwig about those issues and issues you raised about agribusiness. In fact that was the cause of the conversation I had with him—about the shortage of people training for agribusiness and the job opportunities that might be available. I would have to take on notice formally where the paper is at, I am afraid.

Senator BACK: I think the issues paper was to be released in June, and that was extended to September. Obviously in the context of the inquiry by this committee we will be very keen to know the outcome of that. I turn to the structural adjustment fund. In the last round of estimates the department was asked for a date by which stage two of the fund would be announced. Has a date been set for the announcement of successful stage two applicants?

Senator Chris Evans: We normally say shortly but on this occasion I will say very shortly.

Senator BACK: A previous witness said very shortly was the end of this month. I do not know whether you are willing to bet on the end of this month. It is imminent, is it?

Senator Chris Evans: Check your mailbox in the morning! It is basically ready to go and it will be announced very shortly.

[20:31]

CHAIR: We now move to outcome 3.2.

Senator BACK: How many providers are VET FEE-HELP eligible?

Mr McAuslan: We currently have 96 approved VET providers for the purposes of VET FEE-HELP.

Senator BACK: What documentation do providers have to show to prove their eligibility?

Mr McAuslan: They need to provide a substantial range of information. Eligibility requirements include that the body is an RTO, that it is a body corporate—

Senator BACK: An Australian company, with ABN?

Mr McAuslan: Yes.

Senator BACK: Substantially owned, substantially controlled—

Mr McAuslan: Central control is required to be in Australia. They also have to provide us with information about their business and how they plan to develop their business—what their projections are for VET FEE-HELP take-up—and they also provide a lot of information to us about how they are going to protect student interests by having appropriate policies and procedures that protect the interests of students who will be attending.

Senator BACK: Who is 'us'? Is it a committee formed within the department?

Mr McAuslan: The applications are forwarded essentially to my branch. My staff assesses those applications and form a view on whether we have sufficient information. When we have got sufficient information then staff submit proposals to me for my approval or non-approval decision.

Senator BACK: Of the 96 who are eligible, how many might you have refused based on either inadequate information or inappropriate data? If you cannot give us that the now, can you take it on notice.

Mr McAuslan: It is probably best if I give you an idea about the process we go through. We take on the initial application and we seek additional information from providers in the course of that process. Some providers determine that it is not going to be for them or they are not able to meet the requirements, so in our experience the vast bulk of providers who are seriously interested in becoming VET FEE-HELP providers do get there. Since the scheme was opened in 2008 about 50 applications have been withdrawn.

Senator BACK: They have withdrawn them?

Mr McAuslan: Yes.

Senator BACK: Are there any that you have subsequently removed from eligibility?

Mr McAuslan: We have revoked three providers. Two providers were revoked when they were taken over by other VET fee providers and one asked us to take them off the list because, after going through the exercise, they decided it was not for them.

Senator BACK: In the last 12 months and preceding, how many students have actually accessed VET FEE-HELP?

Mr McAuslan: In 2010, which was the first full year of the scheme, 28,457 students were assisted under the VET FEE-HELP arrangements. We do not have final figures at the moment for the year to date, but I can tell you that the scheme is strengthening over time. There is more interest from students. There is a broader range of providers. As you may be aware, the scheme is now available as part of the VET reforms in Victoria—

Senator BACK: Yes.

Mr McAuslan: where students can access a subsidised training place.

Senator BACK: For that 2010 year, what was the dollar value of the help was provided?

Mr McAuslan: It was \$117.576 million.

Senator BACK: Was that an equal sum of money for each person or did the candidates have different needs and get allocated different levels of assistance?

Mr McAuslan: Candidates can elect to take out a loan worth nothing or worth the full value of the tuition fees. It is highly variable.

CHAIR: That concludes 3.3.

[20:36]

CHAIR: We will now move to 3.6, International education.

Senator BILYK: I read yesterday in the media of some concerns raised by international students regarding some hospitals in Queensland that have been withholding care, most particularly maternity and obstetrics care, from international students, irrespective of whether they have health insurance or not. Are you able to confirm if that is the case?

Mr Griew: We understand that the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital has issued an internal directive that international students should not be accepted as patients, as a demand management measure. That is an issue of some disappointment to us, in the context where international students are required as a condition of their visa to take out private health insurance.

Senator BILYK: It is compulsory, isn't it?

Mr Griew: Yes, it is a condition of the visa.

Senator BILYK: I would presume that that is not quite the message that we want to send or the way we want people to see us as treating international students. Are you able to inform us as to whether there have been any discussions between the Commonwealth and state agencies? If they have got to have compulsory health insurance for their visa, then it would appear to me to be a breach.

Senator Chris Evans: I was asked this question by a woman from the international students representative group when I spoke at a conference in Adelaide on Friday. It was the first I had heard of it. She expressed concern particularly, as you say, as it was a maternity and gynaecology patient being refused access in Queensland. I have asked the department to follow it up and, following what Mr Griew informed you of, it appears there have been some directives issued to at least one hospital in Queensland. I have undertaken to write to Premier Bligh to seek clarification of the Queensland government's position.

Management of international education in Australia is a shared responsibility. All the state premiers were very anxious to make sure we repaired any reputational damage done to international education as a result of the incidents involving Indian students a couple of years ago.

We are keen for the visa reforms that the government announced as part of the Knight review. Quite frankly, they cannot be all care and no responsibility. I made the point on Friday that both the New South Wales and Victorian governments have failed to act on the

transport concessions for international students. This situation for international students is seen as being very unfair. The other states have moved. I have urged New South Wales and Victoria to also make those concessions available. As I say, states have to shoulder their share of the responsibility for making us an attractive market. Access to public transport is also about safety and quality of life while those students are here. So I have taken up that issue and called on them to do that.

I was most concerned when I heard—and the department have now confirmed it—that refusal of treatment is occurring. This is not appropriate. We do make it a requirement of the visa that students take out private health insurance. That is a reasonable expense for them, given many of them are operating on fairly low incomes; but it is an important part of making sure that while they are here they have access to health services and are not a massive burden on the Australian health system. I do not think it is appropriate for them to be refused treatment. I am very concerned about it. I will be writing to Premier Bligh and asking that, if it is policy, for that to be revoked. There is obviously a growing concern in the community about it, and I think this will be of serious concern to international students. Quite frankly, again, it can potentially do us reputational damage.

Senator BILYK: It is a bit of a blot on us on the international stage.

Ms Paul: That is right. Anything like this can harm our reputation.

Mr Griew: I can confirm also that the Department of Health has written as well. They would be responsible for the technical issues about what exactly is required under the relevant Commonwealth-state agreements. But that, of course, is just the technical issue. There is also the issue that the minister and the secretary referred to.

Senator BILYK: Thank you for that update.

CHAIR: Are they legally able to withhold treatment?

Mr Griew: That is the technical issue. It is really a matter for the Department of Health under the relevant Commonwealth-state agreements whether private patients can be queued in that way. But that is a matter for them.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions on international students?

Senator MASON: Yes, at 3.6; the Knight review.

CHAIR: International education support.

Senator MASON: If I could briefly go to the Knight review, Ms Paul. Can I ask about the effect of the anticipated changes from the Knight review on the student visa framework. The government has adopted all 41 recommendations. Has the department done any projections on the number of overseas students who will study for the first time in Australia in the next calendar year?

Mr Walters: In the context of the Knight review we did not do any projections. The reason for that is simply if you were to look at the effect of the Knight review you would have to take alongside that a number of other factors that bear on the number of international students, in particular the cost. We know from survey results that it is the cost of studying here which is the major factor for the students. I think between the beginning of the Knight review and the end, the dollar varied between 98c and 110c and it was back to 96c again recently. It did not seem sensible to try and project the consequences of the review.

Senator Chris Evans: Can I also make the point that some of the measures which were like an opt-in system will not be up and running until the second semester of 2012. So the benefits that some of the providers will get will take a while. I think the sector's view, though, of course, is that the reputational and advertising value will flow to them straightaway. But, given how long in advance they recruit or work with prospective students, I think the main benefit of this will be seen more likely in 2013 onwards rather than in 2012. But, generally, I think it has given confidence to the sector, which will have some benefit. But I do not think we are able to pull out one factor in all of this and say this is going to drive particular behaviour. I have seen some of the modelling in the past about it and some people call it economic modelling and some people call it witchcraft. Quite frankly, the Australian dollar is the biggest driver and there is competition from other countries and with India there is the reputational damage, which I think is now on the mend.

Senator MASON: It is subsiding.

Senator Chris Evans: Yes, but it is still an issue. One of the things we are hoping to do is work more closely with the sector. I again gave them the message the other day that growth has got to be sustainable and well managed and the student experience has to be a quality one, otherwise we will ruin Brand Australia, and I am not interested in, and the government is not supporting, some sort of massive explosion of overseas student numbers when universities do not have a capacity to provide a quality—and the right—student experience and social support. So we are going to work more closely with them to make sure that we and industry—and I announced the International Education Council for that very purpose of actually saying we have a strategic view of the role of international education in Australia and in our economy as well as in an educational context—plan and manage that much more carefully than we have. It grew out of nothing. It has had a sustained and fantastic growth.

Senator MASON: It rapidly became important.

Senator Chris Evans: Yes, rapid growth and became a huge success story in terms of our engagement with Asia. It is the one service thing we have done really well in Asia and grown, so it is a remarkable success story. But, as you know, some of those migration changes, particularly around 2006 and 2007, distorted it. Anyway, all of that leads us to saying we have actually got to work much more closely with the sector about a sustainable industry. I know some people in the sector do not like me calling it an industry, but it is. It is the third largest export industry. I think the council will allow us to develop that strategic vision. As you know, Mr Michael Chaney is going to chair that for us. I think we need to develop a strategic vision for international education's role in Australia, but that has all got to be about sustainability. So we are looking to make sure we grow the sector but in a way that continues our reputation for high quality.

Senator MASON: I suspect, Mr Walters, you may have the answer to this. What proportion of overseas students are expected to study at Australian universities, as opposed to private higher education providers? What is roughly the proportion? Is it 95 per cent and five per cent roughly?

Mr Walters: It is something like that.

Senator MASON: Minister, I am sure you are aware of this issue—because certainly it has been communicated to me again through emails and representations—about many of the private higher education providers. Let me go back. The government has accepted the Knight

review recommendations and it has applied them to universities only but many of the private higher education providers that are AUQA accredited and offer degrees, sometimes even PhDs, and qualify for FEE-HELP and so forth will not benefit from the refined and streamlined processes that Mr Knight's review has recommended and they are going to have to wait. What can I tell them? You can see their argument. They say, 'Why can't we be included in the first tranche along with universities?' What can I tell them because they say this is unfair and discriminatory?

Senator Chris Evans: Let me be clear. Who are you talking about, senator?

Senator MASON: Private higher education providers, not the universities but the others. Some of them indeed even provide PhDs. They are AUQA accredited, as you know and as Mr Walters would know—and with TEQSA. Their students even qualify for FEE-HELP and so forth. So what about them, Mr Walters? What is the rationale for, in effect, discriminating against them?

Senator Chris Evans: This is the same argument that the TAFEs and other providers make.

Senator MASON: Not quite TAFEs. They are offering, potentially, PhDs.

Senator Chris Evans: I will let Mr Walters take you through it but the first point to make is that this is a risk-based strategy—it is about people being able to participate in a visa regime that passes the risks to the provider and allows them to manage their affairs more. Immigration does the immigration controls but the other risks are carried by the institution and they opt in, if you like, and have the capacity to access a streamlined system. We have taken the decision in the first instance to offer that opportunity to the universities, but it is very much about a risk-based approach and I have made it clear to them that they will have to meet their obligations or they will not be in the system. As you know, there have been concerns about a couple of universities in particular in the past, and it is a right that will be withdrawn if things are not applied—

Senator MASON: If the universities do not, in a sense, do their part?

Senator Chris Evans: Yes.

Senator MASON: So you will monitor their compliance?

Senator Chris Evans: Yes.

Senator MASON: Will Education or Immigration monitor the university's capacity to comply with, in effect, visa requirements? I suppose Immigration?

Senator Chris Evans: It is not just visa requirements. As you know, we have a joint effort, a working party, and there is a consultation going on with the sector about how those things work. The point I am trying to make is that we are moving to a risk-based management system. We made an initial decision about the universities having access to the streamlined service, but there is a first step in moving to a risk-based approach which will distinguish people not on the basis of their colour or creed, as it were, but on the basis of the risk. Mr Walters will probably put it better than me.

Mr Walters: It is very handy having your own minister at the table at Senate estimates because it cuts down the amount of work you have to do. I do not think I do have a lot to add.

Senator MASON: I have received these emails and representations from private higher education providers. It is about immigration risk—

Mr Griew: There are two other things I can add. We are aware of those representations. There are some issues that have been raised by other providers of degree courses. At this point the decision follows the recommendation that Mr Knight made, which he made on the basis of what could you implement reasonably and with certainty, and, as the minister says, there are other parts to his recommendations that include looking at the whole question of the assessment level structure, its application and the potential for moving towards a more risk-based approach, which might be tough news for some who do not manage to hold up their end of it who are in the system and might be good news for some who are not. But at this point that the decision follows for the reasons outlined in Mr Knight's recommendations.

Mr Walters: One more factor is the workload involved for DIAC, because this is going to be a process which involves individual agreement with the universities and so DIAC have agreed to do that process for the universities that want to opt in, as the minister says, and that is 40 universities. Expanding it immediately, before the system is proven to all of the higher education providers, does pose a workload issue for DIAC.

Senator MASON: Is it right that there will be a further review—

Mr Walters: In the second half of 2012.

Senator MASON: And that will include other higher education providers?

Mr Walters: And the whole assessment level structure. This is a kind of immediate response and then there will be the assessment level review in the second half of next year.

Senator Chris Evans: Being frank, we found the assessment level review Mr Knight did showed it was not managing the risk appropriately—it was not as effective a tool as one would have hoped, so we are looking for a new way of managing that. I think people have misunderstood the announcement in the sense that it is the first step in a transition to a new process. It is not about fairness or unfairness; it is about us making a decision about the least risky area at the start, in terms of our history of practice. That is not a criticism of anyone, but if you look at where we have had the issues before, the universities reflect, and Mr Knight found, that this is the lowest level of risk. So that is the starting point. But, quite frankly, we should be in a position where, in a couple of years time, under the opt-in arrangements, people will be treated on the basis of the quality of their performance.

Senator MASON: I have some questions relating to Indigenous early childhood education centres. Ms Paul will remember I always ask about these at estimates. But I will put the questions on notice.

[20:56]

CHAIR: Is there any more on international students or international education? That finishes program 3.6. We will now move to programs 3.4 and 3.5.

Senator BACK: Can you provide us with an update on the progress of the tender process for Australian Apprenticeship Centres?

Mr Griew: Mr Owen will add to this. Next year is the end of the current contract, so the tender process for—

Senator BACK: You mean 2012?

Mr Griew: Yes, the end of this financial year and the middle of next calendar year. We are about to commence a tender process in each state for the procurement of those services.

Senator BACK: How long will those contracts last once you appoint the successful tenderers?

Mr Griew: That will be announced with the tender contracts. We are considering that matter at the moment?

Senator BACK: What is the length of the current contracts? Are they two years?

Mr Owen: The current contracts commenced in 2006 and, through the exercise of some options under the contracts, have been extended beyond the initial period. As Mr Griew said, they conclude in the middle of next year.

Senator BACK: How many contracts are currently operational?

Mr Owen: There are 70 Australian Apprenticeship Centres contracts, with 28 organisations involved. A number of organisations have multiple contracts—separate contracts for different regions.

Senator BACK: Can you tell us the expenditure on apprenticeship incentives in the last financial year, 2010-11?

Mr Owen: Total expenditure on apprenticeship incentives in 2010-11 was \$1,069.916 million.

Senator BACK: How much was spent on incentives for trainees?

Mr Griew: Do you mean in personal benefit payments to the trainees or to employers about them?

Senator BACK: Employer incentives. You have given us the figure for apprenticeships, now I would like traineeships.

Mr Griew: I am sorry; there may be a misunderstanding. The figure for incentives for apprenticeships includes apprenticeships and what used to be called traineeships.

Senator BACK: When you say that they used to be called traineeships, that does not mean that they have been subsumed into apprenticeships, does it?

Mr Griew: There is a wider term these days called Australian Apprenticeships, which includes the old apprenticeships and the traineeships. It was a decision of the previous—

Senator BACK: Should we take that as a signal that traineeships have lost popularity?

Ms Paul: No, it was just a way to—

Senator BACK: Should it be taken as just a rationalisation of terms?

Senator Chris Evans: It was a signal whereby the previous government tried to convince people that all those traineeships were really apprenticeships, because they were electorally more popular, Senator. There was no better motivation than that, I am afraid.

Senator BACK: Should I be taking note of this, Minister, or will I pick it up in *Hansard*? Can you provide us with advice, perhaps on notice, of the breakdown by apprenticeship type for the flow of these incentives?

Ms Paul: For the qualification?

Senator BACK: Yes.

Ms Paul: Yes we can.

Senator BACK: At the same time, would you provide me with an update on the progress of the National Partnership Agreement for Skills. Where are we with that?

Mr Griew: The national agreement which covers the administration of the SPP funding skills which we have with the state governments?

Senator BACK: Yes.

Mr Griew: Following COAG in July, a Commonwealth-state senior officials working group involving central agencies and training departments in the Commonwealth and all of the states and territories has been systematically working through for governments the content of that national agreement and the associated national partnership which will accompany it, with a view to reporting back to COAG in early 2012.

Senator BACK: Thank you. Additional incentives were offered as a result of the global financial crisis; has the department evaluated the effectiveness or otherwise of those incentives and, if so, can you tell us the outcome; if you have not, do you propose to do so?

Mr Griew: A set of incentives were offered to arrest the decline that was apparent in commencements in the traditional trades. That was called the Apprenticeship Kickstart Program and was worth \$100 million in its first round, and it was an obvious and stunning success. If you look at the downturn in the 1980s and 1990s, the decline in apprenticeship commencements took five to 10 years to return. Following the implementation of the Apprenticeship Kickstart Program, the numbers came back to the previous levels in about—I may be wrong in detail here—18 months, so it was an extraordinary success and was very welcomed.

Senator Chris Evans: Sometimes you pull a lever and they do not work so well, but that one actually worked really well.

Senator BACK: Yes, that is the feedback I have had. Can you tell us how many mature age workers have taken up the training initiatives in this last period of time? This is the 'Experience Plus' training program. Would you like to take that on notice?

Mr Griew: We will take that on notice because we administer that in cooperation with our colleagues in the employment area and we might want to consult with them to get you that information.

Ms Paul: We will get you the whole picture.

Senator BACK: As part of that, I would be very keen to find out what figure was budgeted and what has actually been the total cost of the program. What mechanisms, processes or avenues did you use to advertise that program?

Mr Griew: We will take that on notice in the same spirit, just to get you the complete answer.

Senator BACK: I want to turn now to be Critical Skills Investment Fund. About a month ago now—to the day, in fact—the government announced \$28 million for new training programs under the \$200 million Critical Skills Investment Fund, aimed at reducing critical skills shortages. You, Minister, were saying that more than 7,500 workers would benefit and that it would be distributed to 40 businesses to train new workers. Can you tell us whether the businesses that have been selected and the basis on which they were selected?

Senator Chris Evans: They have certainly been selected and announced and released publicly. It was a selection process run by a group chaired by Mr Keith Spence, who is chair of the Western Australian State Training Board and is ex-Woodside, and, what do we call it, the CSI board—

Mr Griew: It was constructed as the Critical Skills Investment Fund Advisory Board and it advised the department and the minister on the selection process.

Senator BACK: When does the training start?

Mr Griew: That will vary according to the different proposals.

Ms White: We are still negotiating contracts with those 38 or 39 providers. I believe I have now executed six contracts, and those projects will start almost immediately.

Senator Chris Evans: Part of the arrangement was to have projects that would start quickly. It is about trying to meet skills shortages, so we have to get those programs going very quickly.

Senator BACK: I understand the chosen sectors are resources, construction, infrastructure and renewable energy?

Senator Chris Evans: Yes, they were the first priorities.

Senator BACK: I would be keen to know, perhaps on notice, the extent of the shortage you identified in each of those four sectors. When you say they are the first ones, is it the intention that you will over time identify further sectors?

Senator Chris Evans: There was a budget announcement about the Workforce Development Agency and the fund, and we have rolled funds together—I will not try to go through all the detail. We have identified other sectors—one of those is construction and the other is aged care—as areas where we have serious skill shortages. That is based on Skills Australia research, so we are using an evidence base for this stuff.

Mr Griew: The four skill groups and occupations in areas of demand, regardless of which industry and also for industries affected by restructuring, have been extended as well.

Senator BACK: I think the announcement mentioned co-funding by industry, with a total figure of \$41 million—\$28 million from government, so therefore the balance from industry?

Mr Griew: That is right.

Senator Chris Evans: All those programs and the Workforce Development Agency rely on co-partnership. Industry identify the needs but they have to have skin in the game as well. We are happy to support them but they have got to have skin in the game. We require contributions and there is a sliding scale approach—large industry pays a bigger proportion and small industry a smaller proportion.

Senator RHIANNON: Is it correct that in some states such as New South Wales private VET providers now subcontract work back to TAFE and to each other?

Mr Griew: There might be some of that arrangement—it is not something that I am personally aware of. We will take that on notice.

Senator Chris Evans: Bear in mind that TAFE is a state run system.

Senator RHIANNON: I realise that. When we ask it at the state level they bounce us to you and then you bounce us back. New South Wales VET has waived the requirements of

some VET providers to provide lists of existing teachers and facilities during the tender process, claiming that it would be unfair to expect those private providers to have those resources and facilities already in place. Is this consistent with your department's implementation of procurement guidelines?

Ms Paul: Which tender are you referring to there? It is not immediately ringing bells.

Senator RHIANNON: Maybe I will have to ask you to take that on notice, because it has been raised with me a couple of times that this is happening in New South Wales..

Ms Paul: Is it the literacy, languages and numeracy program?

Senator RHIANNON: That was one of the examples.

Mr Griew: We need to be clear about which guidelines are being discussed here. If we fund a state government to purchase a training service, that would be govern by the agreement we have with the state government, not by the department's own procurement guidelines. The question would be: what is in the contract which specifies the nature of the training? We would have no capacity to bind a state government department to the chief executive's instructions on how we procure.

Senator RHIANNON: Maybe I have misunderstood—your procurement guidelines are not relevant here?

Ms Paul: It depends whether it is a tender which we are doing or one that they are doing. It would really help to know the program. We will take it on notice as you asked it, but—

Senator RHIANNON: I will give you some details of programs.

Ms Paul: I think that would be useful.

Mr Griew: My prediction is that it would be very hard to get that information without knowing which program we are talking about.

Senator RHIANNON: I was interested in some administration cost issues. I understand that, between 2005 and 2009, the operating cost for DEEWR rose by more than 130 per cent. Is that a fair estimate?

Ms Paul: I am not sure what you are talking about. Perhaps it is the hour. Which years are you talking about?

Senator RHIANNON: I understand that, since the introduction of competition in VET provision, there has been a massive increase in the budget for admin costs while there have only been small budget increases for teaching. I am trying to get a handle on a comparison of teaching costs and admin costs. We are picking up that the blow-out is with admin costs.

Ms Paul: It is a bit hard to follow, to be absolutely honest. Are you talking about the costs of particular vocational education programs? Or are you talking about the costs in my department?

Senator RHIANNON: I am talking about the overall admin costs for DEEWR.

Ms Paul: For my department—the costs of my own staff. During that period—

Senator RHIANNON: Yes, during that period. To phrase it another way: what has been the added cost burden to your department since competitive tendering was introduced in 2008?

Ms Paul: Competitive tendering for many things has been around for an awfully long time. I think the big change to departmental expenditure you referred to arose from the creation of the department itself following the 2007 election and change of government. That doubled the cost of running the department, because the creation of DEEWR represented a merger of two complete departments and a large part of a third. The costs of running a procurement—a tender—are funded each time by government. The largest tenders we run in this department are in the employment area, not in the vocational education area. They are for Job Services Australia, formerly Job Network, or, as is happening now, for Disability Employment Services.

Mr Griew: Some tendering for VET training goes back a lot further than 2008.

Ms Paul: Yes, tendering goes back for decades.

Senator RHIANNON: Yes, but it has certainly increased recently.

Ms Paul: I do not think it has.

Mr Griew: The Productivity Places Program allowed the private sector in—prior to that there was always the user choice component.

Ms Paul: We did not tender the PPP. I would posit that—

Senator RHIANNON: You see where I am trying to go. You are disputing that there has been a blow-out in admin costs—

Ms Paul: due to the costs of tendering procurement—yes. Indeed, since the creation of the department, the department's internal resources have been on a steady decline, which we have discussed here before and in the cross-portfolio estimates. This year, the department has declined, net, by the equivalent of 200 people. Last year, it declined by almost 600.

Mr Griew: The procurement you are talking about is run by state governments, not by DEEWR.

Senator RHIANNON: Yes, but there is a tendering process. If you dispute my suggestion, that is how it is. Thank you very much and thank you for squeezing me in.

Senator McKENZIE: My questions go to the Regional Education Skills and Jobs Plans. I am wondering if you can give the committee a two-sentence, 30-second description of what the Regional Education Skills and Jobs Plans are.

Mr Manthorpe: Certainly. The Regional Education Skills and Jobs Plans initiative is a concept where we are placing people into 34 non-metropolitan regions to work with local industry employer, education, schools and VET stakeholders to ensure that join-ups are occurring and that opportunities are being taken to meet skills and other labour market challenges in those locations.

Senator McKENZIE: So they are specific to the regional locations where they are placed?

Mr Manthorpe: That is right. So it is trying to make sure that the national programs and education systems and all the rest that are operating out there in a mainstream national sense are focusing effectively on local circumstances.

Senator McKENZIE: Is the Latrobe Valley one of those regions? It would include Traralgon or Morwell.

Mr Manthorpe: The answer is yes.

Senator McKENZIE: And the Goulburn Valley?

Mr Manthorpe: The regions in Victoria are Barwon, South-West Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon Mallee.

Senator McKENZIE: You can take this on notice. I am wondering if you have you taken into account, particularly with Loddon Mallee, what the implications for the Regional Education Skills and Jobs Plans would be under a revised Murray-Darling Basin Authority plan for Loddon Mallee? I would also like to know on notice the implications for the Latrobe Valley, which would be under central Gippsland, of the passing of the carbon tax and how that may change the work that has already been done on those regional jobs plans.

Mr Manthorpe: We will take those on notice.

Senator McKENZIE: Thank you very much.

Senator BACK: I refer to withdrawal rates from Productivity Places Program courses. The question on notice on this from my colleague Senator Nash was EW0401_12. At that time the response was that:

Data for withdrawal rates under the Productivity Places Program National Partnership is not available.

Are the rates available now or are they simply not being collated?

Ms White: Withdrawal rates are not reported to us under the Productivity Places Program by the states and territories. We did have that data for the Commonwealth part of the program which we responded to in that question on notice.

Senator BACK: That is right. The figures as at 30 June for the Australian government component were 128,560 commenced, 40,900 withdrew and of them 14,000 were due to unsatisfactory completion and 26,000 voluntarily discontinued. So that was at the end of June. Would you have an update for us for the next quarter to the end of September, for example?

Ms White: I don't believe I do have that figure with me but we can certainly get the figures for the Australian government component for you.

Senator BACK: Thank you very much. Chair, that concludes my questions in outcome 3, leaving only outcome 1.

CHAIR: I was just wondering whether you could tell me where we are at with the apprentice monitoring initiative.

Ms Paul: Which one, sorry?

Mr Griew: You might mean mentoring.

CHAIR: Sorry, mentoring. It is late.

Mr Griew: I thought we could have an apprentice monitoring program as well!

CHAIR: We probably have one of them too, haven't we? Sorry, the mentoring one.

Ms Sakkara: The guidelines for that program are currently in an approval process with central agencies, and we are expecting to release them in the next couple of weeks.

CHAIR: And The Right Trade for You? I have not heard of that one before; that is new, obviously.

Ms Sakkara: That is a component of that mentoring program. That is the advisers for school students, to give them advice about which trade to choose. That is part of the same guidelines process I just mentioned.

CHAIR: And Support for Competency Based Progression?

Ms Sakkara: That is a separate program. That is also currently in an approval process, and likewise the guidelines are expected to be released in the next couple of weeks.

CHAIR: All right. We will deal with all of them at the next estimates then, I suppose.

Senator Chris Evans: We are now consulting with industry and trade unions about those, about how we make them work for them. We are pretty close to being there.

Mr Griew: There is a lot of enthusiasm for that accelerated apprenticeships program. I was at the meeting with the industry skills councils with Skills Australia last week, I think it was, and they were reporting a lot of industry enthusiasm in their discussions.

Senator Chris Evans: I think there are about 800 or so registrations of persons. It is getting the companies to the starting line, I think. A couple of the big companies are going to take on some significant numbers, so that is good.

CHAIR: I will be interested to look at that. I think that now concludes outcome 3.

[21:21]

CHAIR: We will now move to outcome 1.

Senator BACK: Ms Paul, while Mr Manthorpe is still listening: is it possible for the breakdown of the regions that you mentioned earlier to be presented on notice, please?

Ms Paul: Yes.

Senator BACK: Thank you.

Ms Paul: I am sorry; is that for the plans?

Senator BACK: That is correct, yes. The discussions that took place—

Ms Paul: Yes, check; no problem.

Senator BACK: On 1.1, the Child Care Management System: what proportion of approved childcare providers are currently not meeting the two-week reporting requirement through CCMS?

Ms Taylor: We can get that figure for you, so we will take that on notice.

Senator BACK: As part of that, would you also provide the information to us on the current vacancy rate based on that data, please?

Ms Taylor: Certainly. General, across all care types?

Senator BACK: Thank you.

Ms Taylor: Certainly.

Senator BACK: Is the June 2011 quarterly vacancies snapshot available now, or could you tell us when it is likely to be?

Ms Taylor: We have the December quarter childcare summary data. The June quarter data will be available shortly. I will ask Mr Kimber to give us the information on that.

Senator BACK: I think the March 2011 snapshot is to hand, anyway—at least, I have figures in front of me.

Mr Kimber: Yes, the March quarter vacancies snapshot was released a couple of months ago. The preparation for the June 2011 snapshot is underway, and it should be published in the near future.

Senator BACK: The March figures spoke of 65,640 vacancies in long day care across Australia. Can you tell me how many childcare places there are nationally that are in the CCB approved services from that snapshot?

Mr Kimber: The vacancy data looks at the number of places that are available each day. Around about 700,000 families use a child care in any one week. However, a place can be actually used by a number of families. There are many parts that make up that information.

Senator BACK: They were saying 7,100 family day care vacancies every day across 332 approved facilities. It would be interesting to know what the average size of those family day care centres is.

Mr Kimber: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator BACK: Thank you. Do know how many children are currently paid for under the inclusion support subsidy?

Mr De Silva: In terms of inclusion support agencies, in July to December 2010 there was a total of 47,130 children who were supported under the program.

Senator BACK: And the amount of money paid either in that half year or in the full financial year 2010-11?

Mr De Silva: I can tell you the total amount of funding that was available but I will need to double-check or take on notice the total amount that was actually paid. The total funding available was \$27.994 million and there was flexible support funding of \$4.287 million for 2011-12. But the actual amount of money paid for July to December 2010 I will have to take on notice.

Senator BACK: Thank you very much. Can you tell us how many families were deemed eligible over the last 12-month period under the special childcare benefit scheme? Again, if you cannot tell me now, please take it on notice.

Ms Taylor: We might take that on notice.

Senator BACK: I would also like a breakdown of the reasons for determining eligibility, the range of reasons that they fall under, and the percentage of families that receive more than one allocation—that is, more than a 13-week period. Could you tell us that?

Ms Taylor: Yes, we will be able to tell you that.

Senator BACK: Is the department reviewing the guidelines for the frequency of review where you deem a child to be at risk?

Ms Caldwell: The special childcare benefit guidelines have been in place for some time and they continue to operate unchanged.

Senator BACK: Could you repeat that last sentence.

Ms Caldwell: The existing guidelines as to the timing of reviews are unchanged.

Senator BACK: I go to family day care services under the regional assistance travel grant in rural areas. Can you tell me how eligibility is determined under that assistance travel grant scheme?

Ms Paul: We will take that on notice.

Senator BACK: There appears, from the information in front of me, to be a figure of 50 per cent—where a provider has 50 per cent of carers in an outer regional area that seems to determine the basis of payments. Is that correct? Can you help me with my understanding of this?

Ms Hosking: We do not have those details here so we will take that on notice.

Senator BACK: In general terms, though, is there a figure of 50 per cent which determines a rate at which payments are made? The reason for my question is this. The case has been presented to us of a provider who believed that in excess of 51 per cent of their family day carers were located in an outer regional area as classified by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index, yet they are being paid at an inner regional rate of \$23—obviously a lower figure.

Ms Hosking: I am advised that in general it is the case that if more than 50 per cent of the carers in the scheme are in a regional area they do quality. In terms of the specific case you mention, we would need to have a look at the details to understand what has happened in that case.

Senator BACK: Could you explain in general terms the index you use? Do you use the Accessibility/Remoteness Index? Which of the indices do you use?

Ms Hosking: I understand we use ARIA.

Senator BACK: Can you then explain to me—and I am being pedantic here—if 50 per cent of the caseload is covered, do you then deal with it as the more generous outer regional or the less generous inner regional, or do you in some way split the allocation?

Ms Hosking: As we indicated before, we really do need to get those details on notice for you in terms of the specific guidelines for the scheme.

Senator BACK: If you could do that, I would be most appreciative. In terms of the sustainability assistance, where a centre is currently the only one in town and is in receipt of sustainability assistance, would the payment be cut if a new centre were to open up in competition?

Ms Hosking: My understanding is that in general that is the case.

Senator BACK: It is cut. Therefore, is there any other assistance which may then be available to the party facing losing its sustainability allowance?

Ms Hosking: All our services—and you are talking about long day care services in this case—receive assistance by way of fee relief for parents through childcare benefit and childcare rebate. Other than that, the additional assistance for long day care is the sustainability assistance grant. There are not other particular grants for long day care; there are for family day care and outside school hours care.

Senator BACK: I go to the childcare workers vacancy rate. Again, I think this follows up a question earlier, EW0445. At the time, the department stated that the proportion of childcare workers leaving the occupation and needing to be replaced is 15.7 per cent annually. In

relation to early childhood teachers, degree-qualified teachers, the rate is practically half that at 8.9 per cent. Can you explain to us the higher percentage of wastage from the childcare profession over those of early childhood teaching and degree-qualified teachers?

Ms Taylor: This information came from the Workforce Census 2010. We have not examined the reasons as to why there is a higher rate for childcare workers. The number of vacancies that are around may be due to the nature of the work, the fact that it is a very competitive market with a high demand for those staff. We have not examined the reasons why. Can I say that they are only slightly above the rates for other workers of a similar nature.

Senator BACK: Are they figures you have been compiling for some period? Are the figures of 15.7 and the 8.9 for early childhood typical year on year?

Ms Taylor: We did the first of the workforce census in 2010.

Senator BACK: So it is relatively recent.

Ms Taylor: Relatively, yes.

Senator BACK: Going to the CCMS help desk, in response to a question earlier in the year you told us there were an average of 475 calls a day. Is that number remaining constant?

Ms Taylor: On average we are now receiving 395 calls per day for the year ending 31 August 2011.

Senator BACK: What are the main issues at stake when people call, and what percentage would be attributed to the national quality framework and the new national quality standard for early childhood education? Is that a significant proportion? Do you have that information available to you?

Ms Caldwell: We would need to take on notice the precise detail, but they are not amongst our most frequent types of queries.

Ms Taylor: I do have some information here: 37.81 per cent of calls were about attendance transactions, 20.27 per cent were about enrolment transactions—

Senator BACK: Could you just explain what the 37.8 was again, please?

Ms Taylor: Attendance transactions, so they were about the system that records attendances and enrolments.

Ms Caldwell: Typically, that might be a call from a service saying: 'I entered some details and I realise I typed them in wrongly. I need to fix them up. Can you tell me how to deal with this particular permutation?'

Senator BACK: That is over half of the calls.

Ms Taylor: Yes, and 14.5 per cent are about service change of details—a service wishes to notify us of a change to certain details about their operations—and 4.3 per cent are about payments, around 19 per cent were clarifications around policy and programs, and 3.2 per cent were about newly approved services. So the CCMS help desk is generally not the place where calls about the new national quality system would go.

Senator BACK: You had 27 staff employed in the help desk section in June. With a reduction in calls from 475 to 395, have you seen a reduction in the number of personnel required in that area?

Ms Caldwell: We have been largely stable. At today's date we have 28. The call volume fluctuates up and down slightly, so we are largely steady. We happen to have one more person than when we had this discussion in June.

Senator BACK: I want to go to the childcare rebate. How many families currently receive the maximum childcare rebate, and what is the average rebate paid to a family?

Ms Taylor: The average rebate paid to a family is around \$2,100.

Ms Caldwell: The number of families who were receiving CCR in 2010-11 was 745,000. Again, that will vary over the year, but that is the annual figure. I am sure we will be able to give you a split between maximum rate and less than maximum rate.

Senator BACK: Do you have any indicator at all of how many families you believe are eligible to claim but have not done so? How would you arrive at that sort of conclusion?

Ms Taylor: Exactly.

Ms Paul: How would you know?

Senator BACK: I suppose you would have some understanding of the number of families with children of an eligible age.

Ms Taylor: We do, and that was the reason for part of the childcare campaign that took place earlier in several stages. One was to make sure that people were aware of their entitlement. The second part of that campaign of course was around the fortnightly payments and making sure people were aware of the option of moving to fortnightly payments. The earlier part of the campaign was to make sure that people were aware. It was a fairly comprehensive campaign. It is a bit early to say whether that has produced the rise that we would expect. I recall that around that time it was thought that up to 100,000 families may not be claiming, but I will have to take on notice as to what that is based on.

Senator BACK: Speaking of the campaign, could you take on notice what the cost of the advertising campaign has been to date and what measures you have in place to indicate whether there has been an increase in the numbers applying as a result of the advertising campaign?

Ms Taylor: I am happy to take that on notice.

Senator BACK: That was the rebate. Going to the childcare benefit, what was the number of families and what was the average amount received? The 2010-11 figures would be fine.

Ms Caldwell: I can give you the number of families. I will have to check whether we have the average in the room with us tonight. The number for 2010-11 was 841,000 families benefiting from the childcare rebate.

Senator BACK: And you can take the other figure for us on notice. Is it the case that, under the criteria, for a family to receive the benefit the child has to be immunised or have an exemption?

Ms Caldwell: That is correct. For clarity, the 841,000 was of course childcare benefit not the childcare rebate.

Senator BACK: That is correct. That was the question I asked you. I am interested to know—a bit of a carrot or a stick—what grounds a family would have to receive an exemption from having their child immunised in order to receive the benefit.

Ms Taylor: We will get the exact detail, but I understand there are medical grounds.

Senator BACK: So it would be a doctor's certificate?

Ms Taylor: Yes, so I understand. But I will check that.

Ms Caldwell: I am just checking that for us. The immunisation requirements are a longstanding arrangement.

Senator BACK: Of course.

Ms Caldwell: We will see if we can give you the exact list of exemptions now.

Ms Taylor: We will come back to that.

Senator BACK: I want to ask a question on universal access, the intention of then Prime Minister Rudd, I think, for every four-year-old to have access to 15 hours a week of preschool by 2013. Can you tell us whether you have current figures for the average hours of preschool for four-year-olds? If you cannot give that to us now on notice, could you do it by state and territory, please?

Ms Taylor: Yes, I can do that. At the moment in the 2010 reported performance Victoria has 12.8 hours, 16.1 if you include long day care; Queensland—

Ms Hosking: Fifty-five per cent of children who are in preschool are receiving the 15 hours per week, which was the target.

Senator BACK: Fifty-five per cent are?

Ms Hosking: That is right, and 17 hours is the average.

Senator BACK: Therefore, to meet the 2013 objective the question then becomes: how many additional preschool places will be needed? Again, if you would, provide that to us on notice broken down by state and territory as to where the additional challenge lies, please. Can you do that notice?

Ms Taylor: We can do that on notice.

Senator BACK: In your communications with state authorities have any indicated concerns about their ability to be able to meet the time frame that was set?

Ms Taylor: There has just been the 18-month review of the national partnership for universal access. The work done by Allen Consulting Group is available on the ministerial council website and it indicated that all states and territories would meet the universal access target. It raised particular issues in Queensland and Northern Territory because of the challenges they face in delivery in regional and particularly remote areas. However, those jurisdictions have indicated that they feel they are on track, even though they are facing challenges. Queensland particularly comes from an extremely low base in the preschool area. From the Allen Consulting Group work, those states and territories have indicated that they consider they will meet that.

Ms Paul: The Victorian minister has been claiming that they—

Senator BACK: Is the Victorian minister, Ms Lovell?

Ms Paul: Yes—may have difficulty meeting the target. The data that Allen's looked at suggests that Victoria is actually the closest to meeting the target. So we find it hard to understand that, but we will continue dialogue, as we have with her department.

Senator BACK: You are confident that there will not be a requirement to be forced to offer 15 hours per child and you are confident it will not lead to closure of regional kindergartens?

Ms Paul: When you look at the numbers, Victoria is the closest to being able to meet the target and some of the other states like Queensland, which started way down, are saying to us that they will meet the target. It seems hard to understand how Victoria could not meet it.

Senator BACK: You are confident that the concern expressed by Victoria that the 15 hours a week for four-year-olds will take places away from successful three-year-old programs is not going to happen either in Victoria or elsewhere?

Ms Paul: Yes. We dispute that claim on the basis of the numbers in front of us that they are starting from the highest base in the country.

Ms Taylor: In addition, there is a considerable amount of funding that is going to the states and territories to assist and meet the universal access. In Victoria's case, it is \$210 million. That amount of money is to assist them and assist the services with infrastructure and workforce. From our examination currently of the Victorian situation, we would not consider either that three-year-olds would be displaced or that they will not meet the target. Regarding your phrasing of 'so services will close', this is not a regulatory imposition. There is no penalty for not meeting it.

Senator BACK: So the state would not have to pay funds back to the federal government if they do meet it?

Ms Taylor: I was talking about for a particular service.

Senator BACK: I see.

Ms Taylor: You were suggesting services would close. Services will not be forced to close. It is an agreement with the state government.

Senator McKENZIE: As a Victorian, have you received any information about Barwon Heads kindergarten?

Ms Taylor: Not that I am aware of.

Senator McKENZIE: Let me go back one step. Regarding the \$210 million that has been provided to the state government for workplace and infrastructure needs, and getting the hours up—and I am particularly concerned about the regional areas in Victoria—how much does it cost to build a new kindergarten?

Ms Taylor: It depends.

Senator McKENZIE: I recognise there would be a ballpark, minimum figure. I remember being president of a kindergarten many years ago. We built a new kindergarten. They were quite expensive things. I guess the issue is—and I do not know whether you are aware of it, but I am hoping you are—that in regional areas you do not have enough space to run the number of sessions you need for both three-year-olds and four-year-olds so that four-year-old children can have their 15 hours a week. People are obviously having to build more space. That is actually the issue. I am not confident that the \$210 million will be enough to build all the space that is required.

Ms Paul: We are familiar with the arguments from Victoria about infrastructure costs. Victoria has been mounting those arguments for some time. We are not entirely convinced by

them because the numbers continue to suggest that Victoria is starting off a very high base. I should say that we do sit down with our equivalent Victorian officials and work through these things. The Allen Consulting Group also worked through these things and found that the targets were achievable for every state. From our perspective—without going into all of the detail of it—because Victoria is starting off a high base you are not necessarily talking about a whole new infrastructure build. You are talking about a marginal increase on an already reasonably high provision. I appreciate what you are saying. We have a disagreement with Victoria. We do not think it is as widespread as Victoria claims in terms of the need for new infrastructure because of the high base.

Senator McKENZIE: My suggestion is that it has sort of plateaued because you need that next step of infrastructure to be able to grow the hours. I think it is particular to specific spaces within Victoria rather than the state as a whole.

Ms Paul: Of course there would be different needs in different regions. I understand what you are saying. We just do not think that it adds up to the claim for infrastructure funding that Victoria is putting out there, and the Allen Consulting Group did not either in terms of giving all governments an assessment of whether these things were achievable.

Senator McKENZIE: I have a final question on this. Of the \$210 million available for Victoria, at what point does that not stay on the table in a relationship to achieving the hours? Is it there to be used in an effort to try to get the hours?

Ms Taylor: This is part of a COAG national partnership. We work with Victoria as we do with all states, and payments are made based on achieving the milestones. To date, states have achieved the milestones. Should a state not achieve a milestone, we would want to have a discussion with them about what steps they were putting in place to achieve that. For example, we have had discussions with Victoria and other states about the sorts of flexibilities that are there in delivering the 15 hours. It does not have to be 15 hours a week. It actually can be 600 hours in a year, which does make a difference and makes a difference for regional areas. The way in which you deliver it could be two days in one week and three days the next and then reverse that in different towns. They are the sorts of things that we would want to have a discussion with states and territories about before we would say that there would be no milestone payment or part of a milestone payment, as we do with all states and territories when they deliver their national reports.

Senator BACK: I go to the My Child website. We have had reports from some providers of frustration that the vacancy data is inaccurate. Obviously parents rely on it. Has the department received reports surrounding inaccuracies? How frequently do you collect data from the centres to test accuracy or otherwise?

Ms Taylor: The vacancy data is put on there by the services. So the accuracy is as good as the information that the services give us. I think they lodge their data by Friday night every week—

Mr Kimber: That is right.

Ms Taylor: so there is the possibility that by Monday morning or Monday afternoon the data is out of date. The majority of services report their data. Recently we have been undertaking some work with the services to make sure that they regularly report their vacancy

data. We are putting in place methods to talk with the services about reporting data and doing it on a regular basis. But it is a requirement that they report their vacancy data.

Senator BACK: Your officers do or do not receive this feedback from parents?

Ms Taylor: I do not know that we have received that specifically from parents. No, we have not received that.

Senator BACK: On occasional care funding, could you provide for us a breakdown of the federal funding to each of the states and territories for the provision of occasional care during 2010-11? Perhaps taking that on notice would be good.

Ms Taylor: Yes, certainly.

Senator BACK: And what proportion of the program was made up from federal funding? Is that a set figure?

Ms Taylor: I will give that to you on notice, Senator. That is for general occasional care?

Senator BACK: Yes. At the same time, could you advise us of the number of centres funded in each state and the number of children, if that is possible.

Chair, I have some questions on paid parental leave that I can place on notice, if that would be okay. I would like to go to long day care and ask for the number of long day care centres that currently are supported and the number of children in them.

Ms Taylor: For the December quarter 2010, in long day care there were 568,980 children, which was 456,950 families using 5,991 long day care services.

Senator BACK: Would you have the break-up of children under the age of two years and under the age of six months, or is that something you would have to provide to us on notice?

Ms Taylor: I will take that on notice.

Senator BACK: And would you be able to tell us the average number of hours that a child spends in long day care? If you are able to do it based on those two age groups—under the age of two and under the age of six months—in a typical week, that would be good.

Ms Taylor: Certainly.

Mr Kimber: On long day care average numbers of hours, it is 26. We do not have that detail broken down by age group, though.

Senator BACK: Is there a high incidence of change in ownership of long day care centres, or is it stable?

Ms Caldwell: It is largely stable. There are always some changes in the market.

Senator BACK: They would have to report those to you, wouldn't they?

Ms Caldwell: That is correct.

Senator BACK: So it would be good to know that figure for the last financial year, if you could provide it. On family day care, can I ask you either now or on notice for the figures you may have for children cared for in the family day care sector.

Ms Taylor: Certainly. For family day care and in-home care in the December quarter 2010 there were 108,200 children, which was 73,820 families using 400 family day care or in-home care services.

Senator BACK: That is family and in-home care combined?

Ms Taylor: Yes.

Senator BACK: You are allocating excess in-home care places to existing providers at the moment; is that correct?

Ms Taylor: Consideration is being given to allocating excess in-home care places, yes.

Senator BACK: Great. Also on notice would you tell us the total cost to the department of in-home care last year? That takes me to the final area on which I want to ask questions.

Ms Taylor: We are taking some on notice in occasional care but I can tell you that, in the December quarter 2010, 7,300 children and 5,980 families were using 86 occasional care services. We will get the rest of the information about the dollar amounts for you.

Senator BACK: Occasional care?

Ms Hosking: I can give you the figures for the expenditure on in-home care—

Senator BACK: Just before you do, I am sorry, Ms Hosking. Ms Taylor, you were giving us figures on occasional care?

Ms Taylor: For occasional care in the December quarter there were 7,300 children—

Senator BACK: And 5,980 families and 86 facilities.

Ms Taylor: That is right.

Senator BACK: So now we are to go back to a figure, Ms Hosking, please?

Ms Hosking: I was going to say that the expenditure on in-home care in 2010-11 was just over \$5 million.

Senator BACK: Thank you for that. I want to finish up with the national quality framework. You are finalising, I think, a new regulatory system and a new national body to oversee the system?

Ms Taylor: Yes.

Senator BACK: How many people in the department are or have been working on finalising the regulations?

Ms Taylor: It is under a national partnership with the states and territories as well, so there have been people within our department working on it but there have also been people in every state and territory jurisdiction working on developing the national regulations. Victoria has had the lead on drafting the legislation and the regulations, so there is quite a considerable effort going in there. There have been various working groups of the Early Childhood Development Working Group, which represents all states and territories in the Commonwealth, working on it too. If you want the numbers of staff within the department, I can get that for you.

Senator BACK: Based on that, it would be a guesstimate.

Ms Taylor: Yes. I will take that question on notice.

Senator BACK: My next question was on the number of hours spent writing the regulations, and I think you might come back with a relatively rude answer if I were to pursue that.

Senator Chris Evans: I can give that to you now, Senator, if you want, to save you the research.

Ms Taylor: I would not be able to estimate and, of course, Victoria is the main drafter.

Senator BACK: Sure, but you might be able to tell me how many submissions were received by the department in relation to the draft regulations.

Ms Taylor: There were just over 600 submissions.

Senator BACK: I understand the regulations have been downsized by about half?

Ms Taylor: They have been streamlined. The draft was released earlier for public comment. The final set of regulations was in response to those submissions and stakeholder feedback, and the regulations were streamlined to make them easier to use.

Senator BACK: Should we take that as being complaints from people making submissions with regard to the draft regulations, or does it just mean improved draftsmanship?

Ms Taylor: It has been improved draftsmanship, I would say, in the main. The submissions and our stakeholder reference group have been extremely positive about the regulations. Some of that was removing duplication. Once we had reordered the way that the regulations work to make them easier to read, we removed a lot of duplication from the original draft regulations.

Senator BACK: When do you propose they will be released as a final document?

Mr De Silva: The final regulations were approved and published on Friday last.

Senator BACK: They do not have to come before the parliament?

Ms Taylor: They are not Commonwealth regulations.

Senator BACK: Is it a fact that each childcare centre will be receiving only one hard copy? Can it be downloaded off the internet?

Ms Taylor: Yes, it can be. It is downloaded from the net. That was the initial way that information was going to get out. In response to our stakeholder reference group, the Commonwealth has put in an additional \$2 million to ensure that every service has a hard copy, and that was in response to the feedback from stakeholders reference group, as I said.

Senator BACK: In terms of implementation, I think that Minister Ellis recently made the statement that there would be time to implement the changes required under the framework. What is that time frame?

Ms Taylor: Senator, the regulations come into force on 1 January. However what comes in at that time is only the first part. There is a staggered period of time for things like ratios—child to teacher, or child to worker. I can take that on notice and go through it for the years between now and 2016 and 2020. If you want a snapshot we can do that, otherwise I am happy to take notice.

Senator BACK: Did you have representatives in attendance at a childcare summit in Lismore recently? Was the department represented there?

Ms Taylor: Not that I am aware of.

Mr De Silva: I do not think so.

Senator BACK: Clearly, I was not there! The report to me says that a recent childcare summit in Lismore heard reports about the industry being in turmoil with 15,000 leaving the profession each year. Given this high turnover, the question then becomes: what action is the

department taking to ensure that the framework does not deter people? Are these concerns that you are aware and are addressing?

Ms Taylor: I am aware of the report that came out of the Lismore summit, but does not match with the data we have from the survey of the numbers who are leaving the sector so I would not agree that there are large numbers leaving the sector. In relation to a workforce strategy—

Senator BACK: Before you go on, is the survey publicly available, or can it be made available to the committee?

Ms Taylor: Yes, Senator.

Senator BACK: So you would obviously have turnover figures from that survey?

Ms Taylor: Yes.

Senator BACK: From the survey, would you also be able to get some indication of how many people in early childhood services have a relevant teaching qualification?

Ms Taylor: Yes, we have that and I will give that to you. It is for teaching qualifications and, as well, the vocational, education and training qualifications.

Mr De Silva: There are 69.8 per cent of staff who have an early childhood related qualification, of which 14 per cent have a bachelor degree or above.

Senator BACK: And the balance would have Certificate III—

Mr De Silva: Yes.

Senator BACK: Turning then to access for isolated children, the Access to Early Childhood Education program which aims, as we know, to deliver 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year—and we have been through this. The Isolated Children's Parents Association states that the government needs to be 'flexible with the funding' of various types, and I think that they have proposed models. Could you tell me, firstly, are you aware of the ICPA's concerns and, secondly, if you are, what are you doing to address their special needs?

Ms Hosking: Yes, we are aware of their concerns. They relate to a program that is targeted at schools and therefore is largely being handled by the school outcome within the department. We are particularly aware of those concerns about whether that payment should be extended to preschool or kindergarten students. The general view on how assistance should be provided to those children is that we are providing a significant amount of money to the state and territory governments and that, given that we are doing that, we believe that is the appropriate way to address access for isolated children, to achieve access to preschool and kindergarten.

Senator BACK: But do you exercise any influence over states and territories to make sure that flows on to where you allocate it to be needed?

Ms Hosking: Each state and territory has developed a bilateral plan which explains how they are going to deliver them universal access. It is universal access and they must achieve it for all the children in their area and we do require them to provide twice-a-year reporting on how they are going about achieving the things.

Senator BACK: Is that information available?

Ms Hosking: Yes. Annual reports are published when they are accepted and that information can be provided.

Senator BACK: Thank you. I refer to Indigenous children child care. In 2005 \$2.1 million was provided for childcare centres on the APY Lands. What action has the department taken to speed up progress in building these centres? Can you give me a snapshot as to where we are?

Ms Taylor: I can.

Senator BACK: Has this been covered earlier in the day in response to questions from Senator Scullion?

Ms Paul: No.

Ms Taylor: We have been advised that completion and handover of the two centres, at Amata and Indulkana, is expected in mid to late November. The key remaining site works to be conducted go to things like fencing and connecting up communications systems.

Senator BACK: So services and things.

Ms Taylor: Yes. Basically those two centres are complete and handover will occur very, very shortly. We are expecting them, as I say, to be completed and running in mid to late November.

Senator BACK: So as close as that. I wonder if you could also tell us—if not now then on notice—the number of childcare educators in Indigenous communities who have got either certificate III or degree qualifications in early childhood. Is that information that we could get?

Ms Taylor: I can take it on notice but I am not sure that we would have that information.

Senator BACK: It would be very interesting. Also, do you have the number of children currently attending the Wadeye outside school hours care project, which is funded by the federal government?

Ms Hosking: We do not have it for the outside school hours care project. We do have it in relation to the integrated centre there.

Senator BACK: Is it that you do not have it and someone else does?

Ms Hosking: We do have it and we can provide it on notice.

Senator BACK: Good, and at the same time if you would provide us with the number of staff in and the number of enrolments currently for Indigenous childcare centres. I do thank you for your indulgence given my ignorance of this area. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: That concludes the estimates hearings. I thank Ms Paul and officers, the minister, the senate officers and Broadcasting and all the others involved.

Committee adjourned at 22:13