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Wednesday, 22 September 2021

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

Division 25: Education, \$5 067 884 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr T.J. Healy, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Education and Training.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General.

Mr J. Bell, Deputy Director General.

Ms M. Sands, Deputy Director General, Schools.

Mr J.T. Peckitt, Deputy Director General, Education Business Services.

Mr M. Clery, Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Ms A.M. Brown, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Ms R.B. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Mr A. Blagaich, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Mr D. Stewart, Executive Director, Workforce.

Mrs P. Beamish-Burton, Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the parliamentary secretary to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the parliamentary secretary's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a parliamentary secretary asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Good morning to everyone. Can I ask that when people respond, they get close to and use the microphone, because last night in the Legislative Council we had people just sitting back talking and it was quite hard to pick up. I would appreciate that. My first question refers to page 363 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Towards the bottom of the page under "Election Commitments", there is the line-item "Expanding School Chaplaincy Services", which shows a \$7.5 million increase in funding over the forward estimates. Can the minister explain—I will call the parliamentary secretary "minister" today, if he likes!

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member for Roe can call me what he likes!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister explain this large increase in funding and where the extra services will be allocated?

Mr T.J. HEALY: First of all, I thank the member for Roe for the Dorothy Dixier at the beginning of today's proceedings! The program the member spoke about is one that I am particularly proud of—that is, the expansion of the school chaplaincy program. As a school teacher myself, I can tell the member that chaplains are wonderful. They serve an incredible role in our schools. In answer to the member, in short, a number of chaplains are employed in our 800-plus schools across the state. The short answer to the member's question is that the programs have always been available to all schools. The expansion of the program will allow schools that could not access a chaplain beforehand to access one now.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With approximately a \$7.5 million increase in funding over the forward estimates, how many extra chaplains will come into the mix over that period?

Mr T.J. HEALY: In 2020, 654 schools accessed chaplaincy services. There are 820-ish schools overall. We expect that other schools will now be able to access those services. In 2021, the state government committed an additional \$21.8 million. As we have said, the chaplaincy services are in the forward estimates over the 2020 to 2024 school years, allowing all schools now to access them.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the parliamentary secretary explain the criteria for chaplaincy appointments? I am sure he is aware of quite a bit of controversy over time about the qualifications et cetera of chaplains. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the criteria for chaplain appointments?

Mr T.J. HEALY: First of all, I am advised the number the member for Roe was seeking in his previous question about the annual increase was 107 additional chaplains. Regarding the member's question about qualifications for chaplains, I will pass to executive director Martin Clery.

Mr M. Clery: Chaplains are purchased by schools using a panel of providers available to them. It is not a mandatory panel. Schools can procure a chaplaincy service from beyond that panel if they wish. The buyer's guide for procuring service from that panel is that a chaplain is defined as someone of faith, and there are also some qualifications they need related to the role.

[9.10 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the parliamentary secretary have any concerns about the fact that some chaplains might slip through the cracks and may not have the appropriate skills to provide advice to our students in the school system?

Mr T.J. HEALY: First of all, to address the "slipping through the cracks" and qualifications, I have worked with some incredible chaplains—I am sure the member has in his schools as well—and I would not claim any of them to have fallen through the cracks. I think the member might be slightly seeking to impugn the reputation of our fantastic chaplains, which I completely challenge. Chaplains are required to undertake professional learning throughout their role. They are subject to working with children checks and there is a training and qualification requirement that a number of the providers have as well. YouthCARE, OnPsych and others have a very strong system that they regulate and we do as well. I have not found examples of people slipping through the cracks or providing poor advice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is what I wanted some clarity over. Every chaplain who is employed in the school system has completed a working with children check and the qualification, as the parliamentary secretary said, is that they must be a person of faith. That is my question. I want to make sure that every single chaplain has had a working with children check and that they are suitably qualified to give advice in the school system.

Mr T.J. HEALY: As for the first part of the member's question, schools have a choice about who they employ as chaplains. OnPsych, YouthCARE and Scripture Union provide the rules and requirements for them regarding their qualifications. Further, the contract requires them to have a working with children check. No-one would not go through that process as is normal for the majority of schools.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to this line of questioning and the boost for chaplaincy services, the parliamentary secretary referred to the fact that it will provide for schools that do not currently have chaplains. Does this funding also provide for schools that have chaplains but require them for additional days, given the significant pressures that we are experiencing?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The program is designed to assist schools that do not have access. They will be the first focus of the program. In further answer to the member's question, it really depends on demand. A school might be seeking to add further chaplaincy services, but the priority would be first to those schools that could not access them before.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 363 of budget paper No 2 and the line item "Increase in School Psychologists", which is, obviously, a welcome addition. Can the parliamentary secretary explain how many of these extra psychologists will be placed in regional schools and which schools they will be placed in?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I concur, this is a fantastic addition to regional and metropolitan schools. The election commitment is for an incremental increase in the number of public school psychologists, commencing with 40 additional FTE in 2022, rising to a total of 100 by 2025. Every regional and metropolitan school will have access to a psychologist. There is a weighting towards regional schools. As the member knows, this is a government that greatly supports regional education and services. I think the member will find that the weighting is in addition.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can understand maybe how a larger regional senior high school would have perhaps more access, but can the parliamentary secretary explain to me how outlying smaller district high schools and the like will access these extra school psychologists?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The funding is in two parts. The funding formula set is weighted towards those regional and smaller schools. The second part is that if a school requires further services regarding a critical incident, department staff are immediately allocated. The formula for those people who are based at the school is on a more permanent basis. If there were a critical incident at a school, such as there was recently, extra staff would be immediately deployed to assist in that critical incident. They would not necessarily stay there on a permanent basis, but they would be allocated as per the critical incident.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the reasoning behind the relatively smaller amount in 2021–22 compared with the forward estimates for the next financial year when the need for this service is so urgent?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Just to clarify, the member for Vasse is talking about the line item “Increase in School Psychologists”, that says it is going from \$3 068 000 to \$7 691 000 and beyond? Is that the basis for the member’s question?

Ms L. METTAM: That is right.

[9.20 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: Member for Vasse, thank you for the question. The clarity and the explanation for that is this relates to the financial year, and the school academic year is basically half a calendar year. The additional funding continues because it is funded for the full year after that. Therefore, it is funded for a partial year. We are absolutely delivering on our important election commitment.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the parliamentary secretary clarify how many days a week these psychologists will be operating at each of the schools?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The allocation depends on the situation based on critical incidents and whether they need to be deployed to a different area. It really depends on that weighting and allocation.

Ms L. METTAM: Speaking from a local point of view, will consideration be given to electorates such as Vasse that have seen an increase in youth suicides or presentations at the local hospital regarding youth mental health issues? We are experiencing significant shortages of psychologists across the board. How do those considerations feed into decisions on the welcome boost to school psychologist resourcing in my area and other areas?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Thank you for the question, member for Vasse. As we discussed before, the formula is weighted towards regional communities. When there are critical issues, the deployment of staff towards those areas is the way that we would best address that. When resources need to be deployed, that is definitely our priority. Regarding the member’s other matter on whether we give consideration to other electorates, no; we do not operate on an electorate model. We operate on what regional communities need. We would not necessarily look at the Vasse electorate, but we would look at the needs of the member’s community without that political consideration. Again, we give priority to the needs of our regional communities.

Regarding the member’s question about whether those staff will work with hospitals, every school works with the community around it to do the best it can to support the students. I think the member’s question was about young people presenting at hospitals. The staff connect and works together as best they can, knowing that young people have complex and diverse personal issues. We are hoping that the increase in staffing will move this in a better direction. I might have some further comments in a moment. Sorry, chair.

Furthermore, member for Vasse, the Department of Education acknowledges the strong association between positive student mental health and wellbeing with learning. Schools have an important role to play in promoting wellbeing through connected, inclusive and culturally safe school communities, teaching mental health literacy, mental health prevention and helping to connect students with more acute needs with specialists and clinical services. All public schools have access to school psychologists whom are well-placed to respond to student wellbeing needs in schools. Here is some meat for the member. In 2021, 377.7 school psychologist FTEs were employed across the public school system, which was an increase from the previous year. In 2021, the state government made a commitment of \$42.2 million to employ more than 100 additional school psychologists over the next four years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thought I heard the parliamentary secretary say that there would be only an extra four FTEs in the next year. Can he confirm how the total number of school psychologist FTEs has changed since 2017 on a yearly basis?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Thank you very much, member for Roe. First, it was not four; it was 40. To correct the parliamentary record, it was not an increase of four FTEs; it was an increase of 40. I can definitely give the member figures for new FTE psychologists in public schools. In 2022, it will be 47. In 2023, it will be 70. In 2024, it will be 93. In 2025, it will be 117.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry; what was the number for 2017?

Mr T.J. HEALY: What I just read out was not the total number of FTEs; it was the additional number of FTEs. In 2022, the additional FTEs will be 47. In 2023, there will be an additional 70. In 2024, there will be an additional 93. In 2025, there will be an additional 117. I might have some more information in a moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, parliamentary secretary. I have a further question.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I might just predict what the member’s next question will be. The member asked about FTE numbers in 2017. There were 331.2 in 2017; there were 345.4 in 2018; there were 355.7 in 2019; and there were 362.7 in 2020.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Considering the shortage of psychologists throughout the mental health system, does the parliamentary secretary envisage any issues in being able to obtain the right qualified people?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Thank you very much for the question, member for Roe. No; we do not anticipate a shortage. We have a very strong number of people who are interested in the roles. Because of Mark McGowan and all the great work that has happened over the last 18 months, and although there are still challenges across the community in a booming Western Australia, we have a lot of people who are very much interested in filling these roles. There are a lot of people who want to help the students. I will answer the comment on graduate supply as well. The Minister for Education and Training has been meeting with the vice chancellors of universities to talk about the fact that we want people to continue training and to prepare a pipeline of workers because that is the longer-term plan. We will always be committed to the important element of mental health for young people across Western Australia.

[9.30 am]

Ms L. METTAM: My understanding is that the waiting list to see a psychologist in the regions is extraordinarily long. It can be as long as 12 months. That is not for school psychologists; it is to see a psychologist as perhaps referred by a doctor. I query the comment that the parliamentary secretary has made that it will be easy to attain these additional psychologists and about the good work Mark McGowan has done in this area.

Mr T.J. HEALY: First of all, I did not say it would be easy to find all those people and I did not say that Mark McGowan has done a great job. I said Mark McGowan has done a great job in keeping us all safe and the Western Australian economy booming. I think for what the member is talking about, she might have a line item to ask the Minister for Health about within a different division for the sourcing and provision of clinical psychologists. We are talking about educational psychologists, who have different roles. I did not say it would be easy to find the people. I said we have a number of people who are very interested in the roles.

Our trajectory for the calendar year for additional FTE for school psychologists was 40, to give the member a comparison. A cross-sectoral working party has been established with local universities, as I said, to support graduate supply to meet the election commitments that were made. As I said, our target was 40 FTE. We had 43 final year Master of Professional Psychology students commence placement in public schools in term 2 of 2021, with 14 of them placed in rural communities. As I said, the department currently employs 378.02 FTE school psychologists, which is already an increase of approximately 6.5 FTE since the election.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the role of school psychologists in the bullying space? As shadow education minister, I get a lot of inquiries in my office from parents and other people who talk about bullying issues, and say that bullying has not been addressed by the school. Can the parliamentary secretary tell me what the role of a psychologist is in relation to bullying?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will ask for clarification. Is the member suggesting that school psychologists should be disciplining about bullying? Can the member clarify his question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am just asking what the role of school psychologists is in dealing with children who have been bullied. Do they have a role, or is bullying handled by school administrators? Can the parliamentary secretary clarify that for me?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Bullying and all aspects of the diverse experience of young people in schools definitely come to the attention of school psychologists, but it is of interest to all in the school community to ensure there is support for young people. First of all, it is not the sole role of the school psychologist to address bullying. I think the member will find that in a number of schools, the student services team is largely responsible. There are roles for principals, teachers, parents, families, students and student leaders in addition to the student services teams that exist in most schools. That involves student services team leaders and the school psychologists within the team. They address the diverse needs at the local level.

Further to that, I am also advised that we obviously acknowledge that bullying is definitely a significant issue that unfortunately takes place. We expect every school to have a safe and supportive, respectful and positive learning environment. We acknowledge that bullying behaviour can happen at schools. It can also happen online, through social media and other online platforms. One of the things that school psychologists, as part of a student services team, have access to is that the department is represented on the Safe and Supportive Schools Communities Working Group, or SSSC, with the Australian Education Council. They are involved with the national website, "Bullying. No Way!". They promote the work of the eSafety Commissioner. We have recently launched the eSafety *Best practice framework for online safety education*. Further, there is a range of evidence-based social and emotional learning programs. I will mention three of them that I think the member will find of interest: Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, or PATHS; Aussie Optimism; and Friendly Schools Plus.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Going along that same line talking about bullying and harassment, does the parliamentary secretary have a comment to make on the recent scenario in which perpetrators of bullying and sexual harassment were placed back in the same school? The children who have been harassed are then faced with dealing with these perpetrators inside the school where it has happened.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I think the member is on a different line item. I think it is a valid question but he might want to ask it for a different line item if he has finished the school psychologists part of the question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can ask at a different line item, if the parliamentary secretary would like.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes, if that is okay; just so we can refer to that part.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the heading “Partnering with Families, Communities and Agencies to Support the Educational Engagement of Every Student” on page 364. Paragraph 4 reads —

Services for students needing extra support, including school psychologists and alternative learning settings will continue to be a priority.

In some cases, alternative learning settings do not seem to be provided and some perpetrators of sexual harassment and the like are being put back into the same school as their victims, who then have to front-up to school every day and face them. I want the parliamentary secretary’s comments on that.

[9.40 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will answer the first part of the member for Roe’s question; the member may seek to add a follow-up question. I want to talk about the alternative learning settings program. It is one of several supports for students with complex and challenging behaviours. I think that is part of what the member was asking about. The program aims to address a gap in service for students who have engaged in violence against others in school or are very physically aggressive but have the capacity to re-establish positive behaviour and transition back to school or other education placements with the appropriate intervention and support. I am very glad that the member mentioned the 2020–21 state government election commitment to establish eight additional alternative learning setting sites over a two-year period. They will allow us to better deal with those diverse issues when they arise.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I welcome any alternative learning settings for these students, but I am concerned about the safety of victims. Why does it appear that the focus is on bringing the perpetrator back to potentially the same learning setting rather than in all cases protecting the victim? Victims are having to face up to school every day potentially with the perpetrator in the background.

Mr T.J. HEALY: The state government has implemented strong measures to protect all students to ensure community confidence that schools are as safe as possible. The Department of Education, the Western Australia Police Force and the Departments of Communities and Justice have developed a formalised multi-agency approach to manage cases in which young people have been charged with harmful sexual behaviours. The multi-agency protocol for education options for young people charged with harmful sexual behaviours provides for these four agencies to cooperate and lawfully share information in the best interests of all students and staff. That protocol is implemented across all public and non-government schools.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the real emphasis now on protecting the victim or on putting the perpetrator back into potentially the same school—business as usual?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The emphasis has always been on protecting all students and ensuring young people have access to the education they are entitled to. First, we always protect the victim. Schools work with communities and families to find the best way to do that. I have discussed alternative learning settings; there are also opportunities for the alleged offender—I will call the student that—to obtain their education path in a different location, but that is not always possible. As I am sure the member is aware, everyone also has a right to education. First, we protect the victim. Secondly, we ensure that everyone has an education path available to them. It is important that we do not politicise this. A risk management plan is always developed in these circumstances, and it is really important that the department has an opportunity to work with the families and schools involved to find the best risk management plan to address the victim, the alleged offender and all those people affected. A number of students and families are affected by these incidents, especially in regional communities where everyone knows everyone.

There are not always options, but I will go through a couple of the things that schools can do logistically when there is no opportunity to provide a separate site for the alleged offender, or offender if they have been convicted. There is not always an opportunity for separate campuses or locations, but I will place on the record a couple of things that schools can do logistically to manage the situation and meet all the criteria. The first is in terms of school layout and timetabling. There is travel between home and school, with parents, families and communities providing transport to and from school. In regional areas, seating arrangements on school buses can be explored. Parents can be available at the entry to and exit from a school site and parents can collect students from the administration building every day. Staff can escort students during transition between classes. At break times, students can be encouraged, and are usually obliged, to sit in different restricted or prearranged areas with same-aged students. The school can ensure that student access to toilets is managed in a way that meets all the criteria. There may be opportunities within class settings.

This all depends on the size of the school, the community and services available. Sometimes things are more complex in a much smaller school. There are a number of other things that I can go through, but, overall, the key thing I want to re-emphasise is that we want to protect the victim. That is what schools do their best to do. If there is not another location for the offender to go to, in terms of the education opportunities available, we maintain that all those people have a right to education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The parliamentary secretary is saying that they can potentially be on the same school bus, with a bus driver who has no ability to supervise the students on the bus. I do not think it meets the pub test with the public that we have to bend over backwards to try to allocate facilities for the perpetrator when at all cost we should be protecting the victim. Firstly, how many examples are there of the perpetrator and victim being on the same school bus? Secondly, at the moment, how many schools still have the perpetrator and the victim at the same school?

The CHAIR: Is that two questions, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes. Thank you.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Bus seating is one of the many tools available to a school. School bus services are sometimes the only way that students can get school. They are a key part of school infrastructure, whether a school is in metropolitan Perth or regional Western Australia. First of all, school bus seating may be something that has to be explored. Like I said, there are a number of other options to explore first. It is important that it is always part of one of the tools available. There are multiple things that the school community will explore with the families of all parties. If it was envisaged that there were no other transport options or scenarios, in those examples a risk management plan would be discussed with the families of all affected. All parties would be part of that discussion. There is always a risk management plan and there are potentially opportunities to use different buses and options about other transport, but this is an extreme example where that cannot be done.

[9.50 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The second part of my question was: can the parliamentary secretary give me the number of public schools where the perpetrator and the victim are at the same school together?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member can put that question on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the parliamentary secretary provide that as supplementary information?

Mr T.J. HEALY: No. I am happy for the member to put the question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: On page 364 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, the third significant issue impacting the agency is furthering the access of Aboriginal learners. Can the parliamentary secretary provide a breakdown of the total amount of funding that is allocated across the forward estimates to deliver the KindiLink program and the Kimberley Schools Project KindiLink program?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the question. KindiLink is jointly planned and delivered by early childhood teachers and Aboriginal and Islander education officers, and provides play and learn sessions for Aboriginal children and their parents or carers. From 2018 to 2021, KindiLink has had 38 sites that are funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, the expenditure for which was \$2.459 million in 2020–21. KindiLink has 17 sites that are funded through the department's Kimberley Schools Project.

Ms L. METTAM: How many students are currently participating in the KindiLink program and the Kimberley Schools Project KindiLink program?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the follow-up question. On 1 September, 2021, approximately 1 300 children and 1 200 adults participated in a KindiLink program, which is provided at 38 sites throughout the state.

Ms L. METTAM: Are there any plans, or has the department identified a need, to expand the KindiLink program to include additional schools?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The funding and provision for that program is in the national agreement, which is currently being negotiated for its next hopeful phase.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the heading "COVID-19 Response" at the top of page 364 and the line item "Enhanced Cleaning for Schools". I notice that we have a budget estimate —

Mr T.J. HEALY: Sorry; is the member talking about the table?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Right at the top of the table under the heading "COVID-19 Response" is the line item "Enhanced Cleaning for Schools".

Mr T.J. HEALY: I have found it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We have a drop from \$41.5 million to \$18-odd million for this budget period, and in the forward estimates there is no allocation for that. People are saying that we need to live with COVID going forward. Can the parliamentary secretary explain to me why there is no funding for that at all in the forward estimates?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. I concur with him that I thought it was a very good addition for the McGowan government to provide additional cleaning staff during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow the schools to better address the cleaning requirements that we have all experienced over the last 18 months. The member is talking about the program to put extra cleaners into schools for a period of time. That was done on the advice of the Chief Health Officer. Again, one of the things that separates government members from opposition members is that we will always follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer on that. The Chief Health Officer's advice was that

we put in those additional cleaners. As I am sure the member is aware, Western Australia is not experiencing the same COVID scenarios as the rest of the nation and the rest of the world. A sunset clause for the funding for the school cleaners was based on the Chief Health Officer's advice on the additional allocation of FTE for cleaning.

The member's question was: why has the funding ended? It will end because Mark McGowan and Sue Ellery are doing great work in our schools and they are doing their best to keep COVID-19 out of WA, in short. However, we continue to have enhanced cleaning at schools. I think the member would agree that we all have a better understanding now of health conditions, of not being sick and of following the health advice and rules. The allocation of the funding has changed. I will leave it there. The member may have a follow-up question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In the next few weeks, does the parliamentary secretary foresee an extension of the vaccination program for ATAR students? Similarly, will there potentially be a vaccination program for the balance of our students in the following years?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will give the member the short answer, but he might want to find a different line item for that question. Currently we are talking about school cleaning allocations and the advice of the Chief Health Officer about maintaining enhanced cleaning at schools. The member would be aware that we have now allowed the newest young person category to walk into the vaccination clinics and get vaccinated. I think the member is asking a different question for a different line item. Does the member want to ask anything further about school cleaning? I have some figures and dollar amounts if he wants to come back to the vaccination program later.

[10.00 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If that is the case, in the next line item down, "Face Masks in Schools", I notice that we have no budget estimate for 2021–22.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Is this a new question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, this is a new question relating to page 364 and the next line item down, "Face Masks in Schools". Am I to take it that we are not expecting to use face masks again or do we have ample supply to last us through until what point?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. Following the Perth and Peel COVID lockdown in February 2021, a contingency supply of face masks was distributed to primary and secondary schools to provide a safe environment for schools and staff. I can further advise that one million masks have been supplied to schools. If schools have issues with supplying masks, they should contact our COVID support team; however, as far as we understand, schools are reporting to us that they are happy with the supply of masks that they have.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to page 364—right at the bottom and the sixth point, "Building the Capability of Principals, Teachers and Allied Professionals". This paragraph recognises the constant challenge of attracting teachers with the right skills to the right areas at the right time. I note that, according to the State School Teachers' Union of WA, approximately 25 per cent of teachers are leaving within five years of graduating. This paragraph refers to strategies. My question is: what is the strategy to retaining those teachers? I foresee a scenario in which we could go down the same path as the health system, in which we have a real shortage of staff.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe. The department has a range of strategies to increase the number of suitably qualified teachers applying for positions in public schools. This includes the Teach in WA program, with online marketing, career expos and presentations and a dedicated contact for teachers considering applying for positions, and a Leap program to retrain teachers into specialised secondary subjects. Retention strategies encourage staff to teach in regional or remote schools. The remote connection program allows staff to experience teaching in remote schools, and the Remote Teaching Service induction supports successful onboarding. I think that the member has close proximity to an existing teacher of the year in his electorate—Mrs Rundle—who I am sure can also give the member further advice as to great ideas. I believe that it is the 10-year anniversary of Mrs Rundle's Australian Teacher of the Year award.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct; it is the 10-year anniversary.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Congratulations. The supply of early childhood and primary teachers currently meets demand. The department will continue to work collaboratively with Western Australian universities and focus on maintaining the teacher workforce supply. To fill the gap in secondary teacher workforce supply and demand, we are increasing supply in a number of ways including Teach for Australia, the Public School Teaching Pathway program, Professional Practice Project, the Horizons program and mid-career pathways into workforce areas of need. The department has a centralised teacher staffing pool available to it with the potential to source teachers from other jurisdictions.

To answer the member's final question about what we are doing to stop teachers from leaving, I make the point that I was a teacher who left the workforce of the Department of Education, primarily because I had to come here to this Parliament to fix the education system that was broken by the member's government. I think that if we keep Mark McGowan and Hon Sue Ellery in, we are going to make sure that our schools are strong and people like me will not have to leave the workforce to come to Parliament.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure that the opposition will make a comeback and your teaching career will recommence at some stage.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Hear, hear!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the parliamentary secretary tell me how many professionals the department has been able to attract from other occupations? I would have thought that would be a bit of a challenge given the mining activity et cetera that is happening in the state. Has the department had any successes there? Does the department have any numbers?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe. I will talk about a program called Teach for Australia. Before I give the stats, I will say briefly that Teach for Australia is a brilliant program in which people who already have a qualification in another area can come into teaching and complete a Master of Teaching qualification over a shortened period so that they do not have to go to university for a longer period to do their training. I personally was against the program when it first began because I thought that it could not teach what needed to be taught for a classroom. Personally, I saw Teach for Australia at Southern River College, and every single TFA person adapted well to the classroom, classroom management strategies, and all the challenges of teaching in a school. They are actually brilliant. I would like to say on the parliamentary record that I am a convert of Teach for Australia.

There are multiple pathways to attract experienced, qualified people from other industries who may not have considered teaching as a career option in their first few years. I have to say, we have some amazing additional people who have enriched the department's workforce who probably would not have been able to access the opportunity to be a teacher without the Teach for Australia program. I will give the member some more information on Teach for Australia. As I said, it is an employment-based pathway to teaching for high-calibre graduates from fields other than teaching. Maybe the member and I would not have qualified. It is a two-year program that comprises online learning in an initial intensive program of six weeks, which covers one-quarter of a Master of Teaching, including the two-week practicum. It includes a two-year placement as an untrained teacher. There are additional intensive study programs during school holidays and other opportunities. There is support from academic mentors, in-school coaching and support from an experienced mentor teacher, and leadership and career coaching.

The final answer to the member's question is that since 2015, a total of 241 associates have commenced in public secondary schools, and I look forward to many more joining our ranks.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the parliamentary secretary. I will go on to a new question that is an extension of that matter. I refer to page 369 of the *Budget statements*, under "Regulation and Non-Government Sector Assistance". Down at the bottom of that table is the cost of regulatory services per teacher, and then, under "Explanation of Significant Movements", the third point states —

The 2021–22 Budget Target is lower than the 2020–21 Budget and 2020–21 Estimated Actual due to the lower forecast number of renewals for teacher registration.

That is setting off alarm bells with the concerns about the number of teachers being registered, as we talked about earlier. We referred to teacher registration earlier on. Does that concern the parliamentary secretary?

The CHAIR: Is that a question, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes. The question is: can the parliamentary secretary confirm that we are getting fewer teachers registered? That is the first part of the question.

[10.10 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: During the COVID pandemic, the government did a number of things to make life easier, with all the different stresses that teachers, families and everyone was experiencing. One of the things that the Department of Education did was push out the renewal requirement so that people did not have the stress of meeting that. As a person who has gone through the teacher registration process, I know it was one less thing for our teachers because they were focusing on many things, including preparation and support. One of the things that was a good idea—I am sure the member will agree—was pushing out those requirements so that the stress of dealing with COVID and teaching requirements did not also include Teacher Registration Board commitments.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Talking of the Teacher Registration Board, does the Minister for Education and Training have concerns with the way it is operating? I heard during the year that there was a situation in which teachers would send in their registration application and, at one point, the board sent back a notice saying that if it could not process the invoice on time, the teacher would be charged interest. Seriously, if the board is not efficient enough to process someone's application or invoice, why should a teacher suffer the consequence of that? Is the minister concerned about that?

The CHAIR: Is that the question, member for Roe?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Member for Roe, the line we are discussing is about teacher registration. I appreciate the member's anecdotal feedback.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have had it from several areas.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I was going to suggest that if the member thinks that there is a document that needs to be forwarded to the department for further query, he can certainly put a question on notice. But it does not really relate—I do not want to embarrass the member—to this particular line item. I think his larger query here might be that he has a concern about an anecdotal rumour that he may or may not have heard. Feel free to put it on notice and provide the document.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will find out where it came out in writing, so it will not be anecdotal.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am also informed that late payment fees were waived during the COVID pandemic.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to the registration of teachers, is the minister considering mandating vaccinations for teachers? Is that a consideration of the Minister for Education and Training and the state government?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse very much for the question. It is a new question. Can she direct me to the line item first, if that is okay?

Ms L. METTAM: It is on page 364 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Under the heading “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic”, paragraph 2 refers to ensuring that the response and planning for COVID-19 is current and that all public schools are well equipped, including implementing enhanced safety and cleaning regimes. We have already seen the government implement mandatory vaccinations in a number of areas in line with what is set out in paragraph 2 in relation to the COVID-19 response. Is it a current consideration of the Minister for Education and Training or the state government for teachers to be mandatorily vaccinated?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the question. She has not made it there entirely, but it was a good go. This is not that line item. It is in there if she finds it. She might want to google it; she could probably find it so that she can ask the question again. But I will answer it for her.

Ms L. METTAM: How kind!

Mr T.J. HEALY: Basically, we will act on health advice. We follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer. The member’s question is about mandatory vaccines for teaching staff. We will follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer. That is what we have always done. Again, I know that it is different from other regimes, but we will always follow the Chief Health Officer’s advice.

Ms L. METTAM: In considering the Chief Health Officers’ advice, will the government also consider the impact of teachers potentially leaving the profession or will it be based purely on the Chief Health Officer’s advice and just that advice?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse. We will follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer and consider it if that advice comes through.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to confirm, there will not be any consideration of the impact on teacher numbers; it will be purely a decision for the Chief Health Officer on mandatory vaccination?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member and I went to university together and we both have a Master of Public Policy. We do not have health qualifications. I cannot make a decision on the run and neither should she to say that we are going to make a decision here and now. We have to listen to the Chief Health Officer’s advice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 364 and the line item in the table for the “School Drug Education and Road Aware Program”. I see that there is no budget estimate for 2021–22 and going forward. A small amount reappears in 2023–24 and there is a slightly larger amount in 2024–25. Can I have an explanation of what is going on with this important program?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe very much for the question. The department provides a range of evidence-based and informed road safety and alcohol and other drugs education programs for young people from birth to 20 years of age and their parents and carers. Smart Steps is an early childhood road safety program for children up to eight years of age. The program guides parents and carers and early childhood educators to support children’s learning focused on safe road passengers, riders and pedestrians. The Keys4Life pre-driver education program, which I have seen myself—it is very popular in the member’s electorate and in my electorate—is a brilliant program for students in years 10 to 12, as well as for young adults attending non-mainstream education and training services. This program helps young people to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes about safer driving practices and risk-reduction strategies. The program introduces novice drivers to the licensing system and also delivers information sessions for parents about licensing and tips for being a safe driver. There is also Challenges and Choices, which is a resilience, road safety and AOD education program for teachers of students from kindy to year 9. There is Drug Talk, which is a prevention and education program for students in years 10 to 12. The program delivers professional learning to school staff to assist in the delivery of drug education. There is Wraparound, which is an early intervention program relating to student AOD use. There is the Changing Health Acting Together, or CHAT, initiative, which supports schools to adopt a whole-school approach to resilience, road safety and drug education. Here we come to the exciting numbers that the member is after. In 2020–21, this initiative supported 147 schools to develop and maintain whole-school plans, supporting resilience, road safety and AOD education. As I have already

said, school education programs are critical and very, very important. In January 2019, the School Drug Education and Road Aware program was transferred from Catholic Education Western Australia to the Department of Education, with a residual cash reserve transferred in May 2019. The Mental Health Commission and the Expenditure Review Committee have approved the carryover of \$1 million of the residual cash into 2020–21, and will use it to expand and evaluate the Wraparound early intervention program and to develop a new volatile substance use resource package for school leavers and school staff on how to manage these VSU incidents at school. I apologise that it has taken so long to get here, member for Roe: the increases in the forward estimates realigned the existing budget figures to the current grant agreement.

[10.20 am]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the line item “Covered Assembly Areas” under “Other School Facilities” on page 375 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Dunsborough Primary School is the only school in the district that does not have an enclosed undercover area—that is now a safety hazard—and the canteen is no longer fit for purpose and does not meet local health standards. During the election, WA Labor pledged \$25 000, leaving a balance of \$875 000. The P&C has resorted to asking parents for a levy to pay for the gap. Is it not reasonable for the government to allocate some of these funds, the \$7.7 million, for a school in desperate need?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the question about the covered area at Dunsborough Primary School. The Department of Education does not currently have a program of works to retrospectively extend the covered area due to increased student enrolments. I understand the covered area at Dunsborough Primary School is approximately 260 square metres, with roller doors currently fitted. Is that correct?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: If the school wants to fully enclose the undercover area to prevent wind and rain entering and improving the security, the school can work with the Department of Finance to get a quote or go direct to the market. Further to that, one thing I will also comment on is the McGowan government’s maintenance blitz at that school, which I think is very important to note. Dunsborough Primary School is a brilliant school that does some amazing work. There are often a number of things that schools need to prioritise, such as maintenance applications and other works that need to get done. In case the member was not aware, a number of things were allocated to Dunsborough Primary School in the maintenance blitz. There was \$285 000 allocated in the maintenance blitz, and delivery of the program was increased, I am sure, as a result of the member’s hard work and her very, very hardworking upper house regional members down there. The amount was increased to \$477 000. Does the member mind if I give her the detail of that?

Ms L. METTAM: No.

Mr T.J. HEALY: In phase 1, there was a maintenance allocation of \$62 400. In phase 2, there were toilet refreshments at \$176 000. There were classroom refreshments worth \$12 000. There were structural integrity repairs at \$7 940. There were shade structures and playgrounds worth \$20 000. There were electrical upgrades at \$4 842. In phase 3 there were additional facilities for EduCare out-of-school-hours care worth \$192 000. I reinforce what I said earlier: if the school wishes to pursue that as an option, it certainly can. The school can work with the Department of Finance to get a quote or go direct to the market.

Ms L. METTAM: To be fair, the school has been advocating and pushing for these funds for some time. It is not just that the weather comes into this area; there is an issue with birds. There is also a massive issue with the capacity of the school, with only a small cohort of the school being able to attend assemblies, which are important events. As I have stated, during the election campaign WA Labor pledged \$25 000 towards a \$900 000 construct. The P&C has had to resort to asking parents to pay a levy, which is pretty tough. Can I confirm that there is at least that small amount of \$25 000 in the budget for the undercover area?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse; she has beaten me to the point. I have already emphasised what she said. I want to commend her and her very, very hardworking upper house members for the South West Region, Hon Jackie Jarvis, MLC; Hon Sally Talbot, MLC; and Alannah MacTiernan, MLC. They obviously worked very closely with the member to ensure —

Ms L. METTAM: That is not true.

Mr T.J. HEALY: — that a commitment of \$25 000 will be allocated to Dunsborough Primary School for its undercover area upgrade. I will come back to the point the member made. Again, I commend the very, very hardworking members of the upper house down there —

Ms L. METTAM: Why is the government getting rid of regional members then?

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse!

Mr T.J. HEALY: — who have very hardworking electorate officers based in the regional areas. I come back to the point. We will definitely fulfil the election commitment to fund that amount to the school for the undercover area. If the school wants to further enclose that, the quotes for the works can be done through conversations with the department.

Ms L. METTAM: I will just highlight that the school will not be able to do much with \$25 000. The member pointed to regional members of the upper house, but there may —

The CHAIR: Is this a question, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: I am moving to a question. My next question relates to “Other School Facilities”, and the line-item “Administration Upgrade” on page 375 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I also refer to page 42 of budget paper No 3. I will ask a question about Cowaramup Primary School. Cowaramup is one of the fastest growing areas in the region. The primary school was built in 1923 and still has no permanent early childhood education facilities and the administration area urgently needs upgrading. Will funds be allocated out of the \$26 million for the ageing infrastructure at Cowaramup Primary School?

[10.30 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: Regarding the line item for administration upgrades—there was a separate question about education and career support facilities but because the member addressed the administration upgrade line item I can discuss the administration upgrade budget. In the out years, the allocation of those administration building upgrades has not yet been determined.

Ms L. METTAM: What opportunities will there be for schools such as Cowaramup Primary School to attain funding and how will they be assessed?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member asked about what opportunities there are. A school should ensure that its building condition report is up to date and submitted to the department so that it can assess the functionality of the space and make an assessment. Further, I am sure that if the member has a chance to be down that way, she should meet with the school and invite the region’s upper house members of Parliament to be part of that process. If the member gets a chance to visit Cowaramup Primary School, I am sure they would love to hear from her.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the parliamentary secretary suggesting that if the upper house members are able to visit the school, it will have a better chance of getting this important funding?

Mr T.J. HEALY: No, the member asked about what opportunities there were. As I said, the building condition report is key so that the department can assess that. The member asked for opportunities. I do not want her to think that there is not a role for the member to play as well.

Ms L. METTAM: The parliamentary secretary is suggesting that part of the opportunity lies with the school meeting with the upper house regional Labor members of Parliament? How does that relate?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member’s region is represented by six members of Parliament in the upper house and the member for Vasse as the local member of Parliament.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 364 of budget paper No 2 and Government Regional Officers’ Housing.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Looking at the table?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. Can the parliamentary secretary explain how this change in funding provides adequate housing for professional public sector officers when they are placed in regional positions?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The adjustment reflects the updated GROH expenses forecast based on the department’s property listing as at 31 January 2021.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The GROH program is a real concern in not only education but also police and other public sector areas. How seriously is Education contributing to the GROH program? It is becoming a scenario whereby potentially at times principals and teachers can apply for a job, turn up and not actually have somewhere to stay. Is a program in place in which the Department of Education is investing? The numbers along the line item on page 364 seem to be a bit up and down, and mainly down.

Mr T.J. HEALY: First of all, support for accommodation and relocation are major considerations for attracting and retaining quality employees in regional, rural and remote locations. Housing is provided to the Department of Education from the Government Regional Officers’ Housing program and GROH properties are either owned by the Department of Communities—that might be a better place for the member’s query, though I will try to answer as best I can for the member—or leased from the private rental market. The Department of Education leases over 2 250 properties from the GROH program to provide teacher housing at 160 locations. Again, we lease from Communities, and it is a good location if the member wants to attend that section of the budget estimates. The Department of Education meets the cost of relocating furniture, personal effects and vehicles when staff are appointed to regional or remote schools.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I notice places like Nyabing—funnily enough I just had the Nyabing, Pingrup, Kukerin and Dumbleyung schoolkids out the back there—are really struggling for GROH accommodation. Does Education have a proactive program in place? I know the parliamentary secretary said it is leasing many places, but is it putting any capital investment in there as well?

[10.40 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: Thank you for the further question, member for Roe. The McGowan government takes the Government Regional Officers' Housing supply very seriously. A regular forum has been established to discuss improving housing for education staff. Representatives from the Department of Communities—again, a good place to send your query—the GROH program, the Principals' Federation of Western Australia and the State School Teachers' Union of WA are part of that forum. To answer the member's query, when a GROH property is unable to be provided, staff are provided temporary accommodation at no cost to the employee. I think the member's larger question—I am sorry to embarrass him a little bit here—really rests with the Department of Communities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that. I had an example recently in which we had a teacher's house was broken into up in the central wheatbelt. The teacher was on holiday 700 kilometres away, and the Department of Communities or whatever department controls GROH basically said, "It's your problem. You need to come back and secure the house even though you're in the middle of school holidays 700 kilometres away." Does the parliamentary secretary think that that is acceptable? Is the Department of Education making any moves to help secure this type of housing and to work with the Department of Communities to encourage teachers? That particular teacher, who, I understand, is an excellent teacher has now basically said, "It is too hard. If my house is getting broken into and I have to come back to secure it during holidays, I may as well go back to the metropolitan area."

The CHAIR: Can I just clarify the question, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the Department of Education working with the Department of Communities to encourage our regional teachers to have extra security on their houses to help secure them so they have a proper place of residence?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I have three chunks to answer. First, the member needs to refer this query to the Minister for Housing. Regarding the member's question about security, though, if there is a concern about the provision, sustainability or security of housing, the Department of Education will deploy our own security services if requested. The Department of Communities has line items in the budget about which the member can ask those questions. The Minister for Housing is a great advocate and very much an expert in this space to fully answer the member's queries. The final part is I want to thank teachers for the work that they do in that area. With all due respect, member for Roe, instead of talking to the member for Roe about the challenges they have with security or housing, they should talk to the department and advise it of their concerns. There are some fantastic regional officers in the departments of Education and Communities they could inform. Did the member say the teacher was in the ag region?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: By the sound of it, they may have reached out to Hon Steve Martin, the upper house member, but because his office is in West Perth, they did not get a good regional response. But I would definitely encourage them to reach out to their local representative and the department to ensure that they are informed because the department has resources and services available.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a comment, if I may, Madam Chair. The parents of this teacher were very worried about their daughter, and they reached out to me because they are my constituents because they were not getting a response from the department. Once again, we have a good quality teacher who actually wants to teach in the regions saying, "If I can't get a secure house, I'm going back to the metropolitan area." Then we have lost another good teacher in the regions. Be that as it may, I will ask a new question.

I refer to page 364 of the *Budget statements* and the table concerning the National Assessment program—Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN. The budget estimate for 2021–22 is \$2 106 000, but it disappears in the forward estimates. Does that tell me that NAPLAN is over or is there some other explanation?

Mr T.J. HEALY: While I am finding that information, regarding the member for Roe's previous question, when the parents of the teacher raised the issue with the member that they were not getting the reply they were seeking, I am sure that the member would have forwarded that inquiry posthaste to the relevant minister's office.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sorry. Just run that by me again.

Mr T.J. HEALY: In terms of the previous question about the parents of the teacher involved who reached out to the member saying that they had not had a response from the Department of Education, I am sure the member would not have wasted any time in making sure that that was brought to the attention of the minister's office so that they could make sure that people in the department were replying.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Absolutely. Yes. I was onto that.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I find them to be champions in that area, doing the best they can under very challenging circumstances by ensuring that everyone gets the reply they seek.

The CHAIR: Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Would the member mind repeating the question regarding page 364—the NAPLAN question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The line item table has a budget estimate of \$2 106 000 in 2021–22, and then it disappears with no further amounts in the forward estimates. I wonder what the explanation is for that.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Sure. The spending change the member is discussing provides for funding to cover cost pressures resulting from the delay in the national implementation of NAPLAN Online. Due to national delays, of course—the COVID-19 pandemic, which I am sure the member is aware of—the time frame for the full transition to NAPLAN Online has been extended to 2022.

Ms L. METTAM: Are all schools in regional WA now able to undertake NAPLAN Online?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Thank you very much, member for Vasse. I am advised that all public schools are online.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Parliamentary secretary, does the department see NAPLAN Online as part of the ongoing framework in the years ahead? Is there any plan to discontinue or —

The CHAIR: Is that the question, member for Roe?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Member for Roe, no.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 363 of the *Budget statements* and the reference to specialised career practitioners. The budget estimate for 2021–22 is \$4 832 000, and then there is an increase. Can the parliamentary secretary explain what the increase is, and what the specialised career practitioners do?

[10.50 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: Firstly, I will talk about the numbers—the meat. In 2021–22, the figure is \$4 832 000. In 2022–23, the figure is \$8 190 000. In 2023–24, the figure is \$8 307 000. In 2024–25, the figure is \$8 386 000—bingo!

The second question the member asked was about what specialised career practitioners do. Career practitioners are an essential part of any school community. I am very impressed that our minister, Hon Sue Ellery, very wisely listened to the community and we funded our election commitment in this budget to employ additional career practitioners in schools. They work in a number of schools to provide career development for students. They are a key conduit between schools and industry, and schools and TAFE campuses. They connect students and young people to career pathways. Feel free to ask me some further questions about the year 9 taster program that is also funded in here. As a person who used to be allocated FTE to coordinate these sorts of things, their role is to bring industry into schools to expose young people to career conversations and advise them. Another key thing is that the member may not be aware that the previous government increased TAFE fees by 510 per cent. For a period of time, we froze TAFE fees. There are still very important conversations to have to make sure—not politically—that young people are aware that they can afford to go to TAFE again. They can look forward to exploring all the career opportunities that are available to them.

Ms L. METTAM: Commencements are going down; why is that?

The CHAIR: Is that the question, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: The parliamentary secretary is talking about TAFE fees but commencements have actually consistently gone down.

The CHAIR: That is a different portfolio. Does the parliamentary secretary want to answer?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will take the question. We discussed commencements in Parliament about two weeks ago. I am very, very happy to answer the question. It is definitely a question for the division on Department of Training and Workforce Development. If the member is ready for us to change over, I am happy to answer once the staff have been swapped. There is a great story to tell!

Ms L. METTAM: No, we have further education questions. The parliamentary secretary can spin it later if he likes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: We will put this one on hold until the member is ready to ask it during the Department of Training and Workforce Development division, if she would like.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I note that the parliamentary secretary introduced the subject of TAFE fees into his answer, which was not part of my initial question.

The CHAIR: What is the next question on this division then, please?

Mr T.J. HEALY: We will do commencements first up when the member is ready.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the parliamentary secretary have a breakdown of the regional component of specialised career practitioners?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Can the member for Roe repeat the question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the parliamentary secretary have a breakdown of the regional component versus the metropolitan component?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member for Roe can put that question on notice but I will read out to him the announcement made this very morning, in anticipation of his question. The Minister for Education and Training announced an exciting new initiative to help students make plans to set them up for successful futures. The breakdown is in the minister's media release. It will be available in the following regional schools: Albany Senior High School, Broome Senior High School, Bunbury Senior High School, Busselton Senior High School, Cape Naturaliste College,

which is of interest to the member for Vasse, Collie Senior High School, Eastern Hills Senior High School, East Kimberley College, Eaton Community College, Esperance Senior High School, Geraldton Senior High School, Hedland Senior High School, Kalgoorlie–Boulder Community High School and Katanning Senior High School. I do not want to waste any more of the member’s time reading out that information. Again, if he puts the question on notice or subscribes to my favourite media statement disperser, Minister Sue Ellery, the member will have all the information available to him.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My question is about the table “Support to the School Curriculum and Standards Authority” on page 370. Could there be an explanation of the additional staffing? The FTEs have gone up.

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is partially related to two programs: the enterprise bargaining agreement commitment to curriculum support for professional learning and, further, three new languages for Western Australian schools that are being implemented. I might throw to the wonderful Executive Director Blagaich for some further information.

Mr A. Blagaich: The additional funding for FTEs is related to the expansion of the international education program. It is also related to, over the coming years, the development of three new languages. Essentially, the 11 FTEs will reduce a little later on once the languages come online fully. There is increased funding for the development of the languages. Once they are developed, the number of FTEs will come down.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Could the three languages be identified?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Before I throw to Executive Director Blagaich, on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training, I will acknowledge the students in our gallery. Welcome to the Legislative Council and the Estimates Committee B hearing.

Mr A. Blagaich: The three languages are Tamil, Korean and Hindi.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question about the international education program. When will it be implemented?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Member for Vasse, it is already underway.

Ms L. METTAM: By “already underway”, does the parliamentary secretary mean that it is currently being taught in schools?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Member for Vasse, it is not new news that this program is already underway, because it is in its thirty-fourth year of delivery. Before 2019, there were 11 schools. The Expenditure Review Committee 2019 allocation of \$6.6 million over the forward estimates was for 17 schools. The COVID recovery plan allocated \$1.3 million for 2020–21 and 2021–22 for an additional 23 schools. Eight schools have signed up as of September 2021.

Ms L. METTAM: Are there additional staff to expand the program further?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the national curriculum framework affected FTEs or increased the workload of the School Curriculum and Standards Authority?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The short answer is no. The longer answer is that there was a review of the Australian curriculum and SCSA’s role in the review of those programs was to give feedback on its role and its assessment. But the short answer is no.

The CHAIR: We have been going for two hours, so I propose, with the agreement of the committee, that we break for 10 minutes. Parliamentary secretary, is that okay?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Certainly. Before we break, are there many more questions for Education? I want to make sure committee members have enough time. We have another two hours. Would members like Education to remain?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Education for probably another hour.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Meeting suspended from 11.00 to 11.10 am

The CHAIR: We will resume. The member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the refurbishment works that have commenced at Hedland Senior High School as outlined at paragraph 44 on page 372. I would like an update on how that is progressing, given the trauma we have had at Hedland Senior High School trying to get a new gymnasium, sports hall, undercover areas and so forth.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. I am sure he would join me in congratulating the advocacy of Kevin Michel, the member for Pilbara, for getting this allocation of \$15 million for Hedland Senior High School. I can inform the member that the refurbishment was for the school’s south wing, Hardie House, and was completed in October 2020 by Pilbara Constructions, along with the technical drawing classroom conversions, the home economics classroom refurbishment and the addition of a general learning area for the library. They are well-needed facilities.

The Pindan Group was originally contracted to deliver a new sports hall and classroom building, and refurbishments to other existing areas within the school. In May this year, the Department of Education was informed that Pindan was in administration and all works at the school ceased. The incomplete works were re-tendered as two separate packages. The first tender was for the completion of the new sports hall and classroom building, and was awarded to ADCO Constructions on 1 September 2021—that is a great day; it is my birthday—with building expected to be completed and open for use in term 4, 2022. The second tender was for the completion of refurbishments to the school’s welcome centre, which provides education support facilities. That contract has been awarded to local contractor Pilbara Constructions and works have commenced.

Ms L. METTAM: The parliamentary secretary keeps referring to Labor members of Parliament at the same time as saying that these upgrades and investments will be based on need. When I talked about Cowaramup Primary School, the parliamentary secretary talked about the opportunity to bring Labor Party upper house members to the school. When talking about Dunsborough Primary School, the parliamentary secretary referred to the great advocacy of upper house Labor members. In reference to the dire needs at Hedland Senior High School, the member is suggesting that work has progressed because of a lower house Labor member. I just ask the question: is the McGowan Labor government funding schools based on need or based on the Labor representation in those areas?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the question. When we talked about the member’s electorate, I concurred with how great the member is, and when talking about aspects of the member for Roe’s electorate, I also spoke about him. There could be no Vasse community without Libby Mettam, and I would never say that great things are not done by all the MLAs across the state. We are all part of a team.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to that question, I seem to recall that the member for Roe went to Hedland Senior High School and got an article on the front page of the *North West Telegraph* that ended up on the front page of *The West Australian* after asking a question of the Premier, with all due respect.

The CHAIR: Is there a question?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Is the member talking about himself in the third person?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the member for Vasse pointed out about advocacy, and as the parliamentary secretary knows, I am an advocate for Esperance Senior High School. When we talk about need, that campus is in much need. I point out that the budget contains funding for a variety of performing arts centres and various projects, which I am sure are all very important. Esperance Senior High School has \$1.7 million in STEM spending coming up. I am wondering whether there is any —

The CHAIR: Can the member for Roe direct his question to a line item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My question is: is Esperance Senior High School being recognised as a school in need, as pointed out by the member for Vasse, regardless of the political persuasion of the local member?

The CHAIR: Where in the budget papers is this, member for Roe? Can the member show me where that line item is?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is a flow-on effect from the Esperance Senior High School —

The CHAIR: The member’s last question was directed at Hedland Senior High School. I am looking to where in the budget papers the member is asking a question about Esperance Senior High School.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am talking about the STEM election commitments on page 370.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Is that a new question, member?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The new question is —

Mr T.J. HEALY: So it is a new question about page 370. While the member is finding it, I am very happy to answer his questions, but he might want to look for the line item before asking the question. I want to commend the member: not everyone can talk about themselves in the third person; I was quite impressed. I am happy for the member to find the line item for Esperance Senior High School and we can discuss it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would appreciate that. I think it was an election commitment as part of the large STEM funding that has a flow-on effect, and it is on pages 370 and 371.

[11.20 am]

Mr T.J. HEALY: Did the member say page 371? Please, take your time, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can come back to it if the parliamentary secretary likes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes, whenever the member is ready.

MS L. METTAM: I refer to page 365 and the outcomes, services and key performance information. Under “Relationship to Government Goals” there is the government goal of “Safe, Strong and Fair Communities:

Developing healthy and resilient communities”, and then there is the desired outcome of “School students across Western Australia have access to high quality education.” Of the students who are currently part of the state’s public education system, how many are students whose current whereabouts are unknown?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I can inform the member that there has definitely been a significant reduction in the total number of students recorded as students whose whereabouts are unknown. I commend the whole team behind me for the work that they have done over the last four years to create the factors to reduce that number. The member can put that as a question on notice and we will be happy to provide that.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide it as supplementary information? Obviously, the department has an awareness of the figure.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I do not want to embarrass the member for Vasse. This specific issue is not in the budget papers. It is definitely in the annual reports, and it is certainly information that is available to the member now, but if the member places it as a question on notice, I am sure that we can provide the information to her.

Ms L. METTAM: I am certainly not embarrassed by asking what I think is a pretty important question.

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a very important question.

Ms L. METTAM: I am asking about the number of students unaccounted for in the public education system. I just wonder why that information is not easily at hand?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I think the member just said “students unaccounted for”; the question was about “whereabouts unknown”. That is different but important. The information is available in the current annual reports. It is not available in the budget papers, but if the member asks a question on notice, that is the best way to access that information, unless she wants to access the annual reports herself.

Ms L. METTAM: The reason we ask questions in the budget estimates is to tease out information that is referred to in the budget papers. Of course that information is not in the budget papers; that is what the questions in estimates are about. I would have thought that the reference that I have provided would allow for some accountability of that, but we can just leave that there.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am happy to take that question. The member for Vasse is absolutely right: this is a very important process in which we go through the budget papers line item by line item. In answer to the member’s question, I can confirm that there has been a significant reduction in the last three or four years of the number of students whose whereabouts are unknown. If the member wants specific year-by-year data for that, a question on notice is the best way to provide that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 368, public secondary education, and the line item “Total Cost of Service” at the top of that table. I refer to the first point in the notes, further down, “due to additional election commitment funding for secondary pathway initiatives including Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics”. I go back to Esperance Senior High School, which I understand was given an election commitment of \$1.7 million for STEM as part of that funding, if you like. My question is: aside from that election commitment, is there a recognition by the department that Esperance Senior High School needs substantial work right through the middle of the school? I see in the budget papers that there is recognition of ageing schools, but I do not see Esperance included. Does the government recognise the needs of Esperance Senior High School?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe. He gets bonus points for finding one of the many references to the great work that we are doing across STEM education. Certainly, Esperance Senior High School is one of the recipients of \$1.5 million. I am happy to give the member some further detail about that and the other upgrades that have been done by this government. Esperance Senior High School was unfortunately neglected under the previous government, and it is great to see a great school like this is getting investment in its infrastructure. I am happy to give the member the details of that.

As part of the state government’s election commitments, Esperance Senior High School will receive \$1.5 million for a STEM classroom upgrade. I am sure the member agrees that that is a fantastic place for a STEM classroom upgrade. I am sure the member will concur that that should be allocated and continued, because we certainly do not plan to change that. Very recently, the minister visited Esperance Senior High School. Just last month, she met with the chair of the school board. That is what we do—we meet, we talk and we listen. This government is known for its consultation with regional communities and representation. Further, the school will receive funding as part of the maintenance blitz. The member will remember that during our previous parliamentary term, the maintenance blitz was a very, very large investment in schools under which a huge backlog of maintenance issues was funded based on what schools told the department and the government were their priorities. I am very happy to inform the member that almost \$2 million was allocated to Esperance Senior High School for maintenance, design and technology upgrade and solar panels for that school. The member will be aware that the TAFE will be relocating from the site at the end of this year and the Department of Education is currently investigating how to make effective use of the facilities. I will give the member the information about the maintenance blitz in case he does not have it to hand. Actually, I will finish there. I am happy to answer a further question if the member would like the details of that.

[11.30 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that, regardless of whether it is a National Party member, a Labor Party member or whomever, the department will recognise some of the issues at Esperance Senior High School, as per the cracking ceilings and areas that need to be roped or fenced off? Is the infrastructure department of the Department of Education recognising Esperance Senior High School as a priority in the short term? I am looking for a budget commitment, hopefully in 2022–23 with any luck.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. There are a couple of points to answer. First, we do not think of things perhaps like the member does—which seats vote a particular way or whether they are represented by Nationals, Labor or Liberal members. We are all in this together. Mark McGowan and Sue Ellery are here for all of us. They look after all regional and metropolitan communities, as does the department. The department does not think in partisan terms either, and I think that is important. It is important that that is the case.

I am happy to inform the chamber that the department acknowledges that there is some ageing infrastructure on the site at Esperance. There is also recently built infrastructure that is of a very good standard. As I said, there are upgraded science classrooms and middle school classrooms.

I will now bring the member back to the maintenance blitz. Under the maintenance blitz that has already been announced, at Esperance Senior High School there has been a maintenance allocation of \$93 000; over \$16 000 for roof safety; \$62 000 for structural integrity reforms; over \$206 000 for traffic management, which is very important for the school; \$701 000 for design and technology upgrades; \$30 000 for shade structures and playgrounds; and \$796 000 for sustainability and solar panels. I am sure that the member will agree that it was a very good decision to make that investment of funds at that school. I hope he is not suggesting that we made a poor decision in choosing to fund this maintenance blitz at that school.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I wanted to get it on the public record that I am concerned about the safety aspect and perhaps the integrity of the buildings. I wanted to make that comment and I hope that the infrastructure department of the Department of Education will note that and prioritise it for the future.

I now move to a fresh question. I refer to page 363 and the line item “Expanding Respectful Relationships—Teacher Relief”. Can the parliamentary secretary expand on that? Teacher relief is becoming a real issue in almost every school, not just regional schools. It is becoming an issue in the metropolitan area as well.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe. Is he asking me to give him some more information about respectful relationships or about teacher relief? Can he clarify that or maybe break it down into two sections?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just want a quick explanation of what that is about. Is it about addressing the teacher relief issue?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a brilliant program. Respectful relationships is an essential program. In direct answer to the member’s question, the Department of Education is to provide teacher relief funding to public schools to facilitate participation in the program at approximately \$7 000 per annum.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the education department have other strategies in place to deal with the teacher relief shortage that seems to be coming forth in just about every school that I know of?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am pretty sure I have some good information for the member. Can he re-ask his question for me so that I can make sure that I give him the best possible answer?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The question is: what strategies does the department have in place to address the teacher relief issue that seems to be cropping up?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. There are a number of strategies. We have a very well-equipped department. We have a very good leadership team at the department and at the ministerial level in education, but I will name a couple of programs for the member’s information. There is the Public School Teaching Pathway, professional experience in regional and remote public schools and the supported Professional Practice Project. That is abbreviated as PPP, but it is not the public–private partnerships that the member’s government did but that no longer continue to be created at new schools. There is the Horizons program and mid-career pathways. There is also the casual staff seeker tool, which was launched at the beginning of term 3 in 2021 for principals to access a greater supply of registered teachers who are job ready. There is also a marketing campaign to attract teachers to the system. We are also looking to procure the services of organisations that can source teachers from other jurisdictions and, of course, we are hoping to streamline the process for recently retired teachers to be reregistered.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the parliamentary secretary have any numbers for schools that have been unable to find relief teachers during the last financial year? Is a record kept by the department at a central level of schools that are struggling?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. In direct answer to his question, there is a special unit in this workforce team that specifically makes sure that we have a supply of those teachers. If a principal has pressure to find relief teachers, we ask them to liaise with the department, and they do. A couple of things that will assist the member with that is that the department currently has 8 000 registered relief teachers. Approximately

4 000 of those are used each fortnight. As I said, there is the new casual staff seeker tool that connects teachers to opportunities. When I was a relief teacher, it involved me just handing in my résumé at each of the schools that I might like to work at. We now have a much more complex and informative way to connect those people who are seeking to do relief and those people who are seeking to have relief roles filled. The program also uses final year students for relief. There is the teacher flying squad as well, which is of great importance for our regional communities. They are used to directly support regional and remote schools.

[11.40 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to that, I believe there has been a need to use the teacher flying squad in the lands and some of the areas further out from the goldfields and the like. Does the parliamentary secretary have any numbers on where schools have been caught short?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The flying squad has been around for some time; it is not a new proposal. It has been utilised well in regional communities for some time. I am happy for the member to put the question on notice if he is after specific numbers.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the sixth item on page 364 of budget paper No 2 relating to the difficulties in attracting in areas of specialised skill, particularly in secondary schools. Can the parliamentary secretary be more specific and advise which specialised skill sets are currently in short supply and outline what work is being done by the department to promote specialised teacher training?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Maths and science are primarily the areas of shortages of specialised teachers. The Teach for Australia program will often fill that need. Those categories are often the most attractive to that area. We also have a pathway for final year students to enter the workforce, as a trial, on limited registration.

Ms L. METTAM: How many teachers are we short of in maths and science for this reporting period?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am informed that every classroom has a teacher.

Ms L. METTAM: We are not asking about whether every classroom has a teacher; we are talking about specialised teachers. This item refers specifically to a challenge in attaining these teachers with specialised skills. Surely, if it is a goal to attain more teachers with specialised skills, the parliamentary secretary would have an idea or an understanding of how many of these teachers were needed.

Mr T.J. HEALY: We have a number of programs that all principals can access to meet demands. On that same thing, I welcome the students in the gallery above to the chamber and acknowledge the very, very specialised skill in their teacher. Welcome!

Ms L. METTAM: That is not answering the question. The question is: how many teachers are we short in the specialty areas of maths and science?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am happy to say again that we are not short of those science and maths teachers in front of classrooms. However, I am happy to give the member more information about the strategies we are using to continue to attract more. We are not short.

Ms L. METTAM: So, is the parliamentary secretary satisfied with the status quo?

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse!

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will just give the member for Vasse the information about the strategies. The department has a range of strategies to increase the number of suitably qualified teachers applying for positions in public schools. This includes the Teach in WA program of online marketing, career expos and presentations, a dedicated contact for teachers considering applying for positions and the Leap program to retrain teachers for specialised secondary subjects. Retention strategies also encourage staff to teach in regional and remote schooling. There are a number of challenges to making sure we deliver that quality in our remote and regional schools as well. The remote connection program allows staff to experience teaching in remote schools, and the remote teaching service induction supports successful onboarding. These are the sorts of programs that ensure that we will continue to have teachers in front of classrooms next year. As I said, we have them now, and we want to make sure that there are teachers in front of those classrooms at all times. I will further add that there has been a change in the one-year graduate diploma program, with the introduction of a two-year Master of Education program, which has seen the number of initial secondary teacher education graduates decline. We have to address that with our strategies. I have mentioned Teach for Australia. There is also the Public School Teaching Pathway, Professional Practice Project, Horizons program and mid-career pathways into workforce areas of need.

Ms L. METTAM: How can the government address the issue stated in the budget papers of “attracting teachers with the right skills to the right areas at the right time” if there is no visibility on what the size of the problem is? Clearly the government does not have that.

The CHAIR: Is that the question, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am sure the member would agree that one of the characteristics of the McGowan government is its ability to plan for the long term and the short term. We are not just thinking in short-term bubbles and political fixes; we have a strategy that allows us to do our best to ensure that in a world in which there is a global demand for such skills, there is always the right teacher in front of the right classroom. I think the member is trying to say that there are not the relevant teachers in front of classrooms. In direct answer to the member's question, we have a classroom teacher in front of each classroom. We are talking about specialised teachers. We are ensuring that we have that pipeline of skills and specialist teachers to continue working in metropolitan and regional areas.

[11.50 am]

Ms L. METTAM: The Teach for Australia program is one source of attracting these specialised teachers. How many people are currently participating in this program? Can the parliamentary secretary advise what subject areas they are teaching?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is certainly available for the member to request that information as a question on notice, but I detected some hesitancy and frustration about that earlier. I am happy to give the member a freebie now, to save the member that process, but I do not want to deprive the member and her office of the opportunity of doing that sort of research. I can tell the member that in 2019, 48 TFA graduates commenced; in 2020, 35; and in 2021, 43. I will give the member for Vasse some further freebie information, because they are a fantastic cohort. In the area of science, there are a total of 26 teachers. In the area of maths, there are 22.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 364 of budget paper No 2, the third line from the bottom of the table is the line item "Revision to RiskCover Insurance". I notice that it has a reasonable increase into the forward estimates. Principals who go on workplace leave under workers' compensation have their payments capped at below their salary. Is there any relationship between the increase in RiskCover insurance and that situation?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The short answer is no.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the reason for the revision to RiskCover insurance increasing over that period?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The department has increased its expenditure budget by \$39.8 million over the period 2021–22 to 2024–25, reflecting the upward revision in the RiskCover insurance fund contributions. The increase primarily relates to workers' compensation and insurance, which has been driven by a higher number of severe claims over the past five years and an increase in hospital costs by more than the consumer price index.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 364 as well, further up the table I refer to the line item "Pilbara Education Partnership and Sponsorship", which seems to cease funding in 2024–25. Can the parliamentary secretary explain how this change of funding has happened? I would assume that a reduction in funding will not assist schools in the Pilbara.

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a fixed-term arrangement; that is why the funding changes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it a partnership or sponsorship that has pulled out? What are the actual details of the reduction in funding?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will answer this, rather than answering a couple of follow-up questions. The new iteration of the BHP Pilbara Education Partnership was endorsed in February 2021, with BHP committing a total of \$6.6 million in funding over three years. The partnership has two focused areas, with schools in Hedland and Newman, along with Onslow Primary School, Jigalong Remote Community School, Marble Bar Primary School, Nullagine Primary School and Yandeyarra Remote Community School supported by the partnership. On 12 August 2021, the wonderful Minister for Education and Training announced an additional \$602 000 funding allocation for a new component to the partnership, the Rise Up program. This is a 14-month pilot program that will focus on supporting students to set individual goals to improve attendance and academic achievement, while also participating in leadership and mentoring roles, and volunteering in the community. This program will promote and support student achievement and wellbeing by providing all year 5 and 12 students in Newman and Hedland with the opportunity to participate, ensuring more effective transition processes between primary and secondary schools.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My understanding is that BHP has pulled out of this program, which was very highly valued in Hedland and the like. It is quite disappointing to be honest. Has there been any attempt to reinstate this funding? Has the department been working with BHP to try to reinstate this important funding considering how many billions of dollars that it makes out of the Pilbara region?

Mr T.J. HEALY: First of all, I would hate for the member to impugn the integrity of BHP's investment into our regional communities. I think it is also disappointing that the member would challenge the role of the department or the government in investing in regional education in that area, too.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am not challenging the department's role.

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member asked a direct question: did BHP pull out? I can confirm that the BHP Pilbara Education Partnership, endorsed in February 2021, has BHP committing \$6.6 million in funding over three years. That is a significant investment of funds, and I would not classify that as pulling out. For the parliamentary record, I am disappointed that the member would suggest that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In the line item I am looking at, all I am seeing is a reduction in funding. If the parliamentary secretary can point me to the line item where that particular funding exists, I will be more than happy to look at it.

[12.00 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: I refer the member back to the line item—I hate to do his work for him—and the figure is \$2 775 000 in 2021–22, \$2 059 000 in 2022–23 and \$1 032 000 in 2023–24.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there no funding from 2023–24 onwards?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Clearly neither the member for Roe nor I will become a maths teacher! It is a three-year program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 364. Paragraph 4 refers to services for students needing extra support et cetera. I refer to the *DETECT schools study: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 in Western Australian schools* that surveyed more than 24 000 students across 79 public schools, and found that around 40 per cent of secondary school students were experiencing moderate to high levels of emotional distress. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what the education department has done to respond to the DETECT report, which has been repeatedly referred to in Parliament?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The Department of Education acknowledges a strong association between positive student mental health and wellbeing and learning. All schools have access to school psychologists, the numbers of which are increasing with the additional school psychologist FTEs that I mentioned earlier during estimates. School psychologists can provide risk assessment and intervention for students with identified needs, including those with suicidal behaviour and non-suicidal self-injury. The Mental Health Commission provides the department with funding to coordinate the response to suicide and self-harm in an important schools' program. The Mental Health in Schools project, from our previous term of government, is continuing in 300 schools. It is very important. The department also supports whole-school approaches to wellbeing, including other social and emotional learning programs delivered by classroom teachers, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, Friendly Schools, and Aussie Optimism. Almost 2 000 staff have completed an online professional learning module on creating supportive and inclusive school policies, as one example.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I note that stress levels of teachers have been identified as being very high and the complexities of dealing with the mental health of our teachers have also substantially increased. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what the department is doing to deal with the mental health of our teachers?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will come back to the member's question about staff in a moment, but I do not think I emphasised the role of the chaplains as part of our strategy in responding to the DETECT report. I did not mention the increase in the number of chaplains and the role that they play. I do not want to let the record slip without mentioning the fantastic role that our chaplains play.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My understanding is that chaplains generally deal with students. However, I am asking: what is the department doing to deal with the mental health welfare of our teachers?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Thank you very much, member for Roe. I just wanted to add to my answer to the member's previous question by saying that I did not mention the chaplains.

The mental health and wellbeing of staff is, again, a priority for this government and this fantastic education department. As part of the department's range of programs and services available to all public schools to build and foster student wellbeing, the priority for 2021–22 is to increase access to those services. The department is finalising a new staff health and wellbeing plan for 2021 to 2024 and the school leader health and wellbeing plan for 2021 to 2024 that will focus on ensuring that all staff in schools and other department workplaces are healthy, safe and well through enhanced professional learning, information, initiatives, resources and support with a priority focus on mental health. The department also supports all staff through the Employee Assistance Program, which is delivered by PeopleSense, a free counselling service supporting the emotional and mental health needs of employees and their immediate families. Further, I am not sure whether the member has heard of the collegiate principal program whereby learned principals can assist others. It is a great way to connect resources and experienced people. I have worked with a number of collegiate principals and it is a great way to connect and inform the great staff already in our system.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the parliamentary secretary have an understanding of how many teachers are seeking assistance and what the size of the problem is?

Mr T.J. HEALY: To clarify, is the member asking how many principals are acting in the principal collegiate program or one of the other programs, or does the member mean staff?

Ms L. METTAM: I mean staff. The member for Roe asked about the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, and I am asking whether the parliamentary secretary has an idea of the size, or a number, of this problem?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The Employee Assistance Program is probably the best way to give the member that information. If the member wants a number relating to a program, I am happy to give that to her. The best way to give the member that information is to read out the Employee Assistance Program information and the number of people who are accessing it, if that is okay with the member?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: The Employee Assistance Program continues to be a key strategy to support employees and immediate family members with mental health concerns. Services include confidential counselling with experienced psychologists for employees and immediate family members for personal and work-related issues, critical incident management to provide support to employees and school leaders following a critical incident in the workplace, and the manager assistance program to provide advice and support to school leaders faced with people-related issues. I can inform the chamber that a total of 10 121 counselling sessions were provided in 2020–21, representing an increase of 8.52 per cent or 795 sessions. That is one program.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide by way of supplementary information the number of teachers or staff members who have been involved in the program over the last four years?

[12.10 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: As I said, I am happy to provide the numbers about this specific program through the chair to the member for Vasse. The numbers I have are 10 121 counselling sessions were provided in 2020–21, representing an increase of 8.52 per cent or 795 sessions. I am definitely informing the member there has been an increase. The member is asking about the last couple of years. I am happy for the member to put that question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Issues have been raised with me regarding the education assistants' union induction program.

The CHAIR: Can you refer to a line item?

Ms L. METTAM: It is further to this question, about providing support services for teachers and students.

The CHAIR: What is your question again, sorry?

Ms L. METTAM: I am asking where the EA union induction program fits in. I understand that it is a compulsory program. Where does that fit in with the goals of the Department of Education?

Mr T.J. HEALY: There is funding for education assistants. A better location for this question would be if the member can find another line item. It is definitely in there because we have increased the number of education assistants by 300 FTE, as promised in the previous term of government. It is definitely in the recurrent funding, but I think that is probably the best place for the member to ask the question.

Ms L. METTAM: I am happy to refer to whatever section that is, or to the overall goals of the Department of Education on page 365 under the heading "Desired Outcome", which is for school students across Western Australia have access to high quality education. There is a range of services. My question is a genuine query. Why is it compulsory for education assistants to attend compulsory union-held induction sessions?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I will give the member a short answer, because I know she also wants to get to the Department of Training and Workforce Development. I am not trying to frustrate the member. It is in a line item. It is here for the member to find. If she has the PDF there, I am sure she will find it in about 10 seconds.

Induction is part of the industrial agreement for education assistants. That was negotiated as part of their industrial agreement. If the member wants to go to the line item, we can go through it in more detail. It is not in this part of the budget, but it is in there. I am happy to spend the next 50 minutes on this or on the Department of Training and Workforce Development—however the member wishes to allocate the time. I am answering the member's question. It is there because it is part of the agreed industrial agreement.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 219 in budget paper No 3 and the line item "Put Education Assistants Back in the Classroom". I will ask the question again, referring to that line item. Why are union induction sessions compulsory for education assistants?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Induction is part of their industrial agreement.

Ms L. METTAM: I appreciate that it is part of the agreement. I am asking why it is compulsory for education assistants to attend these meetings. I have had feedback from local teachers and a local principal who was certainly very frustrated when their teacher assistant made a trip from Busselton all the way to Australind. They were five minutes late and were told to turn around and come back for another session. That was quite a strong response and certainly a waste of the teacher assistant's valuable time. I have a genuine question. These induction sessions are compulsory. What is the objective of these sessions and what value do they have in the overall goals of the Department of Education?

Mr T.J. HEALY: In terms of the negotiations, when each of those agreements come up, I understand that an agreement was reached by all parties that they saw value in them. These agreements come up every few years. I think the member is arguing that a case should be made at the next opportunity to discuss it. I think it will be something that all parties will continue to discuss at the next agreement. Is that what the member's question is?

Ms L. METTAM: My question is: if a teacher assistant does not want to attend one of these meetings, are they still able to contribute and teach in the classroom, given that they would be qualified to do so?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Is that if they have not done their induction?

Ms L. METTAM: If they have not been to the union induction, yes.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I have given the answer, member for Vasse. It is in the agreement. It is what has been agreed to by the parties.

Ms L. METTAM: This has been raised as a concern with me locally, given that teacher assistants have had to travel to Australind for these meetings. The feedback on what is actually taught at these meetings has not been particularly positive. What sort of feedback or number of complaints does the Department of Education receive about these compulsory union induction meetings?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am informed that the department is not aware of complaints about the process. Further, I think the member's real question here is about whether the department will implement the obligations under the agreement—yes. I think the member's question might be better placed on notice. If she cannot google it, she may want to put a question on notice to the minister asking when the agreement is next up for negotiation and discussion. Does the member want it to be changed or reviewed at the next round of agreement?

Ms L. METTAM: My question is: if a teacher assistant does not want to take part in the union induction meeting, are they still able to teach or provide their services as teacher assistants? I guess the answer is no; it is compulsory.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am informed that, yes, an education assistant is still able to be present to support roles in the classroom even if they have not done their agreed-upon induction program.

[12.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final question on that. I find it quite disturbing that there is a compulsory induction by the union. I want an unequivocal statement, I guess, from the Department of Education that if a teaching assistant refuses to attend a union induction meeting, their employment will not be jeopardised.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I apologise that I am repeating what I have said before to members. I know there is a lot of stuff going on and it is bit hard to follow all of it; essentially, I will reiterate what I said. We are here to support all parties. This arrangement was agreed upon by all parties as part of their enterprise bargaining agreement. If a person does not participate in the agreed-upon induction, they are able to continue in the classroom in their support role.

The appropriation was recommended.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Madam Chair, if I can say, we have an amazing team of people here and I thank them all for their preparation and their organisation. We have an awesome Department of Education!

The CHAIR: Having been on that side in parliamentary estimates, I absolutely concur.

Division 26: Training and Workforce Development, \$460 677 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr T.J. Healy, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Education and Training.

Ms K. Ho, Acting Director General.

Ms G. Husk, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Ms J. Wallace, Acting Executive Director, Policy, Planning and Innovation.

Mr G. Thompson, Executive Director, Corporate.

Mr K. Coombes, Acting Executive Director, Service Resource Management.

Ms R. Trotter, Acting Chief Finance Officer.

Ms M. Stanley, Director, Training Regulation.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the parliamentary secretary to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary

information is to be provided, I seek the parliamentary secretary's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a parliamentary secretary asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 384 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the election commitments in the spending changes table. Can the parliamentary secretary tell me why funding for the valuable employer incentive for adult apprentices program reduces to practically nothing by 2024–25?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a brilliant program and I am happy to inform the member for Roe about it. In short, it is capped. That is why. Further, the McGowan government committed \$5.2 million over four years to fund the gap in total wage costs for 200 mature age apprentices—that is, of course, people aged 21-plus years. We all think that we are mature age, but we are not; it is a lot earlier. This program assists employers with the additional wage costs to hire apprentices over the age of 21. The program commenced on 1 July 2021, and the first 100 places were taken up quickly. On 5 August 2021, the Premier announced that the next 100 places would be brought forward, and all 200 places in the adult apprentice program have now been allocated. The answer to the member's question is: it is because the program is capped. I am sure the member would agree that it is a brilliant program.

[12.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If it is such a brilliant program, why has it been defunded?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It was an election commitment that we announced during the election, and it was always capped in our announcement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the parliamentary secretary. Is this program open to all businesses or just small to medium-sized enterprises and group training organisations?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes, all businesses are eligible except for those that received incentives under the Construction Training Fund that had their own scheme.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final question. How many businesses that are considered large or corporate businesses have received this incentive?

Mr T.J. HEALY: We do not have that information available to us, but I am happy for the member to put that question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the third line item "Skilled Migration, Including Overseas Qualification Assessment" under the heading "Service Summary" on page 386. Can I get a bit of an understanding about that particular program?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Can the member be more precise? Does the member just want to know what the program is for and what it does?

Ms L. METTAM: I am looking at the funding going forward. This is for overseas students, I imagine.

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member may have a follow-up question. Regarding the skilled migration, including overseas qualification assessment, as a result of COVID-19 and the changes to the Australian government's visa processing requirements, applications for the state-nominated migration program in Western Australia are currently being accepted only from applicants who were residing in Australia at the time of the application. For the member's information, 134 additional occupations were added to the state-nominated migration program, effective from 1 July 2021.

Ms L. METTAM: To clarify: that is 134 additional occupations. I thought that the state skilled occupation list had 178 occupations to start with. The government reduced the state skills list from 178 to 118 and now there are an additional 134. Are those figures right?

Mr T.J. HEALY: That is correct.

Ms L. METTAM: By way of supplementary information, is the parliamentary secretary able to provide information on what the additional 134 skills are that have been added to the skills list since the McGowan government cut the skills list when it first came to government?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the question. The information is available on the skilled migration website. I can tell the member that it covers construction, health, manufacturing and a number of key areas. It is all available on the website currently.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to that, is the parliamentary secretary able to identify, or at least explain, which skills in the area of health the McGowan government originally cut when it came to office?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am happy to direct the member to the website [migration.wa.gov.au/services/skilled-migration-western-australia](https://www.migration.wa.gov.au/services/skilled-migration-western-australia). I am happy for the member to put this question on notice but if she googles that now, she will

find the information. It is under the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list schedule 1. I am happy to read out a couple of them. The occupations include clinical psychologists, dental specialists, general practitioner, hospital pharmacists, midwife, neurosurgeon and industrial pharmacist. There are a number of others, but I do not want to waste time. I am conscious of getting as many questions asked as we can, but the member can find all that information on the website.

Ms L. METTAM: Hopefully, by way of supplementary information, the parliamentary secretary is able to provide a list of the number of skilled migrants who have been able to take up the offer of the reintroduced occupations in the areas of health that have been added to the skills list following the cuts that we saw with the election of the McGowan government.

Mr T.J. HEALY: This was announced only a couple of months ago. Providing the member with the information by way of supplementary information, or even through asking a question on notice about that number, would yield very low numbers because we are still collecting the applications and the data. It is probably too soon. However, I think that a well-timed question on notice a little later —

Ms L. METTAM: Well timed? We have a health crisis. I would not say it is well timed.

Mr T.J. HEALY: What I am saying about “well timed” is that we are responding to the challenges. The member queried how many occupations had been reintroduced. This was announced only last month. If the member puts in a question on notice shortly, I am sure that once the applications have been received we can reply to that question on notice, but right now there is not a lot of information.

Ms L. METTAM: Obviously, this is exacerbated by the shortage of health workers that we have in the state at this time. Given the COVID-restricted environment we are in and the priority to keep Western Australians safe, to what extent will we see an uptake in the number of health workers in Western Australia as part of this scheme? How many additional workers in the health workforce does the government anticipate it will attain?

[12.40 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am going to give the member some rapid-fire responses to squeeze in as many questions as I can. Rather than asking for a question on notice, I will give the member the data. For the state-nominated migration program, on 24 August 2021, 81 invitations were issued for Skilled Nominated subclass 190 visas, and 70 invitations were issued for Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) subclass 491 visas. Again, that is all on the website, and I think there will be more data as more and more people seek to come to wonderful Western Australia.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, for those two visas, subclasses 190 and 491, is that for the overall list or is that specifically for health workers?

Mr T.J. HEALY: That is correct; that is for health.

Ms L. METTAM: In the area of health?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The breakdown is all on the website, if that helps. I am reading from something that we have literally printed off the internet. It is not secret.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 385 and the sixth point about the capacity and capability of TAFE colleges. It refers to capital investment and it then refers to the \$25 million investment in modern equipment. I want to focus on the \$9.9 million commitment to enable TAFE lecturers to return to industry to update their knowledge of current industry standards and practices. Can the parliamentary secretary enlighten me about that project?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a brilliant program to enable lecturers to return to industry. The McGowan government has committed \$9.9 million to support TAFE lecturers to return to industry to undertake professional development. This will enable TAFE lecturers to upskill in line with current industry needs. Professional development is expected to contribute to improving the industry expertise and currency of Western Australian TAFE lecturers, particularly for certain industries, such as the resources industry and those experiencing rapid technological or other workplace changes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure that there is a shortage of industry-experienced lecturers; on the other hand, it is very difficult for some of those with industry experience to blend in to the TAFE industry, if you like, due to the substantial paperwork and requirements that are put on them when they become a lecturer. Is there a package or a program that the TAFE industry is looking at to improve that crossover, if you like, from working in industry to becoming a lecturer?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I think that the member is on the wrong line item. I will take his endorsement that it is a great program to get our TAFE lecturers back out into industry. The member is talking about the other end, and trying to attract people. This line item is about getting our existing lecturers to continue to grow their skills and career development while making sure that they are current with industry. I am conscious of the time. It is the wrong line item but I will give the member a freebie. Last year, we ran a recruitment drive for industry we support, whereby we went out to encourage people to come into the TAFE sector, and, in short, we provided assistance to get their certificate IV in training and assessment to allow them to teach.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will go to a new line item on page 384 under election commitments—that is, “TAFE College Lecturers Industry Placement”. I am getting a lot of feedback about good-quality people from industry who are being brought into the sector, or are wanting to take a different career path, if you like, and come into the TAFE sector and impart their knowledge, but they are finding the paperwork and the issues in dealing with computer work, I guess, quite prohibitive. Does the TAFE industry have a plan to somehow make it easier or reduce the requirements? They are quite prohibitive to people coming from the industry sector.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Again, the member is not on the right line item, but I am happy to give him the information. The community feedback that we found is that the member is right. It is the same when applying for any role. We are not afraid to have very high standards of training for all people who seek to teach and lecture across the sector. That is important. I will admit this: as with any role, it does not matter if someone goes to a mine site to work fly-in fly-out or to work in Narrogin TAFE, they will have to have an induction and a process to teach. After community consultation, we found that one of the biggest challenges for people moving from industry into TAFE roles was the certificate IV TAE. People in the community told us that that was their biggest challenge. It takes time and funds. We put a support program in place for that. After community consultation with industry and lecturers, we felt that that was one of the biggest challenges; therefore, we did our best to support those people. It is the wrong line item, but trying to attract new staff is in there. That was our feedback and that is why we addressed it in that way.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I could go to cost of services or whatever and find some line item to talk about it again, but I would like to make the final comment that it is something that is prohibitive for industry-based people who want to come into the sector. I am just passing on the feedback that I am getting. I am not going to waste any more time looking for line items; I just want to give the parliamentary secretary that feedback, because I think it is a great opportunity to bring in good-quality industry-based people who can pass on their knowledge, but it is a handbrake, if you like. No doubt, I will talk to the director general about that at some different time and place, perhaps.

Mr T.J. HEALY: If I may briefly respond, chair. I formally apologise on behalf of the Parliament for wasting the member for Roe’s time with line items. I think it is very important. I do believe that the member is genuinely saying that there is frustration with paperwork—absolutely. But things like the working with children check and administrative paperwork are core, and I do not think that we should follow the Nationals WA policy of maybe abandoning those things, if that is what the member is suggesting. It is important that we use the appropriate processes to ensure that we can get the right people and the best people in. If the member knows of other people who are searching for work, we will happily take them in the regions. If the member is getting genuine feedback that they are struggling with qualifications, paperwork or admin, please reach out to us. We want the best people.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Madam Chair, I just confirm that it is not National Party policy to do away with working with children checks or anything else, but I will move on to another question.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for clarifying that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to spending changes on page 384. Under “Other”, we have Government Regional Officers’ Housing. Can the parliamentary secretary explain that line item through the forward estimates to me?

[12.50 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. In relation to Government Regional Officers’ Housing, budgets are updated based on Treasury GROH rent revenue forecasts in line with the tenant rent setting framework based on the latest rent collections data. As the member knows, it was very important that the McGowan government froze those rents. An amount of \$3.4 million has been budgeted for 2021–22 GROH homes across three regional TAFEs, with North Regional TAFE requiring the major share. I am not sure whether the member is aware of the complexities of delivering training in the regions, but it is more expensive and highly valued and highly essential. Housing availability and affordability is an important factor in assisting regional TAFE colleges to attract and retain lecturing staff. If it helps, this figure reflects what will be funded.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 384 of the budget papers and the third paragraph under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. It says that secondary school students will have increased opportunities to undertake quality, industry-relevant training. How will this translate in regional areas, where there are some real shortages in industries such as aged care?

Mr T.J. HEALY: This is a brilliant program. The member did not get a chance to ask this question in the education division, so I am really excited that he has asked it now. The year 9 taster program is going to change the way we do career conversations in schools and communities in regional and metropolitan Western Australia. It is fantastic. The \$19.2 million is to provide career taster programs to year 9 students to inform secondary students about potential careers through vocational education and training sector pathways. Again, it is about having those career conversations earlier. Around 17 000 year 9 students—that is about half the cohort—will be able to participate in the program commencing in 2022. The program will be jointly delivered around the state in metropolitan and regional areas across the TAFE and school sectors and will definitely include practical industry experiences and activities for year 9 students based on their location.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the department identified the types of industries that really are short of workers, such as aged care, which is seeing a real shortage in both metropolitan and regional areas? Is the department focused on those areas in which there is a real shortage?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes, we have definitely identified aged care as a priority.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What other industries has the department identified it is going to focus on in the next few years?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. There are a number of industries. There is almost no sector that is not struggling to find good-quality skilled people. However, in the context of the line item for the year 9 taster program, we are not going to just tell communities. The previous government might have just said, “We’ll just dictate from the city what needs to be done”, but we will be establishing a number of regional advisory groups. Regional communities will have a say in what they want to run in their areas for their regional year 9 taster program. I understand that what is needed might be a bit of a stretch for someone like the member, but what is needed in Esperance is different from what is needed in Geraldton, Broome and the Kimberley. Different regional communities have different needs. The regional advisory groups will determine which sectors are needed for those areas. Important things will come out. We will liaise with industry, the Department of Education, TAFEs and the community to determine the local needs. I am happy to give the member an answer to what I predict will be his next question: how many regional year 9 students do we think will participate in this program next year? We estimate that 3 432 regional year 9 students should have access to this program next calendar year. I am sure the member will agree that that is just amazing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is very good.

I refer to the table on page 389. Under “Efficiency Indicators”, there is a line item for the average cost per active training contract. I note that over the last three or four years, it seems to have increased quite dramatically. Can the parliamentary secretary explain why that increase has occurred and what the cost is?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The 2021–22 budget target of \$645 is higher than the 2020–21 estimated actual of \$457 due to costs increasing by \$5.5 million, which includes \$2.9 million reflecting the defence industry workforce employer incentive, \$2.4 million reflecting the election commitment for the employee incentive for adult apprentices, \$2.3 million reflecting the election commitment for additional apprentices and trainees employed through group training organisations and a decrease of 1 062 in the number of active training contracts.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 388 and the jobs and skills centre services. I would just like an explanation of that first paragraph. Are these jobs and skills centre services provided only to Aboriginal people and communities or are the services provided to all parts of the population?

Mr T.J. HEALY: No; they are available to everyone.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 390 and service 5, which is the procurement of training. The first paragraph says —

Procurement of Training comprises the purchasing of training delivery services from the TAFE Colleges and private training providers in accordance with the State’s priorities and the State Training Plan.

Can the parliamentary secretary explain to me how that takes place and are registered training organisations involved in that as well?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Just to clarify, is the member for Roe asking for our priorities or how we contract procurement?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, the delivery services from the TAFE colleges and private training providers.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I think the member is asking about how we contract procurement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the parliamentary secretary explain how the department procures that training from those various delivery services?

Mr T.J. HEALY: We have a contracted panel of providers and that is renewed every few years and can be funded under this.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the service summary on page 386 and service 6, “Recruitment and Management of International Students”. I imagine that there was a drop in 2021–22 due to COVID. I am interested in the number of students reflected in the reporting period and also in 2022–23.

Mr T.J. HEALY: In short, yes, there has been a drop in reaction to the COVID pandemic circumstances. The 2020–21 actual is 1 735 and the 2021–22 forward estimate is 1 167.

Ms L. METTAM: What assumptions have been made about the increase in numbers from a COVID point of view?

Mr T.J. HEALY: A number of assumptions are based on the period of time that the borders remain in their current phase and how many students we can source from onshore.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.01 to 2.00 pm

Division 28: Justice — Services 1 to 8, Attorney General, \$619 448 000 —

Ms K.E. Giddens, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Dr A. Tomison, Director General.

Mr J. Deery, Director, Finance.

Mr M. Hainsworth, Director, Advisory Services.

Mr A. Kerr, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Ms K. Maj, Executive Director, Strategic Reform.

Ms J. Stampalia, Executive Director, Court and Tribunal Services.

Ms P.M. Bagdonavicius, Public Advocate.

Ms K. Kraszlan, Commissioner for Victims of Crime.

Dr J. Byrne, Commissioner for Equal Opportunity.

Dr G.R. Hill, Director, Legal Aid WA.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr D. Emerson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The Attorney General may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the Attorney General to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the Attorney General's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if the Attorney General asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 435 in budget paper No 2, volume 2 and the transition of the Equal Opportunity Commission into the Department of Justice. I have a general question about how that transition has gone.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have the answer but I would rather defer to Dr Byrne because he can give an exact reply.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am happy to be enlightened by Dr Byrne.

Dr J. Byrne: Thank you. Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for accommodating me with my disability. I am profoundly deaf.

I requested the transition because it is very difficult as the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity to manage a very small agency with 20 people. In fact, three-quarters of the problems that worried me and kept me awake at night were about how to make sure that people were paid correctly and about governance and compliance, so I requested that transition. I would like to thank the Attorney General and the director general of the Department of Justice for agreeing to the transition. It has gone very well. We are getting things done quite quickly. I am a statutory officer—the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity—and I am given statutory powers and statutory functions. I am completely independent in performing various things and I cannot be directed by anybody. I report to Parliament. But that fact that I have a statutory function does not mean that I should be managing a very small agency of 20 people. It is really impossible to do that. The transition has gone very well indeed. The smooth transition of the payroll and financial systems are well underway. The integration of the information technology is going well, including Joanne Stampalia's integrated court management system that we are going to use to record our complaints, so we do not have a problem with information technology. Basically, the transition has been very successful. I am very pleased and I have no regrets.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My next question is about the role of the Equal Opportunity Commission. In its annual report it states that there has been positive progress in employing more women in senior management roles in Western Australia. I am talking particularly about departments. In the annual report, the Commissioner for Equal

Opportunity mentioned that greater effectiveness could be obtained by amending the Public Sector Management Act 1994 to require that all agencies move towards or implement that framework. Can the Attorney General advise which departments have already adopted the framework and give an explanation of what amendments to the Public Sector Management Act would be required to achieve that?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am looking for the line item in the budget. I cannot see that that question relates to the budget, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will find the Attorney General a line item. I refer to page 435 and Equal Opportunity Commission services, which relates to the delivery of the commission's functions. One of the functions that the commissioner has reported on is that greater effectiveness in the government's policy framework for substantive equality could be obtained by amending the Public Sector Management Act. What amendments could be contemplated to actually achieve that outcome?

[2.10 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The question related to the number of agencies that are achieving this, or aspiring to achieve this. From my agency, I could not reply, I am sorry. It would have to be from the Public Sector Commissioner. I am not across whether those agencies have achieved that benchmark or not. I am sorry.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That was the first part of the question, Attorney General. As part of the Equal Opportunity Commission's function, a comment in its annual report states —

Greater effectiveness could be obtained by amending the *Public Sector Management Act* ... to require that all agencies strive to achieve substantive equity in the delivery of their services.

I am seeking an explanation about how that might be achieved through the role of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. What would be required?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The role of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity in this aspect is to make recommendations or comments to government, and Dr Byrne has done that in his annual report, but it is up to the Premier, who is responsible for the Public Sector Management Act, to deal with any contemplated amendments to that act. I do not have that within my remit.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So, it is not within the remit of the Equal Opportunity Commission. It is within the remit of the Equal Opportunity Commission to make the comment in the annual report, but the Attorney General is unable to provide detail on what that might look like.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That question would have to be directed to the Premier because he is responsible for the Public Sector Management Act 1994; I am not. I am not trying to be obtuse here.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am feeling like it is a bit obtuse, AG.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I cannot sit here and foreclose upon the Premier's thinking in this regard. I strive personally, as the Leader of the Opposition is probably aware, to achieve greater than 40 per cent in the areas in which I make appointments. I am very pleased to say that we are sitting at having 50 per cent of our judges in the District Court now female.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will make a comment off the books that sitting across from the Attorney General's senior executive here is probably the most gender balance I have seen in the budget estimates that I have participated in to date. There has been a distinct lack of gender balance thus far.

I am not trying to be difficult; I am interested in the role and how this might be progressed, given the issue has been raised by the Equal Opportunity Commission. Does the commission simply make a comment on it and then it goes no further?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No. May I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition puts that on notice to the Premier. I cannot sit here and tell the Leader of the Opposition what is in the Premier's mind in responding to this particular comment of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. The commissioner has put forward a suggestion that it could be obtained by this method. I do not know whether the Premier has any other way of achieving this. I do know that when we make cabinet appointments we always strive to better the gender balance. I am pleased to say that of the seven court jurisdictions in Perth—including the Coroner's Court, District Court, Supreme Court, Family Court and Magistrates Court—four now have a woman as head of jurisdiction. This was unheard of before. All were appointed on merit.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Based on the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity's recommendations in his report, has the Attorney General recommended to the Premier, who is in charge of the public sector, that he carry out the gender diversity plans?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have not drawn this paragraph to the Premier's attention, nor sought his response to same.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Attorney General has not?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have not specifically drawn this paragraph that the Leader of the Opposition has directed me to, beginning with the words “greater effectiveness”, to the Premier. I have a number of conversations with the Premier from time to time about gender balance because I am always trying to achieve it, but I have not taken that particular paragraph to the Premier, no—but I will. I have no problem with that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My question still relates to Equal Opportunity Commission services on page 435. Has there been any significant change in the number of complaints that have been dealt with?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I ask Mr Byrne to reply to that, please.

Dr J. Byrne: Yes, there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints in the last year. COVID has been one of those factors. We have had over 100 complaints and inquiries related to COVID, about the wearing of masks and about whether vaccination can be enforced et cetera. There has been a significant increase in the number of complaints. There has been about a 38 per cent increase on the previous year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it possible to get an understanding of where there has been an increase? My understanding is that the Equal Opportunity Commission does not deal just with complaints relating to government departments; it is across the board—is that correct?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I believe that is so.

Dr J. Byrne: Yes, it is across the board. Only a minority of complaints are about government departments; they are about the private sector also—private sector employers and provision of goods and services by the private sector.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has there been an increase in complaints in relation to government departments?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have got the breakdown of total complaints; I have not got whether it is government departments or not. Perhaps Dr Byrne could respond.

Dr J. Byrne: Could I invite that as a supplementary question? I do not have that information to hand. I think most of the increase was in the private sector, but I do not have that precise data.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I did not quite catch that. There has been an increase. Is data available for the private sector but not for the government?

Dr J. Byrne: Sorry; my speech is not always as clear as it should be. I do not have the data available about the breakdown between the government and the private sector. My impression is that the increase is in the private sector, but I can provide that as supplementary information.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Attorney General, could that be provided as supplementary information?

The CHAIR: Are you happy to provide that breakdown as supplementary information?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am happy to provide the breakdown. To be clear: I am happy to provide the data on the breakdown of complaints resting with the public sector and the private sector.

[Supplementary Information No B8.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further to this question that we were asking about the increase in the number of complaints, in the annual report there was reference to regional versus metro, and I could find the breakdown for that. The numbers in the metropolitan area seem to be much more significant than the regional numbers. I am wondering whether that is just a population-based factor. Further to that, the question then becomes: what sort of outreach does the commission do to ensure that people in regional WA understand the role of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity?

[2.20 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will defer to the commissioner to give the details of his outreach programs.

Dr J. Byrne: The metropolitan population is much greater than the regional population. We have a very significant number of complaints. The regional areas have extensive outreach programs. We try to reach four regions each year with visits. We do that in conjunction with other government agencies; for example, the Ombudsman and the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office. We go in a group to a region; most recently we visited the Kimberley. The member referred to the annual report. There is quite extensive reporting of our outreach in the regional areas in the annual report.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Attorney General, has the commission considered partnering with the community resource centres networks to do some of that work given that it is a government agency or organisation that is based throughout the regions? Has the commission contemplated partnerships to deliver some of that information to regional communities?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will ask Dr Byrne.

Dr J. Byrne: Our partnerships are mainly with other government agencies that manage complaints, such as the Information Commissioner, the Ombudsman and the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office. We also liaise with community organisations—Reconciliation WA, for example, and the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre, which was renamed Kin. We do a lot of liaising with them but we do not do outreach with them. We do training in conjunction with some of these organisations.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Attorney General, this is only a comment. The CRC network is really valuable so that might be something that the commission can use to leverage information dissemination into the regions.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am sure that Dr Byrne will take that on board. Dr Byrne, will you take on board the comment about leveraging off these other organisations?

Dr J. Byrne: Absolutely.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 426, budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the significant issues impacting the agency. The fourth significant issue states that the department continues to prioritise its efforts to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, with a focus on achieving Closing the Gap outcomes to reduce the incarceration rate of Aboriginal adults and youth. Can the Attorney General outline how the department is achieving its target of a reduction in the number of Aboriginal youth in jails across Western Australia?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We are committed to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system and improving outcomes for Aboriginal communities when their members intersect with the criminal justice system. This commitment aligns with the targets that the state agreed to under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We work to promote the achievement of these targets and their progress through a number of ongoing initiatives and reforms. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap commenced in July 2020. The agreement commits the commonwealth and the state and territory governments to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, respectfully referred to as Aboriginal in the paper, and reduce the disparity and life outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The national agreement identifies four areas of priority reforms and currently has 17 outcome areas relating to the improvement of socio-economic factors. This includes two Justice-related targets to reduce the rate of incarcerated Aboriginals by at least 15 per cent by 2031 and to reduce the rate of young people in detention by at least 30 per cent in 2031. The work that the department is undertaking to progress these targets includes, amongst other things, the establishment of an Aboriginal justice advisory committee, which plans to have its inaugural meeting in November 2021. The appointment of people to the committee is going through the cabinet process.

We are also participating in shaping a national justice policy partnership to promote formal partnerships and shared decision-making between governments and Aboriginal communities. We have the continued development of community-based programs, such as the Kimberley juvenile justice strategy and the Western Desert justice program. The member might be aware that the Kimberley juvenile justice strategy is a priority of the McGowan government. A number of place-based initiatives are continuing across the Kimberley, including night patrols, structured activities for young people and education and skills programs. The co-design element of the JJS is being progressed through a broader Kimberley Aboriginal youth wellbeing steering committee, a partnership of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation and a range of agencies. The member will note that there is funding in the budget for the existing structured activities, such as safe place structured activities for young people after school and on weekends in Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Wyndham and Kununurra. It will be funded \$2.1 million in 2023. There is also funding of \$1.7 million for a co-design process, which is what I was talking about before. We need a co-designed program with Indigenous peoples because clearly the system is not working in terms of reducing incarceration rates; we now have to sit down with our Indigenous citizens and their organisations to co-design programs. A new co-designed program is the Fitzroy Crossing night patrol, which will be funded \$1 million in 2021–22. The sum of \$150 000 has been committed to the delivery of a process and outcome evaluation in 2022–23, which will enable a better understanding of what success looks like in this space and how it will be measured. The Department of Training and Workforce Development and the TAFE learning program will continue to deliver industry and workplace skills training for young people through North Regional TAFE in Broome and Kununurra, with DTWD internal funding of \$2.6 million. Future phases of the Kimberley juvenile justice strategy will be progressed through the broader KAYWSC, a partnership of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation and a range of agencies beyond the Department of Justice, including the Mental Health Commission, the Department of Communities and the Department of Education. Some of these programs will include the design of—we have not reached this stage—a facility in the Kimberley for on-country living for youth so that youths will not be remanded in Banksia Hill Detention Centre. This will not require legislative change. It will mean that courts will have the capacity to release people on bail with a residential condition that they live in an on-country facility. There is \$2 million set aside for an on-country facility out of the department's existing budgetary allocations. Of course, there was the huge fines enforcements reform, of which I have the details here.

[2.30 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think I understand what the Attorney General is saying. We are all up against time here.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am sorry; I am in your hands, member.

The CHAIR: You are in mine, actually. Would you like a further question, member for North West Central?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, I have a further question. Has the Attorney General been made aware that there is a directive from the Commissioner of Police to police officers not to charge youth under the age of 15? Has the Attorney General heard any rumours or is he aware that that is fact?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No, I am not aware of that, but I am aware of youths under 15 being charged. The member has to be more specific about which offences. I am aware of people under the age of 15 having been charged.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of trying to reduce the incarceration rate of Aboriginal youth, the Attorney General has spoken all about the Kimberley, but the Kimberley is one part of Western Australia. There seem to be no juvenile justice strategies outside the Kimberley. The police seem to have a reluctance to charge juveniles under the age of 15. In places such as Carnarvon, where crime has escalated dramatically, Meekatharra, Northam and other places around Western Australia, we are not seeing these youths charged. Perhaps that is to meet the targets of 15 per cent and 31 per cent in 2031. It would be interesting to see whether this is a policy of the government to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates, which I understand and accept, but when there is no diversionary funding or strategies available for anything outside the Kimberley region, we have an escalation of crime. I cite Carnarvon as an example of a town that needs respite because no programs are in place to deal with those juvenile offenders. They are not being charged or put into jail and, therefore, are building up these offences, which offers no respite for the community. Businesses there are broken into five times in four days and home invasions are occurring—I have experienced one myself. What plans are in place outside the Kimberley region to deal with this escalating problem of youths under 15 who know they are not going to be charged? The evidence I have from police on the ground is that there is a directive by the police commissioner not to charge youths under the age of 15. What does the Attorney General say to that?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There are several things I would like to say to that in my response, and the first is to duck it. Whether the commissioner has issued such a directive or not is beyond me. I have never heard of such a direction. The member asked whether I had heard a rumour or whether I knew of a direction. I know of no rumour, I know of no direction, and I know that there are youths under 15 currently in Banksia Hill Detention Centre. With respect, to get to the bottom of whether there is any direction, which I suspect there is not, given that people under that age are being charged, the question should be directed to the Minister for Police. It is certainly not within my knowledge, and I will add to that in a moment. My knowledge is that people under 15 are being charged.

Secondly, as to youth justice strategies, that fits in with the Department of Corrective Services and not within the Attorney General's department. When the member asks what strategies we have for different diversion programs, as the state Attorney General, I moved at the Meeting of Attorneys-General, which is known as MAG, formerly CAG—the acronyms change faster than I can keep up; they all sound like a COVID cough—that the Australian Attorneys examine the proposition as to whether the age of criminal responsibility should be raised, given that the Don Dale royal commission recommended that it be 12 and there be no imprisonment for those under 14. Having raised that, I recognised immediately that there must be massive other programs to deal with these children. We cannot just withdraw the police and let the kids have the streets, as it were. Solid programs must be in place. I am working in consultation with other Attorneys General around the country and with the department to look at a cross-agency response to youth justice, especially for those under the age of 12. We have to look after these children. I know the member visits schools for graduations. We are talking about grades 5 and 6 here; they are very young children. The member said there are no programs. We have to have a cross-agency look at the best way of doing this around Australia, and we will.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No programs exist to deal with juveniles under the age of 15 in the Gascoyne–Murchison and other parts of the north west. Often a 14 or 15-year-old, an older teenager, will be influencing the younger kids who are often eight, nine or 10.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Who are not being charged at the moment.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: They are not being charged at the moment and they are committing crimes on behalf of the older kids and being taught by them. We have a significant problem when it comes to children—they are children; it is a taught behaviour—but it is a reality when it comes to the pressures that a community feels. Also, there are reasons children do not go home. It is a very complex issue and I am not trying to diminish that fact, but there is a huge crime issue and no diversionary tactics, policies or funding to assist with what the Attorney General is trying to say. The only way to get respite is to charge these prolific offenders—I am not talking about one to four charges, but 10, 20, 30, 40 or 100 charges against them—who are causing huge problems in the community. It is respite not just for the community, but for those children who need to break away from who they are hanging around. I am firmly against moving the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, or 10 to 12, simply because the majority of that criminal behaviour is being conducted by kids eight to 10 years of age.

[2.40 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: As I said, the proposition was just being examined by the Attorneys General around Australia. The good that might come from that will not necessarily be to move the age but to provide a sharper concentration of alternative programs. We have to remember that after the machinery-of-government changes, Corrective Services is in Justice as well, and Corrective Services has responsibility for youth justice. All the programs that the member would like me to detail, Mr Johnston could detail in the Corrective Services division because it delivers those programs.

The working group of Attorneys General produced a working paper and sought submissions. The Commissioner of Police put in a submission saying that the age should be raised to 12.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the Attorney General support the age moving from 10 to 12?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am waiting until I see the alternatives. The work has to be done. We have to examine the issue and see the alternatives.

If I can prioritise the issues that the member raised when he held his hand down and said that little children are involved as well, the first and foremost responsibility I have is to the victims of crime. When their house is invaded, they do not know the age of the invader, and nor do they care. Their privacy, security and everything has been breached by an offender. Just to prioritise it, the first responsibility is the safeguarding of the community and the protection of the member's constituents. The act governing children puts the welfare of the child as the first priority when looking at the sentencing of children. It does not outweigh all the other priorities that have to be taken into account. The first priority is what is best for the child. Obviously, Banksia Hill Detention Centre is a learning ground for criminals. They are placed there at a very young age and mix with the sort of people that the member described earlier—older people in there. They make all these new contacts in there. If we can keep them away from Banksia Hill and keep them out of the web of the criminal justice system and deal with them firmly in another manner, all the better.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I support that, but the issue is that they have no other opportunities in places such as Carnarvon or Meekatharra. If a juvenile breaks into a house and they are caught by the police, the first port of call is for the police to take them to a parent or guardian. They are often dropped off and off they go again to commit a crime and they are back in detention.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is what we want to avoid.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Then they go to the juvenile justice teams, which work with them time and again until they probably get to the point when that juvenile has committed 100 offences, when enough is enough and the magistrate will sentence them. The issue is that there are no support services for that juvenile, whether they are aged 10 or 15. The issue is that in places such as Carnarvon, which I use as a good example, there are no strategies or funding to assist those juveniles. I keep on saying that respite is needed for the community because if no agencies are working with those youths and, more importantly, they are not working with those parents, we have this revolving door of juveniles going into the police lock-up and getting out without being charged. The community needs respite. The only avenue that I have as a member and that my constituents have is to say we should put these youths in jail, which does not help because they come out better at offending. It is a big problem. When youths under the age of 15 know that they will not be charged, we see crime get out of control. Carnarvon is a classic example of the policy failure set out by the Commissioner of Police that is having a huge impact on our communities right around Western Australia.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I wish to take issue with the member that there is a policy that youths under the age of 15 will not be charged. We only have to go to the Children's Court to find out how many are charged. In the last year, to my best recollection, the President of the Children's Court informed me that 70 different children aged 10 and 11 came before the court. That is not the older ones. As soon as they get to the age of 12 and 13 and the testosterone turns on, the rate of offending lifts, which is not unexpected.

I take the member's point about the dysfunctionality of many of the homes from which these youths come, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. I am concerned about the rate of Indigenous incarceration and realise that the breakpoint for this line of questioning from the member for North West Central is what we are doing to reduce the level of Indigenous incarceration. One of the things we need to do to reduce it is get in early in their lives for the very reason that, as the member pointed out, they come under the influence of older children. We have to replace that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why is the government not doing it then? I hear a lot about the Kimberley but I have not heard anything about any other part of the state.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We are doing things. The youth justice area is within the portfolio of the Department of Justice, not within mine. I am not seeking to wash my hands of it; I will have a go at trying to fix as much as I can. I defer to the director general to give a further answer to the assertion that there are no programs.

Dr A. Tomison: I do not have all the facts in front of me because this is not the corrective services portfolio; that is in my other file. I can say that beyond the Kimberley juvenile justice strategy, there may not be a formal strategy in name, such as the Carnarvon strategy or whatever, but each region of the state has youth justice moneys attached to them, which are designed to case manage individuals who have come before the courts after committing an offence. That is also used to purchase services when they are available. One of the issues in more rural areas is the availability of those services. They can be hard to get. I understand what the member is saying.

To reiterate what the Attorney said, I am not aware of any policy by the police to not charge kids under the age of 15. We have kids in Banksia today who are under the age of 15 and kids before the Children's Court who are under the age of 15. That said, diversion where possible is absolutely a policy of the police and also Justice. As the member recognised, Banksia may be a circuit-breaker but it will not help fix the problem of why these kids are committing offences. Many kids will take risks and test the boundaries. As the member said, those individuals go on to commit 10, 20 or 30 offences. We have to focus on how we manage that and the individuals. Services are available. The issue will be around whether demand can be met using the moneys available and the services that are available in areas such as Carnarvon. About a year ago, I thought the local police and community youth centre was very

effective at engaging kids after school, and the rate of burglaries and vandalism et cetera dropped quite significantly. I do not know why that changed again but these things come in cycles. At that point, Carnarvon was doing very well. I do not know what has changed but these things happen.

As the Attorney General also said, this is not just a justice problem; the underlying causes that lead to kids committing offences require a range of other responses. For example, the Department of Communities has a program called Target 120, which deals with at-risk kids and families to circuit-break and not have them come into the criminal justice system. That is beyond my remit but we participate in that and we think it is an effective way to help circuit-break.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question, and then I will end this line of questioning because I think other members wish to ask questions.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, I have not given you the call yet. Please wait for the call. The member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Oh, my god.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What the Attorney is saying —

The CHAIR: I am sorry; member for North West Central. I will give you the call without any further commentary or reaction. The member for North West Central has the call.

[2.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Attorney General's department has a clear policy position —

A safe, secure and decent corrective services which contributes to community safety and reduces offenders' involvement in the justice system.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Sorry, what are you reading from, member?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is on page 428 of budget paper No 2, in the table "Relationship to Government Goals". I understand the target of 120, but that is to do with first-time offenders. In regional WA, we are not dealing with first-time offenders; we are dealing with offenders who have been in the system up to 100 times and for whom that program just does not work. The program cannot be rolled out because we do not have first-time offenders. I will end on this point: the government's strategies are admirable, and we all want to reduce the number of children in the system. But in the absence of programs and good, sound policy that actually deals with the serious issues, the Attorney General can understand the feeling in the community. These communities are often powder kegs, ready to go, because there is no respite for the children, the parents and the community. The Attorney General can understand that the only avenue we have is to lock them up, unless the government is prepared to back up these very good, sound strategic directions and policies. That is clearly not the case, which is why we have a revolving door and the attitude amongst youth that they are not going to be charged. I put it on the record again that the Commissioner of Police has directed police officers in this state to reduce the number of charges against youths under the age of 15 years, to meet these targets set out by the government.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I reject that last assertion. I take the member to the same table on page 428 of budget paper No 2. Under the heading "Government Goal" it states —

Safe, Strong and Fair Communities:

From his questioning, that is also the member's aspiration—a safe, strong and fair community. When we look at how we want to achieve that, the outcomes are listed in the middle column of that table, including good court and tribunal services, and trustee and guardianship services. All of those fit within my portfolio. The last one is the one the member referred to —

A safe, secure and decent corrective services which contributes to community safety and reduces offenders' involvement in the justice system.

That is exactly relevant to what the member is talking about, and he will see that the services for delivering that desired outcome, services 9 and 10, are the two services that are not in my portfolio: adult corrective services and youth justice services.

I am not trying to avoid the member, but I dispute his assertion that there is a commissioner's directive to not charge people under the age of 15 years. I also dispute that there are no programs in place for dealing with youth crime and youth justice. The government is going to radically improve this area, but the member will have to ask —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How? There is nothing in the budget. The Attorney General keeps talking about the Kimberley; where are all the other programs? Where are they being delivered? Where is the funding?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We plan to improve this, and I have already said that I have been working with the Attorneys General from other jurisdictions to determine the optimal programs for diverting these people into. We cannot not charge people and not have sound, strong programs in place. This whole discussion started with the rate of Indigenous incarceration, which stands at about 45 per cent of the adult prison estate and, tragically, about

85 per cent of the youth prison estate. It can be seen that one leads to the other, if we look at how many people there are in Hakea Prison who have spent time in Banksia Hill Detention Centre. It is tragic, and we plan to do something about it, but we cannot get ahead of the community or the member's constituents. We are planning to put much stronger alternative programs out there.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: One of the other issues is that the Department for Child Protection and Family Support is nine-to-five, but children are roaming the streets from 10.00 pm until five in the morning. That has a huge effect on school attendance. I want to make it quite clear: this is not about being racist.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Nothing good comes after that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: This is about the reality of what is happening in my electorate. Over the last month, youth crime has been 100 per cent Aboriginal, and that has come from the police. There is a significant issue that needs to be dealt with. I understand where the Attorney General is coming from, and I am not questioning his integrity or will. The issue is that it is all very good to say these words, but the reality of what is happening is completely different, and we need help.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is what we plan to give the member; it is not a line item in the budget. First of all, we have to come up with the programs. I do not want to see 10 and 11-year-old kids in Banksia Hill—not because I feel sorry for them, but because I feel sorry for the community. They will only come out of there more hardened in their recalcitrant ways. It is not a case of sympathy for the children; it is a case of: what can we do to best protect the community from further offending from these children? When we see a child aged 10 or 12 years who has committed an offence, it is a pretty good predictor that, throughout their teenage years, they are going to be trouble and a cost to our community. There has to be a cross-agency response.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 432 of budget paper No 2 and service 2, “Advocacy, Guardianship and Administration Services”, and the costs that are associated with these services. Does the increase in the net cost of these services include the changes to the Guardianship and Administration Act 1990 that were promised by the McGowan government some time ago?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will defer to the Public Advocate in a moment. With regard to further amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act, instructions have been settled, but they are with the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. I keep trying to push in front of all the other ministers to get mine done, and they all abuse me because I am the Attorney General and it fits within my portfolio! But there already are instructions with Parliamentary Counsel to carry out significant reforms. We have done some Guardianship and Administration Act reforms, and they went to people who cannot give consent to medical trials. I had to pull that out of the block of amendments at Parliamentary Counsel's Office and deal with it as a discrete item because of COVID and any possible trial treatments. I would like to turn to the Public Advocate to perhaps answer that question if I may, thank you, Mrs Bagdonavicius.

[3.00 pm]

Ms P.M. Bagdonavicius: In answer to the member's question, there have not been any changes that have impacted on the Office of the Public Advocate or the advocacy of guardianship and administration services. There was an amendment last year in amending legislation around medical research. However, at this stage, this is not causing a major flow-on of work into my office. The demand for appointments with the Public Advocate and an increase in applications to the State Administrative Tribunal are, in fact, being driven by changes in other legislative areas such as the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme as well as the changes around restrictive practices that are happening now in aged care as a result of changes to the aged care legislation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Were the amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act the changes that the Attorney General was alluding to in relation to elder abuse?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there no impact across the forward estimates anticipated for that being introduced and being required to be managed or administered?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No. Our pressure point in the outgoing years of the budget is the dramatic increase in guardianship applications. This is brought about for a number of reasons: one is an ageing population and more people seeking guardianship of those suffering dementia of some form; the other big increase in the agency's work has been the number of people who require guardianship under the NDIS. All this has resulted in quite a steep increase in the public advocate's workload.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Attorney General. I understand what the known impacts are across the forward estimates. I am trying to understand when these changes to the Guardianship and Administration Act in relation to elder abuse reforms come into play, what impact they will have across the forward estimates and whether that has been accounted for across the service.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not know; I will have to ask the Public Advocate. It has not become law yet, so I do not know that it has been costed out.

Ms P.M. Bagdonavicius: No, it has not. The work that is happening at a national level around, for instance, elder abuse, and a major national reform, is the introduction of the national register. The impact of that on the state is yet to be costed because it is still being worked through with the working group for proposing back to Attorneys General a model that will operate across Australia. It is very difficult with different legislation around enduring powers of attorney operating in different jurisdictions, and having a point of lodgement with a national register. All of that is yet to be worked through.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When does the Attorney General anticipate having those reforms in front of the Parliament?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Next year. It will not be this year; Parliamentary Counsel has a full book.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That seems quite a long time after the Attorney General made the commitment to introduce those reforms.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It is. One gets these big reports and we have to send them down there. The other one has been outstanding since Mr Mischin was Attorney General and they were referred to the Coroner's Court, which are down there. As soon as we can get them done, we will get them in.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to the first item under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 425. What is the government doing to progress reform to the mentally impaired accused legislation and associated service redesign?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Thank you, member. The Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused) Bill 2021, which will give great effect to this reform, is well progressed. It will deliver the government's 2017 election commitment to reform the current Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused) Act 1996. This is the first time in 25 years that this law has been reformed. The changes are complex and the necessary time and care is therefore being taken to get it right. The Department of Justice is currently working with stakeholders, including at least seven other agencies and statutory bodies, to prepare for the implementation of the reforms to be provided by the bill.

The additional \$1.5 million will support the continuation of this critical policy work over the coming financial year. I remind the member that the complexity of this bill encompasses the new notion in Western Australia of special hearings for mental impairment, special verdicts, and a range of dispositions for offences other than the binary choice between discharge into the community or imprisonment. We are working on this critical area of reform to be delivered to Parliament.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 428, under the heading "Service Summary".

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will turn to my budget paper. Can the member please reframe that question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 428, under the heading "Service Summary", in volume 2 of budget paper No 2. Why is the 2021 estimated actual cost of \$15.660 million for the National Redress Scheme greater than the 2020–21 budget cost?

[3.10 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There are a couple of reasons. First of all, the commonwealth government presaged the states to agree to an increase of the maxima from \$100 000 to \$150 000. There has also been a significant increase in the number of applications brought. We do not get to fix the amount of redress given. The commonwealth office does that, so it is out of our hands. I can say that our role in it is somewhat limited. It is to do with helping people make their applications. As at 17 June 2021, 1 476 applications were received this year with 2 900 requests for information sent to government agencies. There have been 978 determinations, and 870 applicants were offered redress with responsibility for Western Australian government institutions. Of those 862, 799 accepted the offer.

Now, with the uplifting of the maximum, the average payment for abuse, with responsibility for the state government, is \$68 400. The average payment to the applicant may be higher because there might have been joint responsibility between the state and private institutions whom the state pays for a child in care. But in 2020–21, the total cost of redress payments was \$42 million. This figure includes the cost of redress payments, counselling costs, and commonwealth and Department of Justice administrative costs. We have had more applications this year than anticipated. That might be because victims who see other victims successfully go the course, if I can put it that way, with an application might be encouraged to bring an application. There has certainly been an uplift in the number of applications.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 425 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and election commitments in the table under "Spending Changes". My question relates to the Broome Aboriginal-led specialist family violence court. From my reading, it says a total of \$2.8 million is allocated in 2021–22 and the forward estimates for the establishment of the facility. Why is there a difference between that amount and what the government publicly committed to spend, which to my understanding is \$5.6 million?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Capital and recurrent costs are involved. The department has allocated \$2.8 million for recurrent funding, including depreciation over the forward estimates, to establish the specialist family violence court in Broome. In addition, the department has also allocated capital funding of the same sum—\$2.8 million—over 2021–22 and 2022–23. Based on a similar specialist family violence court, the Barndimalgu Court in Geraldton,

the Broome Aboriginal-led specialist family violence court will be co-designed with involvement from the community. The member will remember that when we brought family protection laws into Parliament, we introduced this whole concept of shuttle conferencing for restraining order cases to try to take the stress off people. The court will incorporate a restraining orders conferencing pilot—because there will be a pilot—and shuttle conferencing from the same facility. The space may be used for other court purposes when not in use.

Consultation on the infrastructure and development to construct the custom-made transportable building in Broome has commenced to establish the specialist court. The initiative cannot commence until the custom-made transportable building is installed. This is not expected to be completed until the 2022–23 budget year. Council building approval, current construction shortages and consultation with the local community are all impacting on that time line.

I draw the Leader of the Opposition’s attention to page 440 of the budget paper No 2, new works and the line item “Broome Aboriginal-Led Specialist Family Violence Court”. There she will find \$28 million has been allocated—sorry.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is a lot of money for a transportable!

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have had a lot of trouble with zeros in the past 12 months. I dropped a couple off Clive’s claim at one point.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is like when your head is spinning in the helicopter.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: An amount of \$2.8 million has been allocated for the capital works to proceed on the Broome Aboriginal-led specialist family violence court. It will be \$5.6 million.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question. Just so that I am clear in my mind, the recurrent and capital commitment of \$5.6 million is in the forward estimates, as laid out under spending changes on page 440?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Across the out years, \$5.6 million is the total, because you have the recurrent.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I have a further question on shuttle conferencing, which the Attorney General raised in answer to the Leader of the Opposition. On page 426, shuttle conferencing for family violence restraining orders is currently operating at the Perth Magistrates Court. Can the Attorney General advise when it is expected to expand to other metropolitan sites such as Joondalup and Fremantle, and whether it is expected to go to any regional centres?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I can. Family violence restraining orders conferencing will commence at Fremantle and Joondalup courts during the second quarter of 2021–22—that is, late this year it will commence in Fremantle and Joondalup. Further expansion into the Armadale court is expected towards the end of next year and a regional expansion into Bunbury and Broome courts during the 2022–23 financial year will be dependent upon the completion of that structure that I referred the member to earlier.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 431 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the 2020–21 estimated costs for Coroner’s Court cases. The cost per case is significantly higher than what was budgeted for. What is the reason for this cost increase? I note that paragraph 8 on page 432 refers to “higher costs in forensic pathology services and an increase in body removals”. What are the reasons for these higher costs?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The estimated costs are higher than the 2020–21 budget for the Coroner’s Court by 20 per cent and higher than the 2021–22 budget target by 10 per cent. This is primarily due to the higher costs in forensic pathology services and an increase in body removals, which the Coroner has to undertake. They were the estimated versus actual costs and the difficulty there. In the Coroner’s Court, 3 400 cases were budgeted for finalisation in 2020–2021. The actual estimated came in spot on; I think it fell short by only 18 cases. The member can see the cost uplift there. In 2019–20, the total cost was \$22 250 174. The cost per case did not alter through to 2020–21. In fact, it went up by \$31.

[3.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 426, which states —

The Western Australian Office of Crime Statistics and Research ... which was established in 2020 provides a cross-agency, evidence-based approach to criminal justice decision-making and policy development.

How much of the total appropriations for the Department of Justice has been allocated to WACSAR?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: A sum of \$3 million per annum, which includes the reallocation of existing resources. When I say “reallocation of existing resources”, I refer to about 18 full-time equivalents, but they were people who were writing annual reports, key performance indicators and associated matters that dealt with criminal outcomes. A large quantum of the reallocation of existing resources has gone into this, plus two new specialists who will be able to analyse the data and tell us which programs are succeeding and which ones are not.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the Attorney General referring to the work to establish the non-statutory advisory board or does that come within the work of WACSAR? The budget paper further states —

... comprising representatives from the justice sector and university partners to provide strategic advice to WACSAR and support the administration of a new research grant fund.

How many people are on that non-statutory advisory board?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I defer to the director general, Dr Tomison.

Dr A. Tomison: The office is now fully established and the inaugural director, Dr Shona Hyde, was appointed last year. There is a complement of 18 FTEs, most of which have been sourced internally and, as the Attorney General said, have been reallocated to the function to bring our analytical functions together. The cost is about \$3 million per annum. The non-statutory advisory board is made up of four ex officio members—me, as the chair, the Chief Justice of Western Australia, the Commissioner of Police and the deputy director of the Australian Institute of Criminology—and three representatives from local universities. The cost for doing that will be negligible. The most one would expect to pay is some sitting fees for the three university representatives. It is most likely that they will not be paid for that role.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How will the \$300 000 yearly allocation to WACSAR for those grants be administered?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I defer to the director general again, please.

Dr A. Tomison: Essentially, this money is going to be used as a research grant modelled off the criminology research grants that the Australian Institute of Criminology has run for 20-plus years, but they will be focused in Western Australia and will look to get research done that directly benefits the Western Australian justice system and associated areas. The advisory board will oversee the allocation of those grants. Each year there will be a grants round asking for particular topics that may interest the board, but also other research that universities and other researchers may wish to put forward. They will be ranked, the applications will go through a process of review and the \$300 000 will be allocated according to priorities, best grants et cetera and then monitored going forward. The board will make that decision.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Excuse my ignorance, but can I be given an example of the sorts of things that will be researched?

Dr A. Tomison: In the last year, the office has focused particularly on evaluating our internal programs such as what works in rehabilitation in the prison system. We are doing that internally, but we can also call on academics to work with us. The intention of these grants is to do more primary research for which we may not have the expertise or capacity, or we cannot grow that expertise, and we want to work productively with those who are already experts in the field to perhaps undertake new analyses that will give us greater insights. An example of that which is not part of the office at the moment, but has been a useful exercise in the past, was when Telethon Kids Institute did some work at Banksia Hill Detention Centre that looked at the prevalence of cognitive impairment in kids inside Banksia. That has had far-reaching coverage and also implications for the department and how we manage those children effectively. We will be looking to get applications from universities in the areas of criminology, psychology and medicine, with projects that we think could improve or enhance our courts system or Corrective Services and any of our functions that relate to justice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Was that \$300 000 a year?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How much would the average grant be worth, or is that dependent on the application?

Dr A. Tomison: The criminology research grants have operated on \$330 000 a year nationally for 20-plus years. I am the chair of that committee at the moment and I used to be the director at the Australian Institute of Criminology, so I know this program pretty well. The grants vary. They are usually much less than \$100 000—often only a tenth of that. The applicants will also source additional funding and make a contribution to the projects so that we get more value out of them. I cannot tell the member directly, because it depends on who applies and how much they ask for, but I expect that we would be taking a similar approach whereby we try to get the most substantial benefits from a relatively small amount of money by asking people to bring additional funding and we would part-fund the applications. I think that most grants would be less than \$70 000, just off the top of my head.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I might have missed this bit, but when will those grants be available?

Dr A. Tomison: The money has been allocated in this current budget and we are currently working out a process to, first, set up the board and have the first board meeting, and then we can start to run the grants program. One of the issues is the timing of when these grants should be run because we do not want to compete with the criminology research grants program, which typically goes out around June or July and makes a decision in November of the same year. It is a matter of working through that, but I expect that, certainly within the first year, the \$300 000 for this year will have been hopefully allocated through the grants round.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 429, the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators table and the line item “Coroner’s Court—time to trial”. What factors have contributed to the “Coroner’s Court—time to trial” blowout from 86 weeks in 2019–20 to 140 weeks in 2020–21, and what is the estimated actual time frame?

[3.30 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will defer to Miss Stampalia, who will be able to tell us more about the Coroner’s Court.

Miss J. Stampalia: In 2019–20, we appointed a part-time coroner to deal with a number of matters, including 44 long-term missing person cases. That result impacted this year. Obviously, finalising so many matters last year

reduced the time to 86 weeks. That part-time resource has completed the effort involved with those cases and now we are back to a result of about 140 weeks. A number of factors contribute to that. Sometimes it relates to the complexity of the matter being dealt with and some take a long time to finalise in readiness for inquest. That could involve the police report, or reports from specialists as well.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Many constituents who have lost a loved one and have come in to see me have said that they are waiting on the coroner's report to set a date for the funeral. We are talking 54 weeks' difference; that is a significant difference between the figure in 2019–20 and the 2020–21 estimated actual of 140 weeks. Surely the government could find in its big budget surplus some funds to go towards putting on perhaps a part-time coroner to assist in reducing that figure. It does have a huge impact on loved ones who are left behind having to wait for a coroner's report to be able to conduct what should be done in a very effective and quick manner—that is, to be able to hold a funeral service in a timely manner.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There are two issues. The member talked about the length of time for a resolution of the whole case being 140 weeks. The other part of the question, which I think Miss Stampalia addressed to a degree, concerned the release of the body so that the family could hold a funeral.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry, what was that?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The member said that it can take up to four weeks before a funeral can be conducted. The question was: what can we do to reduce the delay? The coroner cannot release the body until the cause of death has been examined. The coroner is very, very sensitive to the issue the member raised—that is, that grieving relatives cannot grieve properly or achieve closure without a funeral. It happened in my family. The cause of death, which was not known until four weeks down the track, was determined to be a brain embolism. For four weeks, the whole family was walking around in a state of grief and wonderment—not wonderment; concern—about what caused the sudden death of a young man. The hold-up, in my family's case, was the same as the hold-up in most of these cases. There are two sticking points that hold things up; one is pathology—the amount of time that PathWest takes to do its toxicology tests—and the other is that there has to be a full police investigation of any sudden death. Those two factors restrain the coroner from an early release of the body. She does not want to hold on to these bodies, I can assure the member, and she wants to see families get on with the grim process of burying their loved one, but she is constrained by the fact that she has to wait for toxicology and police reports. Not that I tried in any way to hurry things up, but I just watched closely, in my family's situation, on the progress of the matter because it was an instant case. I was observing intensely. It was four or five weeks before they were able to say that it was a brain embolism and release the body. It was an awful period.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of advocating for further resources in the areas outlined, has the Attorney General brought that up with the Treasurer to provide further funding to reduce the time? There is a difference of 54 weeks; it is not a week or two, it is a significant amount of time.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do, and have, but pathology is within the remit of the Minister for Health and police is within the remit of the Minister for Police. Where I can, I do what I can. That is why, on taking office, I moved as quickly as I could to get a CT scanner installed down at the mortuary, so that post-mortems could happen or causes of death could be determined quicker. I think that cost us about \$2.5 million. Within my area, I have been working hard to try to address this, but a body cannot be released before toxicology results have come back. Someone could be buried before someone alleges foul play, and toxicology might not have been done. We have seen this in other jurisdictions; famously, in the case of Marilyn Monroe, as I recall. There were questions about her toxicology results never having been properly completed before she was interred, and then people wanted to exhume the remains to try to do toxicology 40 years later!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There is too much there to even start unpacking! The case of Marilyn Monroe—politics and power! I refer to page 431 in volume 2 of budget paper No 2. Note 3, under “Explanation of Significant Movements”, states —

The 2020–21 Estimated Actual is higher than the 2020–21 Budget due to a decrease in civil and criminal appeal finalisations.

What is the reason for this reduction in appeal finalisations? Further to that, has there been any stakeholder feedback regarding this reduction?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The manager of court services watches this intently, so I will ask Miss Stampalia whether she can enlighten us.

Miss J. Stampalia: The finalisations for the Court of Appeal have varied a little from the previous year as well. Because there is such a small number of finalisations in that jurisdiction, any simple reduction in the finalisations can actually impact the cost per case.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The second part of my question was: has there been any stakeholder feedback regarding this reduction?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: In the Court of Appeal?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Or is it considered insignificant or not relevant?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Has there been any stakeholder feedback?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, regarding the reduction.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I do not think it is a trick question!

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have not had any stakeholder feedback. The only feedback I get from the Court of Appeal is that it is terribly overworked. The President of the Court of Appeal is known to be a very, very hard worker and makes all the other judges keep up. The problem down there is one of workload and stress.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We will get to that, Attorney General.

[3.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 425, budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the spending changes associated with the COVID-19 response, and specifically the \$3 995 000 for community legal services demand. What is the reason for the increase in demand?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will ask the director general to assist us with this answer.

Dr A. Tomison: The department will spend an additional \$3.995 million to address the ongoing demand for legal assistance resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding for the previous agreement, which was the commonwealth's project agreement for COVID-19 legal assistance, ended in 2021, with the state agreeing to match the funding allocation from 2020–21 and 2021–22. COVID-19 is expected to continue to create ongoing need for legal assistance services. Following the announcement in the state budget on 9 September, the department has commenced consultations with the legal assistance sector to determine the funding distribution. The member would be aware that one of the outcomes of COVID-19 over the last year or so has been the growth in family violence matters, particularly, and also elements of clients seeking advice around tenancies and an increase in court applications for eviction and termination. That is pretty much what I can tell the member at the moment. We are consulting with the sector and then we will allocate the funding accordingly. Those are the key areas we are looking at.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the department expect this demand to ease over the forward estimates, because there is no funding after 2021–22? Does the department expect to ask for further funds in future budgets?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The director general, please.

Dr A. Tomison: It is hard to know, frankly, because it depends on what happens in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that may or may not come into force in the state of Western Australia. We know from last year's restrictions—this is a national and probably an international problem—that there has been growth in the areas that I just mentioned. If we continue to have COVID restrictions as a result of outbreaks of the Delta strain or something else, I expect that there will continue to be new demands or higher demands in the areas of family violence, tenancies and other matters. I cannot really predict it, so we may actually go back to the government, depending on what happens, to seek further funding. It is a maybe.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Out of the just under \$4 million for community legal services demand, how many more FTEs will that employ? What makes up that nearly \$4 million that was asked for? Will it be used to employ lawyers and advocates? Can the Attorney General explain the \$4 million spend?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Mr Hainsworth, please.

Mr M. Hainsworth: Basically, the \$4 million will be distributed to the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA, Aboriginal family violence prevention legal services and community legal centres. The expectation is that the money will be there to provide legal services, so it will most likely be used to employ a combination of lawyers and paralegals.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the Attorney General able to provide a breakdown of the \$4 million going to the Aboriginal Legal Service or family domestic violence services? Can the Attorney General provide a background on how that \$4 million will be distributed through those groups?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will ask Mr Hainsworth to answer.

Mr M. Hainsworth: As the director general said, we are still in negotiation with the legal assistance sector, but very broadly, the ALS gets slightly less than \$1 million at the moment, Aboriginal family violence prevention legal services get slightly over \$1 million and community legal centres will receive approximately \$2 million, but we are still in the negotiation phase with those particular providers.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why has the Aboriginal Legal Service had its funding cut—it gets very little of the pie—given its workload and the difficulty it has in retaining lawyers, because they are often poached by community legal services or others? Has any thought been given to addressing the slide in the Aboriginal Legal Service, which is absolutely critical, especially in regional Western Australia, where it seems to lack the funding to properly represent Aboriginal people in remote parts of Western Australia?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Once again, I defer to Mr Hainsworth.

Mr M. Hainsworth: That is just COVID funding. The majority of the Aboriginal Legal Service's funding is provided under the National Legal Assistance Partnership program, which is funded by the commonwealth. That budget provides for a relatively small increase in funding over the forward estimates. For that particular funding, we basically administer the amount of money provided by the commonwealth.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What funding does the state government put into the Aboriginal Legal Service? Does it receive all its funding from the commonwealth or is there a state contribution?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Mr Hainsworth, please.

Mr M. Hainsworth: The Aboriginal Legal Service obviously gets state money for COVID. There are also a number of other programs for which it receives funding from the state. For example, the state provides some money for the custody notification service. It also provides money for the reducing avoidable remand project and the youth engagement project. A number of projects are state funded and that funding is provided to the Aboriginal Legal Service.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the Aboriginal Legal Service approached the department for further funding given the increase in demand that has occurred because of COVID? Has it approached the department and said that more funding is needed to properly advocate on behalf of Aboriginal people?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The Aboriginal Legal Service has not approached us for extra funding because of COVID.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What about in general; has it approached the department for further funding?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I refer to Mr Hainsworth.

Mr M. Hainsworth: The Aboriginal Legal Service of WA, along with Legal Aid WA, community legal centres, Aboriginal family violence prevention legal services and Law Access, have joined with the Department of Justice to form a collaborative service planning group, which is required under the National Legal Assistance Partnership. That group has met on a number of occasions as part of the consultation on distributing COVID money, plus some additional funding that has been announced by the commonwealth. The ALS makes its case in those forums, as do the community legal centres and the Aboriginal family violence prevention legal services about their level of unmet demand. I think that collaborative service planning group would broadly acknowledge that, as outlined by the Productivity Commission, there is a reasonable degree of unmet legal need, particularly in regional areas.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: My question is further to the original question of the member for North West Central before we went off on the tangent of funding of the Aboriginal Legal Service. My question concerns COVID specifically.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It was not a tangent; it was important.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Of course it was important, but it was a new line of questioning. If the member does not know what he is doing, do not worry about it.

In addition to the financial responses that the government has had to implement, what have been some of the legislative responses the government has implemented in response to COVID?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is a further question to COVID.

The CHAIR: It is in relation to the COVID-19 response, which was the first question.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Correct.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: As the member is aware, there has been a range of legislative responses, including amendments to the Criminal Code to deal with a situation in which someone threatens another person by saying that they have COVID, intimidating police by spitting on them et cetera. We then had a range of legislative responses under my previous portfolio of Commerce, including a moratorium on evictions, which ran through to 31 March this year, and the ability to negotiate tenancy reductions, rent reductions and rent holidays. There was also the urgently advanced Protection of Information (Entry Registration Information Relating to COVID-19 and Other Infectious Diseases) Act 2021 to protect the data on the SafeWA app from being used by Western Australian police in the course of investigations. In that regard I note a recent article out of Sydney that says Sydney police have been using the data from the QR entry code and people are calling for the urgent introduction of the Western Australian legislation, being the best in Australia at protecting public data.

[3.50 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 431 and the costs for Children's Court cases. I note that the 2020–21 estimated actual cost for Children's Court cases, which is the cost per case, particularly criminal cases, is significantly higher than what was budgeted. Why is this the case?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Is that \$574 000 to \$1 035 000?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The 2020–21 estimated actual is higher than the 2020–21 budgeted by 80 per cent, the 2019–20 actuals by 56 per cent and the 2021–22 budget target by 61 per cent. The 2021–22 budget target is higher than the

2020–21 budget by 12 per cent. This is primarily due to increased accused costs and the inclusion of WA Police Force security costs as resources received free of charge. The security costs for the court have been factored in as well. Further impacting the results were fewer finalisations, as criminal lodgements declined in theft, burglary, illicit drug and public order offences and property offences as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Dropping the numbers down increased the overall average.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Excuse my ignorance, but what are accused costs?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It is the accused person's costs. Costs may be ordered under the Official Prosecutions (Accused's Costs) Act. Accused persons cannot get costs in the indictable jurisdictions; they can in the Magistrates Court and the Children's Court.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you for explaining that, Attorney General.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 3.55 to 4.06 pm

Division 6: Western Australian Electoral Commission, \$7 373 000 —

Ms K.E. Giddens, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Minister for Electoral Affairs.

Mr R.L. Kennedy, Electoral Commissioner.

Mr C.N. Avent, Deputy Electoral Commissioner.

Ms E.L. Bruce, Director, Business Services.

Ms M. Buchanan, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr D. Emerson, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Leader of the Opposition, do you have any questions?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 90 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I am looking at "Relationship to Government Goals" under "Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information". Was the Western Australian Electoral Commission asked or did it provide any advice or information about the legislation that is now in front of Parliament to reform the Legislative Council and reduce regional representation in the Council?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Is the member talking about the policy position of a one-state electorate for the Legislative Council?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, that is correct, unless we can anticipate more legislation and further changes are proposed.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not know.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Please feel free to share them.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The policy position was arrived at after consideration by the ministerial expert panel. During the drafting of the legislation, there was some consultation with the Electoral Commission but not on policy matters, like what the ballot paper will look like and things like that, just how the next state election would be administered under that amendment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister expand on that and provide me with some specific details on what advice was sought from the Electoral Commission in relation to the legislation?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I did not seek advice from the Electoral Commission; I stayed away from the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission is independent. It just has to administer the law that the Parliament settles upon. In terms of arriving at the bill, I do not think I had one conversation with Mr Kennedy.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Hence the issue!

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I think I had one conversation with the commissioner when I got the portfolio. The commissioner came down to meet me and briefed me on how the last election went et cetera. As the Leader of the Opposition would appreciate, because she was a minister, when a member becomes a minister, all the agencies come in and tell them what is going on in their agency. The commissioner did that back in late March. I will stand corrected but I think the next conversation I had with the commissioner might have been yesterday. Yes, he is indicating that it was yesterday when he came to brief me on the budget papers. Having said that, I am aware from the MEP's report that it talked to the commissioner about things; not about policy, as such, but about the size of the ballot paper and those sorts of administrative matters.

[4.10 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So the Attorney General has not had any conversations, from a government perspective, about the costs that might be involved in a major redistribution of the Legislative Council and also, I anticipate, ahead of the next state election, a major redistribution of the Legislative Assembly as a result of removing the metropolitan boundary line?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I believe there was always going to be a redistribution in the back half of 2023; that is what I was told at my original briefing—that in each cycle there will be a look at the redistribution. As to the cost, if the bill is passed into law—which was the other part of the Leader of the Opposition's question—the first conversation I had on that question was yesterday.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there an understanding of what those costs might be? It is not an insignificant body of work. Is it reflected in the budget?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There is not a line item in the budget concerning the bill, as the Leader of the Opposition will appreciate. I will let the commissioner answer that.

Mr R.L. Kennedy: We were asked questions about the possible costs that might arise from the bill, but our analysis of the bill as it stands is that most of the additional work will be around the party registration side of things and those elements. We are confident that we can absorb those costs within the existing resources.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just to be clear, there has not been a request for an additional allocation to accommodate any of these changes—it will be dealt with within the budget of the Western Australian Electoral Commission?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Correct. That is what I am advised by the commissioner. He has not asked for any money, and, as he has just outlined in the previous answer, he believes that the principal costs will be in relation to party registration. As the Leader of the Opposition will appreciate, party registration will now be required to have attached to it at lodgement 500 individually signed declarations. The commissioner will have a role in auditing that. The commissioner would like to add to my answer.

Mr R.L. Kennedy: The only other item I would identify at this point—we are probably not able to estimate what it would be, and I do not even know whether it will be an additional cost—is the explanation of the changes in the voting system for the Legislative Council, the change to optional preferentials. There will be an element of an educative program that we will have to do in conjunction with the normal education program we will run in the lead-up to the 2025 election. It may be that we will need to spend some more money in that space, and that will be the subject of ongoing negotiations with Treasury about an increased amount for the state election in 2025 anyway.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How much does a normal redistribution process cost? I appreciate that there is a redistribution ahead of each election; it was relatively minor ahead of the last election. I do not know whether a redistribution has an impact on costs, but this will be more significant, regardless of whether there is a change in the legislation to the metropolitan boundary line. How much are we looking at in terms of the costs associated with a redistribution?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: How much would a normal redistribution cost?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Correct.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: They are all normal. I will ask the commissioner to answer.

Mr R.L. Kennedy: If I might, I will ask Mr Avent to cover that. I have not yet done a redistribution as commissioner, and he has been through a couple.

Mr C.N. Avent: The main focus of a distribution is on the lower house, in terms of the drawing of boundaries for the lower house districts. The focus for the upper house to change to a whole state would not have a dramatic effect, I would not think, on the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners and the process. From memory—not having been a commissioner in the distribution office—the cost of a distribution was in the order of \$2.4 million. A Supreme Court judge chairs that process, the head of the Australian Bureau of Statistics in WA is a commissioner, and the Electoral Commissioner is the third distribution commissioner. They establish an office that runs for 12 to 18 months and is supported by the Electoral Commission with corporate and administration support.

[4.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the \$2.4 million for distribution what occurred prior to the last election? I think the one before that was more significant. Is there a difference in cost when we look at a minor-major, or is it all the same?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Mr Avent.

Mr C.N. Avent: The cost is not different. The impact of the previous distribution had a greater effect on lower house boundaries than the last one. In terms of funding, the float provided separately from the Electoral Commission's budget was comparable.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of the minister's desired outcomes, as the Leader of the Opposition has mentioned, will the legislation that is in the house as we speak prevent what happened at the last election, in 2021, when a member of the Daylight Saving Party was elected on 96 votes? Will this legislation, leading to a Senate-style state upper house, prevent the election of someone from the Daylight Saving Party who may get 1 000 votes? Will the legislation that is before the house prevent a member of a party, such as the Daylight Saving Party, who may get 1 000 votes, from climbing the ladder and being elected?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not want to be difficult but this is not in the budget; I do not think the member could take me to a line item in the budget. But it is a question that the member can put on notice to me or ask in the Assembly when we return.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On page 90, under "Desired Outcome", it states —

Western Australian electors participate in independent and impartial elections or referenda conducted by the Commission as part of democratic processes.

We are talking about a democratic process that will be completely undemocratic under the proposed legislation. I refer to "Service" on page 90 again, where it states —

Provision of Independent, Impartial and Efficient Electoral Services to Electors for Parliament and other Electoral Clients.

I argue that that is about making sure that we have a fair, equitable and impartial system. The legislation that has been put before the Parliament will take away many rights of regional Western Australians, or will dilute the vote of people in regional Western Australia by going to a Senate-style Legislative Council. My question to the Minister for Electoral Affairs is: will the legislation that the minister has introduced into Parliament stop a member of a party, for example the Daylight Saving Party, who may get not 96 votes but 1 000 votes, from getting elected?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is a complex issue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes or no will be fine.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No; how can I say that a party such as the Daylight Saving Party will not have a member elected if, for example, it registers as a party with 500 members and starts a big campaign? I cannot say that any person will or will not get elected. However, I can say that this estimates hearing is not the appropriate place to debate the effect of a bill before the house that has not yet passed into law or even been argued in the chamber.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I imagine that funds, listed under "Appropriations, Expenses and Cash Assets", are being used within the Western Australian Electoral Commission, as the minister and the commissioner have said, to enable work on how the ballot can look—the size of the ballot and what costs will be associated with it. The deputy commissioner has responded by saying that the costs should be the same. Financial resources out of the appropriations and expenses of this budget have been put into the minister's so-called electoral reform, so I think our questions are very, very warranted. My understanding is that, as the Premier and the minister have said, the reason behind this legislation is to stop a member of a party such as the Daylight Saving Party being elected with a small number of votes. Will this new legislation that the minister proposes prevent a member of the Daylight Saving Party, or any other party who may get a fraction of votes of a major party, from being elected—yes or no?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is not a line item in the budget and I decline to answer the question.

The CHAIR: The minister is under no obligation to answer the question.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: For anyone reading the transcript, I am happy to answer that question if it is asked on notice or asked in the Assembly.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will ask another question. I refer to the delivery of services on page 89 and "Item 9 Net amount appropriated to deliver services". How much money has been appropriated to assist in providing the government with new legislation to change the Electoral Act?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The Western Australian Electoral Commission has not done anything on the act since 30 June, to my knowledge. This is the budget for 2021–22.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The amount of \$6.747 million is the 2021–22 budget estimate. Is the minister telling me that I cannot ask questions on the forward estimates, which clearly show that the minister sought advice from the commission on certain areas of this electoral reform?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It occurred before. If we look at 2020–21, we can see a budgeted amount of \$25 372 000. The member will notice in all the other lines along there that the amount is always just under \$7 000 000, except in an election year. There is no uplift in relation to anything to do with the Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Bill. I will not debate the bill; it is not a line item in this budget. There is no uplift or additional expenditure in relation to the bill, but the commission had some input into administration aspects during the last financial year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the Electoral Commission done any modelling whatsoever, whether it be on how long the ballot paper will be, what the 37 members will look like or whether it will potentially reduce the number of Legislative Assembly seats? Has there been any discussion or any work done on the legislation that is now before the Legislative Assembly?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I defer to the Electoral Commissioner to answer that question.

Mr R.L. Kennedy: In terms of the allocations in the forward estimates for us, at this time we are allocated, essentially every four years, about \$18.5 million to run the state election. That has been the case since 2013, I believe. That will be the case at the moment for the 2024–25 forward estimates year; that is the amount Treasury has allocated to us for that election. We have not asked at this time for an increase in that amount, partly because we do not know what, if any, additional costs there will be. It is impossible to predict the size of the ballot paper because we do not know how many parties will nominate until essentially a month before polling day when nominations close. Yes, we have had internal discussions about the possibility of a large ballot paper. No-one knows whether we will have one or not. We will deal with that as we get closer to the time. At the moment, I guess the answer to the member's question is that there has not been any forward appropriation made for it because the bill has not passed and is not law. We cannot go to Treasury to ask for money for something that might happen.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There have been discussions between the minister and the Electoral Commissioner about this legislation, which has not yet passed.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have had discussions about it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yesterday.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister has had discussions with the Electoral Commission about the electoral reform bill.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have not.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: You just said you had.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I asked yesterday whether it was going to cost any more, and the commissioner said no.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is a discussion, is it not?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: You are using semantics here.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Well, it is a discussion.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: “Is this going to cost us?” “No” is not much of a discussion.

The CHAIR: Member, I ask that you perhaps consider a new line of questioning. The minister has been quite clear about the relationship between the appropriation and the bill.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Further to my question on line item “Item 9 Net amount appropriated to be delivered services”, the deputy commissioner and minister said that in the back half of 2023 a redistribution would occur. Under that redistribution and the electoral bill that is before the house, surely funds will be appropriated to it. The minister has said on the public record that the Labor Party has been wanting this for 120 years. The Premier time and again has said, “It’s not on our agenda. It’s not on our agenda.” Clearly, it was on the agenda. Clearly, the minister has had discussions with the commission —

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can you ask a question related to a line item in the budget, please?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have. The Minister for Electoral Affairs has, through this budget, appropriated money to look at it. It may not be for 30 June, but money is appropriated to it in the out years of the forward estimates.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have not got money—sorry.

The CHAIR: Minister.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister answer the question: will the electoral reform that the government has before the house change the ability for a Daylight Saving Party member to be elected?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: We have already had this question.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is not part of it. The outcomes of electoral reform —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If the minister believes in his legislation, then answer it by saying yes or no.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, you have the option to place questions on the proposed legislation as questions on notice.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why will the minister not answer it?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Because there is no line item in the budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Obviously, the minister agrees with what I am saying.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No, I do not.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There will be no way of stopping a party such as the Daylight Saving Party, which is the whole premise of the bill that has gone to Parliament.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The member is verballing me.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Prove me wrong.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, do you have a new line of questioning?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: That is not a question: “prove me wrong”. What is his next statement: take it outside?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member for Mount Lawley would not understand.

Mr S.A. Millman interjected.

The CHAIR: Thank you, member for Mount Lawley, there is no requirement to respond.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a new question. I go to page 90.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I just want to say: I do not by my silence accept or consent to the propositions put in the previous question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Of course the minister does not!

I refer to page 90 and the heading “Desired Outcome” in the table under “Relationship to Government Goals”, which I will read again —

Western Australian electors participate in independent and impartial elections or referenda conducted by the Commission as part of democratic processes.

My question to the Minister for Electoral Affairs is: in this process of being democratic and impartial, did the commission, which the minister is in charge of, give any consideration to the size of an electorate and distances between towns, and will it, in its redistribution in the back half of 2023, take into account those distances? I will give the minister one example—my electorate, which is just under a million square kilometres.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It is 800 000 square kilometres.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is 860 000 kilometres to be precise. I think it is maybe a hundred times the size of the minister’s electorate.

Mr T.J. HEALY: How many phantom voters?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am not going to answer that, unless the minister wants to give me some leeway here. Yes, it has phantom voters, but for good reason, because there are 1 000 kilometres between towns. Someone cannot walk around it in half a day.

Several members interjected.

The CHAIR: Thank you, members! We will hear the member’s question in silence.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister for Electoral Affairs, will the commission take into account the distances involved and the remoteness of our state to ensure that places like Meekatharra, Wiluna, The Lands, Onslow, Yalgoo, Sandstone and Gascoyne Junction are able to see and contact their representative by ensuring that the commission does not continue to make these seats larger, which really hurts our ability to represent our constituency given the vast distances between our remote towns and the lack of communication? All these things are reasons why we have phantom voters. My seat is not equal to the seat of Mount Lawley, where people can see a doctor, get mobile phone reception and drive on sealed roads—all those things that my electorate does not have. We need strong regional representation to ensure that we have a representative in Parliament who can represent the electorate, not an electorate which is huge and very difficult to service. Will the minister undertake to ensure that we will still have four members in the current Mining and Pastoral Region who can service the electors and in a way that electors will want to see their member of Parliament?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The question is right out of order. I have asked a few questions in the courts that have been out of order, but the judge has saved me by severing them—cutting the question in half and throwing the objectionable part in the bin! I will sever and throw away what assurances the member seeks and give this undertaking instead, which is an answer to the member’s question: the commission and the redistribution commissioners will undertake

the redistribution in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Act. The member referred to his electorate of just under 860 000 square kilometres and asked whether the Electoral Commission will take that into account. It is mandated to take it into account by the provisions of the Electoral Act, which has in it, amongst other things, that the member's area has a large district allowance and we must multiply the member's total square kilometres by 1.5 per centum. By my calculation that would give—it varies—the seat of North West Central about 12 500 voters, and about 10 500 to 11 000 real, actual people who can vote.

Yes, the provisions of the Electoral Act mandate that the Western Australian Electoral Commission and the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners take into account the size of the member's electorate. The member asked whether there would there be an assurance that people in the Mining and Pastoral Region will have access to their member. That is not a concern that I heard the member express when Hon Norman Moore for many, many years, represented Mining and Pastoral from his office in Harvest Terrace, just over the road, but somehow the member's electors managed to deal with that.

[4.40 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: Has the member asked Wilson Tucker to move his office from West Perth?

The CHAIR: The member for North West Central has the call. I remind the member to keep it related to the budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will the minister change the large district policy in the future, which will enable large electorates to have those phantom voters that realise the large electorate that we must have and do have in the area currently known as the Mining and Pastoral Region?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not want anything to be read into this, but I have never been asked to look at that. As the Minister for Electoral Affairs, I was asked to look at the malapportionment in the Legislative Council. The member said that I said that this had been an ambition of Labor for 120 years. I made a mistake. It is actually 127 years. We have actually been fighting for equality for 127 years and all that we fight for is that every vote in the Council be of equal value. That has been an ambition for 127 years, even at a time when a person had to be a landowner to vote in the Council, and even at a time when the conservatives reluctantly—go back and look at *Hansard*—allowed the spouse of a landowner to vote. Each one of these evolutions has caused angst. But, as I said, we fight for equality. It is not a lone item in the budget. I do not want to go any further. The member can ask as many questions as he like and we can have a debate here that could go for hours.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question —

The CHAIR: In asking that further question, I ask you to move your line of questioning along to something related to a line item in the budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the Minister for Electoral Affairs provide formal advice on the options for electoral reform ahead of the election? Did he have any options presented to him or did he ask for any options from the Western Australian Electoral Commission?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is not a line item in the budget!

The CHAIR: I ask the member for North West Central to place that as a new question on notice.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Sorry, was the question: did I ask the Electoral Commissioner? Is that right?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Did the minister seek any advice from the Electoral Commission prior to the election? The minister said that he spoke to the Electoral Commission about it yesterday, but did he seek any advice on options around reform of the Legislative Council?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: From the Electoral Commissioner?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No, I sought them from the ministerial expert panel, not the Electoral Commissioner. The Electoral Commissioner might have a better memory than me so I will let him answer as well if he can add to the answer.

Mr R.L. Kennedy: No, we were not asked about reform of the upper house either before the election or recently. As the minister has said, we were only recently asked for technical and operational advice around the drafting of the bill. I might take the opportunity to respond to the member's question around redistribution. That occurs independently of the commission. An Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners is set up. It is supported by the commission but operates independently of the commission and of government, as the commission does at election time. If the bill passes, I expect that this will be a contentious issue in certain parts of the community and we will receive a large amount of consultation and feedback when the time comes. I expect that the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners, which includes me, will be doing a lot of consultation at that time around where the potential boundaries might be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The legislation is going to pass and then there will be a redistribution. It is the responsibility of the Electoral Commission to manage that redistribution, whether it is done or not, and from a budget perspective that comes under service delivery. Over the last few elections, a number of concerns have been raised with me around

the application of the guidelines for that redistribution. One of them is a community of interest. When a redistribution is done, it needs to be demonstrated that electorates are created that have a community of interest. As a result of this legislation passing through Parliament, there have been great concerns about how much weight that will be given as opposed to simply drawing a line around a number of people, especially given that the metropolitan boundary line is going to be removed. As the minister would be aware, the metropolitan boundary line means that we have to take into account that some seats are, by their nature, regional, and others are metropolitan. If this legislation passes, as I understand it, that will no longer be the case. Keeping that community of interest as part of the redistribution process is, from our constituents' perspective, important. I do not know whether any modelling has been done, but, over the course of a number of redistributions, we could end up with seats the size of Durack or O'Connor in the federal system as a result of the removal of that line and the changes that this government is bringing in. At the moment, the line can be drawn as large as we like to pull in the number of people to make up the calculation of how many electors there are. How much weight will that community of interest requirement in the redistribution guidelines be given? I can tell the minister that that has not been achieved in the last few elections.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I understand the member's desire to have this debate as soon as possible, but the issues that the member has raised are just not budgetary issues.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With the greatest of respect, minister, they are because the redistribution is conducted by the Electoral Commission. The funding is provided for it to oversee that process.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Of course it is. I am not running from the question. I expect a veritable shower of questions without notice and questions on notice during the coming debate, but this is a budget deliberation. When we talk about redistribution in the budget, we are talking about the commission's delivery of services, and they are all laid out there. The commissioner has already provided an answer that the redistribution process, which occurs every four years, is part and parcel of the commission's normal budgetary allocation. Sorry, I misspoke then. I said that the redistribution is covered by the allocation to the commission. That was not right. Mr Avent has said that for each cycle the commission gets a \$2.4 million allocation to run the office of distribution. I am sorry, I misspoke then.

[4.50 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there oversight from the Electoral Commission in that role, or is it completely separate?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The commissioner himself sits on it.

Mr R.L. Kennedy: With two others.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We are debating here today the budget allocation. Mr Avent told us that there is \$2.4 million —

Mr C.N. Avent: From memory, but that is in 2023.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 8: Commissioner for Children and Young People, \$3 075 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 9: Office of the Information Commissioner, \$2 262 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 29: State Solicitor's Office, \$42 864 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 31: Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, \$46 878 000 —

Ms K.E. Giddens, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Ms A. Forrester, SC, Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr P. Rechichi, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr D. Emerson, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The Attorney General may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the Attorney General to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the Attorney General's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Are there any questions from the member for North West Central?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer the Attorney General to page 472 in volume 2 of budget paper No 2.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes; I am now organised. Someone had taken out a tab.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to "Cost and Demand Pressures" under "Ongoing Initiatives". Why has the budget more than halved from the 2020–21 actual to 2022–23, given the recent report of "overworked state prosecutors drowning in the growing number of court listings"? The Director of Public Prosecutions, Amanda Forrester, mentions in the annual report that the excessive workload was potentially impacting victims, offenders and the community.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: As the member knows, the annual report is not a line item in the budget, so the question is: why is the estimated actual at \$644 000 and the budget estimate at \$453 000? Is that the question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why has it halved between the actual and the estimate?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: As the member knows, we introduced a cost–demand model for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions after it was decimated by the previous administration. As such, the estimated actual is trying to forecast what is going to happen in the future, whilst the budget estimate is a more solid figure.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Also under "Ongoing Initiatives" is "Legal Information Service". What is it for and why is there a budget allocation only for 2021–22 of \$305 000?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: May I let the director answer this, please.

Ms A. Forrester: The legal information service is a service that we currently provide for the provision of information in relation to Redress—criminal injuries compensation. It comes out of the Redress allocation, so it is primarily in relation to that, but also subpoenas, criminal injuries compensation, and applications to ask for information so that people can commence lawsuits under the change to the limitation periods; all that sort of stuff. Three FTEs are funded under that initiative. We have been advised that consideration will be given in future years to continue funding that as needed.

[5.00 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 472 and the line item "Cost and Demand Pressures". I refer to comments made by the Director of Public Prosecutions and discussions in the media about the fact that state prosecutors are performing substantially unpaid overtime, many without complaint.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: They serve our state wonderfully!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There is no complaint on my behalf. The DPP has raised a legitimate issue because there is risk to not only those who they represent or prosecute, but also their own health and wellbeing. There is also enhanced risk of mistakes because they are under that pressure. Certainly, that was articulated in the annual report. Could the Attorney General give us an understanding of how the government is going to address this? From my reading, it looks as though additional legislation will add to that workload, which, I think, was also articulated by the Director of Public Prosecutions. Serious concerns have been raised in the annual report.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The annual report is not a line item in the budget; it is what we are forecasting and what we are putting aside to deal with officers' needs. I am very proud of the McGowan government's support for the office. As a stand-out indicator, in the period 2017 to end of the out years 2024–25, the budget injection is \$35.5 million, which will be utilised by the office for core service deliveries, including the difficult period during the pandemic period. Of the remaining \$34.6 million across the forward estimates, \$25.2 million is allocated in the 2022–23 financial year. If we go back to what has happened to the office historically, the previous administration made severe cuts to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and those cuts resulted from the workforce replacement policy whereby the director could only employ a replacement prosecutor at a salary level of 60 per cent of the person that they were replacing. There was a significant number of judicial appointments from the office. They were senior people and those senior people going to the bar had to be replaced, but they could not be replaced with a senior person; they had to be replaced with junior person at only 60 per cent of the wage. The office suffered significant and cruel cost cutting during the previous administration. I am pleased to say that there has been a huge uplift in the allocation to the DPP and although we are not here to debate the annual report or media coverage of the annual report, the concerns raised do not go to this government's budgetary support of the office of the DPP.

[Ms A.E. Kent took the chair.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 475, "Criminal Prosecutions", specifically the line item "Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)". Can the Attorney General advise whether there has been a higher than what would be anticipated in the rest of the public service turnover of staff? What has the turnover been?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will ask the director to answer the question because she watches the turnover.

Ms A. Forrester: I do not have the information to hand, but we have had a 50 per cent higher than office average turnover in our senior staff because, from the feedback that we are getting, it is the most overworked cohort. I am not aware of the turnover rate of the rest of the public sector so I cannot comment on its relationship to the rest of the sector. One of our strengths is retaining staff in general, despite our heavy workload. The loyalty of the staff is something that I am very proud of.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The DPP referred to a 50 per cent higher turnover of senior staff; what staff does that include? What sort of staff are we talking about? The DPP said senior staff in the office; what does that mean? Can the Attorney General outline their roles and responsibilities?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It means very, very senior people. Senior counsel, very top end staff, are the ones who are leaving, not the ones who have been employed for a year. For example, I refer to Her Honour Judge Carmel Barbagallo, who did the Edwards trial. She is a brilliant prosecutor but she has gone to the bench. A lot of senior staff have left for the Magistrates and District Court. We are talking about senior counsel such as Her Honour Judge Amanda Burrows, SC, who with many years of experience went to court.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further to that, if the high turnover rate is put alongside the introduction of new legislation that will most likely increase the number of cases that the office will have to deal with, how does the government propose to deal with that? Will there be further increases in funding?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There is what we introduced when we came to office—the pipeline of justice. As more police come on and new things are required, they will go up. Let us look at the appropriation figures for 2016–17, the last year of the previous administration. The appropriation was \$35 million against the total cost of the service of \$40 million. In 2021–22, the appropriation is \$46.88 million, which is a significant nearly \$12 million increase, against a total cost of service of \$52 million. That is a 32 per cent increase in the cost of service. We have brought about a 33.8 per cent uplift in appropriations over that period. More than \$11 million is allocated in the budget for the 800 extra police officers in the last budget.

That is the pipeline of justice I was talking about. The previous administration, Mr Barnett's administration, increased the number of police by about 1 000 over the life of that government. However, it did not give extra appropriate allocations to the DPP to deal with all the extra arrests. The pipeline of justice model, which I referred to in last year's estimates hearing, is all done by the bureaucrats. I have seen it: it looks like spaghetti junction, but it is incredible. If they put in 800 extra police at the start of the pipeline, that predicts how many extra arrests there will be, how many extra days in court will be involved and how many more prosecutors, judges, prison officers et cetera, are needed, so with the extra work coming through at all times with new legislation, that will be a further input to the pipeline of justice and will be reflected in the director's allocation.

[5.10 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: From that answer, would the Attorney General refute that with the addition of more reforms on the agenda for the next three years, the government is not providing enough resourcing to set aside those changes that we are likely to see, or the further reforms he anticipates?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: If there is significant change, it will significantly uplift the work and that will affect the pipeline of justice in that budgetary year. These are forecasts. We have not got any hard forecasts on how many extra charges might result from any further work. There are perhaps some jurisdictional shifts to happen.

As to the resources of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and its efficiency, I will ask the director to assist me on that.

Ms A. Forrester: The problem is far more complex than funding. The way the office is funded is based on forecasts, which, of course, change depending on things such as COVID-19. It is difficult to forecast in the forward estimates year by year. We are constantly in discussions with Treasury about how we are funded. It is difficult to predict what impacts those legislative changes will have. As with the cost–demand model, we have been advised that consideration will be given to funding our office if new legislation impacts on our resources. Of course, legislation can impact on our resources both up and down and we are making submissions to government about things that can be changed, and government gives consideration to those.

We are also working on things other than legislation, such as early resolution projects and things of that nature, to try to take some of the pressure off without requiring funding bids, so diverting resources from the preparation of trials to preparation of early resolution kinds of models. We are hoping to get court buy-in on that. That is what I am talking about in the report. It is far more complex than funding. The problem is that we cannot hire ready-made prosecutors. We are still trying to replace the prosecutors we lost five years ago. Our office is substantially juniorised and that is as much a cause of the burnout that we are experiencing, far more than any budgetary restrictions at this point. The fact is that I just cannot hire enough people.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Perhaps the Attorney General can enlighten me: Is it because they do not exist in the system or because we are not paying enough? Is it the conditions? Is it the competition? Or is it all of the above?

Ms A. Forrester: We are reasonably well paid in comparison with the rest of the country, except New South Wales. Unfortunately, that means that if anyone on the eastern seaboard wants to move to a Director of Public Prosecutions office, they go to New South Wales; they do not come to us. They also have quite different legal systems, so we cannot attract people from other jurisdictions easily to this state. It takes about 10 years to train a prosecutor to sign indictments—unless they are exceptional—because signing an indictment is putting somebody’s liberty at risk, and we take that very seriously. The training that is required to get someone to the experienced level of doing that task requires 10 years. The work we do that is unseen in the office—all the case preparation, quite apart from the trial process—takes a vast amount of our time. It is easily 50 per cent of our work and we do that when we are not doing trials, which is less and less often. We cannot have a prosecutor with two years’ post-admission experience doing a trial that involves someone going to jail for 20 years—we just cannot. We need to retain people for 10 years in order to do that high number of trials. We have 98 homicide files floating around the office at the moment. They are allocated to people, but they require management. We have to manage victims and witnesses. Royal commissions have repeatedly said that we need to maintain continuity of the people handling the files. My people do a huge amount of unseen work. Barristers do not want to do that work. They regard it as solicitorial work and they do not want to be solicitors; they want to be barristers. We cannot just brief all our work because they will not do the work that we do, so we have to hire graduates. For a while there we were not even able to hire graduates. We have restarted our graduate program. We advertise nationally, so we try to attract staff, but I recently ran a process and was completely unable to attract quality applicants from any other state, or even external to the office. All our senior promotions pretty much come from within. It is a very difficult issue and it is creating a burnout risk, simply because those staff are doing so much work.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: From the Attorney General’s perspective, are there any other ways to address that burnout risk, or requests that have been made by the office, that are not being met by government? As we have just heard, it is not just resourcing, so are there other matters?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There are requests by the office to consider jurisdictions. The Leader of the Opposition might recall we moved a lot of the Supreme Court criminal work over to the District Court. If there is a request by the office, we look at all the charges that might be able to be dealt with by the Magistrates Court. If it goes to the Magistrates Court, that involves police prosecutors instead of DPP prosecutors, so that is under consideration.

The appropriation was recommended.

[5.20 pm]

Division 32: Corruption and Crime Commission, \$28 073 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Mr D. Robinson, Acting Chief Executive.

Mr M. Squires, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr D. Emerson, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister’s cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 482 of budget paper No 2 and the heading “Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information”, specifically the desired outcome under “Relationship to Government Goals”, which states —

The integrity of the public sector continuously improves and the incidence of misconduct is reduced.

I wish to ask a question about incidents. Does the Attorney General agree with the Premier that he is not always a member of Parliament or a minister?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am a member of Parliament, I am a minister and I am John. The member would have to ask my partner when she cooks my tea whether she is cooking for the minister, the member or John. Clearly, I have a private life.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the Attorney General saying that a member of Parliament is not always a member of Parliament and a minister is not always a minister? Is that correct?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: What line item is the member referring to?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am referring to the integrity of the public sector.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can you direct your question to the budget papers. It is a bit of a long bow.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Okay. I turn to paragraph 2 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 482, which states —

The Commission must assess every allegation of serious misconduct or police misconduct under section 32 of the CCM Act. There is a trend of increasing allegations being assessed ... The Commission continues to explore opportunities for process improvement, to address the level of allegations and assess future resources.

It has been highlighted in the media that the Attorney General went down south in a chopper with someone who has been questioned by the Perth Casino Royal Commission. Given that the Attorney General did not disclose that on the register as a minister or a member of Parliament, does he believe that is cause for misconduct under paragraph 2 of “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”? Does the Attorney General agree that he should be putting that chopper ride on the register because he is a member of Parliament and a minister 24/7?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, I do not think this is in line with the vote of money proposed in the consolidated account. If the Attorney General wishes to answer the question, he can.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Of course I am a minister and a member of Parliament.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the Attorney General a full-time minister and a full-time member of Parliament? The Premier has clearly said that he is not.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, do you have another question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question. Does the Attorney General agree with the Premier’s statement that he is not a member of Parliament full time or a minister full time?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, do you have another question?

Mr T.J. HEALY: This is important.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I agree. The Attorney General is in charge of the CCC.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the Attorney General a full-time member of Parliament or a full-time minister?

The CHAIR: Member for Cottesloe, would you please ask your question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the service summary on page 482 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line items “Assessing All Allegations of Serious Misconduct Received” and “Investigating Allegations of Serious Misconduct”. Can the Attorney General explain the approval process for undertaking covert means of investigation, for example, wire taps?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: By “wire taps”, does the member mean telephone intercepts?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, or other electronics.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is provided for in the legislation and a federal warrant is required.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does that require the approval of the Attorney General?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No. Approval is required by a Federal Court judge, but I do not even know when they go to the Federal Court judge.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Can the Attorney General confirm whether he and the Premier can be investigated for serious misconduct under the Corruption and Crime Commission Act as per these line items?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Anyone in public office in Western Australia can be investigated.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I note that the WA chief casino officer stood aside when a close relationship with Crown executives was revealed. Does the Attorney General see any similarity between that officer resigning and the issue that the Attorney General clearly has a close relationship with a senior Crown officer? At that time, Crown was being investigated by the New South Wales government and it was highly predictable that that officer would be required to be investigated in Western Australia as well. Does the Attorney General see that as a potential conflict of interest?

[5.30 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Where is the line item?

The CHAIR: Member for Cottesloe, this is not in line with the intent of the consolidated account.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It relates, on page 482, to —

1. Assessing All Allegations of Serious Misconduct Received
2. Investigating Allegations of Serious Misconduct

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is true. We can look at that, but it is not down to a cross-examination of a particular person or a particular instant case as to whether the Corruption and Crime Commission should have been looking at this person or that person. This is a budget debate we are having, as to whether there has been sufficient allocation —

The CHAIR: I will take further questions in line with the consolidated account, member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Attorney General, in all other sessions I have participated in, the minister answers questions of a general nature, and this question goes to the function of the CCC and the fact that the Attorney General has participated in an expensive helicopter ride with someone who was a senior officer of an organisation that was being investigated in New South Wales, and there was a high likelihood would be required to be investigated in Western Australia, and that the Attorney General would play some role in that investigation. That is why I am asking the question.

The CHAIR: Member for Cottesloe, the Attorney General has already answered that question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 482, service summary 2. It is noted that there is increasing number of allegations of serious misconduct being assessed, but a recent report tabled by a standing committee expressed concerns —

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Sorry, a recent report tabled by —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Under “Service Summary”, number 2. It is noted that increasing numbers of allegations of serious misconduct are being assessed, and a recent report tabled by a standing committee expressed concerns that only two per cent of allegations of excessive force by police are fully investigated. What is being done to address this?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: To address an improvement in assessing allegations?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Only two per cent of allegations of excessive force by police are fully investigated.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will refer the question to the chief executive officer.

Mr D. Robinson: There are a couple of issues there. First of all, the commission has limited resources in terms of its investigative function. We only have the ability to conduct a small number of investigations each year into use-of-force matters by police and other agencies, but it is a significant issue for us, and we regularly conduct investigations into those matters. The other work that the commission does in relation to use-of-force matters—and we have increased the number of matters that we deal with in this way—is overlooking closely how Western Australia Police Force deals with allegations of use of force. We have increased the number of matters that we closely oversight in that area as a way of bolstering our oversight of police use-of-force matters, in particular.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 483 and the “Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)” line under the heading “Assessing All Allegations of Serious Misconduct Received”. The Attorney General will be aware that the commissioner’s appointment expired last year. At that time, he was remunerated, in accordance with the Corruption and Crime Commission Act, at the same rate of allowances as a Supreme Court judge. When he was reappointed earlier this year, he was no longer a judge because he was over the age of 70, so he was no longer entitled to that payment level. What is the current remuneration of the commissioner, and how is it calculated?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Just as the member has outlined: in accordance with the act. Every commissioner who is appointed is no longer a Supreme Court judge. Every commissioner, before they get a commission, resigns as a Supreme Court judge, so the commissioner who has been reappointed has been reappointed under the terms of the legislation, which was an uplift in the remuneration to the commissioner legislated by then Premier Barnett and Attorney General Mischin. The commissioner is remunerated in accordance with their rules.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the Attorney General able to disclose the remuneration of the Corruption and Crime Commissioner?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That was disclosed when the last bill went through. I forget the remuneration of a Supreme Court judge, offhand, and Miss Stampalia is not with us at the moment. But the member can take it as read that it is in accordance with the act, as legislated by Mr Barnett and Mr Mischin.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 482 and the line “Number of allegations received” in the table under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”. Is it reasonable to have a budget target of 5 000 when the target for 2020–21 was the same but the actual was 7 190?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I think it is, but I will let the chief executive officer, Mr Robinson, answer that question.

Mr D. Robinson: The number of allegations that we receive is something that has grown over a number of years. Through the life of the commission we have consistently had an increase in the number of allegations received. We had a quite significant increase over the last financial year, as illustrated in the budget papers. The question of whether that is an appropriate target for us to maintain is something that we are considering. One of the issues for us is that the targets are developed around the resources we have available at the time when we make the decision about what the target should be, so that will be something we will have to look at in future. We are looking at some process improvements to try to address the increasing number of allegations we receive each year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just on a point of clarification, was the last part of the sentence that the commission is looking to try to reduce the number of allegations?

Mr D. Robinson: No, looking at process improvements in terms of how we deal with the allegations.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to “Investigating Allegations of Serious Misconduct” on page 484. The net cost of service does not change substantially from 2019–20 to 2020–21. Across the metropolitan area over the last couple of years we have seen, for example, murders and shootings in public. It seems that bikie crime is, in fact, escalating dramatically. One of the original reasons the CCC was set up was to look into gang violence. I am wondering whether that budget reflects the seriousness of the effort that is required to prosecute those matters in relation to gang violence. I am surprised; I have looked at a whole heap of agencies over the last day and three-quarters, and it would seem to me that the increase in expenditure for this important agency is minimal and barely keeping pace with inflation.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Firstly, just to disabuse the member of one idea, the CCC does not prosecute anyone.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, but it investigates.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The member asked what resources it has to prosecute this.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Well, to investigate. It was a slip of the tongue.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The member used the word “prosecute”.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am grateful to the Attorney General for alerting me to that, but I meant investigating.

[5.40 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Secondly, the police are the investigators into most crime, overwhelmingly, in relation to the matters the member raised. Sometimes the police seek the assistance of the CCC in relation to hearings. But on any criminal activity, the first investigators are the police, and, in that regard, we have supplied 1 000 extra. We have to be congratulated, and I congratulate myself and the government for doing that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The CCC appears to have devoted considerable resources to investigating some allowances of some members of Parliament. What resources in the CCC budget have been allocated to investigating organised criminal activity in motorcycle gangs?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will hand that over to the chief executive officer, bearing in mind that we cannot disclose any operations against anyone.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not asking for that—just in relation to the budget, what has been spent on it.

Mr D. Robinson: There are two parts to that answer. The first part is in relation to the Corruption and Crime Commission’s organised crime powers. Those powers can be used only on application from the WA Police Force. As the Attorney General outlined earlier, if we receive an application from WA police, the police can use certain powers of the commission to assist them in their investigations. We have had very few of those applications over the life of the commission. The second way in which we can investigate or consider the sorts of matters the member was talking about is through the unexplained wealth function, whereby the commission can conduct investigations into wealth acquired by individuals who may be associated or involved with organised crime.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Can the Attorney General enlighten me on whether the CCC has participated in any investigation of organised criminal activity by motorcycle gangs in the last 12 months?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does the Attorney General not find that somewhat surprising? We have seen the most horrendous level of violence from organised motorcycle gangs in the city, including a public execution at the Perth Motorplex. My understanding of the history of the CCC was that one of the original reasons it was set up was to investigate organised crime. Is the Attorney General surprised?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It was to investigate crime. It does not say “organised crime”.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No; it was done in direct response to escalating issues of criminal motorcycle gangs when it was originally formed. Is the Attorney General surprised that the CCC has not participated in any investigations?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: That is not what he said.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is exactly what he said.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: You asked him if he could tell you and he said, no.

The CHAIR: The Attorney General can hold his own.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: He is just wrong.

The CHAIR: Member for Cottesloe, can you please address the question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am addressing the question, if the members beside me can stop interrupting me. Does the Attorney General find it surprising that the CCC is not participating —

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Madam Chair —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Point of order, Madam Chair, the peanut gallery to the left of us keeps interrupting the member for Cottesloe.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Call members by their names, mate—point of order!

The CHAIR: Member for Cottesloe, please continue with your question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, I am really anxiously trying to do that. Is the Attorney General surprised that the CCC is not participating and has not participated in any investigations of criminal motorcycle gangs or activity in the last 12 months?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will tell the member what does surprise me: he has the temerity to ask that question when for months and months his party held up the anti-consorting legislation that the police urgently needed before last summer to crack down on organised crime; to crack down on bikie gangs. It was passed by this house and held up in the other place. When his party gave an undertaking to treat it as an urgent bill and get it through before the summer, it would not do it, yet he sits here and asks whether I am surprised that the CCC has not acted of its own volition. It does not receive complaints of crime; it receives complaints of serious misconduct and crime. The member for Cottesloe referred to the Motorplex shooting. What a wonderful job the Western Australia police did in cracking it. We cannot wait for that case to get to court to find out the lengths the police went to. They did a fantastic job, when we think about it, in a matter of a few weeks. I will not mention any particular operation but it was this government that legislated to give the CCC the power to investigate unexplained wealth. The investigation of unexplained wealth, which is being used, disrupts all criminal activity, especially organised crime, as it digs at their profits.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is my clear understanding based on the answer his adviser gave to him that the CCC is not participating in any investigations of criminal motorcycle activity or gangs. Is that true?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am not going to answer that question. I am not going to flag to any sector of criminality that the CCC or other agencies might be looking at. They are criminals. They are the one percenters. I will not tell them anything.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the Attorney General briefed by the CCC on investigations that it is conducting?

The CHAIR: Can you tell me which —

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Am I briefed by the CCC?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am following up on investigations that the CCC is conducting.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Rarely, but, for example, if it seeks a freezing order, usually the court requires it to give an undertaking to pay damages if it goes wrong, so the CCC will write to me and inform me that it is giving an undertaking of up to, so in that sort of case I would know there was something. The only other time I have been briefed—because you have to get a section 95 clearance for the commissioner to release the information—was when Jim Chown held up the reappointment of Mr McKechnie. I asked for a briefing on what sort of and how many investigations were on foot and what was being held up. I was not briefed on the insides of the investigation but I was given an overview and I gave to the other chamber of this Parliament an overview of the disruption that was being caused by Mr Chown.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 482 under “Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information”, and the government goal of safe, strong and fair communities and services that are provided by the CCC. Can the Attorney General provide me with advice on whether a breach of ministerial standards would qualify for an investigation by the CCC—for example, a minister who accepted a helicopter ride with a key witness of a royal commission?

The CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, this question has been asked and answered. Next question, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Attorney General can answer that.

The CHAIR: Would you like to answer that question or shall we move on?

[5.50 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Not particularly, but I will say this: in relation to private hospitality or transport undertaken for private purposes, during private time that is what occurred. As the member for Cottesloe noted, it occurred at a time before the other passenger in the said helicopter was before the royal commission and before the commencement of the royal commission in Western Australia. It was 10 months ago; it was in December that Tim Hammond's party was. It was a private helicopter ride, private time and private function. The member is asking whether this matter should be investigated by the CCC.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question because the Attorney General asked whether I was asking about that. That is not actually what I was asking. I asked would a breach of ministerial standards qualify for investigation by the CCC, and I gave that as an example.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will defer to the chief executive officer, but I am not aware that the failure to record anything in a ministerial code of conduct—the obligation to report—comes within the ambit of the CCC.

Mr D. Robinson: Obviously, I cannot comment on any specific matters, but I can say that the commission's process is to assess every allegation it receives, and determine its seriousness and whether there are grounds to conduct any further work in relation to a particular matter, whether that be way of some sort of oversight of an investigation conducted by another agency or an investigation conducted by the commission. But all allegations that are received are assessed.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I assume, Attorney General, that if a key witness of a royal commission is involved in an incident with the Attorney General, who is the person responsible for overseeing that as part of the government, that that would be perceived as a real issue that would reach that level of seriousness that the CEO just referred to.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Serious misconduct is defined in the act. Premier Barnett got rid of the minor misconduct function to somewhere else. The Leader of the Opposition was a part of the cabinet that did that. "Serious misconduct" is defined in the act and anything to do with those sorts of things does not fall within the definition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Was it just minor misconduct in relation to that incident?

The CHAIR: Is that another question?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There is no minor misconduct.

The CHAIR: The question has been answered.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: The member for Cottesloe has the next question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just then in his response the Attorney General made the point that he undertook that journey with a person who was not the subject of an investigation, I believe—I take it as in this state. But the New South Wales Crown casino royal commission commenced on 14 August 2019. This person was a senior officer in a company that had been under investigation by a royal commission since 2019. Surely that would have caused the Attorney General to reflect on the wisdom of accepting a lift from that person?

The CHAIR: This is not a question that is related.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not see this as —

The CHAIR: Attorney General, can I remind you that at 5.53 pm we will have the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission, do you still want to continue with this line of questioning?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will answer the question: he was under investigation by the New South Wales royal commission into Crown, which at the time —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Was Crown discussed in that helicopter ride?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central!

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: He was a witness before a New South Wales royal commission; there was no royal commission in Western Australia. The royal commission concluded that the person to whom the Leader of the Opposition referred was a person of integrity, credibility and should play a part in the future of Crown. That is what the royal commission found. There was nothing that concerned me, but I am not going into any more on this. It is pointless.

The CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this division?

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 35: Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission, \$668 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 5.55 to 7:00 pm

Division 36: Communities — Youth, \$2 121 566 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Youth.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr M. Richardson, Director; Management, Accounting and Financial Analysis.

Ms C.H. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr L. Clarke, Chief of Staff, Minister for Youth.

Ms E. Knowles, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am on page 513, the general appropriations, the first table on the page. The minister will have to excuse me; I have not done the youth budget before. Could the minister point out to me whether there is an allocation within the Department of Communities specifically for youth, or are the initiatives dotted through?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is dotted through, yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is dotted through, so there is not one line item?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I turn to page 535, under "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies", the heading "Youth", and "Youth Support Grants". Could the minister provide me with an explanation as to what those grants are; how they are administered, or by what process; and what the government is seeking to achieve with those grants?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Sure. I think that the member will find that, in the main, I suspect the structure of those grants is fairly similar to how they were structured under the previous government. For example, there are Youth Week grants, which are up to \$3 000 for community groups for activities for 10 to 25-year-olds; there are youth engagement grants, which can be up to \$10 000, to implement projects and encourage young people aged 10 to 25 to develop knowledge, skills, leadership opportunities and the like; there is a new three-year grant that was developed in conjunction with the Youth Affairs Council WA to fund an advocacy group for the LGBTQIA+ community, so that is new; there is a youth partnership program, which is an early intervention program in the Armadale area, and those sorts of things. They are the main items in that grant program. I think that probably covers them all.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Are the details of those grants publicly available on the public record somewhere, like in the department's annual report or on the website?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The youth engagement grants and the Youth Week grants are all advertised. I am sure the member will find a press release from the minister saying who received what. I think the others would be recorded in the annual report, I would suspect.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has that funding increased at all? I know that it is static across the forward estimates. Has it increased since the Labor Party came into government?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I think that in 2019–20 it was \$571 000, and I think we have budgeted \$650 000 across the forward estimates, so that represents an increase on the actual versus what we are budgeting going ahead, if that helps the member.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I was trying to see whether that global amount of \$650 000 that the department has budgeted has been static since 2017.

Mr D.J. KELLY: My understanding is that that grant category has remained fairly constant. The member will also be aware that there are areas such as grants to the scouts and the like and to the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council, which has been new money since we came into government.

Mr H.T. JONES: With regard to page 514 and the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council, I see that the youth advisory council has been allocated funding in this budget and the years going forward. Can the minister explain how the council will benefit young people in Western Australia?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Ministerial Youth Advisory Council was an initiative of Peter Tinley when he was the minister. It is a great initiative. We have a bunch of about a dozen young people who give me advice on a whole range of issues. When that was initiated, people served in a voluntary capacity. We have now recognised that as a government board like any other, and so, for the first time, people now actually get remunerated. Given the enthusiasm and genuineness that those young people put into that work, it is only appropriate that they be paid. I point out, as has been mentioned already, that the \$120 000 in funding that is going to the Youth Pride Network for an advocacy group for members of that community came about because of the issues that they raised with me. Not only do they talk to me and give me advice on good things, but also they have delivered some real change. That Youth Pride Network project is now up and running and is already doing good work.

[7.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Paragraph 6.3 on page 516 of the budget papers refers to the \$3.4 million for Youth Futures WA to establish a new crisis accommodation facility. Can the minister tell me whether the location for this project has been identified?

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is being delivered through the youth-at-risk part of the Communities division, so it is not part of my portfolio responsibilities. Unfortunately, I cannot assist the member with that question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That goes back to my question earlier about how we are supposed to understand which part of this division the minister is responsible for, because obviously there are things relating to youth dotted throughout the budget papers. How do we ascertain which ones the minister is responsible for and which ones other ministers are responsible for, other than just going through the list? Is that the minister's answer—to just go through the list?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am not sure that I can assist the member with how to read the budget papers.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am not asking that, minister. Is there something that defines the minister's portfolio so that we are not wasting his time in asking questions?

Mr D.J. KELLY: As I have said, the budget papers are not laid out by me. There is a standard format. There is nothing that I can tell the member that will automatically point her to which bits are within my portfolio. As difficult as it might be for her to navigate, there is not an easy way for me to assist her with that—not that I am aware of.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would have thought that the item for Youth Futures would come under —

The CHAIR: Which page number and item number are you referring to, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is a continuation of the question about paragraph 6.3.

The CHAIR: Is that the item that the minister just said he is not responsible for? There is no point in furthering that question; sorry.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Let us try the next one. I refer to page 534 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and the empowered youth network. Is that what the minister was talking about with the member for Darling Range or is that a different program?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Unfortunately, that is also not part of my portfolio responsibilities. I will leave it at that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Again, about a third of the way down the table on page 534, there is an item for "Small Commitments". I note that the estimated actual in the previous budget was \$4 million, but now there appears to be nothing showing. Is there any information that the minister can tell us about why this seems to have disappeared out of the forward estimates?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Again, that is not within my portfolio responsibilities, so I cannot assist the member with that line item either.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I am starting to wonder what the minister does!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is a fair question! I would have thought that the minister would want to talk about what is in his portfolio.

The CHAIR: Are there any further questions on this division?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Perhaps I can approach it in this way: in relation to the "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" table on page 534, could the minister point us to the initiatives on that page that relate to the youth portfolio?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I can certainly assist the member there. There is an allocation of \$3 million for a scouts hall in Tapping, and that is it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just so that I am very clear, the only portfolio-related commitment on that page is for the scouts hall. Could the minister tell me a little bit more about that? It was an election commitment, obviously.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That was an election commitment and it is to build a scouts hall in Tapping.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that to deliver a new scouts hall, minister?

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is right. That is correct.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it to build it from the ground up?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I have not visited the site, but I assume that that is the case.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the minister not have any further information about the election commitment and the funding that is in the budget for that?

Mr D.J. KELLY: No, I cannot give the member any further detail on that election commitment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Am I missing something, minister? The minister cannot give me any detail on an election commitment made by his government that is in the budget papers.

Mr D.J. KELLY: There is a funding allocation for the election commitment. It is to build a scouts hall in Tapping. That is correct. The project has not yet been built. The money has not yet been spent. It was an election commitment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a business case for the scouts hall in Tapping?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It was an election commitment to the tune of \$3 million to build that scouts hall.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Do the members not like scouting!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have never met a minister who does not want to talk about an election commitment. It is quite remarkable!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 535 and I go back to the youth support grants, which we spoke about earlier. Can the minister outline how the application process is run?

[7.20 pm]

Mr D.J. KELLY: It depends on the grant program. The Youth Week grants program is advertised by the department, but it is often eagerly awaited. Lots of local governments in regional WA regularly put in applications. The department assesses the grants and a decision is made. It is much the same for the youth engagement grants. It was a little different last year because of COVID. There was a particular flavour for those grants. They were directed to assist young people who might be struggling due to COVID, but again the process was much the same. They are advertised; then the department assesses them and a decision is made.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many proponents have received funding in each year of the program's administration to date?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is not contained within the budget. I am not sure I can give the member that information at this point in time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister provide it as supplementary information?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I would be happy if the member put it on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What portion of the grants are expended in metropolitan versus regional areas?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I cannot give the member an exact figure, but my guess is that most of them, numbers-wise, would be in regional WA. We are seeing whether we can give the member an exact count. It is very popular in regional WA. There is certainly no lack of enthusiasm for them, especially from local governments.

Why does the member not ask the next question and if we can get that information, we can come back to it? I will let the member know.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 513 and the appropriation for the department. Could the minister give me an indication of the total for the portfolio of youth within that total appropriation?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I can give the member a figure for 2020–21. Under this portfolio there is \$5.696 million in grants, but they go to community organisations, local governments and schools. I can give the member that figure if that is of assistance.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that the figure for the youth portfolio for 2020–21?

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is right; it is for the grants within my portfolio, yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the minister have that number across the forward estimates?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Including the number of staff who are dedicated to this portfolio would be very tricky for me; it is not isolated in the budget.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 42: Water and Environmental Regulation, Services 1 to 3, and 5, Water, \$117 841 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Water.

Mrs M. Andrews, Director General.

Mr P.J. Hawker, Manager, Financial Planning.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal, Executive Director, Strategy and Engagement.

Dr S. Meredith, Acting Executive Director, Science and Planning.

Mr J. Moynihan, Executive Director, Regional Delivery.

Mr P.J. Stewart, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Ms S. McEvoy, Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr L. Clarke, Chief of Staff, Minister for Water.

Ms P. Pedelty, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am looking at page 680. The first line item under "Ongoing Initiative" in spending changes is "Commonwealth Funding—National On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme". I note that there is no funding in the forward estimates for that. Is that a discontinued program from the commonwealth or is the state required to put money against it to access the funds? Can the minister explain to me what that line is about?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The previous funding for the on-farm emergency water infrastructure was a combination of funding that we received from the commonwealth and a small amount from us. The commonwealth started it in, I think, 2019, and without any discussions the commonwealth made a decision that it would not fund any more applications in Western Australia unless there was a 50 per cent commitment from the state government. Again, there was a decision made by the commonwealth without any consultation with us. As the member would probably be aware, we have already contributed a significant amount of money to strategic community water supplies. We have funded 65 projects to date that provide for non-potable supplies for regional communities. We have taken the view that the priority is community water supplies. More water can be supplied to more farmers more efficiently. So that is what we are doing. We now have a program going forward for another 70 of those projects over the next two years. We are a bit disappointed that the federal government is essentially saying it will end its program in WA unless the WA government pays for half of it, but that is my understanding, and that is why the budget is as it is going forward.

[7.30 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How much would be available if the state government was willing to put the funding on the table? Is it capped out as a state? Have there been discussions about what could be accessed if the state was willing to fund it?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I do not have that. I think the figure that has been thrown around is \$50 million for the program, but that is a national figure, so I am not 100 per cent sure how much would be available for Western Australia.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So we do not know whether we are knocking back potentially \$10 million from the feds or \$25 million?

Mr D.J. KELLY: No; it would be significantly less than \$10 million.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: But the minister does not know.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The federal government has not given us a breakdown. I have not seen whether it would be broken down on a per capita basis. The commonwealth has not told us—not that I am aware—how the funds would be distributed. I am just checking it has not. A lot of these announcements get made by the commonwealth with a press release, and getting details of how things work is very difficult. For example, the other day the commonwealth government announced \$1.54 billion for water infrastructure and that it would only apply to Murray–Darling states. When we quizzed the commonwealth about whether there would be an equivalent fund for Western Australia and why Western Australian farmers were being ignored for this funding, it was very difficult to get anything out of the federal government beyond what it had put in its press releases. If Western Australia was made eligible for that fund, it would dwarf this program.

Again, there is lots of money going to the east coast, but very little to Western Australia. As I said, this particular fund was started by the commonwealth, and in its first round it was funded completely by it. The commonwealth then made a decision without any consultation and said we would get some money in Western Australia only if the state government paid half of it. Why would the commonwealth government put that gun to the head of Western Australian farmers—saying, without any consultation, that there would be no money for Western Australia unless the state paid half?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is not unusual for the federal government to have a partnership with the state to deliver these outcomes. I am a little bit astonished that there has not been an investigation, questions or any formal correspondence from the minister to the commonwealth to try to determine what we would be eligible for before summarily saying that the state government will not be a part of it because it does not want to contribute. It is not an unusual concept for there to be partnership funding, even though, as the minister says, the program was previously wholly funded by the commonwealth. Is there no consideration to even thinking about trying to access that funding for these communities that might benefit from it?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition is right that there are some programs that are jointly funded, but there is usually some discussion before these things are released. In this case, there was not. I think I have written to the federal minister at least once, maybe twice, asking him to rethink the federal government’s decision to make this either a joint funding proposal or nothing. From memory, I had a video hook-up with Minister Pitt in which this was discussed. So we have attempted to get the commonwealth to rethink its decision. There has not been a lack of effort. The Leader of the Opposition needs to understand that we talked to the water resources reform reference group, which I think was set up when she was the minister—or maybe Terry Redman set it up—about the priorities for water funding in Western Australia. Out of that discussion, one of the priority projects was strategic community water projects. Having talked to local governments, and WA farmers are on those bodies, we identified what our priorities would be if we were to get additional commonwealth money. We have pursued those priorities.

The Leader of the Opposition is probably aware that for the 70 dam projects that I talked about earlier, we identified a source of funding for the commonwealth. The commonwealth said the money was available, but it had to have matching state money, so we tailored our priorities by talking to the industry, and we pitched that. We applied under that fund—I forget what it is called—and we were successful in getting the money. The community water projects are already done. There are 65 of them. They were extremely well received. I was at Gnowangerup and Lake Grace the other day talking to Councillor Chappell about the Railway Dam that his father built, which is 100 years old. As part of the program going forward that dam will be brought back online. It is a tremendous program. It was really well received. That is what we are doing. We are trying to target the money we can get from the commonwealth to the most strategic priorities. The Leader of the Opposition might have a different view, but delivering community water projects that can deliver more water to more farmers more efficiently is to me the wise way to go, and I think most people agree. Even without federal funding, that is what we have done, but if we are going to get federal funding, that is the priority, and that is what we have done.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just so I am clear, there has been a cut to the on-farm state government program for partnering with farm businesses to improve their water resilience individually. There is no funding in WA at the moment for farm businesses to partner with any tier of government to improve their water resilience. The farm water grant scheme has been cut.

Mr D.J. KELLY: There has not been a cut from the state’s money.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So the farm water grant scheme?

Mr D.J. KELLY: From the last budget, no. That decision was made some time ago.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That does not exist and this does not exist, so there is actually no funding in the budget for on-farm improvements for farm businesses.

[7.40 pm]

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is not correct. Farmers are still eligible and can get funding for an audit, which is really the first step to on-farm resilience. If the member wants to get somewhere, having a plan is the first way to get there. Going off and spending money left, right and centre might sound good, but it does not get you where you want to go.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am very well aware, minister. I funded the audits and also the on-farm scheme. We funded both.

Mr D.J. KELLY: You have asked the question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Less of the mansplaining.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That program is still available. Farmers can still apply for that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 19 on page 682 and the community water supply program in partnership with local government authorities that the minister just referred to. Can the minister confirm whether some sort of plan is in place to offload those particular community dams out of the department and on to local governments?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The dams that might fall into that program may be owned by the department, by the Water Corporation or already owned by local government. There is already a multiplicity of ownership of those assets. What I asked the department to do, and what it has done, is look across the great southern, the wheatbelt and into the midwest to find the water assets that we could bring back online as non-potable community supplies. The department has basically given us a list. Obviously, the ones at the top have the biggest bang for buck, and we have already done 65; my understanding is that that figure is right. We have funding for 70 more over two years. Where the ownership ends up is sometimes up for negotiation. I certainly would not characterise it as offloading, as the member put it. Some local governments really want an asset; maybe it is a Water Corporation asset and it wants ownership of it. Some local governments do not want ownership of it. They want access to it, but they do not want ownership. It all depends. Although the Water Corporation is very cooperative, sometimes it is reluctant to hand over assets because of the condition that they are in; they might need significant upgrading. Where the ownership ends up all depends on horses for courses, depending on the asset.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Could the minister tell me what stage the department is at with the upgrading and recommissioning of those 70-odd strategic community water supplies as mentioned here, or is that program well underway?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is well underway. We have already started work on some of them. One of the conditions of the commonwealth's contribution is that the work is completed within two years. In anticipation of getting the commonwealth money, the department had already started to do the work. I might add, had we not got the commonwealth money, we would have continued with the program. We would have had the capacity to do less of the project. Some of them are well underway.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I assume the department is also doing catchment work as well as recommissioning the dams and the like. Is the department also doing the catchment work at the same time to improve the flow of water into those dams?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It all depends on what is needed for the particular project. It might include catchment work if that is what is needed.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister foresee that that will be wrapped up within two years, as he mentioned? Is that the rough time line for those 70-odd dams?

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is our best endeavour. If the member talks to his National Party federal colleagues, and for some reason some of those projects, because of COVID and the like, cannot be completed within the two years, I hope the commonwealth will not be too rigid about that time line. But it is certainly our endeavour to get it done within the two years.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to page 684, under the heading "Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information", under the subheading, "Relationship to Government Goals" and the column "Desired Outcomes" that states —

Western Australia's growth and development is supported by the sustainable management of water resources for the long-term benefit of the State.

Can the minister please advise how our water resources in Western Australia are being impacted by climate change?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I never tire of talking about climate change and the impact it is having on Western Australia, not because it is a happy story, but because it is absolutely crucial to everything we do. I am painfully aware that there are some people in public life and elected officials who still do not acknowledge that climate change is real and that if they begrudgingly accept that climate change is real, they try to portray it as though the impact will be some time in the future. The impact of climate change on the south west of Western Australia in particular is stark. Since 1975, we have had a 15 per cent to 20 per cent reduction in rainfall. That has had an enormous impact on stream flows into our dams across the south west. In Perth, for example, we used to get 400 billion litres of water run into Perth's dams each year, and that was essentially our drinking water supply. Now if we get 50 billion litres, we think we are doing well.

The department is constantly evaluating the impacts of climate change and, as members might know, water allocation plans are constantly being updated. Unfortunately, many of those plans are now seeing a reduction in the water available because of the impacts of climate change. That is really important work that the department does. The idea that an area will always have a certain amount of water available for agriculture is unfortunately not the case

because of the impacts of climate change. It is work that we are constantly doing. The Gngangara groundwater system is Perth's most important groundwater system. Climate change impacts on that system are stark. That is one of the reasons why we have gradually reduced the amount of groundwater that we have been taking from Gngangara and are moving to desalination. The quality of the work that is done by the department is one of the things that I think we can be most proud of in this state. Water is all about science, and I am constantly impressed by the level of work that is done by the department on this issue when faced with such a vexed issue as climate change.

[7.50 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 691 and water and environment policy. I cannot see it anywhere on the page, but I assume that work is being done on water reform legislation, because I know that we had it on the agenda for our government —

Mr D.J. KELLY: You announced it at least twice, I think.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Probably. A lot of groundwork was done, and I am just wondering what progress has been made, because the government has had four years now and I know that was one of the priorities that was announced when it came to government. Therefore, I am happy to take the flak on us not delivering it, but we are now into the government's second term and it was one of the things that it said it was going to progress, so what kind of priority does it have with parliamentary drafting, if it is at that point, or is it languishing?

The CHAIR: Minister, this is not actually a budget-related question, but I will leave it up to you if you want to respond and how you respond.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am happy to briefly respond. Yes, it is still a priority for the government. It is still being worked on, and we do hope to have legislation in the Parliament this term.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question. I can relate it to the budget easily. How many employees does the minister have working on it in the department?

The CHAIR: Minister.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Oh.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it being given the resources? I mean, it is a significant body of work.

The CHAIR: Leader, just ask the question and wait for a response, please.

Mr D.J. KELLY: A bunch of people are working on it, but it is bits of people's time rather than a specific person who is working on it. That is my understanding. The department does not do the drafting; that is a job for the Attorney General. But, as the member acknowledged, the previous government announced it twice but in two terms of government did not deliver it. When we get to the point of having had two terms of government and not delivering it, I will happily take the criticism.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Minister, you said that it will be in Parliament. Does the minister expect that it will be debated in Parliament? It will have a significant impact on the department's ability to manage some of the issues that the minister was previously talking about in the question he answered just before about climate change.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Once it gets into Parliament, I do not control how long it will take to get through Parliament; that is in the hands of Parliament.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is debatable. The government controls both houses of Parliament; I think you can have it through in a jiffy!

Mr D.J. KELLY: I think the member is probably stretching the goodwill. Obviously, I cannot answer how long it will take to get through Parliament once it is introduced. That is not really a budget question. I would like it to be within my ministerial portfolio, but at this point in time it is not.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 698 and "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies", and the line item "Ban on E-Waste to Landfill". I notice that there is no budget allocation for this year.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I had a great interest in this topic when I was Minister for Innovation and ICT, but as the Minister for Water, unfortunately it is not within my portfolio.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 694 and "Compliance Monitoring Services to the Minister". Is this the compliance and monitoring unit within the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation? Does this item relate to the use of bores?

Mr D.J. KELLY: No. This page relates to only the environment side.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is environment, is it?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry. It is page 689. Would that be right? Apologies, I got out of water and into the wrong page. I was after water regulation, licensing and industry governance. I refer to the first note, which states —

The reduction in the Average time taken to assess a licence application across all licence application risk categories ... relative to the ... Budget Target, was driven by the successful implementation of the water licensing backlog action plan ...

Can the minister tell me a little bit about that?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It was a concerted effort by the department to clear outstanding applications and, largely, there was some considerable success in doing that. I congratulate the hardworking members of the department who put the time in to deal with those outstanding licences. The member will be aware that water licences is an area in which we do not have cost recovery. In other areas of the department—for example, on the environment side—there is a greater degree of cost recovery, and that funds the staff required. Unfortunately, we do not have cost recovery in this area, and that can limit the amount of resources that can go into processing the licences. But what the member has identified here is some very good work done by the department to clear outstanding applications.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further to those comments, minister, in talking about cost recovery, is that something that government is contemplating?

Mr D.J. KELLY: No, not at this stage.

The appropriation was recommended.

[8.00 pm]

Water Corporation —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Water.

Mr P. Donovan, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr D. Page, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr E. Hambleton, General Manager, Assets Planning and Delivery Group.

Mrs K. Willis, General Manager, Customer and Community Group.

Mr L. Clarke, Chief of Staff, Minister for Water.

Ms A. Gismondi, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the top line item on page 825, "Dividend Retention". There is \$1.354 billion in the 2021–22 budget estimate. Paragraph 6 under "2021-22 Dividend Retention" states that this has been allocated towards a new desalination plant. Can the minister tell me whether a business case has been developed for the desalination plant?

Mr D.J. KELLY: This is a decision by government to allocate money to the next major water source, which we anticipate will be a third desalination plant. The fact that we need a third desalination plant is, again, because of the impacts of climate change. People think we have had a wet winter in Perth this year, but I checked the figures today and the long-term average for Perth's winter is 473 millimetres of rain. We have had only 421 millimetres, so this winter in Perth, we have had 50 millimetres below the long-term average. The impacts of climate change are real. The government has made a decision that the dividend can be retained for the purposes of capital projects approved by government. It applies to a number of government trading enterprises. In the case of the Water Corporation, it will be for the third source. There has been some planning to date, some sites have been identified and Environmental

Protection Authority approvals have been sought. My understanding is that the process the Water Corporation goes through is that it builds the business case until such point is reached that it identifies the preferred site. At the moment, there are two potential sites. We are a long way off making the final investment decision to spend that money. It will probably cost in excess of \$1.4 billion, I have to say. The final business case will be worked through within the corporation some way down the track.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given that environmental approval is being sought, can the minister give us any idea of the two proposed locations?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Perth Seawater Desalination Plant on Cockburn Sound could be expanded to accommodate some more capacity, so that is one option. The other potential option is in Alkimos. They are the two sites for which we have sought EPA approval. As yet, no final decision has been made on either of them but that is where we are at.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It sounds to me like building the desal plant could be several years down the track. Does the minister propose to carry forward the dividend retention year after year, or will it come back onto the books at some stage?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Building a desal plant is a complicated project. It will probably be a \$2 billion project. There is no intention from the government that this \$1.4 billion will be spent in the next 12 months. Of course, a future government could decide to spend it on something else but the decision that this government has made, and I think we will stick with it, is that it is there for that next source. If we have a couple of really wet winters, it might push out when the next source is needed, but also, if we have some very dry winters, that will bring it forward. It is dependent on the weather, on demand and those sorts of things. We think it will be this side of the horizon but the exact timing is yet to be determined. It is prudent planning.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister give me a rough estimate of how much of the current integrated water system is now supplied by desalination, in volume?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is about 43 per cent, and we have about 150 gigitalitres, give or take, depending on how hard the assets are squeezed.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Are the desal plants operating at full capacity now, at nameplate?

Mr D.J. KELLY: At times, they operate above the nameplate but we have had a reasonable winter, so the Southern Seawater Desalination Plant is at about 80 per cent.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Once again, I refer to paragraph 4 on page 825. It is about reduced rainfall, particularly in the south west area of the state. Could the minister explain the figures for the current amount of stored water in the main Water Corporation dams? How much is deemed to be sufficient for a year's worth of water consumption?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Really?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Water Corporation has a lot of dams. Is the member talking about for metropolitan Perth? There are also a whole bunch of schemes throughout the south west.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Let us start with metropolitan Perth.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The difficulty even with the metropolitan dams is that they contain a mixture of streamflow run-off and desalination water. I do not know whether we have figures for the dams as they are today; we do not. I could not give the member that figure, but it would not be particularly useful because we could say Mundaring Weir is at 35 per cent but if 20 per cent of it is desal water, it really gives a false picture. I do not have those figures available to me.

[8.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: A further question, minister. Could the minister tell me how much —

The CHAIR: Member for Roe! We are here to talk about financial figures contained in the budget and you need to ensure that you stick to something that is relevant to what we are here to discuss. The minister is being quite indulgent in responding to some of your questions; whether that is a great use of our time, I am not sure. Questions need to relate to something in the budget as opposed to general stuff that is going on.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This relates to paragraph 4 under the heading "Impact of Climate Change". The minister has spoken copiously about climate change tonight. Could the minister tell me the amount of water that has flowed into the metropolitan dam system this year?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Approximately 105 gigitalitres of water has flowed into the dams.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: Again on the issue of climate change, this question relates to the frequency and severity of storms et cetera in the face of climate change. Can the minister please advise what measures the government has put in place to assist regional Water Corporation customers who may be impacted by these events?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I thank the member for the question. Cyclone Seroja was a really good example of the type of storm that we would not otherwise have expected to see but we are seeing, and have seen, impact our coast. Cyclone Seroja had a significant impact on the water supply in the midwest. One member of the Water Corporation staff in Kalbarri, whose name I will provide by way of supplementary information, did a sterling job. The Water Corporation did an incredible amount of work up there. All residential and business customers in Kalbarri and Northampton who were affected by that event automatically had all existing charges, outstanding debts and new service charges waived until April 2022. Outside Kalbarri and Northampton, a number of relief options were available to customers, including a 50 000 litre water allowance to help with cleaning up and a major fixture waiver for two billing cycles for impacted businesses. I understand that 2 500 customers across the midwest directly benefited from this financial package. In total, \$2.2 million in service charges was waived and 121 million litres of water was provided via that water allowance. I want to congratulate the Water Corporation for the way that it has responded.

The Water Corporation will have to relook at some of its infrastructure in those areas. Obviously, infrastructure in the north of the state is rated for cyclones, but it would be prudent for that sort of review to take place in parts of the state where they are not expected. The member is right that climate change is not just about reduced rainfall; it is also about the increased number and severity of storm impacts that we will see, and that will impact on Water Corporation infrastructure.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Water Corporation off-budget authority. Thank you very much.

Forest Products Commission —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Forestry.

Mr S. West, General Manager.

Mr A. Lyon, Director, Business Services.

Mr T. de Nobrega, Director, Finance.

Mr L. Clarke, Chief of Staff, Minister for Forestry.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 293 of the budget paper No 2, financial changes and the line item "Softwood Plantation Expansion Program". I assume that this relates to the budget announcement to expand the softwood estate. How much planning has been done on where that plantation will be located, in terms of purchasing the land and whether it will be on private or public land? How far progressed is that planning?

Mr D.J. KELLY: A lot of planning has gone into this program; it was not plucked out of the air. On the Leader of the Opposition's specific question about where the land will be, obviously there are rainfall requirements—softwood cannot be planted without a certain level of rainfall.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it 600 or 900 millilitres?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I think it is 600 millilitres. Obviously, rainfall dictates the zone that it can be in. Another thing to consider is the distance to processing, because if softwood is grown in a remote area that has the rainfall, there is the cost of transportation. Those sorts of things will be considered. Ultimately, the Forest Products Commission will go to the market and make commercial decisions about where that land will be purchased. Some people have said that we are going to buy up all the prime agricultural land. That is very unlikely to be the case because, as the Leader of the Opposition would probably understand, if land is defined as prime agricultural land —

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is Darkan, Williams and areas where people are growing good crops.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Yes. Where the return from other forms of agriculture is higher than softwood production, the FPC will not buy that land and it will not be within the zone. We anticipate that this program will deliver a return to the state, so the FPC will have to make a decision to buy land at a price that will allow a return to the state.

If a blue gum plantation has been harvested, that land may well be more valuable if it were replanted with pine than if the landowner were to de-stump it and try to turn it into something else, but, again, that will be a commercial decision made by the Forest Products Commission depending on the circumstances at the time. I cannot say to the member that there are two blocks of land somewhere outside of Bunbury or something that we have our eye on; that would be a foolish thing for the government to say in any event. But we have not identified 20 blocks or 30 000 hectares of land that we are just going to go out and buy. Commercial decisions will be made by the FPC at the time.

[8.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is a risk in this plan. I understand and agree that the plantation needs to be expanded, but I think that the parameters the minister has just described narrow the amount of land that would be available in the zone quite considerably. Has there been modelling or scenario planning done within the Forest Products Commission to identify that what the minister has announced is actually achievable?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I do not want to make too harsh a point of it, but we are only in this predicament because when you guys were in government, you did not plant anywhere near enough softwood. Had the previous government done that, we would not be in the position of having to expand the estate.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister needs to make sure that the announcements he is making are deliverable, and that is my question.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member has asked the question and has identified risk in this project. The project is much bigger now than it would have been. In 2012, I think the previous government did not plant a single hectare of pine. The member for North West Central, who was then the parliamentary secretary, said I think last week or the week before that the previous government was negotiating to get pine from New South Wales to meet the shortfall. That is completely ludicrous.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Due to force majeure events that had occurred and the need to keep supply coming in to the state, we were absolutely trying to find a way to reduce the shortfall. But the risk still exists, minister.

Mr D.J. KELLY: But if the previous government had —

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The risks in your plan still exist.

The CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, you have asked the question. Let the minister finish his response and then you can ask a further question.

Mr D.J. KELLY: If the previous government had planted the pine that it should have planted and knew it needed, we would not have to embark on this project to the scale that we are. The softwood estate used to be about 90 000 hectares. It is now heading towards 40 000. We are hoping to plant 30 000-plus hectares of land with this money. That only gets us up to north of 70 000 hectares, so it is not even where we were before. Admittedly, some of those existing pines were planted on the Gngangara groundwater system, so, obviously, for good reasons, as the member knows, we are not going to replant there, but the scale of what we are doing is not beyond what had previously been here in the state. We think it is achievable, but it is a commercial program. Had we not been left in this situation by the previous government, in which the member was the Minister for Forestry, the amount of pine that we now need to plant would not be anywhere near as great.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: What is the department planning on planting this coming financial year? Is there a per annum allocation?

Mr D.J. KELLY: No, there is not a per annum allocation. It depends on how much land is purchased. If more land is available, the FPC may pick it up; if land is not available in any one year, it will not. There is not a per annum allocation. It will depend.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the department have a target?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It will depend on what is available. There is another thing that we hope will happen. All the time I have been forestry minister, there have been private sector people out there who are interested in planting pine, but because of the imminent supply gap, people do not know whether there is going to be an industry or not. A private sector person who has some land and is thinking about planting some pine will want to know that there are going to be mills in 20 years' time to process it. A lot of people in the private sector have said to me that there are people who would be interested in planting pine if they were confident that the industry was going to exist in 20 years. We think that the fact that the government has put \$350 million on the table over a 10-year period will give members of the private sector the confidence to come in behind the government. I have to say, I had a short conversation with Senator Duniam, or "Jonno", as he likes to call himself, the federal Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries. He gave this program 10 out of 10. I know that the opposition would like to try to pick holes in it, but the federal counterpart —

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We do not want to pick holes. We want to make sure that the flashy announcement actually gets delivered on, and what the department is claiming it will do is actually achievable.

Mr D.J. KELLY: As I say, we are putting real money on the table in order to deliver this. As I said in a discussion we had a little earlier, the previous government announced the water reform legislation I think twice with great fanfare and never delivered it. Flashy announcements and no delivery is probably something that the member might be aware of.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 294, significant issues impacting the government trading enterprise, and the subheading “Native Forests”. Was there any consultation with the Forest Products Commission, the board or the executive on the decision to end native forestry prior to the decision being announced or made by cabinet?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Some advice was sought on some issues from the executive of the Forest Products Commission.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister advise what that advice was? What advice was sought and when was it sought?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It was advice on the process around the forest management plan, the current customers in the industry and the contracts that they had. I suppose it was mapping advice, if you like.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the minister able to advise whether the department sought advice on whether there was support or otherwise from the board of the FPC on the decision and whether the board was favourable or had concerns?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Beyond what I have said, I think that the advice we have is cabinet-in-confidence.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Formal advice was provided by the Forest Products Commission to the minister and government to feed into the cabinet decision; is that correct?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I did not say that, but any advice we received would be cabinet-in-confidence.

[8.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 295 of the budget papers and the outcome to deliver healthy forests for future generations. It refers to sandalwood and there is a budget target of 2 250 tonnes. In the previous financial year, there was a decrease in demand. Can the minister tell me why he is looking at targeting a harvest of an extra 700-odd tonnes this year?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The amount of sandalwood that we harvest is governed by an order-in-council that was issued during the last term of the Barnett government. The upper limit of that order-in-council is 2 500 tonnes; the 2 250 tonnes is the proportion that is allocated to the Forest Products Commission. What we are currently working towards, given the situation of demand in the industry, is about 1 600 tonnes. That is what we anticipate will be harvested given the state of the market.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Forest Products Commission.

Division 3: Premier and Cabinet — Service 5, ICT, \$14 235 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Innovation and ICT.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Ms S. Black, Deputy Director General.

Mr A.P. Brender-A-Brandis, Acting Chief Financial Officer.

Mr G. Italiano, Government Chief Information Officer, Office of Digital Government.

Mr A.D. Esposti, Chief Technology Officer, Office of Digital Government.

Mr J. Petersen, Chief Digital Officer, Office of Digital Government.

Mr P. Bouhlas, Chief Information Security Officer, Office of Digital Government.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Innovation and ICT.

Mr H. Palma, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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The Leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 64 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2. There is quite a significant increase in the total cost of service from the 2019–20 actual to the 2021–22 budget target of a little bit over \$5 million. Can the minister explain the change in that cost of service, please?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are a number of variations within that budget. In the interests of accuracy, I might ask the director general to go through and give the member the detail of those.

Ms E. Roper: The increase between the actual for 2019–20 and the budget for 2020–21 is reflected in 2021 for ServiceWA enhancements to wa.gov.au for the Bunbury ServiceWA pilot; agency contributions to progress digital ID; the establishment of the cybersecurity operations centre; the ServiceWA common platform for digital ID; cybersecurity testing capability enhancements; and in this financial year for cybersecurity testing capability enhancements and digital capability fund administration. These are offset by other underspends and carryovers in those years, but they are the main items.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The ServiceWA pilot in Bunbury has been an outstanding example of technology and concierge services coming together and achieving some amazing results with customers who use that facility.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to that investment in those services, is it anticipated that there will be any change or reduction in the number of employees required to carry out activities? Is there an efficiency dividend from that investment in those enhanced services that the minister discussed?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is far more about innovation and new ways of delivering services. No anticipated reduction in staffing is associated with this.

[8.40 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: Could the minister give me a specific example of a service that he believes will be enhanced through that investment?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Where do I start? The digital capability fund administration is a shining example of the government's work to improve legacy information and communications technology frameworks right across government. The Office of Digital Government has been charged with the responsibility for administering that fund over the forward estimates and is putting in place a very capable process for making sure that that funding is used wisely. I think that is one very good example of where the service improvements are occurring through the agency.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have been in this place for only three and a half years —

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Seems a long time, member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: To some of us, a blink of an eye; to others, less so. One of the things I have observed is that there seems to be an almost idiosyncratic approach to ICT in departments; they seem to run their own show. I had a specific example in the water area of a massive investment of some \$300 million to supposedly improve licence processing times. In fact, the processing times trebled when the department moved from a manual system to a computer-based system. I also know of an example in Perth Children's Hospital. I know this is not the accountability here, but I am getting to a broader point. Hundreds of millions of dollars were invested in the new Perth Children's Hospital, yet one of my children was gainfully employed for a considerable time pushing trolleys of files around because the new system did not work. I believe that to this day it does not work and paper records are being used at significant expense to government on top of the cost of the computer service. I wonder what level of rigour goes into managing departments and their internal ICT policies. I assume that is the function under this; it is called government policy management in ICT.

My experience in my previous life, before coming into this role, involved working for a large global organisation that had extremely rigorous control. There was no way any part of the business could go its own way on process or system development. My observation is that that seems to be almost the norm in departments. Could the minister explain what level of control goes into the various arms of government in controlling development of programs and also the implementation and development of systems?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think we pursued this line of questioning at the estimates hearings in the last financial year. I recall having a read of that. Ever since ICT was introduced in the public sector many, many years ago, there have been successes and problems. There has been a very siloed approach to IT development. Our machinery-of-government agenda was essentially about bringing together the public sector in a less siloed way, and as part of that we looked at how we could improve administration across the board, but particularly how we could improve IT architecture. As the member may have seen, we recently released the *Digital strategy for the Western Australian government 2021–2025*.

When we think about IT, we often think about an individual agency's particular need from its perspective, and that strategy firmly puts the perspective of the user, the person, the citizen at the centre of how we develop IT architecture and how, both within the administration of government and the citizen-facing part of government, it can work in a much more seamless way. I commend that strategy to the member because I think it is a very, very good read.

Within the framework of the digital capability fund, we have essentially brought IT expenditure within the public sector into one fund over the forward estimates. The Office of Digital Government is the guiding hand for how that fund is utilised, in conjunction with Treasury. We have established a governance framework that has internal and external representation so that we bring fresh perspectives into the recommendation process. Those recommendations, which will be based around the sort of guiding principles for the objectives of that fund, will go through an Expenditure Review Committee and a cabinet process and be subject to my sign-off. There is certainly a high degree of rigour in that process. We are embarking on a new process. It has been designed by the office. I have great confidence that we are on a pathway that will achieve the outcomes that we are after.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I thank the minister. I am always concerned when there is a sort of idiosyncratic nature to the individual systems. I have said it before, but it is simply the case that if I were to go to major corporations on the Terrace that have the same or greater number of employees than the state government—for example, Woodside, Rio or BHP—and I ask them their cash flow for the day, they could tell me as an entire global organisation what their cash flow was for the day. If I were to ask them how many employees they had, they could tell me how many full-time equivalent approved positions they had, how many employees they had and how many people they currently employed. They could also tell me how many contractors there are. In fact, for all those organisations I believe they could tell me which contractors were on their sites. My understanding is that the state government does not have the capacity to do any of those things in real time at all and that that information would require substantial effort.

The minister seems to have indicated in that last response that the government is now centralising the funding, which I thoroughly applaud. Now it is transparent. I suspect that how much was being spent on computer systems was a surprise to some. I assume that there will be some attempt to try to duplicate what has been commonly available in industry for now some significant time in organisations as big or bigger than the state government. I am interested in the minister's response.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am not going to comment on the qualities of the private sector up and down St Georges Terrace, but I take a view that most of those businesses, although they may have a cluster of activities, they generally have quite similar objectives within their organisational structure. When we look at the public sector as a whole, we see that, first of all, we are not driven solely by profit; we are driven by service to the community. Secondly, the range of the services delivered in the public sector are incredibly diverse, and agencies have an incredibly diverse history and, equally, have been accountable to ministers who, over various terms of governments, had different views. There is a complexity in the public sector that is unfair to relate solely to the private sector. Having made that point, our aim is to improve consistency. In the digital strategy we have a focus on data analytics and how we might better use data to improve policy decision-making and use it in a way that helps to inform decision-making that is based on evidence and on science, as we have done in our term of government. There are some very good objectives in the strategy. The funding is there to drive it hard. There is passion in the agency to drive it hard, and I am looking forward to seeing some very good outcomes.

[8.50 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I applaud that drive for some consistency. I understand why there might be a particular service delivery that may have a different look or feel depending on who it is interacting with—for example, a system that is specifically designed for the large businesses on the Terrace that I talked about would have one look. If a system were being designed that was supposed to be accessible to homeless people so they could use it without being intimidated or prevented from using it because of its complexity, it would be different. But with the back office, if you like, those fundamental management tools of managing costs, people and human resources, I would expect a universality of system across the whole of government. I assume that is perhaps what the minister was referring to when he talked about the subtle differences between the agencies.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I referred to back office administration, and there is certainly a framework around how we build a better use of tools that enable comparisons and effective data analysis, but, equally, we need to design with the service to the consumer in mind, and that is why the digital strategy bridges both those gaps. I might ask Mr Italiano to give a bit of a view of the breadth and scope of that strategy, because I think it is a groundbreaking strategy and is well worth recognition in this place.

Mr G. Italiano: The strategy seeks to shift the government towards a position in which citizens and businesses accessing services perceive that access to be dealing with a single government. Obviously, government is delivered through the administration of a number of agencies, and by using common processes and key platforms such as a common identity and a single portal through which citizens and businesses can engage with government, we can present those services to citizens and businesses in a far more cohesive manner. It is also worth noting that many processes of government cross agency boundaries. We look at the design of the work we do through things like life events, like having a child, starting school or the death of a loved one. We look at all the different aspects associated

with that from a customer's perspective. We still make citizens and businesses engage in lots of manual processes. We ask them to provide the same information to government on numerous occasions, so the strategy and the fund are being put in place to address those issues, create far more convenience and give people greater accessibility to those services. One of the fortunate things at our disposal is that technology improves and changes very regularly, so the options to solve some of these issues and the risks and costs of doing so improve over time. This is a good time to be moving forward with this strategy.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there any ongoing audit function to look at the success or otherwise of the implementation of systems? Again, it seems to me, from what I have seen and what has otherwise been reported to me by reputation, that over time there have been vast expenses—they would run into the billions of dollars—for computer systems, and a significant number of those computer systems simply have not worked. It seems as though they drift off into the ether and then with every new government or new budget, we see another initiative that says we are going to bring in a new ICT system that delivers all these improved benefits, and we have this awful sinking feeling that it will have the same fate in that we are not learning, if you like, as a government. I wonder, if there was an explicit audit and these matters were brought into the open, whether it might make sure that we learn from those past failings. It almost seems to be an activity of no consequence, in that we spend hundreds of millions of dollars on a system that does not work. I am happy for the minister to disabuse me, but I think the system in Perth Children's Hospital—I do not expect the minister to answer and know the numbers—was \$300 million, an enormous amount of money, yet people are pushing files around on trolleys and receiving requests for information by fax in a brand new hospital. I do not think that is an isolated example across the state government or historically. Is there an audit function that is part of this department or part of the minister's new initiative?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member for that question. The member talking took me back to when I was in the public sector and Rhonda Parker was the minister. We embarked on an adoptions IT system that was just a nightmare in terms of capture theory by consultants at that time, and the costs just escalated. There are provisions for additional FTE in the Office of Digital Government. There are two aspects to this. One is effective implementation and project management, and that is something the office will have a keen role in overseeing. That will be part of the decision-making process when projects come forward for consideration. I think that will be pretty fundamental. Secondly, it will build evaluation criteria as part of that project management, so there will be an ongoing monitoring evaluation aspect to the rollout. Again, I think the risk has been identified. This is a substantial amount of money, but I am confident with the capability going into the office that it will be able to drive that forward.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is probably beyond the minister's individual scope, but it would almost be good as part of the Auditor General's annual report to keep track of this. I think the minister is exactly correct. I do not ascribe shortcomings in this area to any side of politics. I think both sides are equally as guilty at not getting the value out of this expenditure that they should. If the light is shone on it—it is not to punish people, but to make sure that there are positive learnings—it will be a very worthwhile thing. That does not necessarily need a comment.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will await the Leader of the Liberal Party's penetrating questions at next year's estimates!

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have made a tape recording, minister!

The appropriation was recommended.

[9.00 pm]

Division 36: Communities — Services 10 and 11, Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing, \$190 817 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr M. Richardson, Director, Management Accounting and Financial Analysis.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C.H. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr G. Mace, Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Mr P. Payne, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality.

Mrs R. Green, Deputy Director General, Community Services.

Ms M. Hailes-MacDonald, Assistant Director General.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing.

Ms J. Houston, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr C. Roberts, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the service summary on page 519 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and to items 10, 11 and 12, which outline the state government's contribution to disability services in Western Australia over the forward estimates from 2021–22 to 2023–24. Can the minister confirm that the total state government investment in disability services in WA over the four years to 2023–24 is \$4.57 billion?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that that is correct.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm that for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, it is \$3.87 billion?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is listed in those numbers and if the member has added them up to be that figure, I will accept that addition. I have not added up those figures.

Ms L. METTAM: I also understand that the total for the state's contribution to the residual state-run disability services is \$701.3 million. Does the funding provision for the state-run disability services provide funding for the state government to be the provider of emergency or crisis services when there is a market failure, particularly in regional, rural and remote parts of WA?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can the member repeat that question?

Ms L. METTAM: Does the funding provision for state-run disability services, not for the NDIS but for the state component of funding for disability, provide for emergency or crisis services when there is a market failure?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is funding for the provision of some services by the agency. They are not specific to a market failure or an emergency situation, but the NDIS has been looking at the thin market issue in the north west, particularly in the Kimberley. It has a responsibility to help facilitate capacity building within those areas. Although we might not have a particular fund for crisis-type arrangements or emergency-type arrangements, there are arrangements through the department's normal services to work with the NDIS to find solutions to particular issues as they arise.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the funding provision for state-run disability services provide funding for the full implementation of the state disability strategy over the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is some funding to support the state disability strategy, particularly in the \$5 million innovation fund. That fund is being developed on the co-design principle with the sector. How that is rolled out to support the strategy will be determined jointly with the sector. The implementation of the state disability strategy is not just the responsibility of this department. The department has an oversight role for that strategy through the office, but it is incumbent on all agencies, as has occurred, for example, with housing, to examine that strategy and then look at how the various components and arms within government might support delivery of the outcomes.

Ms L. METTAM: Does it make up only a small proportion of the state disability strategy over the forward estimates? This strategy is very important and I appreciate that a lot of work has been undertaken to invest in it. My understanding is that was only \$2.6 million for four years. Why is it such a small proportion of what is required?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is a \$5 million innovation fund and \$13.7 million will go into the office of disability to help drive the strategy. I think there is quite a significant amount of resource going into that strategy and, as I indicated, it is a whole-of-government responsibility. Responsibility for the delivery of that strategy will be across the whole of government, but, equally, it includes the sector as well. It is a collective responsibility for a strategy that was collectively co-designed with the sector.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 138 of budget paper No 3, the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. Under the heading "Office of Disability" it indicates that the state government will establish and operate the department's office of disability, with an additional \$13.4 million to be spent over 2021–22 to 2024–25, and that the office will lead the state strategic policy and stewardship funding. Can the minister advise whether this funding includes funding to implement the state disability strategy and its action plans?

[9.10 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Sorry, member. Can you repeat the last part of that question?

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister advise whether this funding includes funding to implement the state disability strategy and its action plans?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is this part of this division or division 2?

Ms L. METTAM: It is under the *Economic and fiscal outlook*, office of disability.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is that not budget paper No 3?

Ms L. METTAM: It is in the *Economic and fiscal outlook*.

The CHAIR: It is the office of disability. Is that something that sits under your portfolio, minister?

Ms L. METTAM: There is probably another line item that I can use.

The CHAIR: It is a legitimate question.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Okay.

The CHAIR: But whether there is specific detail in one of the other budget papers for it, there probably is. It is really up to you how you want to respond, minister.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Sorry, member. I was distracted with the issue of which division it was in. Can the member just give me, again, the core question and I will focus totally on it.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. Regarding the funding that has been provided for the new office of disability, is any of that funding for the disability strategy and the action items that are part of that?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The funding is for the operation of the office. It is actually something that the sector itself called for as part of the strategy development, so the sector as a whole is keenly awaiting the office. The amount of money will not provide direct grants et cetera to the sector; it is about the delivery of the funded programs that we have allocated. The office is equally about looking after the management of our relationship with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the federal government. It is about looking at supporting access and inclusion both within the public sector and across the state. The office will also be concerned with government and legislation, so it has a raft of responsibilities, which are essentially about managing the state's interests in disability and ensuring that the state in its engagement with disability is grounded with the sector as a whole. As the member would know, one of the key messages from the disability sector is that it does things with people, not for people or on behalf of people. Therefore, the office has a really important role in ensuring that that perspective is there not only within the agency as a whole, but also in terms of how the government deals with the issue of disability both at a state level, with participants, and a federal level in terms of both the commonwealth government and the NDIS.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister outline the core functions of the office of disability and how the \$13.4 million will be expended over the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are four functions. The first function is supporting access and inclusion. Inclusion is a particularly important one because that is the key message that I get continually from the sector as a whole. Inclusion looks at the development of the sector itself, particularly as we transition into the full NDIS, and at stewardship in the sense of ensuring that what the state expected out of the NDIS is actually what is delivered. I certainly had an awful lot of feedback and anxiety from the sector about the manner in which the NDIS is being rolled out within our state, and I am sure that the member will have had the same inquiries through her electorate office that I am getting through mine in that respect. That is a very fundamental issue in terms of how we ensure that the NDIS delivers not only in a high-volume market such as Perth—to use those market terms that the NDIS uses—but also for people who are in the Kimberley, the Pilbara or the central wheatbelt where the circumstances are very different.

This office will articulate that narrative for us and provide leadership in terms of the engagement with the commonwealth to ensure that that happens. This links into the third function, which is about intergovernmental relations at both a ministerial council and an agency level. The NDIS has grown enormously—in fact, I am sure it might have some IT functions, member for Cottesloe. It has 11 000 people now. That is a very important aspect of the functions of this office. The fourth function is in regard to governments and legislation. We are certainly in a very different environment today than we have been previously, and we need to ensure that we are cognisant of the legislative framework that rolls out, not only in respect of disabilities, but also where other aspects of legislative action might have an impact on disability, and that we make conscious decisions around that.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister outline what FTEs will be allocated to this office, the position that will head the office and who they will report to?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are 27 FTEs this financial year. The position has a responsibility to the assistant director general for strategy and partnerships and a direct relationship with the director general in terms of advice on disability. The director general, of course, reports directly to me in relation to disabilities. This office is embedded within a broader division of the agency, which I think is important because part of the rationale for bringing Communities

together was to start to build that seamlessness between different aspects of community services, but because disability is so fundamentally important in terms of getting it right, this position also has a direct accountability to the director general.

Ms L. METTAM: Did the minister say that the office has been established already? I just have a question about where and when it will be operational.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The office is in the process of being established now, so we have announced it in this budget. It is located in Fremantle. I might ask the director general to comment further on that if need be.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you for the question. We are in the process of establishing the structure of the office. As the minister implied, it has been announced in this budget. The funding is there. The FTE is there. We have an interim management arrangement. Ms Hailes-MacDonald has the lead for the office of disability for now and we are looking forward to the minister perhaps making an announcement in the fullness of time, at the appropriate juncture, about the office. We are looking forward to delivering the four outcome areas that the minister identified previously.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: If I may, chair.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am looking forward to meeting the staff because I think this is a fundamentally important part of the organisation.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister touched on the NDIS, and I understand that there will be further negotiation of the state and federal agreement in 2022 or 2023.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It will be in 2023.

Ms L. METTAM: How prepared are we in terms of being able to advocate in the best possible way for the disability sector here in WA and gather information about what makes Western Australia unique to ensure that we get the best bang for buck and all those billions of dollars for the sector?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am certainly more confident now that Minister Reynolds has agreed, and has requested the agency and the agency has agreed, to release its internal data to all states so that we can have a better understanding of the drivers within the NDIS, what the cost structures are and what the assumptions are behind some of the forward estimates. In some of the published data, I can see fundamental differences in the way that we see that data and potentially the way the commonwealth is seeing that data. I think that provides a very good basis for our Treasury to do the analysis and to look at how we make sure that the NDIS, from a financial point of view, is best suited to the needs of Western Australia. There is also a more fundamental issue with the NDIS rollout being relevant to the needs, for example, of remote Aboriginal communities or areas in regional and remote Western Australia where there are thin markets or there may be only a single provider. A number of aspects are associated with that and we are doing the work now to make sure that the current operation of the NDIS better reflects that. Certainly, the bilaterals would be part of the discussions.

[9.20 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister would no doubt be aware that there are some ongoing concerns about the demise of Lady Lawley Cottage in my electorate. The particular issue that has been raised by the parents who use that facility has been around the quality of service offered by alternative service providers. I suspect that the minister is aware of the cottage. It was particularly well set up for high-needs children to provide respite care for carers, typically parents. Now that the NDIS has come in, I understand that carers and parents enjoy availing themselves of alternative uses of the money, but of course it means that funding no longer goes there. I was encouraged by what the minister was saying before. The feedback I have had from parents is that, yes, there are alternative respite care providers, but they are saying the quality of services is variable and quite often quite low, with an inadequacy of qualified staff. Lady Lawley Cottage had six nurses on duty at all times to care for children. I was encouraged by what the minister said, but perhaps he could comment on the discussion that is going on around some minimum level of service or appropriate standards for care services provided by other parties.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I might ask the director general or Marion Hailes-MacDonald to comment on the specifics of Lady Lawley Cottage, but I would like to comment briefly on the Quality and Safeguards Commission, which is a separate entity to the NDIS. In my view, I think the commission has focused overtly on ticking the box on compliance at administrative levels. The original thinking behind the commission was that it would have a developmental component to it that would be about working with organisations or providers on how to improve quality of service. That seems to have been lost in a compliance audit role and it is something that deserves revisiting, not only for the instance the member is talking about but more generally across the sector in how we lift and support people to deliver the best quality of service that they can. I will defer to Marion if I may.

Ms M. Hailes-MacDonald: In relation to the specifics about Lady Lawley Cottage, the Australian Red Cross has engaged a consultant who is working with parents and other stakeholders to engage a range of service providers to look at how the property may be used but also how it can be used in a sustainable way. The NDIS does not pay for nursing. That has been a crux in the changes of the service delivery for Lady Lawley Cottage.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I was familiar with the Red Cross using its best endeavours to see whether it can encourage other service providers to utilise the facility and I am sure everyone dearly hopes that it is the case. It is a fantastic facility in a fabulous location. I think it really shows respect for the children who have disabilities. It has beautiful amenities and the children are not shoved away in a little, dark corner somewhere. I appreciate that the state has been helping with that. Is the agency the minister referred to a state or federal agency?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is a federal agency. It was set up as part of the development of the NDIS generally.

Dr D.J. HONEY: So I should harass my federal colleagues?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Harass at will.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I refer to the line item “Office of Disability” under the new initiatives listed in budget paper No 2, volume 2 on page 514. Can the minister please explain why the state government has invested in the establishment of an office of disability and how it might assist community organisations, such as the Floreat Surf Life Saving Club, to provide increased opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in recreational and capacity-building activities such as surf lifesaving?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Thank you very much, member. I have to say that I have been so impressed with the member’s work in raising the profile of community services and human services needs generally within her electorate. It has been outstanding.

As we talked about earlier, I have been very proud to be part of the McGowan Labor government, which is establishing an office of disability as part of this budget. The establishment of the office will ensure disability continues to be at the forefront of the state government’s focus.

Ms L. METTAM: It is the government that went with the Geelong decision-making model as opposed to localised decision-making. That is what I hear about.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is a very good model as long as we get a minister and an NDIS that drives it and listens to the state by taking the expertise that exists within the state. I will continue with my answer to the question because I know the member has an axe to grind on that issue.

The establishment of this office will ensure that disability continues to be at the forefront of the state government’s focus. I know from my extensive consultation with the sector that it welcomes this office and looks forward to it. It will be a strong voice advocating for people with disability across government, the disability sector and the broader community. As we have discussed, it will sit within the Department of Communities. The office will drive work and innovation to advance inclusion and participation of people with disability in Western Australia. That goes to the heart of the work that I recently witnessed in the member’s electorate at the Floreat Surf Life Saving Club. It is doing excellent work. I was very impressed with the team there for engaging with young people and getting them involved with surf lifesaving activities. As part of that, a recent election commitment of \$100 000 will go towards all-terrain wheelchairs. I will make some announcements about that very shortly. The office will support and deliver better outcomes for the 411 500 Western Australians who live with disability. It is part of our commitment to investing in key services to support all Western Australians. I thank the member for her question.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to paragraph 9.3 in budget paper No 2, volume 2, on page 517. It is regarding the seed grants to support the establishment of innovative micro-enterprises. How will this funding be allocated to businesses in Western Australia? What criteria will be looked at?

[9.30 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As the member mentioned earlier, the state disability strategy is a very important document, and, as part of that, the inclusion of people with disability in the economic life of the community is a major platform for it. That is about people being able to access not only employment, a career and career diversity, but also the opportunity to establish microbusinesses. I have been impressed with some of the businesses that I have seen. Member, there is an excellent one in the south west. A young man with autism who lives in the Australind area has an artwork microbusiness. I met another person who has a delivery microbusiness. This funding was a pre-election commitment to boost micro enterprises, so it has been operating. There is \$250 000 that has been directed to enable the establishment of further microbusinesses and the remainder will facilitate open employment for people with disability through business mentoring to be delivered through Valued Lives, which has a track record in this area.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 160 of budget paper No 3, the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. I hope the minister can answer this question; I am going to try my luck. The government has approved a \$750 million social housing investment fund, which includes the future dwelling construction project and other initiatives. This increases the investment in social housing to \$2.1 billion. Of the \$750 million, \$222 million has been allocated to the Department of Communities for the government social housing strategy package. Can the minister advise whether this funding will be used to address the long-term shortage in accessible and affordable housing for people with a disability?

The CHAIR: Minister, this is possibly not relevant.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think it is a bit of a stretch of the member's luck. I do commend the Minister for Housing on an excellent social housing package. As I mentioned earlier, there is an absolute commitment to make sure that people with disability are included in government policy agendas. But it is a question that would need to be directed to the Minister for Housing.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister touched on this earlier in his response to the member for Churchlands' question. I refer to page 517 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and paragraph 9.4, which states —

\$100,000 for the provision of purpose-built, all-terrain wheelchairs at beaches and in national parks so visitors with mobility issues can explore the great outdoors.

Can the minister advise how many all-terrain wheelchairs will be funded and the expected cost of an all-terrain wheelchair funded through this initiative?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This has been an excellent program. I understand there are around 47 of these wheelchairs in the state—do not hold me to that figure. I think there are some in the member's electorate. There are certainly some in the Bunbury electorate, and I know that they have been very welcome.

There is an estimated \$10 000 per grant in the grants program to cover the cost of the wheelchairs and any ancillary issues associated with storage, matting and the like that helps facilitate the movement of beach wheelchairs on the beach. The program certainly demonstrates the McGowan government's commitment to building inclusive communities. By "inclusive", I mean that we need to be moving to a point at which it is almost seamless for people with different abilities to access all aspects of community life. That is a journey that is going to take us some time. This is one small part of that journey, but I think it is a very good part.

The CHAIR: That was a very good Dorothy, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. Do you have another one?

Ms L. METTAM: I think we have to move to the next division.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Service 4, Innovation, \$43 291 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Innovation and ICT.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Ms L. Dawson, Deputy Director General, Industry, Science and Innovation.

Ms D. Cousins, Executive Director, Science and Innovation.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Innovation and ICT.

Mr H. Palma, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 203 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and innovation and new industries. Can the minister outline—this refers to the total cost of service on page 210 as well—projects that are currently funded from this fund or that will be funded from this fund in the near future?

[9.40 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member. I could tell the member's enthusiasm for this portfolio!

Dr D.J. HONEY: I love science and innovation; the minister knows that.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I share the enthusiasm! I have to say, wherever I have gone in this portfolio, it has been full of energy and vibrancy and there is amazing creativity within it. The \$16.7 million new industries fund component of our broader fund has gone to a range of activities that are all designed to support and accelerate new and emerging businesses and contribute to our objective as a government, which is to diversify the Western Australian economy and create new jobs. The fund has gone into building capability and capacity, particularly in entrepreneurship and investment. It has supported incubators, accelerators and innovative small and medium-sized enterprises, and it has created linkages between industry and research, particularly through the innovation hubs. They have been particularly exciting. Up in Joondalup, there are innovation hubs concerned with cybersecurity. That is a great partnership. We have the Life Sciences Innovation Hub. We have the WA Innovator of the Year program, which shines a spotlight on innovation, and the innovation vouchers program, which helps to support emerging businesses that have got to the point where they have a scalable product but are looking to go to the next step in terms of commercialisation.

In terms of the evaluation of that program, it has had some excellent outcomes. There is an estimated return on investment of up to 5.2 to one, so it has been pretty significant.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I take it that those moneys are effectively grants and that there is not a return on investment for the government? The minister mentioned a return then, but I assume that that return is a return to the commercial enterprise, and the government just provides the money as a grant?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, that is correct, member. The return on investment is a return in terms of a much more diverse and creative economy. Certainly, in my view, from an innovation point of view, we have a wonderful opportunity to drive forward that diversification that embraces technology. But this funding is an excellent attractor for leveraged funding. When we drill down into some of the activities we have identified, we find that it has been a very useful leverage for both private sector and federal investment. This fund is a catalyst: it achieves outcomes for government in the government's objectives for diversifying the economy, and when we talk about a return on investment, in essence, we are talking about the return to the WA economy as a whole through increased economic activity.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 210 for science and innovation and the total cost of service. That \$16.7 million in the new industries fund obviously leaves a significant balance. What is the balance of that cost of service then expended on?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Chair, I ask the director general to provide the information.

Ms R. Brown: I thank the member for the question. Service item 4, "Science and Innovation", includes the science portfolio administered through the Minister for Science, and, in addition to that, aspects are funded through the department in terms of staff and resourcing associated with that.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Chair, I defer to Ms Linda Dawson.

Ms L. Dawson: Thank you. I think the minister previously covered off the innovation programs very adequately with the innovation hubs that we have in place, the innovation voucher programs and the WA Innovator of the Year program, as well. The X-TEND WA program is probably the only one that was excluded, which is around the accelerator program to help with commercialisation pathways, but the funds are fully expendable, utilised well, and deliver good returns back to both the participants and the state.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does that account for the balance of that and make up the \$43 million or \$44-odd million?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I defer to Ms Dawson.

Ms L. Dawson: The \$16.7 million is for the innovation component, which is the new industries fund. The remainder relates to science expenditure for things relating to the state's STEM strategy and sits under Minister Cook as opposed to Minister Punch. We have a number of other science-based programs, including cooperative research centres and also some funding for a space sector that has been borne out of science as well.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Do any of those moneys specifically relate to projects in the hydrogen area, or is that separately funded?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: These matters really relate to Minister MacTiernan and Minister Cook. They are outside of my immediate purview. I do not think I can ably answer the questions on their behalf.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I was simply trying to ascertain the extent of what is covered in terms of guiding me in asking questions. What about the interaction with schools? Pre-COVID, I had the opportunity to visit Israel with a couple of parliamentary colleagues through the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce. We had the opportunity to visit a range of institutions and organisations. The one thing that is very clear to me about young people in Israel is that if we went into a classroom and asked how many of them wanted to start their own business, probably 80 per cent of the kids would have put their hands up. I am fairly certain that if I did the same thing in a classroom of, say, year 11 and 12 kids here, maybe one or two kids would put their hands up, but the great majority of them would see themselves as employees. I thought that one of the great miracles that the economy in Israel has allowed has been the encouragement of that entrepreneurial innovative spirit in the youth, whereby they want to go out and start their own business and start something new. Is there some level of engagement with students in schools through this program?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member for that question. There is, but the issue of whether it is formalised through the school curriculum is really a matter for Minister Ellery. The various innovation hubs that we have, both regionally and within the metro area—in fact, I visited a makerspace at St Catherine’s School—have outreach programs that have engaged with schools based on individual arrangements with the school as opposed to a formalised curriculum-based program. We are finding there is more and more interest in the notion of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism around this notion of identifying a problem to be resolved and what are the creative approaches that might lead to scalable commercial outcomes. We are seeing that grow organically out of the success of the various hubs that we have funded through the innovation fund, and I think that will continue. I think the government’s more formalised response at a policy level with the STEM programs is adding to that interest in terms of creativity and commercialisation.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have another question. It is a new question. I will get it right by the end of the three days, minister! I am blaming fatigue.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes; it has been a long day.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the quantum of money going in there. When I visited Israel, I was surprised to learn that a nation of eight million people with some significant internal issues was budgeting \$100 million a year to directly fund startups. An equivalent amount of money in Western Australia would be \$27 million or something like that. That was year-on-year funding, and that had really been the catalyst for their ecosystem, as they love to call it—the tech sector—particularly in Tel Aviv, and, like the fund that the minister has described, there was no expectation of a return on that. That was just a year-on-year investment that funded programs for five years. As the minister has said, the principal criteria for a project was that there was a meaningful problem to solve. They were not funding gadgets as much as people who were approaching a meaningful problem. Does the minister think there is an opportunity to increase the fund to a higher level? I thought it was very bold by the government in Israel to say that it would give away \$100 million of taxpayers’ money and expect no direct return, but clearly it had massive returns to its own domestic economy. Does the minister think there is an opportunity to increase the amount of funding in this category, given the enormous payback and also the highly competitive market in this global technology sector?

[9.50 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I certainly think there is an opportunity to increase the amount of funding that comes through private sector investment and federal investment. The beauty of this fund has been the ability to leverage funds from other sources by making very wise and really considered investments and by looking at the capability that exists within Western Australia and supporting it in a very strategic way that engages the universities and industry—certainly the big end of industry that the member knows so well. The interest at that level has been quite astounding in driving broader outcomes that do not need to be solely funded by the state government. Having said that, we have a broader new industries fund that is really geared into how we diversify the state’s economy. This is a subset of that broader fund, which I am responsible for, and that broader fund, of course, is the responsibility of Minister Cook.

Dr D.J. HONEY: One of the other aspects of the government funding in Israel was that any project that was set up under the funding it provided—it was not just the innovators, if you like—had to have an associated experienced investor. The reason it did that was that lots of people have great enthusiasm for an idea, but because they do not have that knowledge of—it is a clichéd term—how the real world works, often they waste effort. By putting in people who are experienced investors and have developed projects in other industries, they could help guide those innovators in working on not just a meaningful problem, but also a problem that has a likely market. Is connecting entrepreneurs and innovators so that they direct their effort an aspect of this fund?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is through the X-TEND WA program. I went to one of the X-TEND program’s pitch sessions, and it was basically a mentoring-type model from experienced people in the business and commercial world who had worked on a program with people who had excellent ideas but just needed that bridge into actually putting the project forward from a commercial point of view. I was really impressed with their pitching skills and their ability to convey an idea succinctly. The elevator pitch that we talk about was excellent. There is a lot of energy. We have Perth Angels and South West Angels, which are angel-type investment models, and they are working very much at that level of bringing experienced business and commercial minds to assist people who are really passionate about their idea but there may be some areas in which the idea could be modified, or they are putting it into a more commercial framework, which has been the missing link for them. I think this program has been very successful in that respect.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am sure that the minister has had a structured introduction to this area. Mine has been less structured. One of the things that I have observed is that there is a fair degree of geographic separation between these various incubators and groups. I wonder whether there is a view of government about perhaps getting these groups geographically closer together. I appreciate that this would be a longer term strategy, but a campus-type approach or some other approach could be developed so that it fuels that direct physical interaction between these innovators post-COVID. In Tel Aviv, there was this close proximity of many of the groups—not all of them. That seemed to be something that catalysed innovation and the sharing of ideas between them. Is the government having any thoughts around the potential for creating an innovation precinct in this space?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I have not had any direct advice about that as a policy idea, but in saying that, we have concentrations of innovation expertise. I think there is a bit of a balance between the synergies from people bringing ideas together and the critical mass that is developed. Those centres have almost developed areas of particular interest, such as space, cyber or life sciences. The universities and the industries that are interested in that space have come together in quite a significant way. I am not sure that we could go much further than those sorts of spaces in terms of bringing that together into one campus. Technology Park Bentley is in a certain sphere of specialisation in the sense that, a bit like industry parks, it attracts like-minded or upstream or downstream-type industries. There is a bit of a balance in there. I think it is something to keep an eye on. I have been very keen to think about how we might extend some of this innovation thinking into regional WA. First of all, with five universities, Perth should be known as the university city. The capability that exists here is quite extraordinary and it is not recognised as fully as it should be. I think that is a challenge, but I also think that we have capability in the regions and they need support as well. That is certainly something that we will be pursuing over the next 12 months.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That was my next question. We are going from the sublime to the ridiculous—not the ridiculous, obviously, but the opposite end of the spectrum. What programs are there in remote regions? I know that the university campus in Geraldton is an enormously successful and well-regarded asset in the community and has really given great hope to people who never thought that they could complete a university degree. The provision of that common-user facility has catalysed a whole group of people in that community who are getting degrees and higher qualifications. Certainly, I think it is an excellent model. If I had control over Treasury, I would strongly promote that model in all our significant regional centres. I am interested in the programs to expand into regions. As the minister knows, there is no geographic limit to intellect or innovation. How are we harnessing that and giving opportunities to people in the regions?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: A university presence in regional WA is emerging. We have seen the development of facilities in Albany. In the member for Vasse's electorate, we have the learning hub. We have Edith Cowan University in Bunbury, and it is keenly interested in the development of education around advanced manufacturing. We have these nodes of activity. We certainly see the new industries fund rolling out on a statewide basis, as I mentioned earlier. Part of the agenda is very much how we engage with regional WA. The department certainly collaborates very closely with the regional development commissions and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and I think there are leveraging opportunities through its capability and how we might roll out more support for innovation and commercialisation in the bush.

Dr D.J. HONEY: This area is a big focus of government, even in remote Aboriginal communities, for example. Is the government making an effort to go further into those smaller communities? A lot of those communities are quite well connected now with communication infrastructure, but are obviously isolated. There is not necessarily a high attendance rate past year 10 in high school.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is a big challenge in regional Western Australia, as the member would know. I have a lot of confidence that the other topic that we discussed in the previous division around access and inclusion and the digital strategy will open up new opportunities to connect with remote areas and look at opportunities for the development of support mechanisms with them. They are not part of this at this time, but I think that is an opportunity to be explored.

The appropriation was recommended.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm
