

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Service 4, Innovation and ICT, \$47 538 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Innovation and ICT.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Mr C. Gunningham, Director, Innovation.

Mr G. Marinucci, Director, Health and Medical Life Sciences.

Ms S. Franz, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

The member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 198, budget paper No 2, volume 1, up near the top is “ICT Digital Foundations Program”. That is not tied to international education. It looks like there is some connection there, but I assume that is not the case, just for clarity.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: They are not connected, no, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On that ICT digital foundations program, \$8.3 million will be spent over the forward estimates period to migrate multiple networks, grants, databases and payroll functions into single systems. Firstly, what are the issues with the existing ICT systems?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is a general improvement of the operating systems. As the member knows, the government is making a big investment in its digital capacity and it is an important investment that will increase efficiencies and savings to government, and increase the services to the community. I ask Rebecca to elaborate for you.

Ms R. Brown: Thank you, minister, and thank you, member, for the question. As the minister has outlined, it is to generally improve the ICT foundations of the department, including consolidation of all users in our WA international investment and trade office network into a single cloud-based network, and that includes our existing offices and the new offices that were funded and announced as part of the budget process, but also responding to previous issues around having each of the offices operate on different networks. That is an important aspect. But, also, it is about being able to implement a number of small replacement business applications that will help JTSI in its work in terms of particularly working with industry, so having a new grants management system and looking to continually improve the way in which we engage with industry and allocate grants.

We will potentially look at putting in place a customer relationship management system, and also a database for our state agreement. It is both about improving some of our foundations but also ensuring that we have the right technology to operate effectively and efficiently in our role in engaging with industry.

[3.50 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many networks over how many departments does this involve? I understand what you have said regarding engagement and the like. Will it have anything to do with the payroll or HR functions of those areas?

Ms R. Brown: We will consolidate from two systems. We currently have a platform operated through Tourism WA and then separate to that we have a service arrangement with the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. This will consolidate us onto one system. We have already consolidated our finance systems and progressively already consolidated our payroll systems. This will enable us to further consolidate some of those systems.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. The next question is: How will the works be rolled out and will it take the entire forward estimates period to get this system in place? What is the timetable?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Again, director general, if you can elaborate.

Ms R. Brown: The funding is allocated over four years. We are working through the sequence of which aspects we will commence first. Some of those are, as I said, foundational elements; and some of them are around improving the way in which we engage with industry, which we will also be seeking to progress. There is a potential that we may be able to progress it sooner than over the four years. But taking into account the work that needs to be undertaken, we anticipate that it will happen progressively over the next two to three years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will this require more staff, or will this actually reduce the number of staff across the requirements?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, the implementation period, which will be a relatively short period, will require some additional staffing. I am just trying to get some details on that, but it is not a large number and that implementation period is limited. We believe it is only a small number, but we are just trying to confirm the actual number for the member. Yes, it would be a couple of FTE to project manage this.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: For the staff recruitment process, are you recruiting in Western Australia, nationally or globally to fill these roles?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As the member knows, there is a real challenge, particularly in the ICT space.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is why I asked. It will be a challenge.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is a challenge for the commercial world as well as government. This is a challenge and I think our preference will be to source local people and not have to cast the net wider. I am hopeful that we can find local people. Given that it is for a short time, there is some impracticality in translocating people from further afield. But, director general, do you have any more on that?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can they work remotely as well?

Ms R. Brown: Yes. Thank you, minister. The program itself is not overly complex, so we are not competing with some of the big players that are looking for ICT personnel. This is largely around project management to ensure the delivery of the project. We have an in-house ICT team that supports the department. They will still be heavily involved in the project, so it is a very small number of additional staff. Through the project, we would be confident that we could engage them locally and, ideally, from within the public sector if they are already there.

Mr C. TALLENTIRE: My question is on page 202, paragraph 20.1, and it is about the new industries fund. I am curious to know whether we have a public exposure of the successes and failures of those and, indeed, if we celebrate the successes but also celebrate the failures that occurred through that new industries fund so that we can learn about it in a true entrepreneurial fashion.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, as the member pointed out, the new industries fund in the 2021–22 budget included an additional \$16.7 million for new industries and demonstrates our commitment of more than \$33 million supporting and driving innovation in terms of that fund. The government has committed \$500 000 to further partnering with the West Tech Fest to highlight Western Australia's innovative startups, emerging businesses and SMEs to attract investment to reach new global markets with an international reach. There is \$616 000 to the Extend WA program, which is a fantastic social program in terms of supporting female founders, Aboriginal people and businesses in regions in terms of starting their businesses. The renamed innovation booster grant, which was formerly the innovation vouchers program, is supporting early stage startups as well. So there is some success there and those programs are designed to bring more success right across the board.

There is also the continuation of the new industries fund in terms of statewide delivery of a range of popular programs that I have just spoken about. Stakeholders are aware that nationally this is important and this is why we are doing this. In 2020, startups received a total of \$7.4 billion in funding across all funding types. That is across the nation, of which Western Australia's portion was approximately \$270 million. In terms of the \$7.4 billion that was on offer across Australia, \$270 million came to Western Australian companies, which is 3.6 per cent of the offering. There is this glaring disparity in terms of our startups and access to that funding. I do not believe our startups are any less innovative here than they are around the country, so we need to encourage that situation to change, and the new industries fund is a way of doing that. Of course, if we support these companies to get off the ground and start to emerge, they are also able to prove their case for assistance from national pools of financing as well, so it is very important.

I do not have any cases of failures that I can detail for the member, but we do know that this is a game where you cannot be sure that every investment has a return. That is the nature of startups, you learn by your mistakes. Some of our most successful companies were born from failures.

Mr C. TALLENTIRE: Exactly.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: So at least their founders had a bumpy ride to success, so I do not see that as a negative or something to be embarrassed about. I think we need to invest in people with good ideas and energy and innovation, and some of them will fail, but some of them will be very successful.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 26 May 2022]

p373a-374a

Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Reece Whitby; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr C. Tallentire

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Whitby. I think given the time, that is closing down division 14, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, service 4, Innovation and ICT.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 4.00 to 4.10 pm