

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Wednesday 4 September 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SKILLS, TAFE AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Susan Carter
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence
The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Sarah Mitchell
The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Steve Whan, *Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

The CHAIR: Welcome to the second hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Abigail Boyd. I am the Chair of this Committee. I welcome Minister Steve Whan and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. I welcome our witnesses and thank them for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind Mr Dizdar and Ms Read that you do not need to be sworn as you have already been sworn before this Committee during this inquiry.

Mr MAROUN EL KHOURY, Executive Director, Industry and Investment, Premier's Department, sworn and examined

Mr MATHEW PEARSON, Acting Executive Director, Training Services NSW, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr STEPHEN BRADY, Managing Director, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined

Ms JULIE TICKLE, Chief People and Culture Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms JANET SCHORER, Chief Delivery Officer, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined

Mr PATRICK WOODS, Chief Operating Officer, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined

Dr MARGOT McNEILL, Chief Product and Quality Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms FIONA RANKIN, Chief Information Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr MURAT DIZDAR, Secretary, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms CHLOE READ, Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session only, which goes from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. for morning tea. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break for afternoon tea at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only, with 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. Today we are starting with questions from the crossbench. I want to clear something up before we go much further. Mr Dizdar, last Wednesday I asked you about the HSC Strategy program. You said:

I've heard a bit of a fallacy around the building that we're getting rid of the HSC Strategy ... It's not the case.

Today it has been reported that the HSC Strategy is being abandoned.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: This hearing is directed to TAFE. The line of questioning relating to another portfolio is out of order and should not be entertained at this hearing.

The CHAIR: To the point of order: I don't know if I can take a point of order to myself, but this goes to the credibility of the witnesses in front of us. I'm happy to call them back at another time to work out whether they have breached the rules of the committees, or we could just clarify it right now.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Further to the point of order: I think it's actually appropriate that we deal with that issue separate from this particular hearing. If there is an issue about Mr Dizdar's testimony in relation to another estimates hearing relating to another portfolio, then that should be appropriately dealt with in a separate proceeding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To the point of order: Obviously there is precedent for fairly wide latitude in budget estimates hearings. If we are talking today about Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, I would argue that the HSC and what happens in the final years of school is quite critical to that. I think it is within the scope of this Committee.

The CHAIR: I think that's where I was going with this as well. This is clearly relevant to Skills, so I would like to at least invite a response to the question. Perhaps Mr Dizdar would like to respond to the allegation that has just been put to him.

MURAT DIZDAR: I would be happy to. Good morning to the Committee and the Chair. I stand by what I said because that is factually correct. The HSC Strategy has been a very important unit in the organisation, but it has been delivering support for between 12 and 14 HSC subjects. I don't want to get the number wrong, but there are over 70 HSC courses. We are going to double down on HSC support for our schools that go way beyond the 14 subjects that we were delivering support for with intensity. We actually want to go across all of the HSC subjects. It is true that we are realigning that directorate. It is called the Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing directorate. We are moving resources around and making sure that our coverage is a lot stronger and not just limited to 14 subjects. They have been valuable; we have had great feedback on that. But we have also had feedback to say, "What about all the other subjects?" That's what we have determined to do with the new structure.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that clarification. It has been suggested that 245 positions will be lost. Is that correct?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: I'm going to have to press this issue. This line of questioning relates to another portfolio. I'm going to have to insist that if you have a line of questioning relating to the portfolio of the Deputy Premier, those questions should be directed at a separate hearing. There is opportunity to have further hearings, but this line of questioning is not appropriate for this particular estimates hearing. If you're going to insist, we will have to go into a deliberative because I want that point of order dealt with and we will dissent from it.

The CHAIR: To the point of order: I'm mindful of what you're saying. The witness is within their rights to say that they don't want to answer it on that ground. I'm not quite sure why you feel the need to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Further to the point of order: It's not up to the witness; it's about whether you have the capacity to ask questions relating to another portfolio under the resolution of the House. This hearing is directed to the Skills portfolio, not the Education portfolio. The line of questioning needs to be contained to that portfolio.

The CHAIR: Out of respect for you, Mr D'Adam, and also because I am appreciative that I am the Chair as well as the person asking the question, I will ask the Clerk for advice and come back to this line of questioning in a future round if I believe that I'm on solid ground. I will now talk about something else. Mr Whan, I understand that there was a case in February in relation to the unfair dismissal of, I think, three members of the teaching staff in TAFE. It was a decision of the Fair Work Commission. For your reference, it is *Kildey and Ors v Technical and Further Education Commission* [2024] FWC 383. The decision was handed down on 13 February and under that decision it was shown that those three people were unfairly dismissed. Compensation has been ordered and they have been ordered to be reinstated. How much did defending that case cost?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thanks for the question. I will pass over for the specifics on cost as I don't have that advice. It is a decision which TAFE was disappointed with. I think there was an expectation from taxpayers in New South Wales that public service appointments should be free of any suggestions of nepotism and learners are expected to be taught by qualified teachers. That was the core of this case. TAFE accepted the outcome and is complying with the orders made by the Fair Work Commission to reinstate the three former TAFE NSW employees.

The CHAIR: Sorry, can I just stop you there because I understand you're reading from a statement and it makes it hard to follow. Just at the beginning there, are you saying that TAFE still believes that it has done the right thing in a case that the Fair Work Commission has said it did not?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I might ask Mr Brady to elaborate on that, but I certainly say we do need to be clear that we are free of any appointments which involve suggestions like this. I'll pass to Mr Brady for the specifics of this.

The CHAIR: Yes, I think we need to be very careful in a court case involving individuals where it's already been found they were unfairly dismissed and unfairly treated.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think we need to look carefully at the reasons for those decisions, but I'll pass to Mr Brady for that.

STEPHEN BRADY: Thank you, Minister. We accept that Fair Work has made a decision and we're acting in compliance with that decision. We still stand by the reasons for the dismissals we made in the first place. We feel strongly that for a teacher to be standing in front of a classroom, and in accordance with the requirements that we have under our regulatory frameworks, that teacher needs to be fully qualified.

The CHAIR: Sorry, can we just go back, though? The Fair Work Commission found that there was no valid reason for these people to be dismissed and you're now relitigating the point—

STEPHEN BRADY: Sorry, I started by saying that I accepted the decision of the Fair Work Commission and that we're implementing that decision.

The CHAIR: I wouldn't now add to the harm that has been caused to these people by continuing to restate the position, the unfair reason—

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Point of order: Irrespective of the merits or demerits of those particular individuals' case, the witness is answering a question and it's not really your position to tell him how to answer the question.

The CHAIR: No, that's true. I will just caution you, though, in accordance with the procedural fairness resolution, not to cast adverse reflections on people, particularly where there's been a court case.

STEPHEN BRADY: Accepted.

The CHAIR: How much did that court case cost to defend?

STEPHEN BRADY: I'll pass across to Ms Tickle, the chief people officer.

JULIE TICKLE: I think we will take on notice how much the court case cost. It was a lengthy investigation and many people were called as witnesses and provided information on the case, but in terms of the amount, we'll need to take it on notice because I don't have it in front of me, Ms Boyd.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I understand there was an initial investigation where a law firm was hired. If you could get me the cost of that, as well as the cost of defending the case, that would be very useful. Have there been any consequences for those TAFE managers who were involved in this unfair dismissal?

JULIE TICKLE: By "TAFE managers" do you mean the people who—

The CHAIR: Who made the decision to unfairly dismiss these people.

JULIE TICKLE: The person who made the ultimate decision made that decision based on the investigation and the recommendations from the investigation, so there hasn't been any action taken against that individual, no, because they based their decision on the recommendations from the investigation.

The CHAIR: Is it standard practice to order an investigation of that kind into people? I don't understand. If you have decided that someone has been unfairly or incorrectly appointed, or whatever the case was, is it then common to go and get some law firm to back up that decision? Is that standard practice for TAFE?

JULIE TICKLE: It depends on the complexity of the case. We use a combination of external law firms and we also have some internal resources that carry out investigations. This one had, as I said, a number of people that were called as witnesses and we often use external law firms to do cases like this which are a little bit more complex. I wouldn't say it's standard practice because each case is a single matter and it depends on the circumstances.

The CHAIR: Is there ever any consequence for the law firm when they get it wrong?

JULIE TICKLE: It depends, I guess, on what the circumstances are again. We use law firms on the government panel. We have a variety of law firms that we engage when we need to for investigations.

The CHAIR: Can you confirm that those TAFE managers who were involved in that dismissal are still employed by TAFE?

JULIE TICKLE: I'll need to take the question on notice because the person who made the ultimate decision is still employed by TAFE, but there are a number of TAFE managers you refer to, so I'll need to take on notice the specifics and come back to you.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Chair, I certainly would defend those managers. The issue with the court's decision was about the process, and certainly that's a problem, but I've been briefed comprehensively on what led up to this and there was certainly strong justification for investigating the case.

The CHAIR: Have you read the decision?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've been briefed on the decision.

The CHAIR: Have you been briefed on the part of the decision where the judge or magistrate—I don't know for Fair Work Commission—said very clearly that there was no valid reason? There were two bits: Was there a valid reason for dismissal and, if there was, or even if there wasn't, was it then done fairly or was it done in a way that didn't cause harm. On both of those counts, for all three, the Justice found that there was no valid reason.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Also, as I said, I would back our TAFE, the TAFE, for taking the action of investigating this case. There was certainly, I think, justification for doing that.

The CHAIR: But you're not going to back the teachers who were unfairly dismissed?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We accept the court's decision.

The CHAIR: Can I ask you hopefully something a bit simpler? Minister, TAFE's training colleges and universities obviously have a role to play when it comes to prevention of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. What sort of primary prevention initiatives are in place in those settings at the moment?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Separate out TAFEs and universities. There are two different aspects to the way that we're engaged with that. Obviously, as TAFE is a New South Wales government body, we have direct responsibility and TAFE obviously has very strong policies in place on harassment and those issues. I'll ask

Mr Brady to elaborate on those. In the university space, we've been working with the Commonwealth closely on the initiatives coming out of the Universities Accord, which include a number of aspects of safety on campus. In my conversations with vice-chancellors—I meet regularly with vice-chancellors—we've emphasised the need for them to take action to implement the action items coming out of the Universities Accord, which we've heard quite a bit about. I can get some more detail on that from the department, but I'll start with TAFE, Mr Brady.

STEPHEN BRADY: Thank you, Minister. TAFE has a sexual harassment and sexual assault policy. In compliance with the requirements of the Public Service Commission, we've established that policy. It has two aspects to it: One is how the policy relates to staff and how staff are protected within the workplace, and the other is in relation to students. We published those policies and procedures at the end of March 2024 and we take our obligations seriously under that. We are also a member of a working group contributing to the Public Service Commission e-learning tool to help inform the rest of the sector and that's due for release later in 2024. I might see if Ms Tickle wants to add anything to that.

JULIE TICKLE: I think the only thing to add is part of that new policy is the positive duty obligations that organisations have. We are continuing to raise awareness around positive duty. We have training in place for employees and they do that training, particularly those who deal with students, and part of our student orientation and induction has some information about it as well. That's probably all I'd add.

The CHAIR: Before we leave TAFE, last estimates I asked basically how many of the TAFE campuses would have on-campus counselling for people who have experienced—in that case I was talking about sexual assault. You came back on notice saying that the campuses with onsite counsellors vary. Do you not know how many campuses have on-campus counselling?

JULIE TICKLE: Our counsellors are across the State, so not every campus has a counsellor that works out of there all the time. But our counsellors move around campuses. For example in the Mid North Coast, where I live, the counsellor looks after three campuses. However, all of the students and employees can access counselling, because we have a counselling service that is available all the time. For employees that includes EAP, but for our students, our counsellors are available. Whether they are on that campus at the time, they can still book a phone consultation with a counsellor. They always have access to counsellors. We have counsellors across the State in regional, remote and metro campuses.

The CHAIR: Are there in-person counsellors? As you said, on a Monday you can go to this campus, or that sort of thing?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, that's right. If the counsellor covers a couple of campuses, like in the example I gave, they have regular hours. It's actually on their doors. The students can book in to see them.

The CHAIR: Are you in a position to say that every TAFE has an onsite counsellor on some days of the week?

JULIE TICKLE: No, I would not be in a position to say that. We would need to take that on notice and provide more information. What I can say is that every TAFE campus and every student at TAFE has access to counselling. Whether it is in person, via the phone or using Teams, which is the portal we use, every student has access to counselling.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that, and that's good, but the nature of trauma from sexual assault is that people sometimes need to see somebody in person, or they're really not willing to take that step. There are also people who are worried about security concerns, and there all sorts of other reasons. Can you tell me how many TAFE campuses don't have any onsite counselling?

JULIE TICKLE: We would need to take that on notice and come back.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that would be very useful.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Do you want to go to the university side of it, Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: I'll say a couple of things before we get to universities, if that's okay. I just wanted to call out that the Smart and Skilled program—some of those learners will be at TAFE—is fee free for students who are experiencing or have experienced domestic and family violence. Our adult and community education providers similarly provide support to a range of learners who experience disadvantage, including victims of domestic violence. Women make up 63 per cent of those in our adult and community education colleges.

To move to universities, last time we discussed the plan that was published in February 2024 regarding ending gender-based and sexual violence on university campuses. The Australian Government is now in a consultation phase on the shape and scope of the national student ombudsman ahead of releasing legislation to create that ombudsman towards the end of this year. They are also replacing the current voluntary code for

universities with a mandatory national code. There is an expert panel being established to design that code and have that in place towards the end of the year too.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning, Minister and colleagues. It's nice to see some of you twice in one week. Welcome back for another day. I want to start with some questions about TAFE expenses. I will direct them to you, Minister, but I'm happy if you need to seek advice from any of the public servants here with you. I wanted to ask about the travel expenses, specifically for TAFE. There is some information that the Opposition has through a GIPAA. There were a number of interstate trips over the past 12 months. There were 52 trips to Melbourne, seven to Brisbane, two to Perth, 36 to the Gold Coast and also some to Adelaide and Hobart. Can you provide some information as to why there were a number of interstate trips taken and what their purpose was for TAFE staff?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will pass over for details on that, but obviously we work very closely with other TAFEs and educational authorities around Australia, and participate in quite a number of national processes. Our TAFE expertise is also very valued in many areas. We cooperate in the delivery of a number of courses. For instance, recently one of the programs was introduced in conjunction with South Australia. But I'll pass over to Mr Brady for more detail on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: The first thing I would say in regard to the Gold Coast is that our Kingscliff campus is right next door. Largely that would be movement between campuses.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I accept that.

STEPHEN BRADY: But to the Minister's point, there is a number of reasons we travel interstate. One would be to go and meet with other TAFEs to share information or to view some of their innovative deliver models. For example, I went to a South Australian TAFE and looked at their facility where they are on campus with university and industry around innovative manufacturing. That is informative in terms of the centres of excellence for advanced manufacturing that we're putting into place. The ability to share information and knowledge and leverage the experience of other institutions is important. We are also engaged in a number of the large reform processes that are happening at both the Commonwealth and State levels. For example, Dr McNeill is on the qualifications reform panel and travels interstate regularly to be part of that. We also attend and speak at conferences. There is a range of different reasons why we've been travelling interstate, but largely it's to do with our interactions with other TAFEs, policy reform processes that are happening and engagement in learning for our senior staff as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You obviously do virtual meetings and things as well, where possible?

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The overall total for travel and expenses for the last financial year was \$700,000. Do you know how that compares to previous years?

STEPHEN BRADY: It's a significant reduction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to provide that on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We might take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It would be good to know for the past couple of years. Minister, you mentioned that TAFE NSW's expertise is often wanted to be looked at by other States as well. Do you have any way that you evaluate or assess the outcomes for those trips?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Not specifically. For the reporting that goes to me for the overall budget, I approve all overseas trips, but not interstate trips, obviously. But certainly where there has been participation in a national body, I am generally informed about that. In terms of whether they are value for money, that is really for Mr Brady to work out to stay within the budgets he has been allocated and meet the saving targets on travel that he has been asked to put in place.

STEPHEN BRADY: I'll just say that with the specific saving targets that have been applied for travel right across government, we are complying with those. We are scrutinising all travel arrangements, both intrastate and interstate, very closely. I'm confident that we have a culture where we are examining the need for expenditure and where we can do things online, rather than physically. But there is value in coming together with people, particularly around complex items, to get that understanding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, you just mentioned the international trips, and I want to quickly ask you about those. I think there were five international trips in the past 12 months. Again, do you have any detail in terms of the purpose of those trips and what the outcomes were?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I currently approve those individually when they're proposed. I may delegate that at some stage, but we'll see.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Oversight's not a bad thing, Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I see the reasons why they're going. We have a number of international operations where we deliver TAFE courses in other countries. That's a revenue raiser for TAFE and it's also an important educational opportunity and link for those other nations that are taking advantage of those courses. As part of that, some of the trips were for our experts to go across and make sure that the standards of delivery in those courses are being upheld. Our experts in TAFE also get regular invitations to international forums and conferences. Many of the trips that I have approved are actually funded by other bodies, at no cost to us. In terms of the detail I will again pass over to Mr Brady.

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right, Minister. Under the regulatory requirements for ASQA, if we're delivering internationally, we need to go and ensure that delivery is happening in accordance with the regulatory frameworks. There is a certain amount that is compliance based. There is also going over and marketing and engaging with our partners to make sure that we are sustaining our level of international engagement. Then there is some travel that is, as the Minister said, for attendance at some conferences, which is largely paid for by partners.

The last element would be where we have experts that need to go and do training internationally. Again, that tends to be paid for by partners. For instance, we deliver courses for the hospitality industry, around sommeliers and that type of thing, where we get invited to attend courses in Italy or elsewhere to make sure that our teachers are at the level of knowledge required to actually teach people who are going to be at that level within their industry. Again, that's paid for through the partners, but it comes through our books.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've recently approved a number going to WorldSkills, which is pretty exciting, as you'd probably be well aware.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask just for a bit of clarity? The information we have, I think there was one trip to Abu Dhabi and two to Shanghai for educational exports. Is that going to look at the quality of the courses? What was that about? Then Manila and Beijing, there's one to each of those in the information that we've been given through GIPAA.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think I have to take on notice what the purpose for each individual one was.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could. I'm interested that you just mentioned that—I'm sure everyone would love a trip to Italy to go and talk about wine, and I appreciate, in all seriousness, that it has a benefit. I'm not being cheeky. For those that are overseas trips that are paid for by partners, but obviously still go through TAFE, can you provide on notice the number of those trips in the last 12 months and who the partners were in that relationship as well?

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely, we'll take it on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On notice is fine. I don't expect you to have that with you today. Minister, I want to go to one more on expenses. I have to ask you—and you're probably expecting this. We did get some information about office expenses. You had quite a large catering budget, \$5,233, which I think is second only to the Premier and quite a way ahead of a number of your colleagues. What was that money spent on?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As you're probably aware, we have the friends of TAFE in the New South Wales Parliament. We hosted a Parliamentary Friends of TAFE event, which was in the Speaker's courtyard. A number of members of all sides of the Parliament came along, along with 100 students, family members and teachers. I don't know if you were able to go, but it was a great event to showcase a number of the things that TAFE did. Our students did the organisation and the emceeing and provided some of the product. At the same time, there was a display in the Fountain Court of the artworks of TAFE students. That entire expenditure was on that event.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right, that was what that was for. Okay.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, on the catering for that event.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you be able to provide on notice a breakdown in terms of how much was spent on food, alcohol and other costs, if possible?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The expenditure out of my budget was only on food and the catering costs, not on the alcohol.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Minister. I want to turn now to some of the specifics in the budget. Are you able to tell me what the total Skills budget is for New South Wales in 2024-25?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The 2024-25 Skills budget is \$3.2 billion, which is \$2.9 billion in recurrent expenditure and \$301 million in capital funding. It's a 3.4 per cent increase over the original 2023-24 budget. In TAFE the budget is \$2.5 billion, which includes \$2.2 billion in recurrent funding and \$301 million capital. In 2024-25, around about 79.9 per cent of the Skills budget will be going to TAFE. It's an increase of about 4.9 per cent over the previous year's budget in TAFE, and capital is around about the same.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So \$3.2 billion is your overall budget allocation?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I then want to ask about some of the capital works. In *Budget Paper No. 03*—I don't know if you've got it in front of you—on page 4-31 where it lists TAFE, it just says "Capital Projects" and "Various" under "New Works". I think there's \$88.4 million estimated cost, and the allocation this year is \$22.6 million. Are you able to indicate which of the new capital projects are covered through that bucket of money?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will in general, and then I'll pass over to TAFE to give you some more detail. The breakdown of the capital program for this year is around \$90 million for the asset renewal program and \$37 million for digital access foundation. There's a specific \$17.8 million for Kingscliff campus and \$21.6 million for Coffs Harbour optimisation project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I see that in front of me. I'm really interested in the new works.

Mr STEVE WHAN: So you're particularly interested in the \$90 million?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I'm interested in the new works that's at the top of that. All the others are listed on the table and that's easy to see. I'm just wondering what capital projects are new works, or what will be starting under that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: A lot of the work that we are doing is maintenance and upgrades of TAFE campuses. We have some quite serious maintenance problems that have been left in TAFE over the years, so a lot of that is going to maintenance programs. We are doing quite a lot of work in digital, so upgrading wi-fi in many of the TAFEs, which hadn't been upgraded since 2009. There is a very large list of projects under that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I just ask on that—sorry, Minister. I didn't mean to interrupt you. "Digital access foundation" is listed as a separate item in works in progress; so is "asset renewal program". Is that what the maintenance upgrades fall under? The "Capital Projects", the "New Works"—I'm just really keen to know which campuses or what that part is referring to, as opposed to works in progress.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Mr Brady to elaborate on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: Sorry, Ms Mitchell, could you repeat the number that you're referring to?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's page 4-31 of *Budget Paper No. 03*. Up the top of the table, under "Major Works", it says "New Works", "Capital Projects", "Various". Over the course of the next four years it's an \$88 million estimated total cost, and this year's allocation is \$22.6 million. I'm curious as to what falls into that "Capital Projects" \$22.6 million for this financial year.

STEPHEN BRADY: The \$88 million consists of a number of elements. One is there are minor works projects, which consists of a range of small projects, really. I'd have to come back to you with a breakdown of what that is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you think you could have that this afternoon, if you could try?

STEPHEN BRADY: We'll come back with what we can.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good. Thank you.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you very much, Minister and officials. Minister, is the Government still committed to the relocation of the Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Relocation and then putting it back? Yes, we are still a part of the project to build a new Bankstown hospital, which will include on the site a new TAFE campus. There is quite a lot of planning that has been going on since I last talked about this at a previous estimates. TAFE has been very closely involved with Health in planning what we need to have in the new TAFE building to cater for the courses that we want to

continue to offer there in Bankstown. TAFE has also been looking at the options for the temporary relocation of the TAFE and looking at options within the Bankstown CBD area there.

I think when I talked about this at my first budget estimates in this portfolio, I talked about understanding that the people who are at the Bankstown TAFE, for many of the courses that we had, needed to have access in a very close proximity to public transport. We're still very focused on that. Planning has progressed quite a long way. We've got a strong idea, working with Health, of what will need to be included in the new TAFE buildings and the new opportunities that might come from being co-located with a health facility and also with a facility that has a large element of hospitality as well. I can ask Mr Brady to elaborate further on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm happy to maybe in the afternoon session, if that's okay. I'm conscious of everybody's time. Minister, I appreciate the planning work and what you've mentioned there. Is there any thinking around the estimated cost of relocating the TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: For specifics, I'll ask Mr Brady to elaborate on that aspect of it. Obviously, the budget overall—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Have costs been part of the planning in terms of the discussion? That's all. We're just wanting to know the costs on some of this stuff.

Mr STEVE WHAN: They're not finalised yet, but obviously there's a budget been announced for the actual hospital development, and we expect the TAFE costs to be included within that. I'll pass over to Mr Brady for detail on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: You're exactly right, Minister. We're in the middle of scoping, still, of the service delivery for our requirements within Bankstown. We're in close engagement with Health Infrastructure. We need to develop a business case together. There will be a single business case that we're anticipating going forward to Government that covers to the delivery of the combined TAFE and hospital on the campus. I can't give you a number now. We're still in the process of doing the planning. But what will need to be covered through that is obviously the relocation of the existing delivery to a temporary location and then relocation back into the new combined campus in Bankstown.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, given that the Minister—recognising the varied courses and the range of courses on offer currently at Bankstown, will there be one or several temporary sites for the relocation?

STEPHEN BRADY: We anticipate going out to market for interest in the local Bankstown CBD to see what is available. Our strong preference would be to have a single site but you would appreciate that it is a fairly large footprint that we need and we anticipate there will be a limited number of spaces that could accommodate us on one space. It may be necessary to have more than one space but our strong preference would be to have a single space.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are some courses which need outdoor space, which we would be looking at putting somewhere else.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we flagged previously that it's likely that, for instance, our animal veterinary related courses will move to Padstow, so we'll accommodate that in other ways.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are there any costs known as to the new campus—reinstating the campus onto the existing site?

STEPHEN BRADY: Not at this stage. You would appreciate that planning a combined TAFE and hospital facility is a complex exercise and that that work is underway.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So there is no budget provision or there have been no budget proposals put forward?

STEPHEN BRADY: I think the Minister mentioned there was an initial budget that was part of the announcement. We're now doing the detailed work around our requirements and, if there is a need for a different budget, then that is something which we'll discuss with the Government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm aware that—I think it was in 1999, and this is pre-me in this Parliament—the \$1.3 billion was committed to the new Bankstown Hospital. My questions today are for you in your capacity here as the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education. Is there any budget provision within Skills, Training and TAFE for the TAFE—for the temporary relocation and the reinstatement of the TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: For Bankstown TAFE?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm not talking Health; I'm talking Bankstown TAFE.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, there is no provision within the Skills budget for any of the costs related to the change to Bankstown. We would expect that to be covered in the Health allocation.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: As part of the \$1.3 billion for the new hospital?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As part of the overall cost of the project.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there any indication, just for families, for students—the time frame on this?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Time frames? Not at the moment. Mr Brady might be able to elaborate on what information we may have got from Health about this, but we will be obviously planning to give as much notice as we can. But Mr Brady might have a time frame on this.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we're still working through that detail. The challenge obviously for TAFE NSW is, with our academic calendar, we don't want to be moving in the middle of a semester. We very much will want to move and minimise the disruption on students. That means that we need to be planning around that calendar. At this stage, until we've got the clarity around where we can move to, what level of fit-out would be required so we can continue to deliver our courses, it's very hard to say exactly what the time frame is.

The CHAIR: Minister, under the previous Coalition Government the TAFE model was getting less and less interactive with actual teachers and resulted in a lot of curriculum assessment materials and other things being outsourced. I understand that has now got to the point where sometimes content has no context in the classroom at all. Have you put in place any changes for that? Are there any moves afoot to try to bring teachers back into curriculum development?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There's probably a long and complex answer to this, but I'll start on it and we'll see how we go. We've obviously just undertaken the VET review, which is really seeking to set the direction for our vocational training in New South Wales. A key component of that was about recommending that we look at the structure of TAFE so that it is able to better—and we are moving to a new operating model, which is designed to enable our TAFE to actually better interact with its relevant industries but also to re-engage with local communities. We're in the process of that.

There are a number of elements of this. I'll get Mr Brady to elaborate on some of this, but there is a lot of complexity that I've discovered in TAFE for teachers in terms of the curriculum development process because, when you have nationally accredited programs, it comes with a lot of admin that teachers have to do, and every time there's a change to an element of the curriculum or a qualification, that's actually quite burdensome for TAFE teachers. There is a huge amount of TAFE teachers' time which is actually taken up in assessment, in ticking off on an apprentice's qualifications, in changing their courses to meet changes that happen to the national standards and curriculums and those sorts of things. A lot of what's coming out of the VET review will help us to simplify some of that over time and give teachers more opportunity to teach face to face in classes.

The CHAIR: Is the VET review finalised? Is it public?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The VET review was released a couple of weeks ago—the final report. It's pretty big. We had six recommendations in the first one, 21 in the second with—I counted—61 different points in them. So there is quite a lot in it. We've also got some fairly—some of the systems which TAFE uses need to be continued to be worked on in terms of the admin that teachers have to go through. I think there's some pretty big challenges there. But we certainly accept that there is a lot of complexity in the way that teachers have to go about changing and modifying curriculum. One of the elements of the VET review was to allow TAFE to trial being a self-accrediting organisation and we'd like to trial that with the centres of excellence in manufacturing. That, I think, recognises the complexity that comes out of the national process. Universities obviously self-accredit. TAFE hasn't been allowed to do that but, as the biggest educational provider in Australia, we think that it's reasonable for them to be moving down that path. There's quite a lot to unpack. I'll ask Mr Brady. He might be able to give a more concise summary than me.

The CHAIR: I'll come to Mr Brady in a minute. Under the previous Government there was a statement of where they were going with this, and it appears a lot through the eTendering records, which I find interesting. The statement is, "TAFE NSW is reimagining its approach to developing training product, moving to a multi-tier, multi-channel approach to ensure an improved and efficient approach to training product development at scale", which I take is shorthand for, "We're going to do a lot of online courses." Has that approach changed? Have you given any directions, Minister, to change that approach? Or are you still building on that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not sure about that fairly wordy little explanation that they put in there about it. We certainly haven't moved away from doing online delivery where it's appropriate. That's quite important for us to be doing that and we're offering a number of short courses and micro-credentials via that aspect, so there's quite a lot of development going on in terms of developing credentials which meet the needs of learners more directly—obviously, alongside the traditional apprenticeships and certs and traineeships. They're all very important, but we're very conscious of the need to be providing an educational product in a way which is accessible for people around the State.

I think out of the VET review we will see some positive work over time, both on the structure of TAFE and the way that it delivers, making sure that we do reduce some of the workload by—in some ways we had a halfway model. We didn't really have a statewide model for TAFE. We are moving to change the operating model to enhance local engagement but also to allow us to work more closely with industry, to be more responsive to industry in the way that things change to try to get better sharing of some of the expertise that's around. I go around to a lot of TAFEs obviously and talk to people working in particular areas. They'll often say, "Well, I hear such and such down in the south of the State is doing this. I wish we could do that sort of thing." There's this opportunity to actually much better share some of the best practices going around as we move through. Perhaps Mr Brady might be more familiar with the words that you used from the previous Government. He might elaborate on that.

The CHAIR: Can I just focus that question then? As you may know, I take a particular interest in the use of consultants, and I love to look through the eTendering website as a pastime. One of the things that drew my attention is actually a contract variation with Ernst & Young, and it falls under this product development program. This variation was published on 9 May this year, and we've gone from just over \$820,000 to an amended contract amount of just over \$2 million but where the duration hasn't changed. What is that work that EY is doing? Why are they doing it and are they doing it in consultation with teachers? What's the deal with that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Mr Brady to answer.

STEPHEN BRADY: Thank you, Ms Boyd. I think we have spoken at previous hearings about the use of consultants in product development. Certainly what we're doing is looking very closely at the way we produce new training product and assessments. The challenge we have had in previous years has been a very high rate of change in the training packages coming through from the Commonwealth. We had a centralised model of product development which struggled to keep pace, hence we are having to leverage the use of external parties. We've been changing that model over the past couple of years, and our operating model actually accelerates that change to enable greater use of our teaching workforce.

Teachers are experts in their field, and we draw on them as subject matter experts. But beyond that, there is a capability, particularly with some of our longer-standing teachers who have a full teaching qualification, to be engaged in curriculum development. The model we're moving towards is having a multi-tiered approach. We have very complex changes done within our central team using subject matter expert teachers. But for the less complex changes, we're actually leveraging those teachers more and more. Part of their duties is not only delivering teaching and assessment but also delivering work towards curriculum development. I might ask Dr McNeill to talk a little bit more about it. What that's doing is enabling us to use less external resources.

The CHAIR: Why have we got double the amount going to EY then under this contract variation?

STEPHEN BRADY: I think if we explore that, you'll see that it's coming down actually.

The CHAIR: But it's double from 9 May this year.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we need the detail.

MARGOT McNEILL: Yes. Thank you for the question. As Mr Brady explained, this has been a process for us where we're continually driving down our reliance on external partners because we work very closely with them to make sure that we always have TAFE NSW subject matter expertise from the teachers but also project oversight. I'll take the Committee back a couple of steps though, because our primary requirement in the product development space is to make sure that the materials are going to be ready in the very complex environment that the Minister explained. In some cases, we have externally imposed changes to the training packages which we need to respond to very quickly. We're not always able to do that relying on our internal sources of our teachers and our own internal project teams. Therefore, we rely on others. If I talk about the training package changes, that's really only one of the sources of changes we have. So, for example—

The CHAIR: Sorry, can I just draw you back to this though? Ernst & Young were hired. We had an original contract duration from 1 September 2022 to 1 September 2025. We have an amended contract with a duration of the exact same time. Why was that three-year contract worth \$820,000 when it was first signed and now as of 9 May it is up to \$2 million?

MARGOT McNEILL: It would be because we have additional requirements to meet these changes. For example, where the building changes, building codes change for specific courses. If Ernst & Young—they're one of the 31 providers on the panel that we have to work with us as external partners.

The CHAIR: The way that I understand e-tendering to work is that there's a tender put out for a specific scope of work. If there was to be an expansion of that scope, then you would consider that as a separate thing. It would be an additional amount that would go under an additional contract. There's no explanation as to why this has just increased.

MARGOT McNEILL: I'll have to come back to the Committee with that information on notice for the specifics about that contract.

The CHAIR: That would be very useful.

MARGOT McNEILL: But it will be because of the external changes we have experienced.

The CHAIR: Right. In which case, there should have been another contract process undertaken or a registering on eTendering of an additional amount. There's no explanation in this. There's another one here to a Strawberry Solutions company. This is a 3½-year contract from 1 September 2022 to 24 February 2026. This one has gone from \$460,000 to \$2.2 million. That's over four times the increase in value. Both of these were registered with eTendering on 9 May. How can that be such an increase under the same contract?

MARGOT McNEILL: Again, I'll have to come back with the details on notice. But it will be because we work with those external partners on the material development.

The CHAIR: Minister, does it worry you, the lack of transparency over these sorts of contracts?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't think there's a lack of transparency in terms of us knowing what they're doing. I think that's pretty clear within TAFE. There are some jobs that we have to do.

The CHAIR: It's not being conveyed to the public.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In terms of not being able to provide that information, we'll do our best to provide that information for you.

The CHAIR: I'm hearing that some of the micro-courses that have been generally well received—people like the idea of being able to do a micro-course—have some sort of product placement or reference to—

Mr STEVE WHAN: You mean advertising?

The CHAIR: Yes—particular companies and things in it. Is that true?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Mr Brady to answer that.

STEPHEN BRADY: I'm certainly not aware of that, Ms Boyd, so if you could provide us with specifics we'd more than happily look into it.

The CHAIR: That's certainly not the intention though?

STEPHEN BRADY: No.

The CHAIR: Who has been doing those micro-courses? Who has been creating those? Sorry, "short courses" I think you call them.

Mr STEVE WHAN: TAFE creates them but I suspect we do have partners in a number of them.

STEPHEN BRADY: For instance, in our institutes of applied technology, we develop those in conjunction with industry and with university partners. An individual micro-credential could be developed by one of the universities or it could be by us or it could be a combination with industry. Although, TAFE NSW, we do a lot of our own micro-credentials as well in other areas. There's a range of ways in which they get created.

The CHAIR: Are you able to provide me perhaps on notice with the 31 providers that you have creating these products and how much each of their contracts are?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Along the lines of the EY and Strawberry Solutions ones that we had before?

STEPHEN BRADY: Right, okay.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: That would be really useful. It's a welcome thing to have online courses and to have that option for people. I think the concern comes when people feel that's replacing face-to-face teaching. What effort

is made, particularly with these online courses packaged up by other providers, to make sure that they can be adapted for the particular needs of the region that they're being delivered in? Even for simple things like places with high levels of CALD communities and First Nations communities, what's done to adjust the curriculum?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will hand that over to Mr Brady in a moment, but we're certainly very conscious of the need for additional support for many parts of the community and wraparound support. It's a very strong focus out of the VET review, and it has been a strong focus of government policy for the whole training sector, not just TAFE. We made a significant change in allowing people to combine the assistance if they were in different disadvantaged groups rather than only being able to access one element of the assistance, which is really important in terms of enabling wraparound support for people. Obviously in terms of delivery, we're also very conscious of where things are being delivered and what the markets are. I understand people saying that they don't always like online delivery. Some people love it; some don't. But it is designed to extend our availability rather than replace. I'll ask Mr Brady to elaborate on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think it's important to appreciate that there are a range of different delivery modes that we use. As a vocational education provider, a lot of what we teach requires hands-on experience. There are motor skills required. The example I tend to use is that you can't learn to strip down a heavy diesel engine online. A lot of our courses are delivered face to face. There may be an element of online in there. It might be, for instance, a work health and safety element or an induction element, which we can absolutely do online as part of any course. We then have online courses where they're delivered by a teacher in an online classroom, so there's a cohort that's together through the delivery of that course and the teachers are there supporting them.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Which is live, so they actually get the interaction directly with the teacher. I have seen some of those in action. They're very good.

STEPHEN BRADY: And those students might be anywhere around the State coming together in a cohort with that teacher. And then there is self-paced learning, where you can register at any time, log in and engage in the course and progress with the course at your own pace and there is support available to you as you progress. The suitability of those we really judge around the nature of the course that's being delivered. As I said, there are some courses where you absolutely have to have the practical element and then there are others where that's not so much the case. We take into account the nature of the cohorts that we're delivering to—some require more support than others. We have been looking at, in that self-paced area, the way in which we develop the curriculum to make sure it makes it as easy as possible for the student to engage. We also have educational support officers who can lend support to learners where they hit a road bump. There are a range of supports there to support learners through. It's not the case that we're trying to replace instructor-led or teacher-led training with online. That's definitely not the case.

The CHAIR: Is there additional support, then? I understand that TAFE had a multicultural plan that ran from 2020-22 and there were multicultural coordinators and other people. I have lost track of where that got to. I'm not sure I ever saw any review of whether it met its targets.

STEPHEN BRADY: We had our diversity and inclusion council meeting yesterday, where we discussed the development of our new multicultural plan, which will be launched in December of this year. We still have our multicultural support network in our campuses. We still obviously support a lot of learners who have English as a second language. They're wraparound supports for those individuals. I might ask Ms Tickle if she'd like to add anything to that.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, certainly. Our multicultural plan, as Mr Brady said, is being released in December. We extended the multicultural plan that we had from 2020 to 2022 because of COVID. We work very closely with some of the communities, particularly in Western Sydney, where we have a higher multicultural population. As an example, in Bankstown campus, they partnered with Canterbury and Bankstown-Lidcombe hospitals and Metro Assist and they supported a refugee and newly arrived migrant health career pathways program. We also have the AMEP or Adult Migrant English Program. We provided training to just over 18,000 migrants through that program. Another program that we delivered successfully with Nepean Hospital was a job readiness program, where 39 people gained employment from multicultural refugee communities at the end of that program. Our multicultural plan, which we saw yesterday, is in draft to be delivered in December. Our multicultural staff network has been very involved in the development of that plan.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I return to Bankstown TAFE. Could you just confirm that, in terms of the relocation of the Bankstown TAFE, there's no funding budget provision within the training budget for the relocation of the Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's correct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of future budgets?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I couldn't say whether, once we have finalised everything, there might be an element that that budget might sit within our budget but, at this stage, there has been nothing allocated directly to the Skills budget for that project.

STEPHEN BRADY: Our discussion with Health and Health Infrastructure is that that will be part of the overall project budget.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, is there any budget provision or has there been a budget proposal put forward by you in terms of the building of the new Bankstown TAFE on the proposed hospital site?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. As Mr Brady is suggesting, we would expect it all to be a part of the one proposal that goes for consideration by the Government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The \$1.3 billion committed to redevelop the Bankstown hospital is relevant to the Bankstown hospital, in terms of Health. Is there a precedent here that TAFE can somehow fit in the back blocks of the new hospital?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's going to be an integral part of the site and we're working very hard with Health to make sure that the projects are delivered together. We are planning together with Health. It is a single project and our consistent conversation with Health and myself with the Minister is that this is a hospital and a TAFE project and that that's the way it's progressing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But there is the absence of any reference to TAFE, in terms of a \$1.3 billion and in terms of Health. The money has gone to Health. It's for the new hospital.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The allocations are indicated with Health but, in all the announcements around it, it has continually talked about TAFE as well. I am comfortable with where we're at, at the moment, on the project.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are there any documents that you could table to say that TAFE is part of this health precinct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I believe there have been some publicly available media releases about it and we continue to have discussions with the NSW Health and Health Infrastructure about the proposals. Mr Brady is in—I don't know how regular communication, but he is in regular communication with them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, the department of health report as to why the redevelopment of the Bankstown hospital is required is because the Bankstown area is likely to grow by 21 per cent to nearly a million people. The increased health needs need to be met, hence the case for the new hospital. What does that say, in terms of the training needs in the south-west? If health needs are increasing with 21 per cent and nearly a million people, what about training?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Mr Brady can elaborate on this, but we are planning for the future needs of the area in the proposal that we have put in with Health.

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely. Bankstown is a critical location for us, given not only the growth in that population but also the demographics. There's a strong migrant population. We know from our experience that a lot of those learners will stay within their communities and won't travel a long distance to go to training. It's important that we have a strong base in the Bankstown area and that we're there and able to accommodate growth. Our planning is not for necessarily what we're delivering today but it is what we will need going forward as well.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think it's pretty exciting that we're going to have a new TAFE at Bankstown. I think that's a really exciting prospect. I think it's a positive all round.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in summary—and please correct me on this—we've got no time frame for the relocation; we've got no temporary site for the relocation, whether it's a single site or a multiple site; we've got no budget provision in the current budget or future budgets; and there has been no budget proposal put forward to support the TAFE. What do we know?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That characterisation is not quite right. We know that there is a budget provision for the hospital project, which includes the construction of the TAFE and includes the relocation of the TAFE while construction is underway. We have been exploring the market already to see what options are there for the temporary location for TAFE, and we'll progress to the market more formally when the project is given the go-ahead. Mr Brady can talk a bit more about the timing on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we're anticipating going out to the market very soon to establish what capacity there is in Bankstown CBD for temporary facilities. We'll have an answer to that, which then helps us to build the cost base and the timings in order to inform the business case to come forward to government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What do students know?

STEPHEN BRADY: We've communicated to students the fact that there is the project. We have communicated our commitment to the Bankstown CBD, that there will be a relocation and temporary facility, and that more information will be made available as it comes to light.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the \$88.4 million in the budget papers in terms of new works—

Mr STEVE WHAN: That does not include Bankstown.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So Bankstown TAFE is not part of that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it's not, and I wouldn't want it to be because we would want lots more in our budget if we were including Bankstown. I'm comfortable with the fact that it is going as a single project with Health.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there precedence here, where we've got money committed to a new hospital and then, all of a sudden, it's going to include a new TAFE campus?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's not all of a sudden. From day one, when the Government announced the Bankstown site, we've talked about it being a new TAFE as well. That has been very clear from the Government's original announcements on this, and it has been consistently clear from my discussions with the health Minister and from TAFE's discussions with Health.

STEPHEN BRADY: That's correct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, is there any precedence for this?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd have to ask others. There is certainly precedence for co-located facilities; I'm not sure of the single-budget approach.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think, given that the intention is to build a hospital on an active TAFE campus, we have to take a whole-of-government perspective. We know the importance of the Bankstown community for Health but also for Skills, so taking a single view and a single business case is the only sensible way that you could do this. Health needs that land in order to be able to build that hospital, and we need that land in order to be able to deliver skills in Bankstown. Bringing the two together is the sensible way forward.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, what's the latest on Gosford TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Gosford TAFE project has had a business case done for it, but the Government hasn't decided to fund that at this stage.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So Gosford TAFE wouldn't fall within that \$88 million bucket of money that we're to learn about?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, that's not included in that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Do we have a time frame in terms of Gosford TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Mr Brady to elaborate but, no, at this stage it is not funded by Government. We have a business case that is there, but at this stage it is not funded to progress.

STEPHEN BRADY: It's exactly as the Minister said. The business case, as you'd be aware, is predicated on moving onto the old Gosford council chambers site. We have agreed with the council to extend the arrangement we have, which potentially gives us access to that site. That remains an open consideration for the Government. We are looking at where there are other ways that we can shape the timing and the cost of the project, but we still believe it's an important business case for TAFE NSW.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, at an earlier estimates you reported that you "expected to give certainty on the project".

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can't yet.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there anything you can elaborate on that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I can't yet. I'm sorry about that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of trying to gain certainty on this, was a budget proposal considered for Gosford TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not going to go into any considerations in Cabinet or ERC. Suffice to say we have extended the option with the council on the site and we will continue to talk within Government about the project.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Have you held discussions with the council relating to the proposed site?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I haven't directly, but TAFE has continued to negotiate with council over it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Have you held discussions with the member for Gosford? I think she has been rather vocal and supportive of this.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have certainly been talking to the very strong advocate in the member for Gosford, Liesl Tesch.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What do we know about the student cohort on the Central Coast in terms of their training needs?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Mr Brady to elaborate on that. We have a number of facilities on the Central Coast, obviously, and there is growing demand there. We have a couple of challenging areas. Ourimbah is one where we have a TAFE as well. We are going through a process statewide of attempting to plan for our future needs in TAFE on the basis of the skills that we know are going to be needed over time, rather than on historical provision and the availability of teachers. That's going to be a process which is really important to planning, delivery, localising, and making sure that we understand the local communities and their skills needs over time. It's actually quite a big change. The Central Coast will be a part of that. We've done some significant planning in terms of thinking about Gosford, but we're also thinking about what to provide at the other TAFE campuses in the area. We are about to start work on a new facility at Wyong, is my understanding.

STEPHEN BRADY: It's an animal care facility that's well underway.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are a number of things we are providing on the Central Coast. Perhaps Mr Brady can elaborate on the planning for the future needs there.

STEPHEN BRADY: We are very much trying to take a view that all our infrastructure and digital capabilities should be driven by our training needs. We are taking a longer term planning approach where we are looking at not only what we are delivering there today but what will be needed into the future. That looks at all the data that's available to us from NCVER and ABS et cetera, from a top-down perspective, about what's driving training needs analysis. We are then engaging with local communities around what's required in those local areas and planning as a network of campuses. For instance, as the Minister said, we've got the Gosford campus and we've also got Wyong and Ourimbah in that area. How do we deliver the skills required across those sites? We're trying not to duplicate but also making sure we're cognisant of the travel distance for students to get to courses that they want to do.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think this afternoon it would be good to learn more about this. Minister, just in summary, in terms of the Gosford TAFE, we've got a growing student cohort there. We've had investment in terms of universities and other training facilities, but we've got no budget commitment for a new TAFE at Gosford and no time frame.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can confirm at this stage that we have no budget commitment for the relocation or new TAFE at Gosford.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the existing TAFE facilities at the moment, what do we know about that? I've had reports from teachers there that the conditions are appalling and "you owe it to us to give us a responsible and safe place of work".

Mr STEVE WHAN: We know that that campus, like many, was allowed to run down significantly under the previous Government. I am certainly also hearing that it is an old campus and in need of work.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Have you visited the Gosford TAFE campus, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have not visited that current campus, no, at this stage. Mr Brady can elaborate on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: We are investing to maintain that campus in a state where it's fit for delivery, so we are ensuring that that essential maintenance occurs. There is \$700,000 being spent at that campus this financial year. Depending on the timing with relocation, we've got plans going forward about how much we would need to spend to maintain the campus. But certainly, it is an environment which is aged. It is challenging because it has been built on the slope of a hill, with a significant road running through the middle of the campus. Absolutely, we

as an organisation would look forward to relocation, but we are investing to maintain the suitability and safety of the site for delivery in the meantime.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of relocation, a business case has been prepared?

Mr STEVE WHAN: A business case has been prepared for consideration. Obviously this is a project which, like all projects, needs to be seen in the context of the overall Government priorities and budget position. To be very clear, there was no forward allocation to this project made when we came into government, even though I understand there had been some community discussions about it. No commitment had been made to it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm aware of the work—like the member for Gosford, the member for Terrigal has been very active on this.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The member for Gosford and the Minister for the Central Coast have certainly spoken to me extensively about this project. They are very strong advocates for this project, and I suspect that they will continue to be. I have heard the member for Terrigal talking in Parliament, but he certainly did not get an allocation of funds to get the project going when he was a part of government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of next steps, in terms of Gosford TAFE, it's on the list and under review?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As Mr Brady said, we've agreed with council to extend the option over the site. That enables us to continue to talk about whether or not the project could fit into the Government's priorities in the medium term.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of budget allocation, would Gosford TAFE fall under new works?

Mr STEVE WHAN: If there was an allocation to it, it would appear, I suspect, with its own line item because it would be a very major project, but it's not in there at the moment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: On one hand we're just propositioning, if there was a commitment to the Gosford TAFE, possibly a line item, how it would be addressed in the budget, but when we come to Bankstown TAFE there's nothing.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Very different projects. Let's be really clear about this. If we're building a new TAFE, as TAFE on a block of land that TAFE owns, then it appears in our budget. The Bankstown project is a project that's being done jointly with Health. We've made it very clear from the outset that that is the way the process is going. It will have an allocation for the project overall. We've been absolutely clear about that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the materials or the agreement or the references that you've made that the \$1.3 billion for the new Bankstown hospital will include the new Bankstown TAFE—could they be made available to the Committee, in terms of the materials, the agreement, the reference?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will take on notice the public information that's been provided and provide that information and any other information we're able to release at this stage.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, is it fair that students and families in the south-west feel like the Bankstown TAFE relocation in the hospital precinct is a downgrade—a downgrade to TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That would be totally unjustified.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: A downgrade to the campus?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. I totally reject that. It's a great opportunity to get a new TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With no money for it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: A fantastic opportunity to get a new TAFE. We will have an entirely new building. We'll be able to really leverage on the opportunities of being on the same campus as a hospital in terms of our health—TAFE is really critical in the provision of health training in New South Wales. We'll have the opportunity to really work directly with the health campus. We'll also have some other really interesting opportunities we can explore in terms of hospitality, for example, because the hospital will inevitably have a number of hospitality businesses and activities going on. I think there are some fabulous opportunities. I think people who are interested in the future of the Bankstown TAFE should be really excited about it—very positive.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, just to pick up on that, you've said in answers to my colleague you don't have a separate budget, you're not quite sure exactly how much you'll get from the Health funding. How

can you be confident that you're going to be able to offer everything that you're saying when you actually have a zero budget allocation at this point?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As with all projects, there is a process of doing planning and then going out and getting cost estimates of how much it's going to end up as. We're very comfortable with the elements of the TAFE. As you've heard from Mr Brady, we're actually planning for the future provision of training through TAFE in Bankstown and catering for future needs with this facility, and we're very comfortable with the fact that Health is engaging with us on that with Health Infrastructure. I don't think there is any concern at all. In fact, I'd probably be more worried if we were talking about two separate budgets building on the same site with two separate planning processes. I'd expect it to be managed as a project on the site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, you've been in and around politics for a long time. You've got two agencies working on this. Health ultimately is stumping up the funds, from what you're saying.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Government is stumping up the funds.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if they have health service delivery as their ultimate goal, how can you give any guarantee that the TAFE won't be an afterthought and you'll just get the dregs of what's left in the budget?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The taxpayers of New South Wales are stumping up the funds. Whether it appears in the Health budget or our budget as a single line item makes no difference, as long as the funds are there to deliver the services that we're planning for. We're intimately engaged in the planning for those services, so I'm absolutely confident that out of this the people of Bankstown will get an excellent facility. They'll get one that's capable of providing for the future needs of the area and we will be providing them with continuing educational opportunities through a temporary location.

The CHAIR: In my little three minutes, if we could come back to the multicultural services, I understand that there was a so-called CALD coordinator in certain regions, but not in all regions. Can you give me an update on how many there are and which regions they're currently in?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: I will have to take on notice the number of CALD coordinators we have, but I can explain where the decision is made to have them in certain regions. We try, and our employees—our goal is to mirror the communities we serve with our employees, so we have CALD coordinators in areas where there are high migrant populations. Many of our CALD coordinators service Western Sydney for that reason.

The CHAIR: I understand that there are five regional areas with none at all. Is that because we don't have any need out there? You would still think that there would be a significant portion of students coming from that culturally and linguistically diverse background.

JULIE TICKLE: I would need to correct the record there, Ms Boyd, because at the moment we have five regional areas in total. Our new operating model is moving towards going away from regional areas and having clusters of communities. At the moment, as it is today, we have five regional areas, so we do have CALD coordinators in some of those regions.

The CHAIR: Maybe you could come back and tell me where you do and where you don't.

JULIE TICKLE: Sure, yes.

The CHAIR: That would be really useful. Similarly, I understand there are Aboriginal education engagement coordinators. How many are there of them and where are they?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, certainly. That's a team under the senior managers Aboriginal education and engagement. There are six of those across the State and each one of those has a team of Aboriginal education coordinators and Aboriginal student support officers underneath them, so we have them across the State as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could just return to the Bankstown TAFE, and I recognise the enthusiasm that you have—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Great opportunity for the area.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: As you just said, a great opportunity, but as we established earlier, in terms of the growing cohort in terms of the south-west and hence the case for the hospital redevelopment, I'm just wondering how would we address a growing student cohort on a new campus on reduced land.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Our planning is looking at future demand.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The campus is getting smaller, that's all.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The land on the campus is, but the buildings not necessarily.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you have less square metres of teaching space in the new facility?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Mr Brady can specifically answer that, but we will plan for the future growth of area as part of this campus. Obviously, the building designs haven't been finalised yet. Some of the land on the campus will be taken up by the hospital, but that doesn't necessarily mean there'll be less building space. I think Mr Brady can answer specifically on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: Thanks, Minister. If you look at the Bankstown campus at the moment, the buildings range from 1960s brick buildings, which are not fit for purpose whatsoever, through to a range of facilities. I don't think there's been anything new constructed on that campus for decades. So it's a good campus, it's delivering for the community at the moment, but from a floorspace perspective it's fairly inefficient because it's spread out across quite a large land area, which is what creates the opportunity to have the hospital and the TAFE on the one spot. What that campus doesn't have at the moment is anything relating to trades. I think it had automotive there quite some long time ago. It has spaces which are quite suited to a vertical campus. It does work around retail, it does work around health and beauty, around care—so they're all things that can easily be accommodated within more of a standard sort of building, rather than having specialist delivery spaces that require a different footprint.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In really simple terms, do you anticipate having more or less square metres of teaching space in the new campus?

STEPHEN BRADY: I'll take that on notice, but it's not our intention to reduce. I have mentioned we do have some veterinary care on that campus at the moment. We think that—it's currently in a high-rise building—it's not really suitable. We would look to move that to one of our other nearby campuses. So there may be some changes to the delivery, but it's not our intention to reduce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you're going to move something like vet services, it's obviously going to be less, isn't it? It has to be.

STEPHEN BRADY: I give the example of something that is probably not in a great location at the moment.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's really about whether we are offering courses and the number of people we'll be able to service. If we can do that more efficiently with a better layout then we will. We're catering for future growth in the area and for future educational demand. That'll be the focus of what we're doing.

The CHAIR: Sorry, time is up. I will just check whether the Government members have any questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No, we're all good.

The CHAIR: We will take a tea break. We're going to have a short deliberative, so if we could clear the room for that, that would be great. We will be back at 11:15.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Thank you for returning. I'm just going to come back to you briefly, Mr Dizdar. It's been reported today that the New South Wales education department is proposing to axe 245 positions. Is this true?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's not quite an accurate representation. If you're referring to today's article, it's referring to a division within our department—it's a very important division—called Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing. We've begun a consultation process with our staff and indicated to them that we're making changes to that division. They're very important changes because they come off the back of a new plan for public education, as well as this Government's priorities, which, as the Secretary, I need to be able to meet. We wanted to remove duplication of resources. We wanted to get better alignment of some of the areas. We are moving some of the areas to other areas in the organisation. But in terms of what's quoted in the paper, it said something like 245 positions. I'll just put it on the record that about 140 of those positions are vacant and not filled and were temporary. We will look at consolidating those. They are not people who are already in roles.

The paper also may not have picked up that in headquarters we have roles called non-school based teaching staff. These are teachers that come from the field—merit selected—and they are predominantly temporary appointments. They are for a year to upwards of three years to provide their expertise in areas that are needed. Then those people have a permanent position in the department because they are teachers in our system or executives in our system. They go back to those positions. We're not looking at the number that was quoted in the paper. We are looking at having a strong division in these areas: in curriculum, in student wellbeing, in inclusion

and wellbeing, in specialist programs and in teaching and learning. For the record, I want to back in the comments I made at the Education budget estimates hearing. They are accurate. We are looking to expand our HSC support.

The CHAIR: Just to clarify, you said that 140 of the 245 potential positions were vacant already?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm rounding out numbers.

The CHAIR: Does that mean that there are 105 positions that are potentially going to be lost then?

MURAT DIZDAR: No.

The CHAIR: How many positions are at risk?

MURAT DIZDAR: The paper quotes about 245 positions. I am saying to the Committee that about 140 of those are vacant. There are about 100 roles that we are looking at. Some of the roles are lift and shift.

The CHAIR: How many?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me unpack that for the Committee. We grab the team and move it to another area. If you would like an example, in the current division, we have people who are supporting government preschools. We now have an entire division called Early Childhood Outcomes, led by deputy secretary Mark Barraket, who you met at the last estimates. We're picking up that team and moving them to the early childhood division so that we're aligned in all the work we're doing around early childhood. Another example is that we've got Aboriginal education curriculum officers who are currently in that division who we are picking up and moving to the Aboriginal education communities division so they are aligned and working simultaneously. All up, there are only about 30 roles, or thereabouts—if I've got it wrong I'm happy to come back on notice, because I don't want to get the number wrong—across that entire division where we will be working with individuals around their placement.

The CHAIR: Are they teaching roles? Is that 30 teachers?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a mixture of teaching and non-teaching roles.

The CHAIR: So it's not proposing to axe 245 positions; it's proposing to axe about 30 positions?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, 245 was quoted in the paper. I'm on record saying that about 140 are vacant, not utilised and not required. I think it's really important to get the balance right between the support arm—how many roles you've got in the headquarters—compared to what you've got on the ground. The Committee may or may not know—this is in annual reports—that just four years ago the headquarters was 5,635 positions. In four years it went to 8,000 positions. It grew enormously, with a backdrop where we dropped 25,000 enrolments and are wrestling with what a teacher shortage looks like. I make no excuse for wanting more of our expert practitioners on the ground, serving our children daily in classes. But I also want to get the balance right with the support that I provide. I think this model does that.

The CHAIR: In the previous estimates you said the HSC strategy was doing a great job and that having those teachers not in the schools, but actually supporting all of the other teachers, was making a huge difference.

MURAT DIZDAR: It is.

The CHAIR: How does that then gel with you now saying that those people need to be not doing the HSC strategy, but doing something different?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a fair question, Chair. I stand by the HSC strategy. It's been doing great work. But I've also got an entire arm called curriculum. We're moving the HSC strategy into the curriculum area because you get duplication. You'll have an individual who is charge of stage four and five history in the curriculum team, which is years seven to 10. Then you'll have another arm that is doing the HSC history. We are able to bring it all together under the curriculum arm and make it easier. Plus, as I said earlier in the morning—and I think it's important you get this detail and I've just had it confirmed—we were delivering 12 to 14 subjects by way of HSC support, and we are going to expand the number of subjects that we support.

The CHAIR: Sorry, because I am genuinely confused—please believe me when I say I am genuine in my confusion—you said that the HSC strategy was great and wasn't going anywhere, but today we've heard that actually you're not having the HSC strategy anymore in terms of having these people sitting within the department, supporting teachers. How do those two statements go together?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me simplify it. When you're talking about a large division, the operational arm can get a little confusing. We are going to keep our HSC work. We are going to expand the number of subjects we support. We're going to move that in alignment to an area called curriculum in that division.

The CHAIR: With fewer people? Finally, can you just confirm from what you were saying before that we are looking at about 30 positions across the teaching and learning division that will be made redundant?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're not looking at making them redundant. We are looking at working with 30 positions—and whoever those relevant people are—around what their placement in the organisation will look like, and if it's not available in the organisation, what it would like across the public service.

The CHAIR: I'm going to leave that for now. I don't profess to be any less confused, but I'll leave it for now.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, I tried. I live it operationally everyday, so I tried to simplify it and make it understandable. I am happy to unpack it further if I haven't been able to do that for you.

The CHAIR: Minister, I understand that there was a learning technology services team that was sitting within TAFE that got made redundant just before the financial year; about 99 positions were scrapped. Can you give us any information on that and the process that was followed?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There is some reform underway in TAFE, but I'm not aware of 99 positions being—

STEPHEN BRADY: I think this refers to the organisational change we made early in the financial year, Minister. We looked across a range of our support functions for where there might be opportunity to streamline and improve support, and the learning technology group—I say it's a group; there is a team—was part of that. They've been doing some work around some of the support services. We've just reorganised to ensure that other teams are supporting the teachers. We found the opportunity to streamline and reduce cost.

The CHAIR: So 99 people did lose their jobs?

STEPHEN BRADY: Sorry, it wasn't 99 people in learning technology services. Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: That change was consulted with employees between 26 June this year and 16 July. There were 63 back office employees impacted; 42 of those permanent employees are going through a declaration of excess process. However, all of those employees are going through the government mobility scheme at the moment. As you would know, the Government has a scheme where public servants are going into a mobility pool and, if suitable, they're offered positions in other areas of government. So far, with that particular change, we have placed five people, and eight further people out of that 42 permanent employees that were declared excess, or were to be declared excess, are going through that process to be placed as well.

Of the 63—so that was the 42 permanent employees—there were also nine temporary employees, and 12 employees are still with us but we've moved them back to substantive positions. The team that you referred to, though, Ms Boyd, is advanced learning technologies. This plan was made up of those people but more people as well. So there weren't 63 people in that team. That team provided technology support—as in their name, advanced learning technology support. For example, they did a lot of work when we had COVID and we had to get all of our teachers to use the Teams platform and that sort of thing.

We made a decision that we no longer needed the focus on advanced learning technologies. A lot of our teachers are using that technology very well now, and we have other parts of the business that support our teachers with the technology. For example, each of our teaching teams has a dedicated group of people called Skills Teams Education Excellence Specialists, and they also support the teachers with technology. It's not that we've removed technology support for teachers in this change.

The CHAIR: I've seen some of what that team was working on, particularly the virtual reality stuff, which seemed to be incredibly useful—everything from learning to swim to other sorts of services that would help people, particularly people who are coming to Australia as migrants and a bunch of other people. Does that mean, then, that that sort of technology development isn't going to be a feature of TAFE anymore? I don't understand why it was scrapped.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it's not my understanding that we're dropping any functions at all in this process. Ms Tickle can elaborate on that.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, that's right. We're not ceasing virtual and augmented reality in our delivery, no. Not only those people did those technologies.

The CHAIR: I understand that Meta donated 1,000 VR headsets to that team. What has happened to those headsets?

JULIE TICKLE: I'm not able to answer that question. I'm not sure if you can.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think they're in a range of different parts of the organisation. For courses that have already been developed using virtual reality, they're being used—I remember seeing at one of our CLCs that I visited, they're demonstrating the online delivery of that virtual training. A range of them are in use. I couldn't account for where the 4,000 are at the moment. I'd have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: It was 1,000.

STEPHEN BRADY: Yes, 1,000.

The CHAIR: This 26 June to 16 July consultation period for these redundancies, is that a standard period of time for someone to be told that they've been made redundant? What does that consultation look like?

JULIE TICKLE: I wouldn't say there's a standard period of time. It depends on the complexity of the change plan and what's being proposed. The consultation process for this particular change plan was with those impacted employees and they were given the opportunity to provide the impact that that had on them, obviously, and the impact that it had on their work at TAFE. The period of time was adequate for the size of the change plan, with 63 people impacted overall.

The CHAIR: Under that eight-week mobility period, who will be out of a job by the end of that? How does that work?

JULIE TICKLE: It's still in progress, so I couldn't tell you what the end result will be. As I said, there were 42 people that were to be declared excess. They're in the mobility process at the moment. Six have been confirmed placed, and we've got a further eight out of the 42 going through the placement process at the moment, and it looks like they will secure a role in another agency. It just depends—in terms of how that process ends for those people—how many at the end will be made redundant.

The CHAIR: So there are about 34 of them that don't necessarily have a position?

JULIE TICKLE: They're in the process at the moment. That's what we've got so far. It doesn't mean that the others won't find a place in another agency. They're going through the process at the moment.

The CHAIR: If I could turn to something a little different. I've been hearing quite a few concerning stories around lack of accessibility in universities for people with disability. In particular, I was told of one university where the student collective had bought a bunch of temporary ramps, like little ramp things, so that they could loan them out to people in wheelchairs so they could actually get into rooms that had little steps and stuff. What is being done to make our universities fully accessible? Has there been an audit? What is the department doing?

Mr STEVE WHAN: To start with, obviously the universities are established under State legislation, but their governance is up to the universities. They operate independently to the State Government. We don't have a role in running the universities per se or setting those standards. The Federal Government is the main regulatory body for the universities, so they would be working with the universities on setting standards in place. Obviously I would expect universities to be living up to the standards we expect of every institution in our State and, indeed, access our rules which exist in many of our planning instruments. I'm not aware of detail—what I'm saying to you is that we don't have a day-to-day involvement in telling universities what they should be doing in that space. Perhaps Ms Read might like to add.

MURAT DIZDAR: I might just add before Ms Read jumps in. The Minister is spot-on. They're administratively autonomous, but that doesn't preclude them from relevant legislation on work health and safety grounds, for example, for their staff and their students. Obviously they've got total responsibility for the teaching and learning. Just like I would in my space for public schools, I'd have to make whatever adjustments were required at a particular school. If there was to be a new build, like I've indicated in previous estimates, I would have to make sure full inclusion and accessibility was available there. But I'd have a footprint that goes all the way back to 1884, so I'd have to also make adjustments. The same would apply to universities. If you do have particular concerns, I think they should be—we should bring them to the attention of the vice-chancellor of each of those universities. I'm not sure if they'd be across what they are. I think the whole State would expect what reasonable adjustments were needed to be made.

The CHAIR: I think part of the problem is that we sit in this kind of gap between regulation and people don't know who is the prime regulator for issues like this, so nothing gets done.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As the secretary said, they've got to comply with all of the same standards that the rest of society has to comply with.

The CHAIR: Yes, which, unfortunately, aren't very high.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Sure.

CHLOE READ: If I can just add that there are also some specific elements of the Higher Education Standards Framework that TEQSA, as the regulatory body, have in place that speak to equivalence of opportunities and speak to things like the learning environment. Also, while the national student ombudsman is being set up as a result of that work we talked earlier on—gender-based and sexual-based violence on campus—they're intended to be a student ombudsman fulsomely, not just for one specific issue. Some of those matters about complaints, and whether students feel that they understand the avenues of complaint and how to get complaint resolution, I think that will help in this instance as well.

The CHAIR: What about TAFE in terms of accessibility of TAFE facilities?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Mr Brady, but we certainly expect TAFE to also have accessible buildings, noting that many of our buildings are over 100 years old and most of them are over 50.

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right, Minister, thank you. Absolutely, our infrastructure very much looks at inclusive design standards when we are looking at new builds. We do have an access advisory group from our staff and students that informs us around any issues on campus. Part of the work we do around our minor works every year is improving access. It's a really critical part of what we do. We had a whole range of lift replacements in the last couple of years to make sure we can increase accessibility. We have a diversity inclusion council, as I mentioned earlier, where we have our chairs of our employee resource groups, who are leading our staff in the inclusion space, come and report directly to our executive around issues. We make every effort we can to ensure that our staff and students with disability can get the full experience, the same as every other staff and student member.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, I'll come back to you with some of the questions that the Chair was asking as well. Could you clarify—I think you said 140 of the roles were vacant at the moment, roughly?

MURAT DIZDAR: Technically it's 141.6 FTE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So 140.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's why I rounded it out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how many of those have been vacant for a year or more?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have that with me. I just know that they're vacant.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take that on notice? You just mentioned there is a bit of change and those roles are often only—people have moved into them for a year or so. I'm wondering how many have been vacant for 12 months.

MURAT DIZDAR: So the ones that I was saying, whether it's a year, two or three—that's the NSBT workforce, the non-school based teaching workforce. They come in on one-, two- or three-year contracts and they maintain permanency as either a classroom teacher, a head teacher—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But none of those are in those 141.6 roles, or are they? Are any of those NSBTs the 141.6?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the breakdown between NSBT or general GSE roles. But 141 of the 245 that is being quoted are vacant—some for lengthy periods, some for shorter periods.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take on notice how many have been vacant for 12 months or more?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can do that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many staff currently work in the HSC Strategy team?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have that. It's a large team. I don't have that figure in front of me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Of the 105 positions that are currently still there and not vacant, what is the proportion of that that is part of the HSC Strategy team?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not going to have these figures. Let me take them on notice, if it's okay with you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many will be transferred into that new curriculum division? Is it all of them?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, it's not all of them. Let me get you that figure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are they still going to be called the HSC Strategy team within the new curriculum division?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to get that wrong. Let me find that out as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you think you might be able to have some of that data by this afternoon for us?

MURAT DIZDAR: Maybe, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, I'll come back to that after lunch.

MURAT DIZDAR: If we do, I'll certainly table it. If not, we'll turn it around quickly with the supplementary questions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Best in Class team—are they part of those 105 positions as well?

MURAT DIZDAR: Best in Class was what it was called when it was kicked off. You'll remember that was in your time. From there, the terminology changed to "expert teachers". There was a little bit of friction with the titling of that, and it was at the request of both the people performing that and the partners. It is the same group of people.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there about 70 teachers in those roles at the moment? That was some of the latest data that I could find, but I didn't know if that was still current.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it at my fingertips, Ms Mitchell. But this was the team that I'm referencing today that was providing support across the State for between, I'm told, 12 and 14 subjects—important support, support well received. But under this new model that Mr Graham and I are moving to, we want to increase the number of subjects that we're going to provide support for. What we also want to achieve—because we've been hearing this from our partners, from the federation, the primary principals, the secondary principals—is support for those that are teaching HSC for the very first time, because that can be challenging, as well as teachers who are teaching the HSC but it's out of their subject area. You can sometimes have a HSIE teacher, for example, who is geography and business studies trained teaching modern history for the first time for HSC. So we not only want to increase the number of subjects but also go to those two areas that I just tabled—and that was not being provided at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I'm just trying to break down, though, is are the Best in Class/"expert teachers", as they're now called, separate to the HSC Strategy team?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, that was the team.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's part of that as well?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I think there were close to 70 teachers in that Best in Class from the data that I could find, which is a couple of years old, but there might be updated figures. You're saying that there are 105 positions that aren't vacant, and 30 roles that—I think you said before to Ms Boyd—you're looking for movement. Does that leave you with about 70-odd positions to go into that curriculum? I'm trying to work out whether we're actually going to have more or less people supporting teachers in the classroom and how that is all going to play out. It's just not very clear. I agree with the confusion, that's all.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I have another go, Ms Mitchell? I do want to make it clear.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Please, if it is going to help, go for it.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think 245 was quoted in the paper, and I'm saying 141.6 of that is vacant. In round terms it is about 100 more positions. Only about 30 of those or thereabouts are ones where we're going to have to look at options for individuals and those roles. With the HSC arm that you're referring to and the Best in Class—that's one and the same—we'll be moving less positions into the curriculum area, but we have an army in the curriculum area. We'll be getting that one team to now go from 14 subjects or thereabouts to an expanded subject range and deliver through the curriculum, with the new curriculum rollout, the HSC support.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to this this afternoon. But any figures you've got, potentially, this afternoon in terms of exactly how many there are currently—I think you said the HSC Strategy team was quite large.

MURAT DIZDAR: Quite a large team, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But is that 70-odd then? Is that what the rough figure would be?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me get the numbers, if that's okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We'll come back to that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I only had the global numbers of the entire division, which I was trying to unpack for you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think we might come back to this. I want to pivot into other changes within the department in your area, Ms Read. Again, there has been some public reporting about I think up to 67 roles within the Education and Skills Reform division no longer being there or being moved. Can you outline what is happening in that space?

CHLOE READ: We've just finished consultation for—we've got a change we'll be announcing the final structure for tomorrow. There are about 30 ongoing positions in that change that were proposed to be removed. As a result of the consultation process, that number is going to change. But I will take on notice by how much because we won't have finalised that structure until tomorrow.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide that on notice that would be good. Minister, what involvement did you have in terms of the changes within that part of the department? Were you briefed, consulted?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The education department changes have been managed by the Deputy Premier. I've obviously been briefed about impacts in the Skills area, but the decisions were made by the Deputy Premier and the secretary.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But surely, Minister, this division helps with the support for apprentices, for trainees in schools and TAFE, is my understanding. But you don't, as the TAFE and skills Minister, really have any final say? It all goes to the Deputy Premier, is that what you're saying?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It actually rests with the secretary. The secretaries are responsible for the management of their departments. I've been informed about the arrangements in the department. I'm confident in the quality of the work that has been done there and will be.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did the Deputy Premier speak to you about it at all? Did she ask for your advice or input on those decisions?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I was briefed on the proposals and they've been going through a consultation process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Briefed by the Deputy Premier?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I get a regular briefing from the secretary.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you didn't have any discussions with the Deputy Premier about this at all?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Not directly, no.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask then how this is going to feed into the VET review? You talked about the final report earlier. Obviously there are a number of recommendations, as you rightly said, but there are some that talk about better integration between schools and SBATs, NESAs, what you are doing around HSC, subject choice and how you can better support students with careers advice. I think there are about three or four recommendations that go to that. How are you confident that you will be able to implement some of those recommendations, given that we are hearing today quite substantial changes to the HSC strategy team and cuts in Ms Read's division. Is that concerning to you at all?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm confident that we have the team in place that can help us deliver the VET review. I have no concerns about that at all. The department's structure in terms of the way that it focuses itself on the job is very much moving to implement the Government's policy priorities, which is what we want it to do. The VET review offers a number of really important challenges for us. You have highlighted some that I have been particularly keen on as well in terms of the links between high schools and vocational training. There will be elements of that where—for instance, you would be aware of the Educational Pathways Program and the RIEP program. They're not everywhere in the State. There is some great work in there.

We'll be working through the VET review and our response to the VET review to see how we can better deliver programs that make those linkages and how we can make more consistent, I guess, the link between high schools and vocational training. It is not particularly consistent around the State at the moment. We need to make it so because we need, as we know, nine out of every 10 high school graduates to go onto some sort of further training and four out of every 10 of those to be in vocational training.

We haven't responded to the VET review yet. We still have to do that work. There is a lot in it. But I am confident that we will be able to get that very strong focus. I have the secretary and the department come and see me at least every fortnight to update me on how things are going with the skills side of the portfolio to address any issues. It is a very good process and I'm confident that we will be able to implement some of those really important recommendations out of the VET review. I would love to talk some more about the VET review if you want to ask me some more questions about it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Maybe I will. Don't worry, I've got some more for you, Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll hand over firstly to Ms Read.

CHLOE READ: The two programs that the Minister just mentioned as part of this change are coming together. The Regional Industry Education Partnerships team has been sitting with training services. They connect industry and schools together, looking for opportunities for schools and schoolchildren to understand local employment opportunities and what is in their local area. The Educational Pathways Program is currently sitting in a different part of my area, because they grew up at different times, essentially. We are bringing those together so that schools get a single coherent offering.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: All back in under your area?

CHLOE READ: Yes, in that instance, no change to the numbers in the Regional Industry Education Partnerships team, but they're coming together with the EPP team so they can deliver those kind of more consolidated and more streamlined services for schools so schools don't have to know "Do you do this? Do you do that?" They can just look for one part of support from the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, you did just mention that you haven't had a formal Government response yet to the review, and I appreciate it only came out in the recent weeks. What is the time frame in terms of a Government response?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Later this year, around November or December, I'm expecting a Government response to come out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In the interim—Ms Read just talked about some of the work that will continue, and I appreciate some of the recommendations do go to continuing work that has been in place frankly since we were in government as well. Some of these aren't new. Will you be doing any work on some of the recommendations, mainly probably those out of the interim report because you've had that a bit longer? Are there any updates on that you can give us?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. We are working on a number of recommendations out of the interim report. We were asked to do a new TAFE charter. The work has been done on that. We are doing a new operating model for TAFE, which is moving TAFE to a faculty model, so it means that we'll have statewide faculties in particular areas where they can build a closer relationship with industry and enable them to stay more up to speed, I guess, more consistently across the State. We are moving to re-engage with local communities and emphasise that engagement. That's part of it. We are also undertaking the recommendation around the review of the assets that we have around the State and matching those with demand over time. There are a number of those angles that are actually already going.

There are a few really important things out of the VET review which I have been highlighting, which are down the track. It certainly talks particularly about better regional-based planning for skills, so looking at the future skills needs for regions and trying to align that with the sort of teaching resources that we have. As you'd be aware, there is a shortage of TAFE teachers in many areas. We need to be working very hard to try and make sure that we are actively seeking teachers in the areas, which regions are telling us is their future skills needs rather than just offering what we happen to have available at the time.

There are a number of aspects of it that we are actively working on. There is work that we are undertaking on most of the other aspects of the interim review recommendations at the moment. With the final review, I'd say that we'll be able to divide it up into a few different categories, being things that we can respond to immediately and things where we need to do a bit more consultation. I'm sure you've had a look at some of the recommendations. Some of them need a little more work to determine how you actually go about implementing them. I think we'll be able to split it up into three categories.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We look forward to the Government response later in the year. The budget for the review was \$2.2 million. Was that the final cost?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't think we have the final cost yet, but I'll ask the department and we'll be able to provide that.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're going to finalise it for the annual report but we're not expecting it to be anywhere near that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could just touch on skills—and we are continuing to hear about the skills shortage and the impact and the consequence. Minister, were you part of the New South Wales Government's decisions to address the housing crisis by accelerating supply and committing to the National Housing Accord to build, which was reported, 377,000 new homes across New South Wales by 2029?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. It's a Government policy priority that has been announced. We do have a number of cross-portfolio consultations going on with the skills needs. It certainly fits in. I forgot to mention in answer to a previous question that one of the things that we will have out later this year is a New South Wales skills plan, the first one since 2008. The construction sector is one of the priorities that will be in that skills plan. We're also working very hard to recruit teachers, with pay to learn in that space. As I mentioned, internally within the Government we have a focus on the skills needs for that construction sector and also some other key sectors like the transition to renewables and the care sector. There are a range of areas where we have higher skills shortages where we are taking a cross-government approach. Perhaps, Ms Read, do you want to add some more on the construction skills side?

CHLOE READ: Yes, happy to. We have a range of initiatives in place to make sure that we deliver on the skills needed across, as you say, different sectors, and I think housing added to also the national priority list and the national skills agreement. As an example, the top five apprenticeships in the State include electrotechnology electrician, carpentry, plumbing and engineering fabrication trades, so all skills that really gear themselves towards being able to deliver on those housing commitments. In addition, we have things like the women in trades work, so looking to make sure we connect more women into those sorts of trades and apprenticeships that will be so vital to delivering those commitments on housing.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As Ms Read just mentioned, I asked for construction housing to be included on the national Skills Priority List, which it has been in response to that. I'm also responsible for skilled migration. We have the department represented here. That will also integrate with our skills plan, which will be released later this year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I have reports from the construction industry—relating to apprenticeships and trainees—that there were changes to the incentives that were in place. Those changes, I'm informed, came into place on 1 July. The construction sector were then reporting that there has been a significant decline in the number of applications for apprenticeships and traineeships. They are reporting 30 per cent. Would this concern you?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It would concern me. I can't confirm those figures. I have anecdotally heard from some builders that they are taking on less because they are a bit less confident about the industry at the moment, but there is certainly huge demand out there. The incentive side of things from the Commonwealth Government has tended to be a program which has been a bit inconsistent over the years. It has stopped and started, depending on what the political priority might have been at time or things like that. The Federal Government is currently doing a review of employer incentives for apprenticeships. Our submission to that review emphasised the need for there to be a consistent regime of incentives which people could predict and which didn't result in us getting waves of massive demand followed by lowering demand, so that we can actually plan our servicing to cope with that. Perhaps Ms Read might want to add to that.

CHLOE READ: Of the incentives that you refer to, there were two programs, one after the other. There was the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements program that the Commonwealth instituted, I think, in 2021 as a COVID response. That was some significant wage subsidy from employers to encourage them to take on apprentices at that really disrupted time when we had COVID uncertainty. That segued into continuing apprenticeship completions, so continuing those subsidies for those who had commenced under the previous program.

There was a set of incentives that concluded in the middle of the year, as you note. But I believe they extended the incentives in place for priority occupations. That would include construction, Mr Pearson? Yes, Mr Pearson nods at me. As the Minister mentioned, the incentives review is underway with the Commonwealth. In the meantime, I note that we have made sure that we extended fee-free apprenticeship and traineeship access for New South Wales learners in the last budget, so making sure that the learners themselves don't have a barrier to taking up an apprenticeship or traineeship.

The CHAIR: I come back to close off on the disability adjustments and things in TAFE and universities. I'm told that quite a number of students are dropping out of university because of a lack of disability provision and adjustment. I understand there is a division in responsibilities between the Federal Government and the State

Government on this. But we learnt in our PC 3 inquiry in relation to children with disability in educational settings that there is zero oversight of the provision of academic adjustments in universities. It's up to a university as to how they implement things like whether or not a student is required to write with a pen instead of using their laptop and those sorts of basics things that they would get adjustments for at school. What is in your power to do, Minister, in relation to those things?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Unfortunately, with universities, not a lot. Directly ringing up universities and saying—obviously, in TAFE, where we do have direct responsibility, we do endeavour to give quite personalised support and responses to students who have needs. I have had a number of items of correspondence come across my desk of people who have raised issues and have had them dealt with individually to make sure that they are getting the assistance that they need. With universities, in terms of reasons why people drop out, those figures and that sort of information is collected by the universities and by the Federal authorities. There is a big gap between what the State Government is responsible for and able to deal with. I do regularly talk to vice-chancellors. I do, on occasions, raise issues which are of concern. I can't tell them what to do, but I ask them for their responses. Perhaps the department can add to what the Federal regulatory authorities for universities can do in this space.

The CHAIR: Before you do that, given that there is this overlap and responsibility between the States and the Federal Government for universities, is there a forum where Ministers meet regularly to discuss these issues?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There is. Going back a step, the 10 universities in New South Wales are established by Acts of the New South Wales Parliament, so some of their governance comes to us. Two positions on their boards are appointed, and we have diversity as a very important element on those and educational backgrounds as important selection criteria that we put in place on those. In terms of the Commonwealth, we do have ministerial councils where we discuss things like the Universities Accord and the implementation of that, where we talked about the safety on campus issues and the work that was being done in that area, and what State governments could do to support. As I say, it's a very limited engagement that we have because of the Federal authorities, but there are regulatory authorities at a Federal level who have the capacity to make more. There is going to be a—what's the position that has been created?

CHLOE READ: The national student ombudsman.

Mr STEVE WHAN: And the commission as well?

CHLOE READ: The tertiary education commission.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, the tertiary education commission, is going to be created as well, which may be able to have a role.

The CHAIR: I'm asking, Minister, is there a capacity for you to advocate to your Federal counterparts in relation to trying to close the gap on disability, given that it is such a problem?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There's certainly capacity to advocate. If there's information which is showing—I haven't seen any figures that you're talking about, but I'd be more than happy to see them and raise the issues.

MURAT DIZDAR: I also just want to add that I know the vice-chancellors in New South Wales would take the matter very seriously because they carry the responsibility for the full teaching and learning sequence, which starts at course offerings and content, and goes to enrolments and progression, and completion and awards. They would take the matter of meeting student and staff need by way of adjustment, I'd suggest, very seriously. That's why I think they would welcome information, if you've got it, on particular sites or particular student experiences on particular campuses. I think they would be alarmed to hear that there are students that are dropping out and not raising these concerns for these concerns to be met. It's not my experience, when working with vice-chancellors, that they wouldn't take this matter seriously. I'd just suggest, Chair, if you do have particular instances from particular universities, I think they would really benefit from being made aware.

The CHAIR: I'll give it a whirl between now and next budget estimates of writing to them all with my list of examples.

MURAT DIZDAR: One other mechanism is they know, and they're fully aware, that their annual report has to be tabled in Parliament. Meeting student need is an aspect of that. Those annual reports are audited by the New South Wales Auditor-General. That might be another angle as well.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, in relation to the 30 ongoing roles being cut potentially from the HSC strategy team, how many are temporary roles? I understand there are the permanent ones, but how many temporary contractors are there in that team?

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, I just gave the global numbers for the division. I don't want it to be confused with the HSC Strategy team. I don't have those numbers. Ms Mitchell asked for those too. If I've got those this afternoon, I'm happy to table them. This is a very big division, and this division has the following areas. It's got curriculum, student wellbeing, inclusion and wellbeing, student support and specialist programs, and teaching and learning. It is the largest division in the organisation. The global figures—the paper referenced 245 positions. I'm letting the Committee know today that 141.6 of those are vacant, so that leaves—I don't know; I'm rounding it out—100 positions. Of those 100, we're of the view that there are only about 30 that we'll need to case-manage.

The CHAIR: And the 141.6 that are vacant—is that work currently being done by temporary contractors?

MURAT DIZDAR: No.

The CHAIR: So that work's just not being done; it's just those positions are vacant and have been vacant for some time.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, because they haven't necessarily needed to have been drawn upon. That entire building, called the corporate headquarters, has gone from 5,635 to 8,000 in four years. We've had a commensurate drop in enrolments at the same time with a teacher shortage. Some of those roles have remained vacant because they're no longer required.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I will just pick up the issue of the skills shortage and where we left off. We had established that there had been a 30 per cent decline in apprenticeships and traineeships reported by the sector. Ms Read, I thank you for your comments on that. Minister, in light of the skills shortage, the National Housing Accord, the quotas and what New South Wales is set to deliver in terms of the number of new constructions, is there anything that you, as the Minister, can do to make it easier for employers to take on first-year apprenticeships and boost commencement rates?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Firstly, I think the 30 per cent figure came from you; we didn't confirm that. We don't have a figure along those lines.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just to confirm that confirmation of a decline was noted.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We haven't seen a decline in our enrolments in TAFE in those areas. In fact, I think they're some of our most popular courses.

STEPHEN BRADY: They're still very strong. I think there is a distinction between trainees and apprentices.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In the apprenticeship side of things, we're obviously working very hard to try to promote apprenticeships. That's part of the importance of building the links between secondary and vocational education. It is challenging. You'd be well aware, I'm sure, that part of the challenge is making sure that parents see the value of these careers for their young people, so that they're also encouraging their young people to go into what are fantastic and well-paid careers with great long-term prospects. That's part of our ongoing work. I'll come to your question about the cost and things in a moment, but obviously some of the things that we do link with schools through the Educational Pathways Program, the RIEP program and also the YES Program. There are a range of things where we're trying to give young people experiences so that they can see what those might be like—building on the old work experience programs that have been around.

As Ms Read said, we've extended, in the last budget, the fee-free—completely free—apprenticeships. We're working on our delivery around the State with TAFE to make sure that we make it as easy as possible for people to access their courses. That means we certainly recognise that, for many areas of the State, we have barriers of distance. We work with apprentices and employers around block release and elements of their course that they can do without having to come physically. We have the Kingswood IAT, which specialises in construction. That's working with tertiary institutions and industry to design courses which can help us to overcome some of the skills needs and respond more quickly to the skills needs around the State. That's a really important model.

In terms of that side of things, we don't provide financial incentives for employers to take on apprentices; that's more in the realm of the Federal Government. We wouldn't have the administrative ability to do that because that's more in their space. I'm aware that there are a number of excellent group training organisations around who are working in that area, and I talk fairly regularly to them as well. We'll do whatever we can to remove barriers to people coming in and make it as cheap as possible for them to participate in the courses. We are still seeing really high demand in carpentry and electrotechnology but, as you say and as we know, the demand in the community keeps going up. That's obviously because there is a huge amount of work being done on infrastructure, as well as big demand in housing, as well as an increasing demand in the transition to renewables, all calling on the same skill sets. We will be working very hard to try to address that.

At the same time, we have quite low unemployment. In fact, Monaro, which I represent, has the second lowest unemployment in the State at 1.2 per cent. That means that there are a lot of people out there contesting the same market for those young people. One of the focuses out of the VET review, which I think is really important for us over time—I talked a bit before about the help we give to people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds or who are less able to access to education. The VET review has a strong focus on how we can improve that so that we're continuing to access that base of people who might otherwise not go through and complete skills training.

I will give you an example: The Government is working as a whole at the moment on the REZs, with the renewables, recognising that there is a massive demand in that electrotechnology and civil construction space. Part of what we're trying to do there is to ensure that we're working with industry throughout our upcoming manufacturing centres of excellence, but also with local communities about how we get up-front and in the communities and overcome some of the barriers that might be there to getting apprentices. For example, is there better use we can make of group training organisations when projects tend to be only a couple of years, so that they can transition from one to the other and those sorts of things? We're very actively working in those spaces at the moment.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, can I just also add that the Premier has also charged us with the election commitment to deliver an additional 1,000 apprentices and trainees across government. Under the Government at the time, there was a decline in those apprentices and trainees in government from 2.8 per cent in 2019 to 1.7 per cent in 2022. Under that election commitment he has charged us to reverse what that looks like and to run hard and work across all agencies. We're making good, groundbreaking inroads there, given that the public service is a large employer.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, I'm happy to pick up that up this afternoon. I'm just conscious of the time.

MURAT DIZDAR: Just because it was on apprentices and trainees, I thought it was another important deliverable.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's another excellent program.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of what would be within your powers, we are receiving reports of a decline in applications in terms of apprenticeships or traineeships—or whatever the classification is that is relevant to what we're seeing. Could you do anything more as the Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: At the moment we're not seeing a decline in people coming to TAFE for those apprenticeships. I've heard anecdotally some of what you're talking about from local builders, but I'm not seeing the decline flow through. We'd certainly be encouraging builders to be taking on apprentices. As I said, the things that we do, which I outlined in some depth there, are around making it easier for the apprentices, reducing or removing costs for them participating in courses, and helping those employers to link with our schools to build the young people's knowledge of what they might be coming into. One of the things, interestingly, that Ms Read mentioned before was, for example, the work on women in construction—trying to make sure that we're working with the large construction companies to ensure that worksites are welcoming places and appropriate places for women to participate in. There's a lot of work which is going on with industry in those spaces. The only area that we don't go into is financial incentives for employers because that's the domain of the Federal Government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of industry engagement, you mentioned that you've received similar reports to myself from builders and construction. Is there a strategy in terms of your engagement with the industry? Do you meet with the peak bodies?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, I've met with the HIA and I meet with builders around the place at various times, and also obviously our TAFE teachers who are working in that space. One of the important reasons why we're moving the operating model or proposing to move the operating model to a new structure is so that we've got people who work really consistently all the time with industry and are actually getting that feedback. Hopefully, over time we'll also encourage them—frankly, the biggest immediate challenge for us is getting enough teachers. As you'd be well aware, it can be somewhat more lucrative to be out there actually practising your trade in the building industry than it is to teach at TAFE, so we need to continue to encourage to do that. But we will be actively working out of the VET review on building the attractiveness of the construction trades for young people and for their families, and continuing to get the feedback from industry on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of the construction trades you make reference to, who would you have met with last in the construction trade sector?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I obviously speak to a lot of our trade teachers, but I've met with HIA and I've been at a number of business events.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sorry, the HIA?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Housing Industry Association, I believe. We've been to a number of businesses—the other day to Agriweld at Dubbo—so I've been to a number of businesses who are employing apprentices and talking to them about various—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Why didn't Stephen go with you to Dubbo?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think you had him stuck here in estimates, actually.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: He's got to earn his money.

Mr STEVE WHAN: He was stuck here in estimates, but it's okay, we talked to him.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It's important work.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Any other industry groups or construction groups within the sector who you might be meeting with?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Off the top of my head, I can't tell you what other groups. You mean peak bodies?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of whether it's the plumbers or the electricians—these are guys who are critical to the construction trade.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've certainly spoken to the electrical peak body, NECA. I've met with them. I was out at the plumbing industry centre recently where we're building a Hydrogen Centre of Excellence, so I've met with that group. I've met with the Plumbers Union. There's a range of different peak bodies who I speak to about various—and I have to say there hasn't been one that's come in the door so far who hasn't said that they are in skills shortage.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are there any targets or goals in place in terms of skills?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Out of the VET review we're obviously trying to set ourselves up with a structure which can actually service the future skills needs. What there will be in the skills plan, which as I said will be released later this year, will be a series of measures which we report against. So, I guess, after the skills plan comes out, you'll be able to see. We're out consulting on the skills plan at the moment. Do you want to add, if you've got more to add?

CHLOE READ: Yes. There are already targets in place on things like the industry skills legacy program, so we talked about women in construction before, trialling new higher targets in that space, and then also having ongoing targets as part of that program. The draft performance and wellbeing framework that was released as part of the New South Wales budget proposes some particular targets in the skilled outcome piece of that that includes, I think, from memory, people employed after training and also certificate III achievement. Finally, just in the national space, the outcome framework that's intended to sit alongside or underneath the National Skills Agreement is something that we're developing across States, Territories and the Commonwealth. I think that's due to come to Ministers towards the end of this year, so that will give us a kind of national lens on some of those targets too.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. So, confirming the skills plan later this year?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, towards the end of the year I'd probably say at this stage.

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could just ask about the domestic manufacturing centres of excellence, I understand in the 2023 election campaign NSW Labor promised to create three manufacturing centres of excellence. I'm just checking what progress might have been made relevant to the Western Sydney training centre.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can tell you that you can expect something quite soon announced on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We'll be there.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Actually you asked earlier on about the \$88.4 million in the budget papers for works. That includes an allocation of capital for the manufacturing centres of excellence.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How much of that 88?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Some 65.8, which is State and Federal funding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have the breakdown of what's State and what's Federal?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, not that we can—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On notice maybe?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll take that on notice. We're not building grand buildings for this. It's going to be mostly about the courses that are being provided, so there isn't a large capital budget for this; it'll mainly be for equipment, fit-out and things. The focus for these is very much about the course offerings and working with tertiary institutions and business and industry. There's a recurrent aspect to it. We are linking in very closely with the Federal Government on these projects and you will start to see some announcements quite soon.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Minister, you said 65.8 of the 88 that I asked about earlier. That's obviously all a State allocation, is it, that 65?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, that includes some Federal money.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think there are three proposed locations.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that for all three or is it just the Western Sydney one first?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's all three.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And \$22 million is allocated this financial year, from what I asked about earlier, so I'm just trying to work it out. Over what years will that 65.8 be available if only \$22 million is this year?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's capital, so obviously the recurrent cost is there as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but the capital that I asked about earlier for new works, which was \$88 million over four years—you're now saying 65-point-something is part of that. Is that right?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it's only 22 this financial year—\$22 million in the budget papers.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's right, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So how much of that 22 will be going to these three centres and what is the breakdown?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Of that, \$20.6 million is for the manufacturing centres of excellence.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a breakdown of how much for Western Sydney, for Hunter and for Illawarra of that 20—

Mr STEVE WHAN: How much of the capital?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll take that on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of progress relevant to the training centres, what is currently in place?

Mr STEVE WHAN: For the manufacturing centres of excellence?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've been working through the planning for them, essentially. As I said, we will be making announcements soon. Mr Brady can talk a little bit more about what we have, if he'd like to elaborate on that.

STEPHEN BRADY: Thanks, Minister. Certainly we've done quite a lot of work around the educational models for the centres of excellence, drawing on our experience with the institutes of applied technology. Through these centres we're looking at a combination of skill sets, some of it relating to traditional apprenticeship programs, but also going beyond that to look at higher apprenticeships. We've worked closely with industry to understand what are the new types of skills and skills combinations that they really need in a rapidly changing manufacturing

environment. We have two streams of higher apprenticeship we're seeking accreditation from TEQSA for at the moment. These higher apprenticeships will give qualifications—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, accreditation from whom? For Hansard.

STEPHEN BRADY: TEQSA, the higher education regulatory body. We're seeking accreditation for those higher apprenticeships at the moment. One stream will seek to combine traditional manufacturing capabilities with digital-type skills, so bringing together into that new world, gen 4 manufacturing type space where there's a lot of data requirements, there's a lot around programming of machinery, et cetera. In the other stream we're looking at bringing in more T-shaped skills, so bringing in some of the leadership and critical thinking skills that you need in a rapidly changing environment. We've worked closely with major organisations in industry to design those courses to make sure they're meeting their needs. On top of the apprenticeships, that's the second type of education model. The third will be partnering with universities and industry to develop more micro-skills and micro-credentials so that people who are already predominantly in industry will have the opportunity to upskill and advance their knowledge base to meet the changing needs that are occurring as technology in particular impacts manufacturing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of student numbers when the centres are operating, do we know anything about that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: My memory is that we're aiming for 1,000 a year, but we'll come back to you and confirm that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many, sorry?

Mr STEVE WHAN: A thousand.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Across all three?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

STEPHEN BRADY: I believe that's right. Can we come back?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will confirm that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the time frame—and I appreciate there is some initial capital in this year's budget—when would you anticipate these three centres to be up and running. What is the time frame you are working on?

STEPHEN BRADY: We're anticipating our first enrolments at the beginning of 2025.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In all three at the same time, or is there a staged delivery approach?

STEPHEN BRADY: Let me come back to you on that as well. I think there is some staging in terms of the timing, but there will be some core units that will be applicable across all three.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Brady, picking up on what you said about the educational modelling, I'm assuming that there is the intention to do slightly different courses at the different centres based on industry connections et cetera?

STEPHEN BRADY: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you provide any information around what sort of conversations you're having with industry in each of the three areas and where you foreshadow those linkages will be made?

STEPHEN BRADY: Certainly. We've held round tables in the Hunter, Illawarra and Western Sydney with industry and universities and really explored what training needs they see in their local areas. Those centres will have focuses that meet those needs. In Western Sydney we see a very significant advanced manufacturing base, so it'll tend to target those direct manufacturing elements. When we're thinking about the Hunter, there is obviously the transition of the Hunter economy due to energy changes. It will be manufacturing based, but it will be focusing on the manufacturing needs in a transitioning economy, particularly around green energy. In the Illawarra there is a range of industrial drivers. There is still some very heavy manufacturing down there that is advancing with technology. We have been partnering with some large organisations such as BlueScope to understand their needs. There is quite a bit of defence manufacturing happening down in the Illawarra as well. The focus there will be around manufacturing, heavy manufacturing and defence.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I will just raise—and Mr Dizdar touched on it before—the 1,000 New South Wales public sector apprenticeships and traineeships program. I was wondering if you had an update on the number of students enrolled in the program?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, it's going extremely well. I can give you numbers. The second round of it has been promoted just over the last few weeks. From memory, there are 440 places up for grabs over that across a really large range of government agencies across the State.

CHLOE READ: Yes, that's right.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are some particularly big ones in the energy sector and health sector. Recently I visited four young people who were doing traineeships over at Royal North Shore Hospital in—where were they?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Pathology. I've got your media release. I'm happy to help.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thank you. They were in pathology. That was great. I made a point before about convincing parents. I asked all four of them how they got into it and one of them said, "My brother-in-law gave it to me and told me to enrol", and the other two said, "Mum made me." They were all enjoying it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's good advice. Do what your mother tells you.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's a very important area to go into to. Our first year of that has been very successful. As I said, 440 of those are up for grabs at the moment. We've also had a really good response from the agencies across government to taking them on. We've also put benchmarking in place to make sure that they are actually in addition. We actually set a benchmark for the existing level of apprentices and trainees in government and we'll be measuring it to ensure that we're going for the full 1,000 above that over the three years.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, are there any indications of retention or the success of the program so far?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Not yet, no. It's too early. Even our trainees are still in their traineeship period, so we aren't able to measure that yet. Is that correct?

CHLOE READ: Yes, that's right.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So it is a three-year program in terms of the 1,000 new public sector apprenticeships?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct. There will be 1,000 in total over the three years. Obviously some people will be doing a single-year traineeship and some will be doing a three-year apprenticeship. There are obviously differences in those time frames.

MURAT DIZDAR: Without round two and the number the Minister gave, we're about a third of the way there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is the program funded for the three-year period?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, it is. There was a \$93 million allocation in the initial year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask about the 1,300 apprentices and trainees in local government. Will that be available to all local government areas? How is that going to be delivered?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I understand it, at this stage it's being delivered by the Office of Local Government. We're obviously talking to them about delivery because we think we've been really good at delivering the 1,000. But it is my understanding that all local governments in New South Wales will be able to ask for those—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Who is actually delivering it then? Are you funding it?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it was funded by a specific allocation to the Office of Local Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The \$250-odd million was the funding allocation. But that's gone to the Office of Local Government and it is doing the implementation?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct. It is a bit different to the 1,000.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My question—and I'll get to it—was around how that's a \$250 million allocation for 1,300. You've got \$94-odd million for your 1,000. Can you explain how it is different as best you can?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is quite a different model because the local government one is providing wage. That is my understanding. Perhaps I will pass over to the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, what do you mean by providing wage?

CHLOE READ: We might need to take that on notice. I don't have enough detail on the local government quantity in comparison.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The bottom line is that the Office of Local Government is administering that program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there guidelines or allocations that come with that? Are these questions better directed to Minister Hoenig?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, they need to be directed to Minister Hoenig.

MATHEW PEARSON: My understanding is that they're still working on the guidelines, so it's a couple of months away.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We obviously expect to be providing some of the training through TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was going to be my next question. In terms of the TAFE component of those roles, how does that work for funding? Will some of that \$250 million come back for those students? How does that work in practice?

CHLOE READ: I think we will need to take the specifics on notice for the Office of Local Government. I know we are working with them closely on it and we are helping with advice on how apprenticeships and traineeships are structured and the different ways you could do this. But there are lots of different approaches they could take. We might just come back on notice on the specifics of how things will flow between us. But obviously we are really keen to support them in the delivery of that commitment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, and share the expertise, I would imagine, rather than having—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've got regular meetings set up with them over the next couple of months.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate what you've just said about taking it all on notice and that a lot of it goes to local government, but is there any time frame for when they hope to have those 1,300 apprentices? Is it within this term of government or over the next four years? Do you know how long the funding is meant to last and the time frame to get to 1,300?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll probably direct that question to Ron Hoenig.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have a couple of quick questions about Queanbeyan TAFE. Minister, do you know how many students you currently have enrolled at that campus?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I know that it's well used. I visited a bricklaying class there the other day.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you learn anything for a bit of DIY at home?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have had a go at bricks before; mine are nowhere near as neat as theirs. We also have a number of the migration courses—English as a second language courses. We've got hairdressing there and a range of others. Have we got some information on the actual numbers?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm after how many are enrolled and also the face-to-face courses and any changes in the last 12 months, at Queanbeyan specifically.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't believe there have been any changes in the last 12 months.

STEPHEN BRADY: No.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll take on notice the actual numbers enrolled.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And what face-to-face courses are currently on offer as well at that campus?

STEPHEN BRADY: We'll take that on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On notice is fine. I want to touch briefly on some of the quantum research issues. Microsoft recently made a decision, which you're probably aware of, to close their research facility at Sydney university. Are you across that? Were you briefed on that at all?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I visited the quantum facility at Sydney university recently, but, no, I wasn't briefed on Microsoft's decisions in relation to it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think in July they made some announcements around closing their facility on that university campus. Was there any concern or impact around—my understanding is that Microsoft is also a partner in applied technology at Meadowbank as well.

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right.

Mr STEVE WHAN: They are.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been any impact on that from Microsoft?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, they're a very active partner, indeed. We very much appreciate Steve Worrall's leadership of the digital compact, which has been producing some really good results in New South Wales, and also his leadership of the—

STEPHEN BRADY: Skills Board.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —Skills Board.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because he's the chair of the Skills Board as well, yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: He's the chair of the Skills Board. But, no, the Meadowbank facility has been going from strength to strength. That's my summary of it.

STEPHEN BRADY: I'd also say that Microsoft has established a data centre academy with TAFE NSW. It's one of only a few in the world, so a strong commitment with Microsoft as a partner, leading industry.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think it was July this year they're exiting the research facility at Sydney university, but if they're still doing the other work and that's not impacting TAFE, then that's reassuring. More broadly, my understanding is that the Sydney Quantum Academy was funded by the previous Government, I think, in 2019, and there are four universities, I believe, as part of that. Do they have any further funding allocated to them beyond what's already there, do you know?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not aware of any capital funding allocated for the quantum group.

CHLOE READ: I don't think the funding was part of this portfolio. I think it came through another bit of—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, it was \$15.4 million in 2019. My understanding is they got a 12-month extension, but they're not sure of ongoing funding. Who would that fall under?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's not something that has been raised with me by them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Read, you just said that you didn't think it was part of this—

CHLOE READ: I don't think it's us. I think it might be the Chief Scientist. I'm happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Take it on notice, yes. That would be good.

CHLOE READ: I'll see if I can find out.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said, I actually visited the building just a few weeks ago, and they didn't raise funding concerns with me in my visit. They're welcome to, obviously.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Chair asked some questions about the TAFE restructure, in general. I think, Mr Brady, you said before it's about streamlining, and obviously the anticipated reduction of cost. Is there a predicted headcount reduction within that restructure?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are two processes going on. There was the change to the operating model, which was a bit different to the questions that were being answered before about overall headcount. I just want to be completely open about that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The change to the operating model is about changing the way TAFE operates, putting in place a structure, just it was focused on industry, as I said before. There are some changes to staffing that go along with that. There will be more teachers and less in some of the administrative side of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it a 200 headcount reduction in support staff? I've seen that figure. Is that accurate?

STEPHEN BRADY: No.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, there was a figure which was reported overall. Out of the operating model, 664 positions are directly affected, so they go through and fit into new jobs. From the information that I've got at the moment—and consultation is just concluding on this, so people have had the opportunity to raise issues with the mapping of their job match to a new one and all those sorts of things—I'm expecting that there would be a net of around 80 employees who are eventually affected by losing their job, but a lot of other employees who actually had their jobs changed or their section changed or who they report to changed was just a part of the restructure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With those 80—I think, Ms Tickle, you were talking before about seeing whether there are positions for them within other government agencies—they would fall into that category as well?

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, that's correct.

Mr STEVE WHAN: They will also go through the established mobility provisions that the Government has.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, mainly administrating, accounting, IT roles. Is that what you're talking about when you say non-teaching-based staff?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll go to Ms Tickle for that.

JULIE TICKLE: Just to clarify, there are 664 positions impacted and 505 employees, so positions and employees are different. "Impacts" means that they can be reappointed, their role can change or they can go through a placement process; that's the whole descriptor. There are 239 less positions proposed, which is a net reduction of 80 employees. These people are across three areas. The changes impact our product and quality group, which is proposed to be changed to the education quality group; and our student experience group, which will go into two new areas proposed. One is called the learning and teaching group, which is where all the teachers sit, and one will be called student support and community group. The roles are a mix of administrative roles in those areas. There are no teachers planned to be reduced. In fact, we're adding 14 more head teachers through this plan. No teachers or frontline student support resources—so that includes education support officers and assessors. There's no reduction planned anywhere there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the 80-odd employees that you expect to be impacted—and I appreciate what you said about trying to find them other positions—do you have a breakdown in terms of how many of those are regionally based versus metro?

JULIE TICKLE: We have just concluded consultation, as the Minister said, on 23 August. We're currently going through all of the feedback. It's unclear where those roles will eventually go from—if they in fact do, because they go through mobility. We've got 156, I think, learning locations across the State and a really high percentage of our roles are location agnostic, so you can do the role from anywhere across the State. It's really hard to tell in terms of what the end result will be. But we have just under half of our employees working in regional and remote locations at TAFE. Certainly there are some roles that are in those numbers that are impacted that are regional. But in terms of what ends up happening, we can't answer that yet because we're still going through all of the feedback.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The reason we're doing this is to set TAFE on a path where we can be more efficient providers and hopefully grow over the future and provide more education. I got pretty consistent feedback from people that the model that we had before wasn't very practical, including from some of your colleagues, who had complained to me about their local areas. The expectation here is that the TAFE will, with this new model, be engaging with communities and listening to their communities, and that the faculties will be able to more directly engage with industry and be more responsive and up to date with industry. It's certainly not my intention to keep TAFE in a constant state of change, which they have been in over quite a lot of years. But we do need to get the base model right to move forward.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the time frame of having this restructure all sorted and in place and everyone having that certainty?

STEPHEN BRADY: Ms Tickle was saying our consultation with staff just finished last week.

JULIE TICKLE: On 23 August.

STEPHEN BRADY: We're waiting on the final feedback from our unions, which will come in tomorrow. We'll consider that feedback. We've had over 4,000 pieces of individual feedback so there's a bit to get through. We've been working our way through that. Our intention is that we will be able to have finalised the placement processes et cetera so that we can step into first term of 2025 with the new model in place.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So day one, term 1 next year is what you're working towards?

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This might be linked, but I think there were some changes in June in terms of pausing recruitment on non-teaching roles. Did that tie into this restructure? Is that why that happened?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: In June we talked to our employees about pausing recruitment on a couple of areas. One of those areas was in casual teachers because we've been undertaking a workforce stabilisation program and moving many of our current part-time casual teachers into permanent and permanent part-time employment. We really wanted to make sure that we were maximising that opportunity and pause, where possible, recruitment of casual teachers. There was no pause or stopping of any permanent or permanent part-time teachers—in fact, we were ramping that up—but in other areas there was a pause requested in terms of looking at our resourcing.

This was certainly not directly related to the operating model but it certainly—we often do this to take stock of the resources, make sure that we've got them in the right areas and that sort of thing. There was not a freeze on recruitment, and I do want to make that clear for the record. What we instead said is that more consideration needed to be taken by line managers and we escalated the approvals to higher executive management to make sure that we were putting priority recruitment first.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That is consistent with the Government's priority, which is to reduce insecure employment and get more teachers into permanent positions, more TAFE employees into permanent positions. We've been getting a really positive response to that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data, Minister, on how many you've converted from casual to permanent or temporary permanent?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can tell you that, in percentage terms, we've gone from in June 2022 having 50.8 per cent permanent in our teaching ratios to now 57.8 per cent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for it to be on notice, but do you have the raw figures as well?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The raw figures? We've exceeded our initial 500 target and we're going out again talking to employees about another round of people who have expressed interest. We'd be expecting—at the moment it would only be a guess, but was it around 800 or something?

JULIE TICKLE: No, we exceeded our target of 500 for this semester. We converted, between new people coming in through Paid to Learn and existing people, 540. As the Minister said, we're going out for the next round now. We expect there to be quite a number. There's around, I think, just under a couple of thousand people that we're looking at eligibility for conversion at this time.

The CHAIR: That does bring us to 12.45 p.m. I will check if the Government members have any burning questions.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No, we're all good. The Minister is far too thorough.

The CHAIR: Very thorough. Thank you very much, Minister, for your time. That concludes questioning with you today.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thank you—and thank you to all the team, who've worked very hard.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Professor MARK SCOTT, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Sydney, affirmed and examined

Professor ANNAMARIE JAGOSE, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney, affirmed and examined.

The CHAIR: I welcome the additional witnesses to the hearing.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Good afternoon, Professor Scott. Can I take you to the university's 2032 strategy, which identifies an aspiration for transformational, student-focused education. It notes:

Regardless of where and how they learn, our students are confident in their abilities, sure of their personal goals, and feel that they belong.

I then take you to a comment I received from one current student: "In the bathrooms, in the lectures, in the courtyard—everywhere you look, you're not accepted. It's hard to speak up and try to hold a conversation when it feels like the institution you believe in and require support from betrays you." Is this the transformational education that the University of Sydney aims to provide?

MARK SCOTT: Thank you for your question. The University of Sydney is committed to providing a transformational experience for every student who elects to study with us. We want a supportive environment. We want an inclusive environment. We want an environment where students can explore their interests, make new friends, engage with broadening experiences and engage with faculty, because we know all of those things are key to excellent engagement in learning, success in learning and a pathway through. It's a large and complex institution. If any students do not feel as supported as they want to be, we want to be able to help identify the causes of that and work with them. Our student support team is extensive.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If I could just take you up on that. What attribute of this student would you identify that made them feel so unaccepted at your university, bearing in mind this is a comment from this year?

MARK SCOTT: It's been a complex year on campus, there's been no doubt about that. If this is a—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes, and what attribute of that student do you think is what made them feel so—

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order: I'm not exactly sure how asking a witness to engage in some process of inference or speculation in relation to an anonymised statement is actually relevant to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

The CHAIR: I will uphold the point of order. If you could get to the point, Ms Carter?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm happy to move on. I'm happy to say that this was a Jewish student and they were made to feel that way by their experiences at the university, which I'm sure you would not welcome, as I certainly would also not welcome. I'm interested in a lot of the university's policies, which are very well developed for a range of students, which is very appropriate. As one example, the university's commitment statement on LGBTIQ+ practices states that in order to achieve "a safe and supportive environment for all, ongoing targeted action is required". Is ongoing targeted action required to create a safe and supportive environment for Jewish students?

MARK SCOTT: Let me go to the year that you've referenced. I think it's been a challenging year on our campus; I think it's been a challenging year on university campuses across Australia and around the world. I can tell you that I've met numbers of times, in groups and individually, with Jewish students and staff and with Palestinian students and staff. I've never encountered an issue which has generated more grief and anguish, anger and concern as over the issues that are taking place in the Middle East now. The events of 7 October, the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the genuine distress that it's caused for members of our community—I've never been around an issue where I've seen more people just tearful and so grief stricken by what they have seen happen and by their own personal connection to that; those who have family and friends in Israel, those who have family and friends in Palestine.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I think we can acknowledge all of that. What did the university do to support those students?

MARK SCOTT: Let me talk on that. Immediately following 7 October we wrote to students and staff to express the university's shock and to indicate the fact that we stand against racism, terrorism and violence in all its forms. I've written to our community—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can I just inquire about that a bit, please?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order: The witness was asked what the university has done in relation to what is obviously a highly sensitive and complex topic. The witness got a sentence or two into that answer and had referenced only one matter. I would suggest that is not a reasonable opportunity, particularly given the breadth and nature of the question that was asked. If one asks a question, one can expect an answer.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: To the point of order: I was seeking to elucidate part of the answer that I was given so that we could tease it out more fully.

The CHAIR: It is appropriate for there to be a robust discussion between the witness and the member, and for the member to be able to redirect if the answer is straying. However, in this case the answer had only just begun. Given the nature of the topic, it would be good if we could take the pace out of this a little bit and allow Professor Scott to respond.

MARK SCOTT: Thank you. I can indicate that there have been over 20 communications from me and senior members of my team to the community around creating a supportive, safe environment since 7 October. We've identified and emailed students of Palestinian and Israeli citizenship. We stood up an incident response team to manage what was a complex and evolving situation. My office convened a community of practice to ensure a coordinated response to issues that were being raised with us by staff and students. Members of my executive team met twice daily, at times, during the year as we were developing an operational response. We reviewed a significant number of policies as they were tested through the year, including our advertising on campus policy and our ICT resources policy. The policy around when and how flags can be used on campus was raised and worked on.

We significantly increased our security presence on campus. We made 24/7 support for students and staff available through security and health and wellbeing teams, including information being available around security escorts. We increased levels of counselling, including, when students felt they needed it, special considerations around exam arrangements and other kinds of assignments as well. I held an all-staff town hall meeting only days after the Hamas attacks and reiterated our expectation of civil discourse and a zero tolerance approach to racism and antisemitism. We shared information to our staff on how to report incidents of racism, harm and abuse, including that which occurred online.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: With respect, Professor Scott, the question I asked originally was did you believe that targeted, ongoing action was required to support Jewish students? I've heard of many actions. Is targeted, ongoing support needed to make sure that Jewish students feel safe on the campus of the University of Sydney?

MARK SCOTT: I have had representatives of the Jewish community—staff and students—express to me areas of concern that they had. They've written to me. I've met with them in groups and I've met with them individually. Many of the processes—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Again, I thank you for telling me what you've done.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The question was—

The CHAIR: Order! I'll hear the point of order.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: I would suggest that the witness was being directly relevant to the question that he was asked, and he should be given a reasonable opportunity to answer the question and not be interrupted.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: To the point of order: I've had to ask the same question effectively three times—is targeted support required for Jewish students on campus? That question has not been answered by the witness yet.

The CHAIR: We do have plenty of time, so let's try and take a breath. With that feedback, Professor Scott, if you could respond.

MARK SCOTT: Sure. I would've thought it's inherent in the answer that I've already given that Jewish staff and students expressed concern. Many of these initiatives that we implemented were in response to issues that they had raised that we then investigated and we then responded to.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: One of the things that you put in place was, I believe you said, security escorts?

MARK SCOTT: The availability of security escorts—can I say that for many years, even since I was a student, we've run security buses and other sorts of support, but we did say that if anyone was concerned about their safety or there were any issues involved that they felt they needed security support for, then that would be available. I must make it clear—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can I just ask you a specific question about that? Would that mean that if a Jewish student felt unsafe walking past the encampment on the way to lectures, a security escort would be available to assist them?

MARK SCOTT: What it would mean—without getting into specifics of it, this was a service that was not just available for Jewish students but any students, and many of the issues that I've outlined about concern—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can I reframe? Would any student who felt unsafe walking past the encampment be able to ask for a security escort so that they would feel safe walking to class?

MARK SCOTT: I believe that they would be able to talk with our security, and if that was a feeling of some support that they needed, then I hope our security team would engage around that if necessary.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But you can't tell me that that's what's—

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Perhaps I could just jump in and add here, we did actually circulate the security contact number to students broadly and we did encourage them if they felt unsafe on campus. That arose in specific relation to engagement with the Jewish community, Jewish staff and Jewish students who reported feeling unsafe, a condition that we could well empathise with.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Thank you both, but I don't believe the question has been answered. What does a security escort mean? Does it mean that a student who felt unsafe could be escorted to class?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: It could mean that, yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Did it mean that?

MARK SCOTT: I don't have the precise detail of that engagement there. It's a service that's—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: You'll understand my frustration, Professor Scott, because you tell me that this is what you're putting in place to support students that you acknowledge need targeted support in these circumstances, yet most of what you've said is communications and, when I ask about a specific example, you don't know the details of that specific example. If I could perhaps ask another question. If as a woman I felt that there was a climate of sexual violence on the campus, do you think it would be a sufficient response to a climate of sexual violence to say, "We'll provide you with security escorts to walk past the predators"?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Perhaps I could answer this question as a woman—

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I'll hear the point of order.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It's just an inherently speculative, rhetorical and provocative question that has no relevance to what is going on here. It's comparing two things that frankly it's not useful to compare in this context.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: To the point of order: There are many ways in which students can feel unsafe.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: That's true.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Having been a female student myself, I know there are many times when one feels unsafe, and I also know that there have been issues with which the university has struggled in relation to sexual violence on campus. I think it is directly comparable to say that at a time when a student feels unsafe because of culturally what's happening at the university, is the answer security escorts or is the answer broader than that?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Further to the point of order: This is obviously, as has been clear from the evidence, inevitably going to be a case-by-case basis, so to pose rhetorically whether persons fearful of sexual predation could expect a particular thing as if that casts light on this question of the encampment and the response is a question designed not to garner relevant evidence but to simply provoke. It is out of order, I would suggest.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I couldn't disagree more strongly with your characterisation of that question.

The CHAIR: I will rule on the point of order. I do think the question is provocative. If there is information that you are seeking, if you could be more direct with what the question is and the information you're seeking, that would be helpful.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do you believe that if students feel there is a climate of violence, Professor Scott, the appropriate response is to provide somebody to walk them past that violence?

MARK SCOTT: Let me start by answering that and then the provost may have some views as well. I think it is a very significant oversimplification of the detailed university response to the complexities we're dealing with to suggest that our only offering was a security escort. A security escort was available—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Excuse me, for clarification, I was not suggesting that was the only response. I was asking if that was an appropriate response.

MARK SCOTT: I'm saying that if our students felt that they would like a security escort, then of course the appropriate thing for us to do was to provide that. There were other things that students asked for. There were many other things that we acted on as a consequence of our engagement with students.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps we can move onto something else because we're getting bogged in the weeds.

MARK SCOTT: But perhaps the provost—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: No, if we could move onto something else. When did you become aware that Hizb ut-Tahrir was active on your campus?

MARK SCOTT: In our engagement since 7 October, we were constantly in touch with New South Wales police. One of the things I'd say about our campus—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Sorry, it was a very specific question, Professor Scott.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When did you become aware that Hizb ut-Tahrir was active on your campus?

The CHAIR: I'll hear the point of order.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It might've been a very simple question, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's a very simple answer, and the witness was a sentence or two into the answer. I suspect there was about to be a bit of nuance in the answer because it's not a simple answer, even though my friend might think it's a simple question.

The CHAIR: I would suggest that we allow Professor Scott to answer and then, if you feel he hasn't answered the question properly, you can ask again.

MARK SCOTT: Since 7 October, the University of Sydney has been in constant contact with the police, and the safety of our community has been our absolute top priority at all times. One of the issues we had to deal with on the encampment in particular is the porous nature of the university's environment. There are 28 entry and exit points to the University of Sydney campus, as far as I understand it. We are anything but a gated community, and so we were aware at the time of the encampment that some of our students and staff were there, students and staff from other universities but also outsiders around that. That's why we had this ongoing engagement with the police to constantly seek assurances from them about the external influences that they understood might be on our campus, and we were assured by police that we would be notified by them about any extremist, violent or radicalised behaviour of groups on campus that we needed to be aware of.

In early May, we received a phone call after a rally suggesting that Hizb ut-Tahrir may have been a presence on campus. This was referred to our security team that is in constant contact with the police. After the *60 Minutes* report and the reporting in Nine media, I then sought another meeting with New South Wales police and protective services particularly looking at the issue of Hizb ut-Tahrir. In the briefing that I received then, I explicitly raised Hizb ut-Tahrir and we sought and received assurances about being notified of any relevant information on the encampment that related to extremist, violent and radicalised behaviour. We've also received briefings in the University Foreign Interference Taskforce from the most senior intelligence officials in the country, senior government officials, and those briefings have continued. If there is concern around Hizb ut-Tahrir or other groups that may have been at different times on the university premises, we have engaged with the group that is expert on any of these groups, and that is New South Wales police, counterintelligence and other national security agencies.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So you acknowledge that Hizb ut-Tahrir were active on campus.

MARK SCOTT: No, I have not said—if you pay close attention to my answer—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So you're saying that Hizb ut-Tahrir was not on campus.

MARK SCOTT: No.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order: Clearly the witness was attempting to respond to what also occurred to me as being a mischaracterisation of his previous answer. He should be able to do that, particularly on a topic such as this that my friend is seeking to wade into.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps I could get the direct answer to the direct question that I asked. Were Hizb ut-Tahrir active on campus? Professor Scott, a yes or no would suffice.

The CHAIR: I will rule on the point of order. The witness was just half a sentence in. Again, we will just try and take some of the heat out of this. We have plenty of time.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: We don't, actually, with respect, Chair.

The CHAIR: You do because I was going to give you more of my time, but maybe I'll rethink that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That's very kind.

The CHAIR: We will allow Professor Scott to respond.

MARK SCOTT: Of course, I have seen the reports of Hizb ut-Tahrir's presence on Australian university campuses. I recall the *60 Minutes* and Nine media reports. As I indicated, there was a phone call that raised the question as to whether, in fact, they were on campus. I put the question to police and authorities when we met with them after that report about Hizb ut-Tahrir. There was a general conversation about Hizb ut-Tahrir's activity in the community. But what I took from that meeting was, again, the assurance that, if we had things we needed to be concerned of around extremist violence or radicalised behaviour of groups, the police and intelligence units were around campus and would let us know.

I would say about Hizb ut-Tahrir that it's a question perhaps for Parliament, in some respects. If this was a declared terrorist organisation that was illegal, if the Parliament had declared Hizb ut-Tahrir an illegal organisation, then of course they would be banned from campus. They are not. Therefore, there is no, as I understand it, limit on how that group can operate in protests and rallies and encampments and in other such activities anywhere in and around the city or around the State or, as I understand it, anywhere in the country. If they were on campus, there was no mechanism in the sense for us to stop them being on campus as they are not a banned group. The key test for me, which is the way we continue to frame it with police and intelligence authorities, was were they concerned about extremist, violent or radicalised behaviour with groups that were associated with the encampment that we needed to be aware of. We were repeatedly assured that they were not.

The CHAIR: I obviously come from a different perspective in relation to the encampment. I understand that there was a difficult set of decisions that needed to be made by each university. Different universities were dealing with very similar issues. Was there coordination between universities to share approaches or is there a forum for that?

MARK SCOTT: Yes, there are a number of groups that would meet and discuss these matters. It's quite a close grouping of New South Wales vice-chancellors. There are 11 universities. I notice that 10 are missing today from the hearing, but they are here in spirit, I am sure. We would meet amongst New South Wales vice-chancellors and talk about what was taking place in different universities. There was an encampment at Newcastle. The University of New South Wales was on semester break at the time the encampment started, so they clearly didn't have one. Also, Universities Australia and the Go8 universities—the big research intensive universities—had more of the encampment. So, yes, we discussed how we were managing the tension. The tension is a clear one.

We are committed to doing two things. We are committed to freedom of speech and we are committed to academic freedom. We are implementing the model code that was identified in the French report on free speech, and the University of Sydney was regarded as an exemplar of that. We recognise, as the French report said, that free speech at times will mean that people will feel shocked and offended by the actions of others. At the same time, even though protests might be rowdy or spirited, they cannot interfere with the rights and the freedoms of others. It is how we balance that commitment to free speech and academic freedom that has been part of the culture of the University of Sydney for more than 100 years—but recognising that these are distressing times. There would be people on our campus who were upset that the encampment was there and who were opposed to the views that were being articulated there.

Can I add, there were Palestinian students who also came to me with similar arguments to Jewish students. They did not feel as welcome and accepted on campus as they would want to be. Managing that was a complexity for us. It's very complex to hold those dual commitments of free speech and the safety and wellbeing of our community at the same time. And, yes, we are all learning from others. We also learnt extensively from the experience of universities overseas. One of our clear commitments here—if you look at what happened in the United States when they tried to clear those encampments and they called riot police on campus, those encounters

with the police turned out to be very violent in many circumstances. On the day after, the crowds were bigger, the violence was more widespread, the destruction was clear and, in some circumstances, the universities and the police totally lost control of those circumstances.

We had three options that we were working on. One was to not escalate violence or harm, and that was to try and make sure, if at all possible, we didn't have police in riot gear on campus arresting students and staff. Another option could have been to wait it out and pretend it wasn't there, but it clearly was there. It was a big presence on our front lawn and upsetting to members of our community. What we decided to do, as other universities did, like the University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland, was talk to the students at the encampment. There were many things that they wanted us to do that we couldn't possibly do. There were some things that we engaged substantively with them on. The approach that we took, I think, was informed by the experiences of other universities in Australia and also informed by what we were seeing overseas. If you go to many overseas universities now, including, as I understand, Oxford and others, the encampments are six months on and still going.

The CHAIR: Do you think mistakes were made, in hindsight?

MARK SCOTT: It's a very fair question. I can tell you that we had teams, as I said, working 24/7 and executive teams meeting twice a day as we were trying to manage what was a complex and quite raw situation for many. The question I asked was did we make reasonable decisions, given what we knew at the time. One of the things we have done is we have commissioned a review by Bruce Hodgkinson, a senior counsel who is an expert in health and wellbeing in safe workplaces, to review our policies and our practices and our processes to think through a little bit on our experience but also to look ahead and to think through have we got these settings right. Are there things that we can learn from this experience that can help us make sure that we can try and manage, I think, this tension that does exist between free, robust speech that is a hallmark of a university but also an environment where all feel safe and affirmed and included—psychosocial safety, if you like. Psychosocial safety is clearly a new area of the law and I think we are all learning about how you deliver that effectively in an environment that is committed to free speech.

The CHAIR: You talk about free speech as being the consideration on that one side, but I guess a lot of students involved in those encampments would also view what they were doing as expressions of solidarity with people who weren't having solidarity expressed with them by the major parts of the mainstream media et cetera. I guess that's the other tension, isn't it? It's not just free speech; it's also symbols and showings of solidarity. Was that considered as part of that process?

MARK SCOTT: I think that's one of the reasons why—and I appreciate that well-meaning people will disagree on this—we felt that this protest, which was a different style of protest and I'll talk about that in a minute, fell into broad traditions of the university. If you go back in the university's history, there were big crowds protesting conscription, the Vietnam War, nuclear disarmament and apartheid in South Africa. There's a long tradition at the University of Sydney. Political economy was an issue that students protested on—the way we were teaching economics. These are all issues for which there's a long tradition of protest. Some of the students I spoke with on the encampment had family in Gaza, they knew people in Gaza, and we have people in the university who have lost family in the Gaza conflict. Of course they were often so genuine and heartfelt in their grief at what they were seeing on the television sets every night. I think they also felt solidarity with the student movement around the world. Often you've seen that at university. Students around the world are protesting and they wanted to be part of it.

What we needed to say to them, "You're able to protest. There are rights and responsibilities that come with that. Part of that responsibility of exercising that right to protest is exercising that right in a way that does not infringe on the rights, health and wellbeing of others in the university community." I would say as well that I think the nature of the encampment was a challenge for us. The protests at lunchtime in the quadrangle—these are well known to us—encampment came back on the back of the Occupy Wall Street original campaign and others that followed. This is different. We are not set up for 24/7 protests; we are not set up to be a campsite at night. There were health and wellbeing questions that we were aware of for students who were camping over.

We didn't have facilities set up for them to camp overnight. We were worried about fire risk at times. We were worried about health risks for them at times. We had significant security in place for them too. Managing all of these complexities—to allow free speech to happen, to protect the broader community, to protect those who were in the encampment, and to make sure we understood or were appreciative of the challenge that was created, in that we didn't always know who was at the encampment because, fundamentally, it's a public space—these were all things that the leadership team were engaged with around the clock for seven months.

The CHAIR: Can I ask you what the demands of the encampment were?

MARK SCOTT: Yes, let me talk to those. It took some weeks for the encampment to articulate those. That reflects that there were numbers of different groups up there—the Students' Representative Council, a number of other student activist groups, and the Muslim Students' Association—and they finally did come together on some demands. I can tell you that some of those demands we simply could not agree to and didn't agree to. They wanted us to cease university partnerships with universities in Israel, to cut back on the ability for our academics to work in exchange with some Israeli universities, and they wanted us to stop university exchanges with Israel. All of these things we felt fundamentally worked against the commitment we have as a university to work in partnership with global universities, to allow academics freedom, and we are a great believer in the opportunities of students travelling, seeing the world and taking advantage of those kinds of partnerships.

But there were some things that we did do. They were targeting defence and security contracts that we had in research and we said, "No, we're not going to scrap those." But one of the points they made was that our defence and security contracts were not as transparent as they probably should be. We looked into it and we agreed with that. If I looked online at the information that the University of New South Wales or the Australian National University put up, they were far more detailed than the University of Sydney. We agreed to be as transparent as we can be around our defence and security research contracts. That information is now going up online. There was also a question about the money the university has invested in endowments and our future fund, and other matters that earn an income back to the university. They asked if some of that money is invested in defence and security industries. We said that we appreciated there wasn't transparency around that, so we did what a number of United States universities have done.

We said we'd put together an eminent panel—there could be student representatives and staff representatives on that—to look at that defence and security investment, and to provide advice to the University of Sydney Senate that finally determines that investment policy. Dr Simon Longstaff, the head of the Ethics Centre, is heading that committee that's doing that review. We have a number of other eminent Australians who are business leaders, from the military, and student representatives too, who are providing that review. That review will take place by the end of the year. We expect that that advice will go to the senate and then the senate will decide. So on the negotiation, as you would want, there was detailed and substantive engagement around the substance. There were some things that we felt we couldn't do in the interests of the university and our key principles; there were other things we could engage in, and they were the things that we agreed to do.

The CHAIR: In terms of weapons manufacture and the investments in weapons manufacture, I know that was a common demand of many universities. It's not, "Yes, we're going to cut ties with weapons manufacturers," and it's not, "No, we won't." It's more, "We're going to do a review and see."

MARK SCOTT: I think I'd frame it this way. You're talking about the investment side. Do we have investments in firms that are involved in defence-related industries? To what extent is that a significant investment? What's the nature and form of that investment? What have other universities done about that? And what would the recommendation be to the senate about that? If you look at our investment policy, already there are a number of industries that we don't invest in. We don't invest in the gaming industry or in alcohol and tobacco. There has been a divestment from fossil fuels in recent years.

Then there are other things that are banned. Cluster munitions is identified specifically as something that we can't and won't invest in. The investigation will be: What are those investments? How are they structured? What do we know about those firms? What is appropriate for university policy on that? But finally, the decision about how and where the university invests, in a governance level, lies with the university senate. This group will provide advice and then the university senate will come up with its decision. I imagine the report that they write will be publicly released. I imagine the university senate's response, as a consequence of that, will also be publicly released. So far greater levels of transparency on the back—

The CHAIR: When will that be done by?

MARK SCOTT: I think we are expecting the first meeting of that committee—that review group took place last week, I believe. They are meeting now and doing that work. We are expecting that their report would go, firstly, to the senate investment committee and then probably to the senate as a whole, we expect, by the end of the year.

The CHAIR: Just to clarify, I think there has been some mischaracterisation about the encampments being somehow about Jewish students. I understand that, regardless of the intent of the encampment—and also acknowledging that people within that encampment may have had different intents—the actual intent of the encampment did have demands. Some of those demands, although not met, have been heard, and something is being done about some of that. My final question on this is how much harder did the misinformation coming from the right-wing media and commentators make your job during this?

MARK SCOTT: That's a complex question, I think. What I would say is that it has been a very heightened time. As I said earlier, there was genuine, heartfelt distress from students and staff. I have met with leaders of the Muslim community and leaders of the Jewish community, some of whom I've met in different guises and different roles over many different years. I think they would both say that this is as raw and demanding and complex a time as they have ever had to deal with. The media and commentary—many in the room won't be shocked to hear that when you look at media reports, at times you wonder that question as to whether that is as complete and accurate as you would like it to be. I did feel that the university's attempt to de-escalate the risk of violence, to bring a peaceable solution to an encampment, to deal with a volatile environment—which was highly fraught on all sides—and to bring a peaceful solution was a worthy aim, worth working towards, and worth engaging with students on. It was pleasing that we could de-escalate without there being violence, which was what we worked towards. I sometimes thought some of the nuance of that—that that is a goal worth working towards—was not always reflected in media coverage.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Professor Scott, I'm interested in your remarks about de-escalation and I agree that de-escalation of violence is always a worthy goal. I'm reflecting, though, on the SafeWork NSW claim that the university has received from a number of staff claiming that the events of the encampment and the associated disruption of lectures and meetings and various other events meant that the university was a psychologically unsafe environment for Jewish staff and students. Did your policies de-escalate the psychosocial violence that was connected with the protests, the chants and the encampment?

MARK SCOTT: The first thing I need to say on the reference you made to SafeWork is that, with the most recent information that I've received, the only thing we know about that is the report that appeared in this morning's newspaper. So if, in fact, there has been a complaint that has been lodged, the university has not been officially notified of that. However, I can assure you that, if there is to be an investigation, the university will fully cooperate with that, as we are completely committed to an environment that delivers safety, health and wellbeing, including psychosocial safety, for all who operate within our community, and if there are some people—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Professor Scott, can I just ask you a specific question about that on psychosocial safety. Students have reported:

I do not feel safe on campus and actively struggle to learn when faced with the reminder that people are openly allowed to call for my death in the next room.

How does that help the psychosocial safety of students?

MARK SCOTT: I would want to see the specific nature of that allegation.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So, Professor Scott, you're suggesting that there were not groups of people moving through the campus, making claims and chants, such as "Globalise the intifada", and that Jewish students would not have read that as a call for their death?

MARK SCOTT: Let me—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are you suggesting it didn't happen, Professor Scott?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order: The witness was about to answer the question and then he was subjected to another barrage of rhetorical statements. He should just be allowed to answer.

The CHAIR: Yes. I think also, when there's a lot of assumptions embedded in the question that might want to be refuted, we should be allowing the witness plenty of time to respond. Please go ahead.

MARK SCOTT: I would say that the university, whilst allowing free speech and academic freedom, has hardly been passive around issues where we feel there has been a breach of our policy, where we feel there has been harassment and intimidation, and where we feel that there have been examples of our policies being breached. We have dealt with cases where there was an antisemitic image on a banner, when inappropriate banners were used, when there was unauthorised entry into a building, when there was an attempt to disrupt traffic on City Road, where lectures were interrupted, where university email was misused—a whole series of issues that we looked at and that we have investigated and where complaints have been upheld and we have taken disciplinary action. In some of the complaints that we dealt with, where there were specific complaints around specific issues, we have been able to follow that through and uphold. I appreciate, though, that some of the complaints we received were complaints that were quite generalised about the fact that the encampment was there and students were unhappy the encampment was there. They didn't like its presence at the front of the universities.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Could I ask a specific follow-up on that? When students contacted you, was the word they used "unhappy" or was it a stronger word about them having to walk past the encampment to get to class?

MARK SCOTT: I'm talking generally.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Perhaps I could jump in here. We definitely saw a spike at the University of Sydney in relation to staff and student complaints associated with the protests going on on campus across this period.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Specifically, were they complaints about being unhappy, or were there stronger terms being used in these complaints?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: As I was about to say, those complaints were generally framed in pretty stern ways around antisemitism specifically—about 260 complaints and about a quarter of those maybe indicating antisemitism as the grounds for complaint. We take complaints exceptionally seriously at the university and have very clear processes organised around justice for both the person making the complaint and, if there is an actual person at the other end of the complaint—for both of those things. It involves searching down evidence, it involves interviewing, it involves a lot of detail—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm very grateful for the discussion of the process.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: My point is that what we found in the large majority of the complaints that used the word "antisemitism" as the grounds for making the complaint, the entire basis of that allegation rested on something like, "There was a protest", "There was a pro-Palestinian protest", "There was a Palestinian flag displayed at the encampment." Our assessment—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Was there also a jihadi flag displayed at the encampment?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: There was no jihadi flag displayed at the encampment.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I've seen photos of it, with respect, Provost.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: There was a lot of representation in the media that there was a so-called jihadi flag on our campus. We took advice from experts. We're very comfortable that it was a Shahada flag. It was simply a flag testifying to Muslim faith. It doesn't breach any of our protocols—in fact, it goes to the heart of our commitment to diversity on our campus. That, however, suggests the kind of inflammatory environment in which we were operating, in which people—sometimes organs of the media—would claim that all types of terrorist activity were being represented on campus, which was blatantly untrue.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Were there people walking through Eastern Avenue chanting slogans, such as "Globalise the intifada"?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I believe there might have been exactly that slogan.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And what do you understand that slogan to mean?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: There are some wide variety of representations and interpretations around such slogans. I'm not going to sit here and make my own personal sort of choice. What I would reflect, however, as a provost, as somebody who has to deal with complaints in a very even-handed way, is that there is no consensus—critical, academic or popular—around what those statements mean and people have very heated interpretations of them, which are often, and unsurprisingly, shaped by their personal histories.

MARK SCOTT: Can I add to that, because there's been quite a lot of discussion around the language of rallies and protests, and I'd appreciate the opportunity of discussing it with you.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Professor Scott, before you do, could I take you to a statement that you are recorded to have made in *Honi Soit* in November 2023, where you said that a case for global intifada carries the reasonable imputation that the meeting may be linked to support for terrorist activities. Do you stand by that statement?

MARK SCOTT: Yes, so let me talk about that—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Sorry, do you stand by that statement?

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

MARK SCOTT: Well, in the context—

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order. I suspect I know what it is.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: It is not appropriate in this context to cross-examine in that sort of discourteous way. The witness was clearly about to answer the question. It's a complex issue. He should be allowed to expound upon it, I would suggest.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It's a simple question: Do you stand by your statement?

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order. Again, if we could just take the heat out of it and allow the witness to respond.

MARK SCOTT: In the days after 7 October, a rally was attempted to be organised by what I recall was an unauthorised group, an unofficial group, at the university. The rally was the call to global intifada. It was accompanied by an image of a tank crossing over the border into Israel on 7 October. The university's leadership and I believe also the university student union came to the view that the juxtaposition of the language and the image seemed to be inciting terrorism, supporting terrorism, invoking support around that. It was the two together that we felt, at that time, were inappropriate. I had made it clear in notes to staff, and emails to staff and students, that we did not believe that free speech extended to supporting acts of terrorism and to supporting Hamas. Therefore, we cancelled that meeting. There was some criticism in some circles that we cancelled that meeting, we did so unapologetically. But it was the combination of both that seemed particularly powerful and manifestly inappropriate, hence our decision.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do you believe the words "globalise the intifada" could be reasonably interpreted by a Jewish staff member or Jewish student as suggesting a call for personal violence against them, their loved ones or their families?

MARK SCOTT: Yes, some Jewish staff and students have expressed to me their concern around phrases like "intifada". The other one that has been much discussed is, "From the river to the sea". They have found them deeply offensive and deeply concerning.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In terms of free speech, does that raise concerns for the university's free speech policy? If somebody else finds something deeply concerning and personally threatening, does that then not call for a free speech discussion?

MARK SCOTT: Let me address that, but I would be keen to engage the provost on this issue as well. That is why I said, publicly and regularly, that I really wished those phrases would not be used if they are causing such distress to some in our community. It would be my wish that they not be used. The fact that we then have to deconstruct them, and debate their history, their meaning and their context when some people find it very distressing, I said that I would prefer that they not be used. However—and I think this is very significant and I think it's very significant for members of Parliament to reflect on this—I cannot find a Jewish diction in the country that has banned the use of those phrases. Those phrases are used—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: With respect, Professor Scott, are you hiding racism and antisemitism behind the cloak of the law?

MARK SCOTT: No.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What is your responsibility to the safety of students?

The CHAIR: I'll hear the point of order. Also, your time is up.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: That's not a question. It's a discourteous rant, I would suggest. It should be ruled out of order.

MARK SCOTT: I would appreciate the opportunity to address the issue.

The CHAIR: Please do.

MARK SCOTT: We were in a situation for some of those where rallies were held on weekends here, with thousands of people surrounded by New South Wales police, where those phrases were used and no action was taken. Those phrases were used at rallies that appeared outside this Parliament, and no action has been taken because lawmakers have not come to a view that that represents hate speech and that language should be banned. The complication around having a different standard and free speech being less available at a university than elsewhere in the community is a challenging confrontation of the traditional view, which would be that there is more licence for free speech at university than elsewhere. That is why university vice-chancellors wrote to the Federal Attorney-General seeking advice on this matter, wondering whether in fact lawmakers at a Federal level or State level want to intervene precisely on this matter.

Let me reinforce that there is no jurisdiction in the country that has banned these phrases. That is not to say that there may not be some circumstances where we would take action around that. I could see a scenario where if Jewish students were standing together and they were being targeted and surrounded by protesters citing these phrases, that that would feel direct and intimidatory and possibly antisemitic.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And if Jewish students are sitting in a classroom and this is coming past them—

The CHAIR: Order! It is not your time for questions.

MARK SCOTT: When protesters intervened in classrooms and attempted to take them over, we took action against those students. We have suspended students from the university who have disrupted with their protests.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How many?

The CHAIR: Order! I think what you are saying is very sensible, that words such as those really do mean a different thing depending on the context and the circumstances. It's not as simple as saying that particular words—as we've just heard—are somehow racist, when they may mean a completely different thing to a different bunch of people. Is that what you're trying to say, that there is context around this?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Perhaps I will come in here, if that's okay. I think there is always context and it is really useful to think about what the context is. I think the vice-chancellor has given a couple of examples where context determined a decision in relation to a juxtaposition of images and words. The other piece that I would say here, however, which has also been very exercising of the university leadership, is that in times like these when certain student and staff demographics feel particularly anxious, as if a hostile world is facing them, I think we have made every effort to listen really carefully and non-defensively to what they're saying. That does not take away from our absolute commitment to academic freedom, which is core to a university. But I think when we hear from our staff and students on both polarised sides of this conflict that they feel less confident coming onto campus than they have previously, we listen hard to that. It affects us and we feel like that's not right.

We have also done a lot of work outside this very formal complaints-based system, which we have to have—it's more of a judicial piece. There is also a hugely important cultural piece. We have done so much work in this space, before and after 7 October, in terms of trying to take seriously our responsibility to educate our students about how to talk about issues when you have conflicting and maybe even contradictory viewpoints on how to extend empathetic understanding to someone who stands for something that you don't stand for. We've got online and face-to-face training for students. We've trained a lot of our tutors and a lot of our student peer mentors, who deal with large numbers of undergraduate students.

This semester we've launched a civic campus initiative, which is pulling together expert academics to really put our heads together to say, "What does a contemporary twenty-first century university want to stand for?" It will not step away from academic freedom, which any academic will passionately think is the absolute heart of the university. But around that, what can you wrap around in terms of a culture where people are more culturally capable and competent in a society that seems to be rapidly polarising? How can a university try to deliver on its social mission by holding that intermediate space of deliberative conversation that is respectful, that can listen empathetically and that can bear to tolerate a view that is not its own? As old as I am, I have to say, that task is way harder than I ever thought it was going to be. It's a very difficult set of skills to teach. I don't think there is a quick fix.

The CHAIR: In the educational context, it's being able to teach people critical thinking. It's very easy to say, "You can't do this and you can't talk about this." My experience with young people is that they are very good at having nuanced conversations about things. I'm going to move to a completely different topic in the time that we have left. Because I have the opportunity of having you here, I want to ask you, Professor Scott, about the university's approach to people with disability. We just had an inquiry where we looked into the experiences of children with disability in educational settings, and it did cover some aspects of university and TAFE experiences.

As part of that and following that, I have had a lot of students contact me from the University of Sydney, as well as the University of New South Wales and UTS, in particular. They are saying that they have students leaving at quite an alarming rate because of a lack of accessibility or their needs being met. The examples I have been given include things like the university not always having wheelchair access to every room or blind students not being able to have bluetooth stethoscopes because they cost too much. It's those sorts of things, where everything is just really difficult. I was asking the Minister about that this morning, and it seems that universities are governed primarily by the Federal jurisdiction but by the State when it comes to these anti-discrimination provisions. Does it concern you that those sorts of comments are coming to my office?

MARK SCOTT: Yes, it does. Central to our 2032 strategy is that we are a truly diverse community. We have a number of initiatives in place to drive that, and students with disability are absolutely central to that. We've got a disability inclusion action plan that is currently underway. There are a series of initiatives that are in place—flexible working arrangements, reasonable adjustments for staff with disability and support for students in the classroom with disability. We remain fully committed to this. We measure our number and our data. You make

reference to our physical infrastructure. That is challenging, I must say. Thirty per cent of the University of Sydney is heritage listed. We have some brilliant, bright new facilities where disability access will have been centrally built into all of that construction and that planning. The retrofitting has been more extensive, but when we are doing retrofitting, certainly disability access forms part of that.

Through our Senate People and Culture Committee, there's a detailed monitoring of numbers of students with disability and staff with disability and the flow and pattern of that over time. I'd say that I don't think I've seen data that indicates that we've had flight of students with disability or staff with disability away from the university, but we're not seeing the growth of the level that we'd want to see congruent with levels in the community. I'm not sure if the provost wants to add to that.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I would say that, since 2013, we've had a very robust multi-year physical infrastructure plan, as Mark says, to bring up much of the heritage architecture, which is largely done by quite physical things like ramps and wheelchair hoists and the like. The thing that I think is probably even more centre for us is thinking about disability and mental health, which is very prevalent and a growing identification amongst our student group, especially undergraduate students who identify and make themselves known as having a disability which might be, for example, an anxiety disorder.

Just numerically, that is a much greater disability component for the university, which we address through a whole bunch of student wellbeing initiatives, including some very practical orientations around learning assessment adjustments made for students—for example, special considerations or lengthier periods in an exam or working to have a customised staggering of assessment dates—in a way that a student without that disability identification wouldn't have. I guess there are those two pieces, to me. I've been at the university since 2011 and, physically, I can see the campuses made a very large jump forward. I think the challenge for us—I mean, I think we could always do more; I'm certainly not suggesting we are perfect in this space. But I think the real challenge for us will be addressing and engaging with that mental health piece. I think that will be a bigger challenge.

The CHAIR: Do you keep data for the reasons why people are quitting their courses? Would you have any visibility over the numbers of people who were quitting because of their disability needs not being met?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: We watch our retention rates very closely at a large demographic scale, so we would notice, for example, if we had a spike in a particular area or even a unit of study or a course of study where, idiosyncratically, a large number of students were not finishing—were leaving the university. We don't, to the best of my knowledge, have any kind of mechanism that would pick up those individual students unless they had already made themselves known to, say, a student wellbeing unit or were working with a counsellor in a disability adjustment plan or some such thing like that.

MARK SCOTT: I'd add as well that I think one of the things that we pick up in this area of diversity is the need to build the confidence and the trust in our community so that staff and students with disability will happily identify that they have disability and talk to us on that and feel that they'll be well supported in our community through that identification. We suspect that there is an under-reporting of disability within our community, so we're trying to interrogate that as well. The more insight we have on the needs of our staff and students, the better equipped we'll be able to be to reach out to them with support that they might find meaningful and supportive.

The CHAIR: That does bring us to three o'clock. Thank you very much to both of you for your time. I know that it's unusual for us to call university reps, so it has been incredibly useful. You are now excused.

(Mark Scott and Annamarie Jagose withdrew.)

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I might be able to pick up on the Bankstown TAFE from earlier today, Mr Dizdar. In terms of the costing of the relocation of the Bankstown TAFE to a temporary site before its reinstatement at the hospital site, I understand that the previous Government had discussions in this space and the costing was about \$200 million to \$300 million. I'm wondering whether you may have knowledge of that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I might let my TAFE colleagues jump in. I think we heard clearly from our Minister this morning and Steve, as head of TAFE, that we're working very closely with Health. This is a whole-of-government project that has got a Health component, with a TAFE component. It's being packaged together for delivery. They're in productive discussions. The budget of this sits with our Health colleagues. It is a TAFE I know well. In my career, I spent four years at that TAFE, sharing the premises on the school site when I was regional director of south-west Sydney. I'm taking you back to my working knowledge around 2012, and I visited many of the facilities there when we were in partnership. I think there will be a tremendous opportunity to have modern facilities here on the TAFE site. I think there will be a period where it will be difficult—because we're going to be on a temporary site—delivering continuity but the end result, when we move back onto that campus with modern facilities, will be a great fillip for that community.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Specific to my question, Mr Brady, was it \$200 million to \$300 million?

STEPHEN BRADY: A detailed business case for the relocation is under development now. We hadn't done one prior to now, so I'm not sure where that number comes from, but it certainly doesn't have any veracity to it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I guess I established with the Minister this morning that there's no money in terms of the TAFE budget for the relocation or the re-establishment of the Bankstown TAFE and that this is going ahead on the understanding that, we are told, there's an agreement with Health. I'm just wondering if you might be able to elaborate on what that agreement is or whether there are any documents or anything to substantiate this arrangement.

STEPHEN BRADY: We're in detailed discussions with our colleagues at NSW Health and Health Infrastructure on a very regular basis around the planning et cetera. One thing that we have to work through for that is the site ownership. Currently, obviously the TAFE campus is owned by the Minister in his role. As we move forward into the new arrangement, where we're building a hospital and a TAFE on the site, the ownership of that land will need to be considered. We are actually working through, with our colleagues, a form of understanding about how those mechanics are going to work, but it's very clear—I met with my counterpart in Health Infrastructure online I think in the last two weeks, where we clearly discussed the need to develop the joint business case, the fact that a joint business case was the best approach and that the initial relocation was part of that overall business case, and it would come from the bucket of funds that are allocated for the overall project. As far as I'm concerned, we've got a very clear understanding, and that'll be documented sometime over the next few months.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, I'm looking for something a bit more substantial about an agreement in place. The \$1.3 billion for the hospital—there's no reference to TAFE.

STEPHEN BRADY: No, but it's on TAFE land. It's pretty hard for them to build a hospital without land, and there's clearly a TAFE there. The understanding—the discussion that we've had with Health and Health Infrastructure and the meetings that I understand the Minister has had with his counterpart is that this is a whole-of-government solution for the community of Bankstown that requires a skills outcome as well as a health outcome.

MURAT DIZDAR: If I can just add, what's clear is that rather than have two separate business cases, both agencies are going to partner together—both Ministers—and bring forward to Government one business case that covers a build of a hospital, that covers a relocation of the TAFE temporarily and that covers the re-institution of that TAFE on that premises.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What's the timing again on that document being finalised and publicly available?

STEPHEN BRADY: The agreement between ourselves and Health Infrastructure?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes.

STEPHEN BRADY: As I said, it's only within the last two weeks that we discussed the details of that. It's something which we'll work through. I don't have a specific time frame for you. I think the important part for Government is how we work towards the funding decisions. Obviously, there's a budget there of \$1.3 billion. We need to step that through for Government about how that's going to work, the scope of the service delivery for both organisations. Probably the most significant milestone will be coming through the budget process as we clarify those arrangements. But we do anticipate being able to move forward, as I said, getting the expression of interest out into the market for the temporary accommodation—and start to move forward on that planning and commitment so that we can look at what sort of fit-out we require, what do we need in order to be able to have that continuity of service delivery, which is critically important. Whilst the really major milestone coming forward is actually the development of a detailed business case for the combined facilities, we will not be waiting for that to be completed, I don't believe, until—we'll be taking action on the interim relocation based on the budget that's already available within Health for that interim work.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of community concern on this, the issue is there has been no public information that the \$1.3 billion is going to cover the TAFE. People are concerned that the hospital is coming onto TAFE ground, so the TAFE is clearing out and there is no reassurance here that TAFE is actually going to be a part of this.

STEPHEN BRADY: With respect, I think if you go back to the press releases put out by Minister Park and Minister Whan when the Bankstown site was announced, it made very clear that there was an ongoing commitment to TAFE in the Bankstown CBD.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there precedence for a situation like this, where TAFE loses the land, loses the campus, the temporary relocation not known, the budget not known, the reinstatement of the new TAFE and the time frame not known, but we sit back and we say, "Look at a ministerial press statement"? Is there precedent here?

STEPHEN BRADY: Ms Merton, I think—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of process and how these joint arrangements happen, what is the precedent?

STEPHEN BRADY: I don't recall us having built a hospital on a TAFE campus in the time that I've been in the role, so I can't really point to a precedent. What I can say is that this is clearly a situation where a whole-of-government solution is required. It's not a case of TAFE dealing with its land in its own interests solely and it's not the case that Health can come and build a hospital on our campus without our collaboration. There's clearly a need for the two agencies to work hand in glove to deliver a whole-of-government solution for the community of Bankstown and that's exactly what we're doing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The concern is people say, "Hang on a moment, TAFE hasn't got a seat at the table with Health." Then—

STEPHEN BRADY: With all due respect, that's not right.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —they'll say, "Budget blowouts". Let's say the cost of the hospital is more than the \$1.3 billion. What reassurance is there that the kids in the south-west are going to have a new TAFE campus?

STEPHEN BRADY: I can only reiterate that the press release that was issued—the statement by the responsible Ministers at the time was that there would be a continuing TAFE presence in the Bankstown CBD. And that's exactly what we're working to.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's also what the business case will go to, Ms Merton.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: And we're awaiting the joint business case. Is that currently underway?

MURAT DIZDAR: That is what is being developed.

STEPHEN BRADY: Correct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The time frame on the joint business case is?

STEPHEN BRADY: I'd have to come back to you on the specifics of that if I can.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Alright. Mr Brady, you have well spoken about the current teaching infrastructure at the Bankstown TAFE as it stands today in terms of the hairdressing, the child care—and I think there's some other sort of business services.

STEPHEN BRADY: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Given the history of the TAFE being 50 years, the growing student cohort in the south-west, are we thinking those facilities will be moved to the temporary site when we know it? It may be a single site or multiple temporary sites and possibly those facilities will be reinstated at the hospital precinct.

STEPHEN BRADY: That's our intention. Our intention is that we maintain the strong presence in the Bankstown CBD. One of the things I would say is our adult migrant education program is a very large part of what we deliver in the Bankstown community and a very large proportion of our student population have English as a second language, so it's a critical part of supporting that local community that we engage those learners, that we can help them engage with the local community and be a part of that community because they have the confidence and the language capability, that we can put them on the path to vocational training and get them engaged in employment. A large part of what we do in the Bankstown TAFE is work with those communities to not only teach them how to speak English but also start to engage them in training that leads towards a job outcome. That's certainly what we intend to continue to do.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, in terms of communication, what do students know? Mr Brady, you were just highlighting some of the cultural groups and the language and cultural environment. What do they know?

STEPHEN BRADY: They know our commitment to the Bankstown CBD. We've developed a detailed communications plan that will work with local—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: You have developed a plan?

STEPHEN BRADY: We had developed an initial plan. We'll revise that as the time frames et cetera become clearer. That plan talks to us working with local multicultural groups as well as with our teachers and staff on the campus to make sure that they're clear and feel supported with respect to not only the final campus design and delivery but also the moves because there'll have to be a decant from the current campus to the new campus and then from that interim campus back into the final facility.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: An initial communication plan? What do they know today?

STEPHEN BRADY: They know today—with all due respect, there has been a statement that we'll be working with Health to deliver a combined health and TAFE campus in the Bankstown CBD, that we will be continuing the delivery of TAFE courses in Bankstown, that there'll be a temporary facility, that we'll be moving to the final facility which is intended to be on the combined campus. Until we have more information, which is coming out of the planning process that we're undertaking now, there's not a lot more I can say to them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So that statement—to be issued?

STEPHEN BRADY: Communications were issued back when the initial announcement was made.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In the form of a ministerial joint press release?

STEPHEN BRADY: There was that but we also issued communications to our staff. We'll make further communications as more information becomes available. At this point I can't say exactly when we're going to relocate. I can't say where. So there's really not a lot for me to say until such time as we progress particularly this piece of work around the interim relocation.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What do you envisage some of the impacts might be on the students if we're saying, "You're going to a temporary site, not sure where or how long, and then you're going to come back when we reinstate the campus"?

STEPHEN BRADY: The initial impact will be telling them what the timing is for us to have the interim relocation: where the location of their current studies will be, talking to them about the period of the likely interim facility, and then the likely time for them to move back onto a full campus. It's really important to make sure that there is confidence about the continued delivery of their courses, about the location and their wayfinding, to make sure they can find their courses. That is all part of what we will be looking at in the communications plan that we finalise as we get closer to having that clarity of location.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Earlier we were speaking about the priority in terms of skills training in New South Wales. In terms of the interim arrangements on this—the cost of that—how are we going to manage the continuation of the training?

STEPHEN BRADY: I'm not 100 per cent clear on what your question is. There will be a cost of renting, fitting out of the new facility. There will be the relocation cost of picking up equipment or whatever needs to go across, of communicating to people. The teachers who are currently being employed will still be employed. That cost will be very, very similar, if not the same. It's really that location, relocation, communication and the physical fit-out that will be the cost of that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of changes to jobs or job losses or gains—too early?

STEPHEN BRADY: There is no intention here that there would be job losses. This is really looking at how we develop and deliver the facility with a minimum disruption to teaching.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, I might look at the Gosford TAFE campus. I'm wondering what arrangement is in place in terms of the identified site for a new Gosford TAFE campus? Is there a contract in place on land?

STEPHEN BRADY: The intended new facility, if we get approval, is the current—well, it's the old Gosford City council chambers on Mann Street. I don't know if you are familiar with it? It's currently vacant. We have an agreement with Gosford City council that we can acquire that land. That agreement expired at the end of July this year. Prior to its expiry we agreed with the council to extend that for a further—I think 12 to 18 months. I will have to come back to you with the timing on that. It is 12 months. Thank you, Patrick. We have the agreement with the council that we can exercise that arrangement so that we can take ownership of that land. It's currently still owned by the council. It's under their care and maintenance until such time as we do, or if we do, take control.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, in terms of the growing student cohort and envisaged training needs, is there a pipeline in place as to where new campuses or expanded campuses by TAFE may be required?

STEPHEN BRADY: Great question. I think I started talking this morning about our longer term approach to planning at TAFE NSW. What we are trying to do is really drive our planning from the point of view of what are the training needs in local communities? That takes a "top down and a bottom up" approach. Top down, we are very much looking at the data that comes through from NCVR, which is the national VET statistical body. So taking that data and combining that with ABS data and any other data we can get. It will be informed by the NSW Skills Plan, when that is published at the end of the year. That will give us an overall picture of the training needs across the State.

We then need to localise that. We are driving a lot of local community engagement as recommendations out of the VET review progress. There is further emphasis on regional skilling. We will bring together those pieces so that we get a really strong understanding of not only where the priority skills are but also where in New South Wales we need to deliver those skills. That will then drive us to understand what is the physical infrastructure we need in order to support that? As well, what is the digital infrastructure? Because that is critically important. Also, what are the teaching resources we need? What is the quantity and skill sets of the teachers we have and where in in order to be able to support those localised skills requirements?

From a physical infrastructure perspective, that then gives us an understanding of not only what have we got today but also what are we going to need into the future? We are doing that, informed by some campus master planning that Mr Woods' team is leading. That's looking not just at each individual campus but looking at a network of campuses that support a local community. That allows us to understand, based on the training needs that we've identified through our training portfolio strategy, what's the type of physical infrastructure, how do those campuses work together in order to be able to support those local communities? That gives us the ability to build a longer term plan about where we need to invest, how much we need to invest et cetera.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What we might know so far from some of this work, does the Central Coast look like it may be an area in need of an expanded campus or a new campus, or in terms of the students?

STEPHEN BRADY: Certainly the Central Coast is growing, so we certainly expect that it's an area that we can see enrolment growth over time. We are looking at it, as I briefly touched on this morning, as a combination of campuses. We've got the Ourimbah campus, which we co-locate with the University of Newcastle. We've got our Wyong campus, where we are currently building a new animal facility. We run some significant trades and more migrant programs there. We run a whole range of programs at the Wyong campus. Then you've got Gosford. So we will look at that across those three communities, which are relatively close together. We'll work out where we will best locate which disciplines. In planning for the Gosford campus, we would be taking into account the growth we see. In terms of the population, we would suggest that we are probably underservicing the population at the moment, based on the old campus we have in Gosford and its ability to support the delivery of skills in Gosford.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the old campus and its condition, we have reports from teachers saying, "Hang on a moment, we need a better place than this." Are maintenance and repairs in place?

STEPHEN BRADY: I wouldn't disagree with those teachers. We are certainly very keen to—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: They said, "You come work from here."

STEPHEN BRADY: We'd certainly love to upgrade that facility. Gosford is not alone like that. We've got a very significant backlog in our 154 campuses. Professor Scott spoke about their heritage buildings. We similarly have a large portfolio of heritage buildings, many of which were old assets of other departments. The Department of Education has kindly given us some of their old facilities over time but not the maintenance budget to go with them—thank you, secretary. We've got old hospitals and we've got old ambulance stations. We have a portfolio of assets which is extensive, but it's very, very aged. We have a significant maintenance backlog. To answer your question around Gosford, given that we don't have clarity around timing of the investment in the new campus, we are continuing to spend money on our existing Gosford campus to make sure that it is safe and that it is accessible whilst a decision is being made. Let me just clarify, even when a decision is made on a new campus, it will take time for that new campus to be made ready for accommodation. We anticipate that, no matter what, we will be on the old campus for a number of years, so we need to continue to make sure that it's safe and suitable in the meantime.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Unlike the funding arrangement or agreement entered into for the Bankstown TAFE, the Gosford TAFE would be a freestanding TAFE, funded by TAFE?

STEPHEN BRADY: That's correct. It's a TAFE business case about the delivery of a TAFE-only facility. Therefore, we have our own business case that we're putting it up for consideration by government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But can I just say, do you see the uncertainty? The community can think, "Hang on a moment. If we're going to replace a freestanding TAFE such as Gosford, and that is going to be funded through TAFE, when we look at Bankstown, we're moving out for the hospital, but the TAFE is going to be funded by Health." Or there has been an agreement or a joint statement, or something is happening. It doesn't seem to even up.

STEPHEN BRADY: I disagree, I'm sorry. We're developing a joint business case that will go forward for consideration of government for Bankstown. That's not terribly different to us putting forward a Gosford business case for consideration by government. I don't really see there's a huge difference between them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But in terms of the Bankstown joint business case with Health and the understanding that the \$1.3 billion committed to Health and the new hospital will also fund Bankstown TAFE, there's no precedent for this.

STEPHEN BRADY: Not in the time that I have worked in TAFE NSW. Again, there have been whole-of-government property developments done before. There are government office buildings—for instance, 52 Martin Place where the ministerial offices are located is actually occupied by ministerial services, the Treasury and the department of Premier and Cabinet. That was a single business case considered by government. I would say there is precedent for this sort of arrangement and it really puts government in a position when you put the two together that it can make an overall decision.

I would find it problematic for me to have a TAFE business case and a Health business case that may not align, whether that's in terms of timing, funding, scope, the legal rights around the property. We're not thinking about building a hospital and a TAFE here with a big fence down the middle. We want to have a campus where people flow across it. You think about a hospital where it has a food court and hairdressers and all those things, we want our TAFE community to benefit from that as well.

The idea of having a joined up business case that considers the whole community, the way people flow across the campus—are we going to build health teaching specific facilities within the hospital? That's quite normal, and then we do similar sort of facilities in a TAFE campus. Why wouldn't we do it once and have it shared by both organisations so that we get economies of scale for government? They're the sorts of discussions we're going into. I've got a meeting with the South Western Sydney Local Health District in the next couple of weeks. We're going to talk about what the opportunities are for us to deliver health-related training on the Bankstown campus. If you think about enrolled nursing, it's one of our larger courses, and that's the sort of thing we want to talk about.

The CHAIR: We're out of time. We are going to take a 15-minute break and we will be back at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We're back. We'll start again with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Brady, earlier when I was asking about some of the overseas trips and travel, I was curious to learn a bit more about how many overseas campuses there are at TAFE, where they're located and how many staff are working there. Can you provide an overview of that for me?

STEPHEN BRADY: We don't have any overseas campuses. Our international delivery works in two ways. We bring students into Australia and teach them here. In some cases we do some online delivery in their home country and then bring them for a block of training here, so they actually study through TAFE NSW. They get accredited through TAFE NSW. Then we do some other delivery which is actually offshore, and this is where we'll have a partnership with an in-country education organisation. We'll have our teachers go over and teach their instructors. We'll give them our course materials and assessments, and then we'll go back and check that they're actually doing that well and that they're complying with the Australian regulatory requirements under ASQA. We deliver offshore but through partners.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it's either international students who are doing it or then you'll partner with other providers?

STEPHEN BRADY: Exactly.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have staff working overseas currently?

STEPHEN BRADY: We don't. I don't believe we have international staff who are located permanently overseas. We have an international team here in Australia which goes over regularly and works with partners.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a limit to how long the staff go overseas when they do that or how does that process work?

STEPHEN BRADY: They'll put up a proposal through me to the Minister for approval, but generally they're pretty quick trips. They're going over for either a partnership discussion around the terms of the arrangements. They might be going over to do the regulatory review work or training delivery to train the trainer. They're generally not gone for any more than a few days, so they're not extended trips.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of TAFE staff more broadly, do you have any that are working for TAFE NSW but either live interstate or overseas and work remotely?

STEPHEN BRADY: We do. With respect to overseas, as I said, we don't have staff who are based overseas, but we might have a staff member whose family is in India or Pakistan whose family is unwell, so they might go home to see their family and while they're there they'll do some remote work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sort of a flexible working arrangement in certain circumstances.

STEPHEN BRADY: Precisely. There's no overseas permanently based staff. With respect to interstate, I think I talked about Kingscliff earlier, and similarly in places like Wagga, people live either side of the border in those border communities so there's a fair bit of that. There are some arrangements which sprang up through COVID. Our policy is not that people can permanently reside in other jurisdictions and work for us. We have flexible work agreements with all of our staff, and we're currently reviewing those in light of the Premier's circular around flexible work to make sure that we're complying with that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the time frame of that review? I think when we had Mr Dizdar last week that was being worked on with the department more broadly trying to implement the Premier's memorandum I think by the start of the year if not sooner. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but that was my recollection of the evidence.

MURAT DIZDAR: Exactly.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is TAFE working to a similar time frame in terms of complying with that memorandum?

STEPHEN BRADY: To be perfectly honest, we've just been in consultation around turning our entire organisation on its ear, so that has been our primary focus. We'll be turning our mind after tomorrow, I'd say, when we have our final input from our unions to the timing around the Premier's memo. We have looked at what we need to do and the fact we have our agreements in place and then we need to work down through our management layers. I might ask Ms Tickle if she has a time frame in mind.

JULIE TICKLE: We have already started looking at our working flexibly arrangement procedure and it really does align with the Premier's memorandum, in any case. We don't have in place permanent working off campus at TAFE NSW. Many of our employees participate in flexible work arrangements, some of that might be working from home or varied starts. We do have 154 or 156—I always forget which one—campus locations as well, so people actually work across the State in lots of different campus locations. That's one of the ways that we're very flexible. We are certainly reviewing our current procedures to make sure they're in line with the Premier's circular.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That probably goes to your earlier evidence, but I was asking about some of the positions that they can be located—they're not necessarily location specific. They could work at a TAFE campus, which could be anywhere.

JULIE TICKLE: That's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to move to the Universities Accord now, which I think is Ms Read. I'll direct them to you and, if anyone else wants to jump in, go for it. I think last time we were here the final report had only just been released a few weeks earlier. I think it came out earlier that month and we were here last time. Is there any update you can provide us, in terms of the last six months, about what has happened from a New South Wales perspective in terms of the recommendations that came with that final report?

MURAT DIZDAR: Want me to kick off?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, happy for either/or. I do have a couple of specifics, but I'm interested in the general position first.

MURAT DIZDAR: The report was released in February—you're right. It was 24 February. The Commonwealth budget for 2024-25 had some line items that went to the Universities Accord. The first one was around capping indexation of HECS from 1 June 2023. That was widely covered in the media. There was also the

new means test—the Commonwealth Prac Payment—for students completing nursing, midwifery, teaching and social work. That's yet to come into play, Mrs Mitchell. It's from 25 July. We're working at officials level because we're keen, particularly on our side, with teaching, to see what that is going to look like. This goes to what has been labelled as prac poverty. You're on prac and you might be working part-time while you're studying and you can't complete that work.

There was also developing a managed growth funding system for Commonwealth supported places, needs-based funding to boost the number of students in under-represented backgrounds, and there was \$350 million nationally to expand university enabling and preparatory courses. Also, it was announced in the budget—at least the Commonwealth budget—the establishment of the Australian tertiary education commission. Ms Read might talk to where those things are at because, while they were announced as budget line items, there's still a lot of work to go on many of those.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I'm interested in the implementation as well.

CHLOE READ: Many of those pieces—we talked earlier about the national student ombudsman a little bit ahead of the accord—are still in consultation and the development of legislation at the Commonwealth level. The other piece that I think is going to progress hopefully to Ministers shortly is that there was a recommendation that came—again, I think it was from the first or the interim accord on early offers for universities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was one I was going ask about.

CHLOE READ: I thought it might be. The Commonwealth is looking to work with States and Territories on what that might look like and how we might approach that work. You would recall that the accord gave a timeline of having something in place on that for enrolments from 2027. And then other pieces include the establishment of the study hubs. I think round one of the regional study hubs has been completed and they've awarded those funding arrangements. The two Country Universities Centres that we most recently established in New South Wales—I think Cowra and Mudgee—were successful in that round. They secured Commonwealth funding there. Round two, I think, is out at the moment. The metro or suburban study hub closed in late July, but they haven't announced yet what's coming out of that. They've also convened an implementation advisory committee to work on the tertiary education commission to understand the scope and the implementation of that.

And then, in terms of New South Wales, we've submitted feedback—I don't think they did a public consultation call on a couple of different papers, but there has been a paper on the needs-based funding and the managed growth approach for universities at the officials level, as Mr Dizdar said. We've given them some feedback. Finally, just to round out the New South Wales piece, we held off on updating our Higher Education Strategy with a view to looking at what came from the accord. We're moving ahead with consultation on that strategy. In fact, I think there's a round table in a couple of weeks time with the sector to talk through that. We have also been open for submissions and had a good deal of interest on the back of the discussion paper that we put out for that too.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just wanted to pick up a couple of things. The early offers—and I note that the recommendation, as you said, was to have consistency across the country by 2027. But there was a mention in the report about agreeing for education Ministers not to issue them before September in the year before, I think, for next year and the year after. I know a number of universities in New South Wales have had previous agreements. What would you anticipate for offers this year or what has that communication been like with the universities around how that will work?

CHLOE READ: That's in place. We went with September again, which was the date that New South Wales universities had agreed independently from the rest of the country in the year prior. Minister Clare wrote to all universities and said, "We're doing this nationally", and so we would expect that no universities were giving offers ahead of that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's hard. Is it just operating on good faith that they won't or will that have an impact from 2027 if any universities do go early? How are you going to make sure?

CHLOE READ: The restriction on early offers is in place until 2027 while we do more work on what it looks like to do this well across the country to balance those considerations of equity in both directions, actually. In places, say, like Western Sydney University, a lot of the offer scheme is not ATAR dependent—lots of students who might otherwise not be able to rely on their ATAR securing offers for university through those mechanisms but on the other end of things the resources and the support needed to secure an early offer in some universities might be a bit of a barrier for some people. The work to be done across the next two years is to work out what is the right offer timing, what is the right way of managing those things, should there be a consistent process and do some research on the impacts of early offers. That's the work that Commonwealth and States and Territories are going to do together ahead of then—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Prior to the 2027 decision.

CHLOE READ: —having it in place for 2027. In the meantime, we don't do early offers before September.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You mentioned the tertiary education commission and I know there was also a recommendation to establish a centre of excellence in higher education and research as well. That was one of the recommendations. Are there any discussions between the State and the Commonwealth about who will fund those, both the commission and also the research centre? Has that happened yet?

CHLOE READ: Not discussion, no—not that I'm aware of. We would expect that the Commonwealth would fund both of those because they fund universities, largely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Everyone loves asking for money from the other levels of government, so I was just curious about that.

CHLOE READ: Don't give them ideas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The last one I wanted to ask about was recommendation 38, which talks about a pathway for TAFEs to become self-accrediting in VET at the Australian Qualification Framework level 5 and above in areas of national priority. I don't pretend to completely understand what that one means. Mr Brady or Ms Read, can someone enlighten me? Does New South Wales already have that or what does that look like for our jurisdiction?

CHLOE READ: From memory, level 7 is bachelor degree, level 5 is advanced diploma and level 6 must be—sorry, it's diploma, then advanced diploma and then bachelor degree. The areas of national priority reference there, I think, relates to the intent that we might trial this as part of the centres of excellence. Mr Brady might want to talk a bit about that and then also about the pathway to self-accreditation for TAFEs.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we've got to remember, whether you're talking about higher education or VET, we're currently applying through TEQSA, as I mentioned earlier, for a higher apprenticeship, which is a higher education degree. Minister Brendan O'Connor announced that there would be a trial of VET self-accreditation through ASQA, which is the regulatory body for vocational training. The intention is that there will be a trial with a few TAFEs. We are waiting to hear on the next steps with that. We are very keen to participate. We have had discussions with the regulator, but there are no details available as yet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry for my ignorance, but when you say it's a higher education degree through the manufacturing centres, will it be at bachelor level or is there somewhere in between?

STEPHEN BRADY: I think it's a bachelor's, isn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry if I sound silly. I may well do. I'm just trying to understand where the differential is.

STEPHEN BRADY: A normal apprenticeship is a cert III or cert IV. What we are actually talking about is stepping up beyond that into the bachelor's realm. I might ask Dr McNeill to talk about that in particular but also a little bit about our work with the regulators around self-accreditation.

MARGOT McNEILL: Certainly. The higher apprenticeship program that was just mentioned is actually AQF level 6, which is an advanced diploma. We have a view to extending that up to AQF level 7, which is a typical bachelor's degree level. The way it has been designed is a really innovative mix of typical vocational education units, if you like, and higher education units. The students, for example, with our industry partners—they acknowledge that there are typical trade programs that learners can go through. Sometimes they need a merge of a couple of typical trades and some skills like leadership skills or digital skills that we've moved across from our existing higher ed programs. That's an innovative program because it combines those types of units that aren't usually pooled together in a vocational qualification. That's currently with TEQSA at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that the first time you will be doing that through TAFE as well?

MARGOT McNEILL: Yes, it is. We're piloting that with TEQSA because we've used our higher education accreditation processes. We've had about 30 qualifications, either accredited or re-accredited in our higher education programs, over the past couple of years. That's very well documented as a respected process. They have all been there for seven years with no conditions, which is as good as you can possibly get in that context. The other thing that we have done is we are working on our self-accrediting authority for a range of four fields of education for our higher education component of TAFE NSW, and then we've mapped the two sets of standards. In the vocational education space at the moment there are draft standards which all RTOs, or registered training organisations, are required to meet. We're working closely with ASQA to document how we would act

as a self-accrediting authority in the two different regulatory environments. That's the work that we're currently undergoing. We're submitting our self-accrediting authority with TEQSA for our higher education programs in December, if all goes well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might ask you about it when we're back here next year, but it sounds very interesting. All the best; I hope it goes well. Do you envisage that there could be the potential to expand that even further in the future if it's successful with those three centres?

MARGOT McNEILL: Yes. To the point about them being priority skills areas, for example, in the centres of excellence we know that that model of combining units that aren't typically—if I take the Committee back to the structure of existing VET qualifications, they take a long time to be developed. Really, there's about a five-year process of designing what the qualifications are going to be like. In some cases, we need to be able to move much more quickly than that to do things like build students' digital fluency.

STEPHEN BRADY: There's also an intersection with the qualifications reform work that's happening at the Commonwealth level, which Dr McNeill is involved with. If you think about something like electrotechnology, it's heavily licensed and heavily regulated. It's unlikely that we would want to be self-accrediting in something like that because it's a national qualification and it's nationally limited by the real safety issues involved. But there are other types of qualifications in the VET space which really go more to capabilities rather than a single job outcome. The ability to have self-accrediting in that space gives us a lot more flexibility about how we bridge people across different types of job categories and give them capabilities and better recognition of prior learning as well. There are some really interesting developments happening at the Commonwealth level. If we combine those with a self-accrediting authority, it will give us a lot more flexibility and agility to be able to respond to changes in industry.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, in terms of infrastructure funding—I know we mentioned this in relation to the Gosford TAFE campus—I wonder if we might be able to get a breakdown of the \$190 million allocated for repairs at TAFE campuses. Which specific campuses will receive the funding and how much will that be?

STEPHEN BRADY: Just give me one moment. We've got the Asset Renewal Program. That's \$90 million.

PATRICK WOODS: Yes, it is. I'm not sure where the \$190 million comes from, I'm sorry.

STEPHEN BRADY: Why don't we talk about the Asset Renewal Program, which is \$90 million? It's really looking at a whole range of different repairs, maintenance or replacements that need to occur across our facilities. For instance, it's looking at roof replacements across 10 campuses; replacement of noncompliant electrical distribution boards across 14 campuses; fire system replacements focusing on high-risk noncompliant areas; we're looking at HVAC, or heating, ventilation and cooling systems, that are at end of life; we're looking at remediation of potential safety issues, including retaining walls, trip hazards, footpaths and deteriorating building facades; but it also goes to the equipment we teach on, so things like lathes and other technical equipment, which we need to keep current.

We need to keep it current so we produce graduates who are job-ready in the modern environment but also to keep them safe. A couple of big issues there include replacing the aircraft cabin simulator at Kingscliff, which is estimated at \$500,000; we're replacing some milling machines at Tamworth, which is worth \$247,000; and we're replacing some hydraulic training equipment at Wollongong, which is estimated at \$220,000.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the \$90 million Asset Renewal Program, how many campuses fall under that?

STEPHEN BRADY: It covers a statewide program; it depends on where the need is greatest. We work across our infrastructure teams and with our teaching teams to prioritise where the greatest need is, and then we will roll out programs of work to deliver that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, in terms of the projected timeline for completing infrastructure upgrades at TAFE, how will the progress be monitored and reported on to ensure the timely completion—just in terms of what the process might be on that and the oversight of upgrades to campuses?

STEPHEN BRADY: On the program that I just outlined, last year we put in place some contracting arrangements which were multi-year. One of the things we've struggled with at TAFE NSW is single-year funding, which has been a problem for many years. By the time we're aware of what money we've got, we then have to do our design work and go to market, so you've lost four or five months for delivery. Last year we put in place a multi-year program, which allowed us to bring forward packages of work each year. We've got those packages of

work now; we're allocating those. The real incentive for us is that the Treasurer hates carry-forwards, so our incentive is to get all that delivered well within the financial year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The asset renewal program is the \$90 million?

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: For this financial year?

STEPHEN BRADY: That's correct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, in terms of digital infrastructure upgrade, where would that sit in terms of the budget?

STEPHEN BRADY: There's what we call DAF, which is digital access foundations. That's a key program for us where we're rolling out a number of things. We're rolling out, particularly, a network upgrade. I think we mentioned earlier today that some of our networks date back to 2009. We've put in place some foundational things around—and I'm not a technical person—SD-WAN, which will benefit across all of our campuses, but then specific network upgrades in, particularly, a lot of our regional campuses. We had a program, which we commenced last year, which I believe was for 24 campuses. We've got a further—I'm looking at my CIO—80 campuses for this year. But then, of course, you need to have the equipment on the back to access those things as well, so it also goes to thousands of devices for teachers and students in order to be able to access that better digital connectivity.

It is a really important part of what we do because a lot of the students we support do not have access to great connectivity outside of a TAFE campus. They don't necessarily have home wi-fi. They don't necessarily have a computer at home. Being able to come onto our campus, access good wi-fi and access a laptop is critical to them to be able to complete their courses, and it's part of an ongoing program we have to improve that access. We've rolled out a very significant number of devices over the last two years. This year we'll further do that to bring the equipment that we have available to both teachers and staff up to date. Of course, most of this sort of equipment has a lifespan of three to four years, so once we actually catch up we then have to maintain that level of investment. It's also things like overhead projectors, and all those sort of things that are technology-based, that we need to make sure that we're investing in so that our teachers have the right tools to support our students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask about two semi-recent announcements—in July, so we'll say recent announcements—from the Government. One of them was about the animal care facilities at Kurri Kurri, I think, getting an upgrade. In another committee that I'm on we did an inquiry into vet shortages but also the importance of veterinary nurses and making sure you have facilities and enough places available. Does anyone have any details in terms of that particular upgrade and what it's expected to deliver?

STEPHEN BRADY: I believe that's at Wyong. I was there a couple of weeks ago and the building is well and truly under construction. I think it's nearing completion, in fact; it's not terribly far away. It will provide some standard classrooms but, most importantly, it will provide the sort of technical specialised spaces for vet nursing and vet nursing support. Mr Woods might have some more detail on that facility.

PATRICK WOODS: Not specifically, other than to say you asked the question as to whether it's going to provide the spaces necessary. Everything that we're hearing at the moment, based on the demand analysis and talking to the teachers and those that manage the schedule, would indicate that, yes, it is going to meet those demands. Having said that, should we get funding and should there be demand, we have the flexibility of being able to increase the capacity in a modular basis as we move forward in time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the offering of animal care courses more broadly across the State—and I'm happy if you need to take this on notice—how many campuses offer those courses currently?

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's all right. Could you maybe provide a list of where they're offered as well?

STEPHEN BRADY: Happy to. Also, out of some of this year's budget or over the forward estimates, we're enhancing our facility in the Northern Rivers, at Wollongbar, so there is money going in. We've also just completed, at Richmond, an upgrade of our vet space as well. It's been an area of focus for us.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also provide on notice how many students you currently have, or the capacity of how many? We're just interested. We've obviously made some recommendations in the inquiry around opportunities, and we'll wait for the Government response, but certainly the evidence that we heard

was that there's a very high demand in the market for professionals and the role that, particularly, the veterinary nurses can play to assist vets as well.

STEPHEN BRADY: I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just interested in that space in general, but if you can provide it on notice that's fine. In terms of new courses generally, obviously we've spoken about what you'll be doing at the manufacturing centres, but are there any other areas where new courses are underway? I know there's the Hydrogen Centre of Excellence that the Minister spoke about, which I think is being constructed at the moment or about to—

STEPHEN BRADY: That's not a TAFE facility.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's not TAFE?

STEPHEN BRADY: No, it's a plumbing industry facility.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry. The announcement talked about plumbers and gasfitters et cetera, but it's being done by industry. So there's no engagement or—

STEPHEN BRADY: No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there any other areas around technology or renewable energy, outside of the three centres, that TAFE is looking at to add or develop new courses in, I suppose, emerging markets?

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely. The Institute of Applied Technology – Digital is working closely with the major tech companies and with the University of Technology Sydney and Macquarie University to produce new courses. We've had over 115,000 enrolments in the two institutes of applied technology since they were established. They have an ongoing program of delivering new micro-credentials and micro-skills. In the renewable energy space, obviously that's an area of focus and rapid change and we've got a whole program of micro-credentials that we're rolling out. Some of those relate to things that you'd expect, around electric vehicles and safety for emergency responders, but also for teaching existing mechanics in industry to upgrade their skills so they're able to deal with electric vehicles; and also pieces of knowledge for people in industry in the energy space about photovoltaics, about hydrogen et cetera. We have a whole package of those sorts of programs. We also have one which we've developed which actually is more for school kids, which talks about the types of careers that are available in a green energy environment. There's a range of different courses, but perhaps Ms Schorer might provide more detail.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, thank you. There are probably two parts to reform around courses and what might be new. It connects to some of the work that Dr McNeill has been involved in and things that we've been doing within TAFE about how you make the more foundational courses that we deliver contemporary for the sorts of industry, whether that's working into renewables or different kinds of infrastructure, other sorts of projects—even in nursing. Nursing is quite a different qualification in terms of the technology that you need to utilise. How do we incorporate those very current and future-thinking skills into the foundational programs that we have? As well, as Mr Brady said, we have the opportunity, through micro-skilling and micro-credentialling—which is more rapid to market, if you like—to provide students along their journey with us with that level of upskilling but also meet some of those immediate industry demands that we need to respond to. We need to have both in step, I think.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Brady, you mentioned the EV vehicles maintenance-repair courses et cetera. Are they currently available through TAFE, or what's the time frame?

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are they designed as a micro-skills course to be done on top of or as part of another course? How does that work in practice?

STEPHEN BRADY: There are different types. Janet might fill in some detail here, but we are delivering courses for emergency responders so that they understand how to safely engage with an electric vehicle. That's one type of course. We have other courses for mechanics in industry. When I was at Tamworth, I was talking to the auto teachers. They'll do courses at night for mechanics in the area. Some of that they'll do online and some of them they'll do in the workshops. We're currently rolling that out statewide. Electric vehicles are becoming a larger and larger part of the fleet. They need to be able to support them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you want to add anything, Ms Schorer?

JANET SCHORER: Yes, just a couple of specific examples. We've got about \$5 million in a Federal grant to enable us to deliver the Wetherill Park electric vehicle training centre, as well as the Illawarra renewable

energy training facility. That's work that's ongoing. I think it's safe to say that if you go to many of our automated workshops now, there is less grease—it's still there—and there are certainly more computers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's better for washing, maybe—less Napisan.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's right—less Napisan. That means, in talking to some of our teachers and head teachers specifically in that discipline, young apprentices are having to learn much more how to work with computers. That's the skill they need today. What we need is the ability to tap them into what industry needs. That doesn't mean we're going to have all the equipment in every campus, because we wouldn't be able to keep pace with industry. But that partnership to be able to access what an apprentice or any student is going to be using in their workplaces is what we're about.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, can I touch on student support and financial assistance? How much funding has been allocated in the budget to provide financial assistance to TAFE students facing economic hardship?

MURAT DIZDAR: I might get Ms Read to comment on that.

CHLOE READ: I might start and then we'll see. Our funding relates to learners across a number of registered training organisations—not solely at TAFE. There are a couple of things that I would call out. The first would be the ongoing access to fee-free courses under fee-free apprenticeships and traineeships and also the fee-free TAFE program. There is also the Vocational Training Assistance Scheme, which provides support for apprentices who might be located a fair distance from where they need to travel to attend TAFE or training. That supports them with things like accommodation, petrol costs and those kinds of things.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Read, are there specific forms of financial assistance in the form of grants, subsidies or scholarships?

CHLOE READ: There are some scholarships. There are the Bert Evans Apprentice Scholarships—Mr Pearson is going to help me with the numbers and amounts. We also have a set of scholarships called the Elsa Dixon scholarships for Aboriginal students. I know that we've increased the number of those scholarships year on year for the past four years or so. Mr Pearson, do you have any information?

MATHEW PEARSON: I think it's 150 for the Bert Evans scholarships and I would just have to have a look for the Elsa Dixon scholarships.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is that 150 scholarships?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

MATHEW PEARSON: For the Elsa Dixon scholarships, as at 30 May 2024, we had approved 313 positions across New South Wales.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the distribution of the relevant scholarships, how is that managed to ensure it's for students most in need? What is some of the process around that?

MATHEW PEARSON: The Bert Evans scholarship is an application program. In terms of the Elsa Dixon scholarship, because it's actually working with government departments, it's applied for through them and then they manage the process of selecting candidates.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of student support services, what portion of the budget is allocated to enhanced student support services for TAFE students such as mental health, career counselling and academic support?

CHLOE READ: I will pass that one to Mr Brady because he has a broad budget and some latitude on where he applies those things.

STEPHEN BRADY: There is a range of supports provided for students. We have a student support area where they are supported through identifying what they would like to learn and whether that is suitable for them, helping them through their enrolment process. We also have a range of counsellors and educational support officers, some of whom help around the academic side if they are struggling. We have got LLN teachers who help with literacy and numeracy as well. There is a surprising amount of maths, for instance, in the electrotechnology course and apprenticeship. It is about assisting those learners, identifying very early when they might have an academic challenge and providing that extra support to them.

In terms of other types of support, we have significant wraparound support for students with disability. One of the really important parts of that is disability teacher consultants. We have 84 of those around the State. They provide an assessment of educational needs for a student with disability and then look at the orientation,

access and mobility needs and make sure they are met across different delivery modes and environments, including face-to-face, distance and online learning. They then work with the teachers to advise them on the needs of the students and ensure that the teaching teams are in a position to support those learners through teaching methods, assessments, examinations and curriculum delivery modifications. It also goes to the materials themselves and the way they are assessed. It includes things like the ability to change the pace of delivery and the pace of assessment.

There is a whole range of supports that go towards those disability teacher consultants. I think I would have to come back on notice in terms of budget breakdowns for the support services, but they are quite extensive from the point that a student is trying to work out which course they would like to engage with, right through, as I said earlier, to supports for their mental health and their physical disabilities as well—whatever they need to help try to get them through.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the effectiveness of the support services to students, are there any measurements?

STEPHEN BRADY: One thing that we are doing is looking at our courses and developing what we are calling a course canvas. We are measuring the progress of students through the delivery of the course, particularly when they might be starting to drop out. We are using that as part of a continuous improvement process in order to make sure that we are providing the right levels of support in the right places. It is things like students might be starting the course with a really hard unit. If they have a bad experience, they don't continue, whereas, if we can build student confidence through some of the easier units to complete, then when they reach those harder units, they've got the confidence to push through. We're using that in more of a continuous improvement way.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to come back to Mr Tidball. Before the lunchtime break we were talking about the temporary to permanent conversions for staff. I have a couple more questions I want to follow up on in terms of what criteria was used to determine which of those casual teachers were converted to a permanent position. I think you said it was 540 in the first cohort. I'm just curious about how you are identifying who is offered those permanent positions. Could you provide a bit more information about that? I am happy for either of you to answer.

JULIE TICKLE: The first target we set was 500 teachers. That included 400 existing part-time casual teachers becoming permanent and 100 new teachers. We exceeded that target and we have put 540 teachers on permanently. What we did with the part-time casual cohort was that they actually did a streamlined recruitment process to be selected into those roles. Many of those people have been working with us for a number of years, so we put them through a streamlined recruitment process in areas where we needed them. Only internal people applied and it was limited to those part-time casual teachers. That's how we did that first cohort. The second lot that I was talking about that we have now received initiations from are actually part of the Closing Loopholes legislation, which came into effect on 26 August. That Federal legislation resets the definition of what a casual employee actually is. We've got a number of people who have initiated the process and we're currently going through and reviewing their eligibility against permanent conversion. If they meet the eligibility criteria, they'll be converted. That legislation has six months to be implemented, so we'll have it implemented by term one next year.

STEPHEN BRADY: And the criteria is set out in the legislation for those conversions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data—and I'm happy if you need to take it on notice—in terms of your overall numbers of teachers? I'm particularly interested in numbers that are permanent, permanent part time and then casual. If you've got it now, great. If not, you can provide it.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, we do. I'll provide you full-time equivalent, or FTE, numbers. Our total staffing number has gone up 8.4 per cent for FY 24, which is a 907 increase in FTE. Total number of teachers—6,299 FTE, so a 5.1 per cent increase, or 307 teachers. In terms of the breakdown of teachers, for 2024, FTE permanent full-time teachers were 3,436; permanent part-time teachers, 202; temporary full-time teachers, 331; temporary part-time teachers, 53; and part-time casual teachers, 2,278.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, this is just using my knowledge of people I know who have taught at TAFE over the years. Obviously there's a role for permanent positions, but are there some people who will come and they might have another job, but they come and they do—

JULIE TICKLE: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're always probably going to have a part-time or casual contingent just because of the nature of the offerings and the way that courses are running.

JULIE TICKLE: Absolutely. I was a casual teacher myself for 10 years, and that was by choice. We have many teachers who, for a number of reasons, wish to remain casual. In fact, the Federal legislation, the

Closing Loopholes legislation—the teachers actually request to be converted. We've got a number of our part-time casual teachers who have not requested conversion because they don't wish to be permanent.

STEPHEN BRADY: They're more than likely still working in the industry, which is great for us because it means they're absolutely industry current and they're coming and passing on that knowledge to students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, there are benefits both ways for that, I would imagine. In terms of professional development opportunities for your teachers, how does that work in terms of upskilling? I know we talked about EVs and renewable energy. How do you ensure that your teachers have got the most up-to-date professional development and skills that they need for their day-to-day work? What does that look like?

STEPHEN BRADY: Under our regulations, we are required to ensure that all of our teachers are current with industry practice. We have them record a diary of the work that they do to maintain that currency. That could be a combination of going and working in an industry, attending seminars in their chosen field—a whole of range of different things go towards it. There are professional development courses that we run for our teachers. We ran actually a whole festival of teaching and learning this year, where we had I think about 3,000 teachers attend online through a range of different programs. So there are things we run internally and things that they will do themselves in industry or with professional associations. They record those in a diary, and that then helps us to provide the evidence to our regulator that our teachers are maintaining their currency.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just mentioned online. Particularly for the teachers in more regional, rural and remote locations, to ensure that they can have access to that same sort of professional development, are there particular opportunities that you offer?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, certainly. I love talking about this. We offer a lot of professional development opportunities. Our teachers are double hatted. As Mr Brady said, they need to be current in their industry area, but they also need to be current and competent in the practice of teaching and learning. We offer both of those opportunities for our teachers. The Festival of Learning and Teaching was something that we trialled with great success this year. In fact, we're going to have a further follow-up for that in term 4, because it was so well attended. That provided teachers with the opportunity to put their hand up for—there were lots and lots on offer, so it was a little bit like a "choose your own adventure", and they actually went to things that they wanted to do.

In terms of regional and remote, we do it a number of ways. We have a staff Moodle, or on our intranet we have a capability central portal, where everything that we have on offer is listed and teachers can apply through an EOI to do it or put their hand up to do it. We use a variety of modes. Some of it is self-paced learning; some of it is hybrid learning. We have people conducting the sessions online or face to face. A lot of our teachers actually support each other with professional development. That's actually one of the advantages of our new proposed faculty model, because by going to a statewide faculty, if I'm a hairdressing teacher in Gunnedah, I'm getting the same access to professional development as a hairdressing teacher in Ultimo, for example. We certainly have a lot of different things that we do.

We also put a big focus on wellbeing at TAFE NSW. Every September for the last four years, we've had a two-day hack-a-thon around R U OK? Day. All of our teachers and all of our support employees can participate in that. Quite a lot of our teachers actually run sessions—for example, our fitness teachers run fitness sessions, and some of our TAFE counsellors do sessions on wellbeing and mindfulness. There's just a whole range of things that we offer. We change them based on what's happening, too. Cybersecurity, for example, has been a focus. Psychosocial, of course, has been a focus with the new legislation. It just depends in terms of what the teachers want and what is happening in the sector. That's how we make the offerings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Presumably, as you just said, with the new faculty model, you would envisage even more linkages between staff right across the State when they can work more closely with cohorts.

JULIE TICKLE: Absolutely.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think one of the great advantages of the faculty model is our ability to identify best practice and have that peer taught across the State, alongside our ability to have a really strong direct engagement with industry so we can actually bring in industry experts to work with us statewide rather than having to try to do that region by region, which is almost impossible.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to do something that's not on our list so I'm just going to go freewheeling here. I want to come back to the VET review. I don't know who's best placed to answer these. I appreciate the Minister said earlier that obviously the Government's still considering them, but I wanted to ask about careers advice in schools. That was one of the recommendations that came through about strengthening the roles of careers advisers. I think Careers NSW is still operating. Is there any movement or work underway in terms of that careers advice in school and how it feeds into TAFE and higher education?

CHLOE READ: I might tackle that one a little bit. Obviously the review has some specific recommendations that relate to the careers advisers positions that we have in public schools, and seeking to strengthen those positions. We'll need to work with the Government on the response, and with the Deputy Premier on staffing and the positioning of that within schools. In the meantime, there's a range of ongoing professional learning and support that we're putting around careers advice in schools. We talked earlier about the bringing together of the schools pathways and careers support: pieces like having the head teacher of careers that exists in the educational pathways program—a really good way for us to be able to both give careers advisers a pathway, a different step in their career to become a head teacher of careers working across a network of schools, but also a way for us to try to expand some of that provision. The Minister has referenced this morning that, at the minute, we have some things in some places and not in others. What we really want to do is aim for statewide provision where we've got good support, good advice and good careers provisions across all of those schools. I'm definitely excited to take things to Government—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have no doubt you would.

CHLOE READ: —to seek a position on the recommendations. Certainly careers advice in schools is an incredibly valuable piece for parents as well as for the students in schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Tying into that, there are also recommendations around the school-based apprenticeships, but also the VET in secondary schools. I know that NESAs play a role in that, too. I appreciate that they're not here, but is there any more work happening—and I think I asked about it last week, too—in terms of increasing the number of VET offerings at schools in those senior secondary years and the changes to the HSC ATAR requirements with the VET courses? How are you seeing that play out from your perspective?

CHLOE READ: There are a few things there. One would be the answer that I think Mr Martin from NESAs gave on the review of stage six and where that fits in the curriculum rollout. I'm really interested—work already underway, I believe, between some of my teams and his on what the role of reviewing the VET frameworks that exist, largely for year 11 and 12, in schools is. Then I think the other piece is the ongoing kind of making sure we have teachers in training to become vocational education teachers within our schools. I stopped in to a training session a couple of weeks ago that they were running in Parramatta, where there were teachers doing visual arts. They said a whole bunch of kids who really want to do visual arts but who really don't come to the theory side of that well—there was one trained teacher in VET visual arts in the State and so, as a result of that training, there will be 13. We're trying to make sure that we continue to offer a really good range of vocational vision in schools and then, where we don't have that ability inside the school gates, turning to partnerships with TAFE to make sure that our EVET program also delivers those pieces.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously this is something we'll keep an eye on, because I do think there is, as you know, a lot of opportunity there, too. Hopefully it'll pan out well in terms of offering more opportunities and getting more students into those subjects.

MURAT DIZDAR: There is also the freeing up next year. For year 12 you can do as many VET subjects—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I think we talked about that last week.

MURAT DIZDAR: —and get the HSC.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think Mr Martin said we'd have some data on that maybe next time to see how it's tracking in terms of enrolments, because it's current year 11 students that that would apply to. I wanted to ask—again, it is in the report. I preface this by saying I know we haven't got the Government response yet. There is mention about strengthening provider capacity and particularly the role of Aboriginal community controlled organisations and RTOs—more support for interested ACCOs to become RTOs, to use a few acronyms. In your experience, Ms Read, are there any barriers at the moment? Where does that kind of recommendation come from in terms of the evidence base around needing a better pathway for those Aboriginal controlled organisations?

CHLOE READ: I think it comes from a few places. One would be it's really hard to become a registered training organisation. It's quite a complicated process. I'm not sure we think that is, in and of itself, a bad thing. We want registered training organisations to be strong and reliable organisations.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: High quality, yes.

CHLOE READ: But nonetheless I think it's also a little bit reflective of some of our discussions on closing the gap, both locally inside New South Wales with our partners but also at the national level—that there's a sense that part of really allowing Aboriginal people to understand the value of vocational education to improve

completions, to improve pathways from vocational education will be to have Aboriginal people delivering that training for other Aboriginal people. It ties in really well with the National Skills Agreement approach, which has that same emphasis on strengthening the Aboriginal controlled and owned sector and working really closely with the peak organisations there. Mr Pearson looks like he wants to say more.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He's very welcome to.

CHLOE READ: He's suddenly very energetic beside me. Before he does—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I feel bad for Mr El Khoury. We haven't had anything for him all day, but anyway we'll see how we go.

CHLOE READ: I would just say, the other thing we've done under our current Smart and Skilled program is the latest round of refreshing the panel of providers on that—increased the number of Aboriginal controlled and owned providers to 20. I think it was between eight and 12 before, over the past few years that I've been in this role. That's a really positive step for us and us doing some work across those providers to build a community of practice and/or to share experience and expertise. Mr Pearson, did you want to add something?

MATHEW PEARSON: I would just add, in terms of that ACCO-RTO piece, some part of it is actually just the ACCO sector piece as much as the RTO. This is a kind of issue not just around VET but more broadly, and so it's one of the Closing the Gap actions—is to support ACCOs in general. Part of what we're doing with that new cohort—we'll have 20 on the Smart and Skilled contract—is we've established a group to work with them collectively to understand how we can really tackle some of the specific issues that they face. That then feeds into the work that we're doing on the National Skills Agreement as well—engaging with the broader sector.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And presumably with an end goal of trying to have higher numbers of Aboriginal people undertaking the course. In terms of TAFE figures for Aboriginal students, do you have any data around that?

STEPHEN BRADY: We've got approximately 38,000 Aboriginal students at TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's that as a percentage of your students?

STEPHEN BRADY: We've got approximately 400,000 students, so just under 10 per cent. To the point that we want Aboriginal people supporting students, making sure they feel culturally safe on campus, we've got an Aboriginal employment team, which is really trying to drive greater Aboriginal representation in our workforce. We've been doing a lot of recruitment in teaching support roles to make sure that we've got that in place. We've got some quite significant work happening around our engagement through the organisation with our governance level. We've got Aboriginal senior leadership groups and we've got our Closing the Gap steering committee we're working with. We're working with local communities across government to try and improve the outcomes for our learners. As you know, it's a very complex question but the more Aboriginal staff we get within TAFE NSW, the better understanding and better support, so that's been a really key focus of Ms Tickle's, to try and strengthen that program. I think our team is up for an award this month, so we're making steps but there's more to do.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, in terms of transparency and accountability, what specific measures are in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of the budget funds for TAFE NSW?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Brady carries that accountability directly to the Minister and government, so he may want to comment on the budget. The Minister earlier spoke about the budget and how TAFE is in receipt of approximately 79 per cent of the entire Skills budget. There was an election commitment that that would be at least 70 per cent, so it's good that there is an increase on the TAFE budget. He gave the figures for the Skills budget.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, my question was around transparency and accountability, as opposed to budget numbers.

MURAT DIZDAR: Like all agencies—Mr Brady can comment on TAFE—there's an end-of-year financial process. The accounts are audited by the Auditor-General. Mr Brady can talk to their processes in place at TAFE.

STEPHEN BRADY: We're the same as other statutory authorities, where we receive our budget through the budget papers. We're audited by the Auditor-General. We produce an annual report, in which we provide as much information as we can about our performance. We report through to NCVER around our performance as part of the national dataset. Regular publications by that authority show our completion rates, for instance, and I'm very happy to say our completion rates are above the average nationally—above the average for all TAFEs.

There's a really quite dense dataset. What we are looking forward to, though, is the work that Ms Reid spoke about earlier about the national dataset and, coming through under the National Skills Agreement, how that's going to link through to the New South Wales skills plan. TAFE is a subset of that, so we can show how we're contributing through those layers to the achievement of the Government's priorities.

I think we've got a situation that the moment where some of the reporting is a bit fragmented, I'd probably say, but there's a move towards a more integrated system, which will show much clearer alignment. One thing is that achievement in VET tends to get simplified to completions. One point I would make is that a lot of our students achieve great outcomes without necessarily a completion in their course. That could be for a range of reasons. One is they only wanted a couple of pieces of knowledge out of that qualification; they didn't want the qualification. Another would be that they've achieved a level of confidence out of the course that has allowed them to go on to work. In some industry sectors, if you've started the course and you can go and do your job placement, you'll find you're employed before you get back to your TAFE campus, and so that's a great outcome in its own right. Some of the work we're doing now is to start to do more surveying with our students about what is their intention when they enter the course so we get a better measurement of what does success look like. But there's more work to do there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How much of the budget is allocated to stakeholder engagement activities to ensure the needs and feedback of students, teachers, industry partners and community groups are incorporated into TAFE NSW planning and delivery?

STEPHEN BRADY: Great question. As I was saying earlier, we're really shifting our operating model and the way we do our planning. One of the real drivers of that was to get a much stronger community engagement approach as well as stronger engagement with industry. Part of your answer is that it's embedded in the way we're changing the organisation. Part of standing up the new community area is to make sure we have a more fine-grained understanding of community requirements, so we're moving from very large regions—running from Gosford to the Queensland border was one region; from Orange to the South Australian border was another region—and encompassing lots of different economies. How would you get a handle on what communities actually need? We're moving towards more the 10 State planning boundaries, which will give us a much better understanding.

We've run what we're calling TAFE Connect, which was a series of community engagements. We did a statewide digital engagement. We have done 13 local community engagements across the State so far. That's going to be an ongoing program, meeting with community, understanding their requirements, understanding how we can better engage and support them. This area we're standing up as a new part of TAFE NSW will have an executive leadership member who will be on my executive, who will be there representing the interests of local communities and students to talk to their requirements. But it also feeds directly into our planning processes, so that we get that bottom-up community need informing what we're delivering where and how. In terms of those community engagements, we're not spending a gazillion dollars to do that. It's more the fact that we're building it into our business as usual. I think we spent something like \$40,000 across all those 13 engagements.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, you've touched on some of this in terms of TAFE Connect but in terms of specific mechanisms that will be used to gather and respond to stakeholder feedback—

STEPHEN BRADY: Firstly, there are the forums we are going to be running. We have dedicated leads in each of those regions who engage with the local community, whether that's local government, the local chamber of commerce or the school principals, who are always a key stakeholder in those communities as well, or large businesses in those areas, so making sure that information then comes back into our planning processes. We have a complaints mechanism, which is always an asset for any organisation to understand what's happening with our communities and with our students. We have different mechanisms for those two. My LinkedIn profile seems to be a great source of community feedback as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Brady, just as an example, when we're talking in the community—and just off the back of some of my questions this morning to the Minister about the construction sector—different builders and contractors would give us views and opinions and their experiences with apprentices and what they're seeing. You can imagine some of this is positive, some of this is constructive criticism. I'm wondering how those views are captured on the ground.

STEPHEN BRADY: We have industry forums that we work with regularly, that we meet with, get their feedback and incorporate that into the way we're delivering our classes. As I said earlier, we have our course canvases where we're looking at what's happening with student feedback as well as progressions. There are a range of different mechanisms.

CHLOE READ: I was going to add that the NCVER data collection that Mr Brady mentioned earlier also surveys employers, so there's employer satisfaction with vocational education in that survey. There's a place for both because you won't be able to tie the broad survey to specific regions or particular areas. Having both in place is a good mechanism.

STEPHEN BRADY: Of course our teachers are working closely with employers all the time and getting that feedback. Janet, have you got anything you would like to add?

JANET SCHORER: To reiterate, I think the housing industry is one example where there are big statewide multinational companies and then there are local developers and local businesses, and we need to connect with all that. In terms of a skills area that we have now in our Skills Excellence Network but that will become faculties, the heads of those faculties are very deeply involved with our industry innovation specialists in connecting where is the industry now and where do we need it to be with, as Mr Brady said, the intelligence that our teachers have from being on the ground, working with the businesses that our apprentices and other students are engaged with. How do they connect that together? Our teachers are a great source of that local business intelligence, and they're the ones who are managing those relationships day to day. Our ambition with the new operating model is to be able to harness much more of that insight that our teachers have and use that to inform how we engage and plan for a longer term future with our delivery.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Picking up from the questions just now, I know that Rachel asked earlier about particular financial support for students. I think I raised this last time we met as well. But specifically for rural and regional students who might have to travel and have accommodation and transport costs if the course for their local apprenticeship isn't offered in their town, is there any specific financial support for students in that circumstance, or do they need to apply for one of the other scholarships that was mentioned earlier?

CHLOE READ: There's the Vocational Training Assistance Scheme that I mentioned before that assists with, particularly, apprentices and trainees who might be located far from where they might need to go to study.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any more detail on that, on what's available?

MATHEW PEARSON: It provides financial assistance to apprentices or new entrant trainees when they're travelling more than a 120-kilometre round trip.

CHLOE READ: I think, from memory, that assistance can be things like travel and accommodation, as well as—

MATHEW PEARSON: Accommodation, yes. It's around \$9 million a year that we've been allocating.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if you live in Gunnedah and you go to Tamworth to do your course, however many days a month or however it works, is there a limit to what each student can get? I'm happy if you need to provide it on notice; I'm just curious, in real terms, what an average student can get under that program.

MATHEW PEARSON: We might take it on notice, just around the specifics.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I sort of asked about this last time. In terms of the consultation you have with stakeholders and employers, when you have larger cohorts or the potential to run a course in a rural community—rather than having to travel to Tamworth, Dubbo, Wagga or wherever—how do you do it? Is it the number of students? Is it facilities? Is it teachers? Is it a combination of the three? Have there been any since we last met where you've been able to offer more remote or more rural locations for some of those courses, rather than those major regional cities?

STEPHEN BRADY: It's not necessarily the case that all those courses are concentrated in the large centres. For instance, in Leeton, we've got a very strong electrotech delivery. That's why we talk about a network of campuses.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that because of industry or demand? Why Leeton? What's the history of that? I mean, it's great, but I'm just curious what makes certain campuses have that offering.

STEPHEN BRADY: I think it's the fact that we can't deliver everything everywhere. But it's not necessarily the case that we need to have a hub-and-spokes model; it's more about how we combine capability across campuses. Some of that might go to the fact that you've got a strong teacher in that location who's built up strong relationships with industry. You sort of build around that, and then they bring in other tradespeople to work with them and you build a level of depth within that teaching team. But Ms Schorer might have more.

JANET SCHORER: I'd certainly agree it's a combination. Some courses you definitely need the infrastructure in place in some form, but we do have our mobile training units that enable us to take a lot of the more bespoke equipment to places and for the teachers to utilise it there. It is also about enrolments.

Predominantly, in my view, the reason for not having small classes is it's not a great student experience. But there are certainly still things that we do with small numbers and the availability of teachers. Many of our teachers still travel large distances to be able to reach to students. But it's also where the industry is. I think part of us thinking differently about how we plan for delivery is—some of the time we deliver in many places because of history. I think us having a better sense and intuition as an organisation about where industry might need us enables us to keep step with that a little better.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was going to be my follow-up. Do you work with industry and employers about future projections as well? If you've got emerging projects coming on in certain areas, they might be able to foreshadow, "At the moment we've only got this many apprentices but, actually, in five years we think we'll have triple or quadruple that." How do you use that to plan so that it's not a chicken and egg where you're waiting for numbers but you might not get the numbers without the delivery of the course? How do you manage that?

JANET SCHORER: Industry has that insight about what they need in the future and then there is the, as we were talking about earlier, conversation about pre-vocational pathways. How do we prepare students, whether they're in school or in other parts of the community, to be ready for that learning? Not every student walks in and is able to successfully complete a cert IV straight up. How do we prepare for that? That's also what we have to plan for. The model we're moving towards as an organisation gives us much more of that insight and the ability to use that insight to plan over longer periods with industry.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And more flexibility, potentially.

JANET SCHORER: And more flexibility, exactly.

STEPHEN BRADY: I was going to say that, for that forward-looking planning approach we've been talking about, this is very much where it comes to bear—having that intelligence from local industry and business about what's coming up over the horizon. It takes time to be able to step up a capability. We need to be able to recruit someone from industry, train them to be a teacher, make sure we've got the facilities available and, if it requires specialist equipment, make sure that is in place. The more we can have that forward view of what industry needs, the better position we are in to be there when that's needed.

The other thing I'd say is, when you look at the interim report of the VET review, it talks a lot about local community. One thing we find is that trying to get a sufficient class size can be a challenge, and then getting the right teacher in the right place at the right time. One thing we're thinking very much about is how do we engage with community around a pattern of delivery? I've been to some of our campuses where we have taught business studies in that community because that's what the teacher can teach. They have taught everyone in town and there's no-one left to teach and there probably won't be anyone to teach for several years as a new generation comes through. We're starting to think about things like why wouldn't we teach it every two years? You can provide certainty to the community and you can make sure the teacher is there and you can deliver that. Thinking a little bit differently is not just about, "Let's put a course up and see how many enrol." Let's work with the community about what their needs are and then try and schedule things in a much more certain way so we give the community confidence that we are there for them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Read, this might be your space. In terms of the fee-free places, I'm wondering how many fee-free TAFE places have been allocated in the 2024-25 budget and how this would compare to the previous year.

CHLOE READ: The fee-free program has two tranches. The first tranche was 2023 and we enrolled 174,451 students and then tranche 2 runs from 2024 to 2026 inclusive. You asked about the 2024-25 financial year, but they don't really match the financial years. I think Mr Pearson is going to give me the actual—no, he's not. In tranche 2 there are 147,000 places across those three calendar years. To 30 June, we had already enrolled 44½ thousand students or just a bit over, so about a third.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The 2023 figure you gave me was, in terms of fee-free places, 174,451.

MATHEW PEARSON: Who enrolled.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That being for a 12-month period, 2023-24?

CHLOE READ: Yes, it's just the calendar year, 2023. Some of those students will, obviously, still be in training.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: And then, in terms of 2024 to 2026?

CHLOE READ: The agreement says we need to deliver at least—

MATHEW PEARSON: It's 147,000.

CHLOE READ: Yes, 147,400 places.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Over a three-year period?

MATHEW PEARSON: Yes, and the agreement actually asks that it is spread over the three years.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We've gone from 174,000 over one year to 147,000 over three years?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So there has been over one-third reduction?

CHLOE READ: Yes. The program is a Commonwealth election commitment, obviously jointly delivered with the States as we run the skills systems. They had significantly more investment that they wanted to put into that first year and then wanted to spread the remainder across the other three years to then align, I think, with the rest of the time frame of the skills agreement itself. So that's why it's stated that way.

MATHEW PEARSON: And there is a tranche three which was announced in the Commonwealth budget, which is for construction places. That's around 20,000 nationally. But that agreement is still in negotiation. That starts from 2025, over two years.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I appreciate, as you say, they are Federally funded, but just in terms of the availability and how they're managed, what measures are in place to ensure that these fee-free places are accessible to students across all regions of New South Wales, including rural and remote areas?

MATHEW PEARSON: In terms of the availability they're tied, effectively, to the allocations that our providers have for the subsidies, and those subsidies are then actually distributed across New South Wales, so we fund by different regions. Effectively, 50 per cent of our subsidies go outside of the Sydney metro area, so that does give us that spread. We also, obviously, have a distinct allocation that goes to TAFE NSW compared to the rest of the non-TAFE market.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are those fee-free places tied to a specific area of study?

CHLOE READ: There is a course list, which is similar to how other programs that we've run like this operate. There is significant enrolment across priority areas, so care and support, technology and digital, construction and agriculture all feature heavily in terms of the course profile.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Can you provide a demographic breakdown of the students who have enrolled in fee-free TAFE places so far?

CHLOE READ: Perhaps we could. Mr Brady, do you have one for your enrolments?

STEPHEN BRADY: I think we'll have to take it on notice.

CHLOE READ: Yes, I think we might take that on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Given the anticipated high demand for fee-free places, what steps have been taken to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet student demand? Have we had that experience?

MATHEW PEARSON: Do you mean in terms of having enough providers there to deliver those places?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes.

MATHEW PEARSON: Probably we've got the opposite difficulty, which is there are really not enough places to go around for that student demand, particularly with the second tranche, which is obviously a much smaller number over a longer period.

CHLOE READ: And most of them, as we've said, are with TAFE. TAFE, obviously, have the capacity to deliver, I would assume, more than they are currently allocated.

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right. If you have any left over, we're willing to take them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of what strategies are in place to manage a situation like this, is there a waitlist for high-demand fee-free courses?

CHLOE READ: I'm not sure. Do you guys run a waitlist?

JANET SCHORER: No. In general terms, we have a fairly technical process to determine the availability for fee-free places and once that allocation is exhausted they move to fee-paying courses. Obviously, the course is still available but we alert students that they are now a fee-paying student, and that might determine their choice.

The other part of that is, obviously, trying to process students who don't wish to take up that place quickly so that we can offer it to another student who may have been fee paying. It means a fair bit of volatility in processing that, but we want to make those places available to as many students as we can.

CHLOE READ: I'll just flag that there are other fee-free places on offer that are not part of that Commonwealth scheme. We mentioned before that apprenticeships and traineeships in New South Wales are currently fee free, and if you enrol under one of our Smart and Skilled places, certain people will either get a fee benefit or it will be fee free. So Aboriginal people, students with a disability and veterans, I think—there's a list of people who are eligible already for fee-free support under Smart and Skilled.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want to go back very quickly—I know you took it on notice, Mr Pearson—to the support that's available for students with accommodation and travel costs. Could you also, either now or on notice, provide information as to whether it's available for students of cross-border communities—if you live in one area but come across, or vice versa? I don't know how that works.

MATHEW PEARSON: I would be happy to take it on notice, but I would assume most of our cross borders are Albury-Wodonga-type situations around the border. I would think that most people would qualify, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

CHLOE READ: They wouldn't incur the distance requirement probably.

MATHEW PEARSON: That's right, exactly—the 120 kilometres. But I'm happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good because there may be some potentially where they do. Anyway, I'm interested if there is any information on that. Can I just go to the general enrolment trends and numbers across TAFE. I know we spoke about this last time as well but, so far this year, how are the enrolments tracking and is it on par with previous years? What are the numbers like?

STEPHEN BRADY: We've just had the discussion around the fact that the second tranche of fee-free TAFE was lower and spread over a longer period, so obviously that flows through into our general enrolment numbers as well, given that we were doing over 70 per cent of our program fee free. Our enrolments for 2023 were just over 400,000, which is pretty much where it was pre-COVID, but it's down a little bit from the peak in 2020 when we had all the COVID stimulus with the responsible service of alcohol and all that. They are very short courses, but they count as an enrolment, the same as a four-year course does. We had a peak of 468,000 enrolments. But, as I say, you're comparing apples with oranges. Certainly a lot of the courses we delivered through fee free were more certificate III or certificate IV courses, which were much more substantial pieces of delivery. We would say that we've had very strong involvement.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm also particularly interested in regional areas as well. What are you seeing with student numbers there in terms of trends?

STEPHEN BRADY: I don't actually have that data with me.

JANET SCHORER: No, I don't. We can provide what we can on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you can provide on notice a bit of a breakdown of the students and where they are based.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, of course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The issues around equity and accessibility—I know we spoke before about Aboriginal students, but we've done an inquiry recently, as the Chair mentioned, into access for young people with disability in terms of educational settings. What is offered or available to assist any students with disability? Do you have a breakdown of the numbers of students who fit that cohort?

STEPHEN BRADY: For TAFE?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, for TAFE.

STEPHEN BRADY: Certainly. Disability is about 45,000 students, so about 12 per cent of our population. As I mentioned earlier, we've got a significant support network for our disabled students. We have the disability teacher consultants. We've got 84 of those statewide. They play a really crucial role in making sure we're complying with disability standards and actively promoting access to our courses. They work really closely with our teaching teams. All the consultations are confidential with the learner, and then they go and work with the teaching teams to make sure that we've got all of the support necessary. We offer a whole range of adjustments, whether that's note-takers, specific technologies for reading or hearing, and we support them with the teachers taking into account their disability in the way they run the classes as well.

The assistive technology—we also provide disability awareness training for our teaching staff. We negotiate and review reasonable adjustments within their individual education plans, which is what I was saying about the way that teaching is delivered. But there are also some changes for disability access courses: courses specifically tailored to provide a slower pace and more repetition of learning, where that's the suitable support for the learner—things like one-to-one tutorials. There is a whole range of supports, but that disability teacher support consultant helps to design the program around the individual learner.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's one of the 84?

STEPHEN BRADY: That's right. They are available either on campus or via phone. Appointments get made and they follow up. They work with the teaching teams to make sure that the plan that has been designed with the learner is then implemented in practice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And that plan would obviously include any of the adjustments that you were speaking about in terms of that?

STEPHEN BRADY: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any capital money for disability upgrades or access requirements on your campuses? How do you manage that?

STEPHEN BRADY: We do that through our general maintenance programs. I mentioned earlier we've got an access advisory group which has a really key input into what sorts of changes on campuses we need. One of the things I spoke about with the asset renewal program was lift changes. Lifts, ramps, making sure we're checking the trip hazards—things that we can do to support those learners. But we are working in a campus environment where we've got a really long backlog of maintenance. So we're making the changes. We prioritise those within our maintenance programs, but we've got old infrastructure—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's ongoing work.

STEPHEN BRADY: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think that is our time.

The CHAIR: It is. You have done very well to fill it all, and our witnesses have done very well to answer it all. Thank you so much for your time. To the extent that there have been questions taken on notice, or there will be supplementary questions, the Committee secretariat will be in touch to discuss that. Does the Government have any questions?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: No, we're all good.

The CHAIR: That brings us to the end of the day. Thank you very much.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.