

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2002–03 budget estimates

Melbourne – 20 June 2002

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Ms L. Kosky, Minister for Education and Training;
Ms M. Gould, Minister for Education Services;
Mr S. Hamilton, Secretary; and
Mr M. White, Director of School Education, Department of Education and Training.

The CHAIRMAN — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings on the budget estimates for the portfolios of education and training and education services. I welcome the Honourable Lynne Kosky, Minister for Education and Training; the Honourable Monica Gould, Minister for Education Services; Mr Stuart Hamilton, Secretary of the Department of Education and Training; Mr Michael White, the director of school education; other departmental officers; and members of the public and the media.

We have apologies from committee members, the Deputy Chairman, Roger Hallam, Susan Davies and Theo Theophanous. All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcripts early next week. Before I call on the ministers to give a brief presentation on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolios of education and training, and education services, I ask all people present to ensure that their mobile telephones are turned off.

I invite the ministers to make a brief presentation to the committee should they wish to do so.

Ms KOSKY — Thank you, Mr Chairman. My ministerial colleague and I will share in the presentation, and we will try to keep it as brief as possible, understanding that it covers all of the education and training portfolio.

I want to provide a brief overview. As a start I thought it might be worth reiterating our respective responsibilities as ministers. My responsibilities are overall responsibility for the education and training portfolio, including strategic directions, budget management, service delivery and program implementation within school education, training and further education, higher education, and adult community education, with the exception of those areas that are the specific responsibility of my ministerial colleague.

Ms GOULD — My responsibilities with respect to education are teacher work force planning and recruitment; teacher registration and standards, including the Victorian Institute of Teaching; implementation of agreed capital programs, including buildings, equipment and information and communications technology (ICT); asset maintenance and security; and student welfare, including disability and impairment strategies, student transport and other services for students at risk.

Slides shown.

Ms KOSKY — We would like to outline the investment the Bracks government has made in this portfolio in recent years, the progress that has been made and the challenges that we believe lie ahead, and how we are meeting those challenges. In setting the scene, we all know the importance of knowledge and skills in a global innovation economy and, certainly for Victoria, it is very clear that we do need to ensure that our education and training systems are of the highest order, and that they deal with the competitive nature of the economy and ensuring we have the skills and education required not only for current needs but also for future and emerging needs.

The Growing Victoria Together framework outlines the government's vision and strategy for transforming Victoria into a successful competitor in the innovation economy. A core part of the strategy is a focus on education, training and skills development. We certainly believe that education and training are our strongest competitive strength in terms of meeting the needs of both the global economy but also ensuring that we have an innovation economy here in Victoria. That means building a system with more innovation, with excellence and with access for all students, and which meets higher standards of quality in terms of teaching and learning. That is why we have committed ourselves to identifiable goals and targets for education and training so that we can be judged by the way we meet those goals and targets, but also so that our focus within education and training is on the achievement of those goals and targets.

I will very quickly restate those goals and targets. The five goals are: to improve the standards for literacy and numeracy in primary schools, to increase the percentage of young people who complete year 12 or its equivalent, to increase adult participation in education and training and hence the overall level of educational attainment in literacy levels in Victoria, to increase the level of participation and achievement in education and training in rural and regional Victoria and among groups where it is presently low, and to make near-universal participation in post-compulsory education and training the norm in our society. The targets by which the government will measure progress against the goals are: by 2005 Victoria will be at or above the national benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy as they apply to primary students; by 2010 90 per cent of young people in Victoria will

complete year 12 or its equivalent, and by 2005 young people aged 15 to 19 years in rural and regional Victoria engaged in education and training will increase by 6 per cent.

As you can see by this table, Victoria has made significant investment in education and training. We have set about rebuilding Victoria's education and training sectors. We have initiated wide-ranging reforms to revitalise learning, to encourage greater access and deliver better outcomes, and we have targeted funding at reviving both vocational education and training and putting in place the recommendations from the reviews that we conducted early on in government. We are now in the process of putting those reforms in place and have made sure that the funding is there to do that.

So in total since we have come to office we have put an additional \$2.75 billion into education and training sectors. We have allocated \$822 million of that funding to TAFE and capital school improvements. To put that in context, it is more than double the \$333 million allocated in the last three years of the previous Kennett government, so we have made a substantially significant investment in capital in schools and training facilities. We have also funded innovative approaches to increasing access, participation and excellence in education and training.

I will give some key data from the education and training budget. Members will notice that the output measures show that government school education is \$4.12 billion, which is part of the school education output; non-government school education is \$283 million; and services to students with disabilities and impairment, \$258 million. The second major service delivery area is TAFE places, with an expected 2002–03 output cost of \$955 million dollars and ACE places at \$35 million.

We as a government contribute \$5.37 billion to the delivery of education and training through the department, and the commonwealth government contributes \$1.47 billion to the delivery of education and training through the Department of Education and Training, so as you can see in those figures the Victorian government is really by far the major investor in education and training within the state.

I will give some figures to do with the profile of the education and training sector. The number of government schools is now 1625; the total number of students in government schools, 536 562; student contact hours of training rose in 2001 to 103.9 million — an increase of 7.6 million over the previous year, so the student contact hours in training are increasing as well. The total number of TAFE and ACE module enrolments has reduced to 2.64 million, and we now have 123 658 apprentices and trainees in training. That is a record not only for Victoria but across Australia, and it continues to grow in Victoria.

This government made a major investment in education in the 2002–03 budget — an additional investment that will include funding for up to 925 new teachers in our schools throughout Victoria and new capital works in schools and TAFE institutes of over \$216 million. It contains initiatives aimed at improving literacy and numeracy standards that include reaching our target for class sizes of an average of 21 from prep to year 2. It includes new programs aimed at developing innovative ways to keep students in the middle years engaged in education, and it also provides for the statewide expansion of the Victorian certificate of applied learning in the senior years. It provides funding for improving participation and educational standards and opportunities among indigenous students and also provides new and better facilities for our schools and TAFE institutes.

I will list some of the budget initiatives for the early years. For the numeracy program \$34.6 million is allocated in the budget to ensure that all of our primary schools will now have essentially the equivalent of a 0.5 position focused on coordinating the numeracy program in the early years of primary schooling and to assist our commitment to reduce the average class sizes of prep to year 2 students to 21. The funding in this most recent budget will enable us to reach this target because we had higher than expected enrolments. The graph shows how we are proceeding in meeting our commitment to prep to year 2 average class sizes of 21. As I said, higher than expected enrolments have resulted in the actual result for 2002 being 21.8, but with the additional funding we are absolutely confident that we will meet the target of 21 in 2003.

Included in the other budget initiatives is a middle years reform and innovation program, Schools for Innovation and Excellence, \$84.3 million over all our secondary schools in conjunction with their primary feeders over a three-year period, which will really allow them to develop innovative and creative curriculum and organisational responses to make sure that we more actively engage students in those very important middle years.

Restart, an initiative that commenced at the beginning of this year, provides additional funding for 100 extra qualified teachers to be employed in 100 schools with high proportions of at-risk year 7 students, particularly focused around improving literacy levels. Access to Excellence — \$81.6 million is targeted at those schools which, due to their location, their economic profile or some other factors are finding it harder than other schools to assist

the government in achieving the goals and targets it has set, so we are putting additional teachers into those schools. Around 100 to 125 schools will benefit from those 300 additional teachers.

Post-compulsory schooling — with the Victorian certificate of applied learning, which was trialled this year in 20 schools including five Catholic schools and two TAFE institutes, we are seeing some terrific results already. We are currently concluding the evaluation and looking to, over the next couple of years, rolling that out to all schools across the state and also to TAFE institutes.

In relation to Koori education, last year the Yalca document was launched — an agreement between the Koori people involved in education and training for the Koori community and the government to develop a partnership to deliver on education for the Koori community. This budget provided for 15 Koori educators and 6 home liaison officers, focused again on improving literacy and numeracy standards in the Koori population, particularly for school-aged students.

In other budget initiatives there is additional funding for sporting equipment and library resources of \$10 million — \$5 million for each. That has been distributed to every Victorian government school this year. In addition, in this budget we announced just over \$3 million to stage the 2005 Pacific School Games, which will have 3000 competitors from more than 30 countries. While it is not part of the budget allocation within this portfolio we also put \$9.2 million into the budget to improve and develop Victoria's design capabilities, an initiative in which our TAFE institutes will play a vital role.

Monica will now talk about her areas of portfolio responsibilities. She will talk about assets as well, even though we both have a responsibility for that.

Ms GOULD — One of the major improvements in this budget was the free school bus service, which is an important part of ensuring children in rural and regional areas can access education services they need. Following a review of the school bus services the government will increase funding over the next four years. Some of the new features of this initiative include a new variable scale for private transport where free bus services are not available. Also included are greater access to spare seats for VCE students undertaking approved courses not available to their closest school; establishing a special allowance for deaf and blind students; improving reimbursement arrangements for non-government school students and allowing access to free bus services for students within the 4.8-kilometre rule in some circumstances.

The question of the challenges that are out there for teacher recruitment: we know that it is difficult and we have been experiencing the difficulty of recruitment of teachers in some geographic locations and to teach some curriculum areas. Broadly, the total number of teacher graduates is insufficient to meet the demands for our new teacher employment. We have a three-pronged attack with which we hope to address this issue by providing competitive salaries and working conditions, raising the status of the teaching profession and providing recruitment and development opportunities.

The key elements of this approach include the Victorian Institute of Teaching, and that has been established at a cost of \$1.7 million as an independent statutory body responsible for professional advocacy, professional learning and professional standards; and teacher recruitment, including the teacher scholarships, which will support high-quality students to become qualified teachers to teach in Victorian government schools. We have in place a number of other teacher recruitment strategies and are considering extending the range of options that are available.

With respect to information and communication technology, the high-quality learning and training environments need appropriate equitable access to information and communication through technology. This is the key to ensuring that schools and TAFE institutes provide students with the skills and knowledge required for Victorians to be competitive in global knowledge.

Today I want to focus on three areas within information and communication technology. The Notebooks for Teachers and Principals program, the government's program of providing notebook computers to teachers, has been progressing extremely well. For example, in the first two years of the program, skills related to in-class use have increased from 51 per cent to 84 per cent for principals and teachers, in the use of computers.

Bridging the Digital Divide — Computer to Student ratio — this program for modernising the ICT in secondary school programs supplied about 21 000 computers in schools. The state average computer-to-student ratio is presently 1:4, which is the best in Australia, if not the best in the world.

Enhanced Learning Environments in Schools and TAFE — \$9 million has already been spent on e-learning centres in secondary schools and \$11 million has gone directly to schools for building modifications and network changes. The first year of a three-year program costing \$19 million to dramatically overhaul the ICT infrastructure in Victoria's TAFE institutions has been completed and this will enhance network access. That is an important area.

With respect to the budget outcome assets, since 1999 the government has committed \$822 million to modernising schools and TAFE institutions. Our investment of over \$216 million over the next three years on capital works will include funding of \$141 million to modernise 110 government schools to create enhanced learning environments — which includes \$52.1 million from the Growing Victoria fund — \$44.3 million for construction of new schools and major redevelopments, \$7.5 million for rebuilding projects and \$16.7 million for four TAFE projects.

With respect to education and training asset investment, about \$70 million or one-third of the 2002–03 asset investment program has been earmarked for rural and regional Victoria. This demonstrates the government's commitment to investing in the future for all Victorians.

Ms KOSKY — In terms of measuring how we are going against our targets, the current statistics that are available show that we are having significant improvements in meeting national benchmarks in relation to literacy and numeracy. Ninety-three per cent of year 3 students are meeting national benchmarks in literacy and 96.5 per cent in numeracy. This is an improvement from just two years ago when 89 per cent were meeting benchmarks in literacy. But I should stress here that it is the trend data that is important, rather than the individual yearly data.

While we have some way to go before we reach our 90 per cent target of young people completing year 12 or its equivalent, we are making progress. The percentage of young people aged 19 in Victoria who had successfully completed year 12 or a vocational certificate at AQF level 2 or above in 2001 was 73 per cent, an improvement from 71.6 per cent in 2000 and 71.5 per cent in 1999. The percentage of 18 to 24-year olds in Victoria in 2001 who had completed year 12 or a vocational certificate of AQF level 2 or above was 80 per cent. While completion rates for young people in rural and regional Victoria still need to improve, around 90 per cent of young people in rural and regional areas participated in education and training during 2001.

Mr DAVIS — What do you mean by that? Young people of what age group?

Ms KOSKY — That is the 18-to-24 cohort. So that is one measure, but we are focusing also on the completion at year 12 or its equivalent for rural and regional Victoria. This is a measure which assists us to get a sense of what is happening in rural and regional Victoria in education and training in a broader sense. Students in rural and regional Victoria do particularly well in the VET sectors; they actually pick up in the VET sectors quite significantly.

In terms of future directions, a number of challenges do remain and in closing I would like to focus on four of these. The first challenge is putting lifelong learning into practice, making sure that we have the systems in place for lifelong learning to take place and that we remove as many barriers as possible to ensure that lifelong learning starts in the early years and proceeds right through to the post-compulsory years of education and training, allowing people to move in and out of education and training at a later age. Challenge no. 2 is setting key priorities: the priorities that I would like to talk about are excellence, which means offering the best education we possibly can and supporting students to achieve excellent outcomes. Innovation, which is developing innovative approaches to learning — really, to make sure that the experience of students in our education and training system is exciting and engaging. Innovation also means picking up the best in new methodologies of teaching and learning and not continuing to do what we have always done. Access is really about making sure that all people can have access to educational opportunities along a range of different educational pathways that we have provided. Challenge no. 3 is making sure we do deliver across the system, in the early years, the middle years, and the post-compulsory and tertiary years. Challenge no. 4 is around quality and accountability: quality assurance, making sure that we do recognise quality within our system and we do reward quality within our system and accountability, really identifying and rectifying poor teaching and learning outcomes. That is a challenge that we will be taking up in the near future.

Thank you for the time to make the presentation.

The CHAIRMAN — Perhaps I can commence with one of the areas that was mentioned and is mentioned a number of times in the budget papers, and that is class sizes. It appears in a number of places in the budget papers and specifically on page 26 of budget paper no. 3 where it gives the actuals and targets in class sizes over recent years and for the coming years. Class sizes is one of those issues that has been raised significantly in all

sectors. It is talked about as one of the key instruments of achieving better outcomes in education. Can you provide this committee with some detail of how the trend that is shown here in class sizes is actually leading to better outcomes in education in Victoria?

Ms KOSKY — The data in relation to class sizes across all years demonstrate that the class sizes are coming down. I suppose in stressing that it is also important to note that in some instances in individual schools where class sizes are not coming down we want to make sure that the student–teacher ratio is certainly improving. Earlier this week I actually released data on class sizes in secondary schools which showed a 0.5 per cent improvement in class sizes. We measured on English secondary class sizes in year 9. It showed a slight improvement there. We have not made a commitment in those years, but it is a demonstration that one part of the education system is not being sacrificed in terms of class sizes in order to achieve them in the earlier years.

In relation to the way it is making a difference, our literacy and numeracy results, as I mentioned, are improving. The trend data show that our literacy and numeracy results are improving in the years 3 and 5 when we do test them. In the near future we are looking at introducing literacy and numeracy testing in year 7. It is demonstrating a difference, particularly in the early years, which is where we have made the investment — in the years prep to 2 — so that it would make a difference to literacy and numeracy results. The results show that in 1999 in relation to year 3 Victorian students 89.1 per cent were achieving the national benchmark. In 2000 the figure was 93 per cent, so we have seen an increase in the year 3 students achieving the benchmark in reading. In year 5 there has been an improvement from 1999 at 88 per cent to 92 per cent in 2000.

The numeracy results have improved as well. The first year that we had the proper numeracy results, as I remember, was last year, and Victoria was top of all the states in that. But I emphasise it is trend data, so we need to keep a close eye on the trend data. Obviously the results also indicate where there are particular pockets of schools that may not be doing as well in literacy and numeracy results. That is where we are targeting further investment to ensure those individual schools can improve their results as well.

The CHAIRMAN — Perhaps those results can be made available to the committee as well at a later time.

Ms KOSKY — Yes.

Mr CLARK — Are you saying that the improvement between 1999 and 2000 is a result of your current government's policy initiatives? It seems to me that you would measure these things on a lag and that the results that students got in 2000 would depend on the calibre of their education up to and including 1999. Are you saying what I am taking you to say, that this is a measure of the success of your government's policies?

Ms KOSKY — They were your words, I think, not mine. Certainly in terms of the grade 3 results we would have expected that our investment in reducing prep to 2 class sizes was having an impact on the grade 3 literacy and numeracy results. In regard to grade 5, you are right, there is a lag time. What we are seeing is that both the investment and the emphasis on literacy and numeracy in those early years are having an impact on the improvements in students reaching the benchmarks. But also what is evident, given the targets that we have set for ourselves, is that we do need further improvement. We certainly want further improvement in terms of students achieving the national benchmarks. We have put in additional investment and we will be testing — obviously through the literacy and numeracy tests as well as other measures — to make sure we are indeed making a difference in those results.

Mr CLARK — My next question is to Minister Gould. I refer to your slide on budget outcomes and assets, in which you refer to \$216.4 million for asset proposals over the next three years. Is it correct that of this \$216.4 million, \$52.1 million is money that was previously announced in last year's budget as part of the Growing Victoria fund and was unspent or was rolled over into the current year's budget; and that in fact of the \$53 million that was allocated out of Growing Victoria last year, only \$900 000 was spent, hence the \$52.1 million has been rolled over? If that is correct, why was it that only \$900 000 of the \$53 million allocated out of Growing Victoria last year was actually delivered?

Ms GOULD — With respect to the budget allocation, that money came out of the Growing Victoria program. I was just getting that clarified. In the financial year 2001–02 we had committed \$90 million. The projects were only announced in 2001–02, and the balance were to be announced this year. As you would appreciate, what happens with all funding arrangements with the schools is that you have to ensure they have gone through the proper stages. The projects are tendered out, and we have to ensure those tenders meet the criteria and the schools exercise financial prudence. Sometimes we find that when schools receive approval to get some construction work done they go above what has actually been allocated. We have to ensure the work is done within the budget that is

allocated. The tender process is then checked, they are approved and then after the tender process is completed you would award the project to the appropriate builder. So you can have commitments made for \$90 million for 2001–02, and you can have the projects then not awarded until the next financial year because of the process that needs to be undertaken to ensure they meet all the guidelines and the criteria set out by the department to ensure the schools are built in a safe manner and within the budget constraints.

Ms KOSKY — I think we will see an improvement in this process. Obviously there was a large amount of money provided through Growing Victoria and there is that lag time for schools, as Ms Gould said, to prepare for the building work. Once that amount of money was announced we moved schools onto a much quicker planning process, so all schools announced in this budget as being in receipt of capital funding will be ready to commence works either now in the rest of this calendar year or at the beginning of next year, rolling through. It will be a much quicker process than it has been in the past.

Mr CLARK — So you are saying that it was not up to scratch last year and this year you are expecting to get the \$61 million — —

Ms KOSKY — Not that it was not up to scratch, but that there was an extraordinary increase in the capital budget for schools — for which we are very grateful — but that was not anticipated 12 months prior to the 2001–02 budget being released. Now, because we had that expectation, the process is well and fully in train.

Mr CLARK — So you would expect to deliver this year the money that has been set aside for this year?

Ms KOSKY — You will start to see schools being built this year all around Victoria, very quickly.

Mr CLARK — I look forward to it.

Mrs MADDIGAN — My question is also for Ms Gould. I refer to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, for which there is an allocation of \$1.7 million in this year's budget. Can you just tell the committee a bit about how the VIT will operate in supporting and enhancing the teaching profession and when we might expect to see it up and running?

Ms GOULD — You are right, we have allocated \$1.7 million. It is true that for a number of reasons there are teacher shortages which means we will need to put a bit of work into that area. We can fill those places because the budget allows for an increase in teachers. There is an identified shortage in some areas. We experience particular difficulty in recruiting teachers in some geographic locations, including the far west, parts of the north and parts of Gippsland, and parts of the urban fringe of Melbourne. We are also experiencing difficulty recruiting teachers in certain curriculum areas, including technology studies, information technology, mathematics, and languages other than English. In an overall sense a lot of the problems stem from the fact there are not enough teacher graduates in Victoria to meet the demand we have in new teachers.

As you would be aware, the funding for higher education is the responsibility of the commonwealth government. Unfortunately the commonwealth has cut 6382 fully funded places for students in Victorian universities since 1996. These funding cuts have affected obviously the universities' capacity to respond to their students' demands. As a result approximately 20 000 eligible students missed out on university places this year. Many eligible students are missing out on gaining places and there is high demand for teaching courses in universities.

Concerns have been expressed to the commonwealth government about the inequitable funding arrangements for Victorian universities, and the commonwealth has been requested to address this situation. But of course the previous government removed 9000 teachers from the state school system which has impacted on the morale and status of teachers and has made that even more difficult.

We have put some initiatives in to tackle these issues. A number of initiatives will revitalise the teaching profession and support recruitment needs for schools. They include the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which is a statutory body, and the Victorian government schools agreement, which is a collective agreement focused on the standards of performance and to improve the pay and career structures of teachers. The difficulty was that there was no long-term certainty under previous arrangements in place for teachers, so the desire to become a teacher has dropped off.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching is an independent statutory body and will be responsible for the professional advocacy, learning and standards of all teachers in Victoria, both in government and non-government schools. The teaching scholarship scheme supports high-quality students to become qualified teachers in Victorian government

schools and we provide a scholarship of \$3500 which provides for ongoing employment at a school. We are supporting currently employed teachers to retrain in the areas where there are shortages and to undergo professional development in the hard-to-staff areas.

We are also campaigning to promote the professionalism of teachers in specific targeted areas, such as career areas for year 12 students so that they undertake the teaching program; encouraging teachers undergoing professional development to go into areas where there is a shortage of supply; and there is an Internet site which allows for teachers who are out of the profession to be aware of what is available.

Mrs MADDIGAN — Excuse my ignorance, but is it one physical entity or will it be spread through a number of tertiary areas?

Ms GOULD — The Victorian Institute of Teaching is a statutory body. Last week I announced the chair, Susan Halliday, who has experience in school, TAFE and university sectors.

Mrs MADDIGAN — Where will it be located?

Ms GOULD — It is located in Transport House at the bottom of Collins Street, near Spencer Street. The institute will be self-funded. We put in \$1.7 million and teachers will be required to register and pay a registration fee. The council of the institute was only announced last week. It has to put a business plan together and present that to me for approval. It will be self-sufficient. It fulfils an election commitment of this government to introduce a professional institute for teachers such as there is for doctors, lawyers and nurses. There has not been one for teachers.

Mr DAVIS — Minister Kosky, I refer to the fact that the Auditor-General's report on the finances of the state of Victoria revealed that the education department will be required to redirect \$65.4 million a year over the next three years as a result of the botched teacher pay deal. What education programs will the minister reduce to cover for the redirection of funds? If no programs will have any money removed from them or redirected, how will you find the almost \$65.4 million each year, or almost \$200 million over three years?

Ms KOSKY — Can you point out the Auditor-General's report you are talking to?

Mr DAVIS — Yes, it is the Auditor-General's report on the finances of Victoria, page 54, table 5C.

Ms KOSKY — He said 'botched', did he?

Mr DAVIS — No, he did not say 'botched'; he said that \$65.4 million would need to be spent in 2001–02, \$65.4 million would need to be spent in 2002–03, and \$65.4 million would need to be spent in 2003–04 to cover the redirection of existing funding towards new agreements. That is almost \$200 million over three years. I am interested to know how you work that into existing programs.

Ms KOSKY — The teacher agreement is fully funded so there is not a difficulty of programs being cut. I might ask Stuart —

Mr DAVIS — Not according to the Auditor-General.

Ms KOSKY — I do not think in that report that he refers to programs having to be cut to fund the teacher deal, does he?

Mr DAVIS — He refers to a redirection of existing funding towards new agreements.

Ms KOSKY — I will ask Stuart Hamilton to respond in detail to that issue because he knows where the funding came from within the education budget in order to fund the teacher agreement.

Mr HAMILTON — The funding was provided by funding that was already in the system — for example, the career structure extra payments that were made for teachers taking on additional duties were rolled into the core salaries.

Mr DAVIS — This is the experienced teacher with responsibility (ETWR) funding?

Mr HAMILTON — No, not the ETWR funding particularly. There was also the fact that attrition of teachers would enable us to fund the new career structure. So it was within the overall modelling of the forward

structure of the profession, payments that we made for additional tasks which were rolled into the additional funding. It was fully funded in all respects.

Mr DAVIS — Why does he refer to this as redirections of existing funding towards new agreements?

Mr HAMILTON — Because it was the funding we just talked about, the funding that was available for all those other purposes, for leading teachers, for the additional teachers schools took on — all that was redirected towards the agreement.

Ms KOSKY — I will run through the figures, if you like: assistant principal performance payments, \$5.5 million; leading teacher performance payments, \$11 million; teacher level 1 acceleration, \$5.4 million; associated on-costs, \$6.3 million. They are the areas that Stuart is referring to which would cease and be rolled into the teacher agreements. Schools also had the potential to reallocate special payments totalling \$19.3 million to offset the costs of the ETWRs not directly funded by DET, so it is within the total envelope of funding available. It does not mean programs will be cut. It was the funding envelope for teacher payments; it is just repackaged to fit into the new framework.

Mr DAVIS — That still sounds short of the total amount.

Mr HAMILTON — No, the government gave additional funding and that was money we had to find from within the education payments that were already made for teachers.

Mr DAVIS — How much is that amount you had to find?

Mr HAMILTON — That was the amount the Auditor-General talked about.

Mr DAVIS — That was the redirection, so it has to come off other programs.

Ms KOSKY — The redirection from within the existing funding for teachers.

Mr DAVIS — But it must come off some other aspect.

Ms KOSKY — I have just run through those areas.

Mr DAVIS — So it has come off other teacher programs in fact.

Ms KOSKY — No, not teacher programs. It is the way the payment — —

Mr DAVIS — That is what you just said.

Ms KOSKY — No, it is the way payments are structured for the funding of teachers' salaries.

Mr DAVIS — They are either taking home more or they are not, one way or other.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Do those figures add up to the \$65 million — the Auditor-General's figure?

The CHAIRMAN — We will take one question at a time.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Just to clarify.

The CHAIRMAN — We will still take one question at a time, even for clarification.

Ms KOSKY — Michael is probably the best person given that I was not Minister for Education and Training when that agreement was established.

Mr DAVIS — We understand you cannot be held responsible for the botched deal.

Ms KOSKY — It is not a botched agreement; I want to make that very clear. Michael knows much more of the detail of that and how the money was pulled together for that program. If it is okay, I will ask Michael to respond.

Mr WHITE — The agreement was funded — I cannot go to the specific figure because I have not come prepared to discuss that specific figure — however, the figures that the Minister for Education and Training read out included two components. The first was about \$37.5 million in performance pay, teacher accreditation,

principal performance pay and so on. Those were ways of delivering funds to staff that were not to be carried on further into the new agreement: they were not to be done in the future. They were not cuts to programs, it was a way salary was delivered to staff.

When the Auditor-General refers to redirection, the redirection that you are commenting on relates to the redirection of the way money is paid. That is one component of it — \$37.5 million. Another component of it would be the \$19 million in special payments to teachers. The ETWR was created as an experienced teacher with responsibilities, and specifically identified that the responsibilities which the new ETWR classification would take up would include the sorts of responsibilities — —

The CHAIRMAN — Order! Just a moment, it is not appropriate for members of the gallery to be approaching committee members during the hearing.

Mr CLARK — That applies to both sides of the table, I trust, Mr Chairman — that is, the same principle applies to both sides of the table.

The CHAIRMAN — It applies to both sides of the committee, yes.

Mr CLARK — No, both sides of the conference table.

Ms BARKER — The department is there to assist the ministers with notes. That is not correct.

Mr WHITE — In terms of the principle of the Auditor-General's comment, it relates to the redirection of the ways in which payments had been made previously. If I could just finish the component of the answer on ETWR, previously teachers were given additional responsibilities within a classroom or a school and schools had that money in their budgets to do that. The creation of the ETWR enabled principals to make decisions about how they were to use that amount of money.

Mr DAVIS — And none of this blow-out in funding is related to the increased number of ETWRs over what was budgeted and planned for?.

Mr WHITE — There is no blow-out in funding. If you are implying a cap on ETWRs, there was no quota placed on ETWRs either in the funding we received from government — —

Mr DAVIS — The Treasurer certainly referred to one at one point.

Mr WHITE — Or in the agreement itself.

Mr CLARK — I would like to take this further. The Auditor-General's notes refer to a redirection of funding ranging from an estimated \$34 million to \$73 million. That was a combination of schools and health, and schools were two-thirds or more of the total. He then went on to say of that total:

The progress made by departments in achieving these savings will need to be carefully monitored by the government to minimise any potential budgetary impact that may arise in the event that they cannot be achieved, without adversely impacting on service delivery by the respective departments.

The Auditor-General clearly raises this as an issue and government school teachers are the dominant component in the figure to which he is referring. You may be saying that the Auditor-General has got it wrong. The point I am making is that he has raised this warning and it would seem to be perfectly relevant to what we are asking about this afternoon.

Ms KOSKY — Can I check in terms of process so we are clear on this side of the table what the process is? I thought we usually shared questions between people. We have now had three on the one issue. I am just seeking your clarification, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN — I have been allowing Mr Davis to clarify, but I think we are probably reasonably well clarified.

Mr DAVIS — Not really.

The CHAIRMAN — I think we are reaching a point where there is a need to move on.

Ms KOSKY — Can I just — —

The CHAIRMAN — Perhaps Mr Clark's question may resolve the issue.

Ms KOSKY — The Auditor-General did indicate that this would have to be carefully monitored, and that is exactly what we are doing. However, it is within the envelope of funding and there have been no programs to schools cut as a result of this.

Can I just add a clarification to the figures I provided before of where the funding has been redistributed from? It also included principal performance payments which were \$9.2 million. Those areas that I indicated add up to \$37.4 million, and then there was an additional \$19.3 million from special payments. The rest was found internally, not through program cuts but areas such as — —

Mr DAVIS — \$20 million?

Ms KOSKY — It is the management of areas such as long-service leave; the way they had been funded in the past and the take-up rate. We are carefully monitoring this, but I can assure the committee that it has not resulted in any cuts to programs to schools.

Mr DAVIS — Certainly the Auditor-General's warning would make it — —

Mrs MADDIGAN — It was not an urgent warning; you are just making it up.

Mr HOLDING — I would like to ask a question about drug education. If I could firstly take to you page 31 of budget paper 3, which includes the output group of student welfare and support. In that output group there is a new measure for government schools which have completed an individual school drug education strategy with a 2002–03 target of 100 per cent. That is obviously a very impressive and encouraging target. On behalf of the committee I am seeking some information about how progress is occurring in relation to the achievement of that target and how confident you are of achieving the target. Secondly, what sort of strategies are being implemented as part of that quantity measure?

Ms GOULD — Thank you very much for the question. You are right: we do take drug education seriously. The establishment of the Premier's Drug Prevention Council is an indication of that; it demonstrates our commitment to not running away from issues relating drugs but instead working with government to address these difficulties. For the first time a measurement has been introduced to ensure that every government school has its own individual drug education strategy and implements a drug education program for all students. There have not been any measurements before, and we have now put them in place.

By the end of this year all schools will have had the opportunity to review the strategy they have and develop an action plan to improve their drug education provision. This financial year the government has allocated \$3.77 million through the Community Support Fund for the implementation of ongoing effective drug education for all government and non-government schools. Importantly, all schools conducting a review of their strategy this year will be supported by a grant of \$750 to \$1500, depending on the size of the school, to assist them to enhance their drug education programs.

All schools have been supported in the implementation of effective drug education by the regional offices and the department. A range of key support resources and programs is available. They include creative conversation programs, where parents and students come in together and ask questions so the parent can work out what and how to ask if they think their child may have a drug issue. They give them skills on how to deal with those issues, which is important. There are teens alcohol and other drug programs for school teens. There are community drug forums for school communities and funding of the drug education collegiate support groups right across the state.

About 80 per cent of non-government schools have introduced drug strategy programs within their schools, and we are hopeful that before long that figure will be 100 per cent as well. All the government schools have introduced these programs and are now reviewing them to see how effective they are. They are constantly upgrading them because new issues come on board and more parents want to be aware of them.

A resource to assist schools to specifically address the chroming issue has also been developed. This resource, 'Volatile solvents — A resource for schools: health and safety guidelines', will provide information and guidelines to help schools develop appropriate responses to volatile solvents issues. This resource was launched last week as part of a whole-of-government response to volatile solvents issues. It will be distributed across Victorian schools, but it will be done with a comprehensive professional development program. The teachers will have to undergo the

development program before they can implement it. We are very proud of what we are doing with respect to this particular area in our education system.

Mr HOLDING — You mentioned that 80 per cent of non-government schools have developed drug education programs and you hope for it to be 100 per cent. Do we have any information about the profiles of the schools that have not done it to date — the 20 per cent? Even if you do not have it off the top of your head, it would be interesting to see what sort of schools have not addressed that issue yet and whether there are some consistent characteristic of those schools.

Ms GOULD — I am happy to get that information to you because it would be interesting, as you rightly say, to see whether they are regional or metropolitan areas, or primary or secondary schools. But I know that especially the Catholic education department and the independent schools are very keen on doing it. We are up to 80. We will get that information to you. I am happy to forward that on to you, Chairman, for the general consumption of the committee.

Mr DAVIS — I have a very short follow-up to that. Has your adviser Davy Henderson — —

The CHAIRMAN — Hold on. Is this the same question?

Mr DAVIS — Absolutely, about the drug problem.

The CHAIRMAN — Clarifying Mr Holding's question?

Mr DAVIS — Yes, it is, and it is asking the minister whether her adviser, Davy Henderson, had any involvement in that program?

The CHAIRMAN — You might like to ask that as your question when we come back to you.

Mr DAVIS — It relates to a drug program.

The CHAIRMAN — I think it is a different question to that which Mr Holding asked.

Mr DAVIS — There is a simple answer.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask Minister Gould about the asset program. There was a slide in the presentation which shows \$822 million worth of asset investment over the period 2001 to 2002–03. Firstly, I would like to seek some clarification. Does that figure relate to announcements made in those years of the budget, or does it relate to planned expenditure in those years? If it is planned expenditure in those years, I could only find slightly less than \$400 million for the years 2001–02 through to 2002–03, which would have meant around \$400 million in the first year. That does not sound like a particularly likely scenario — that you would have spent \$400 million in one year and then dropped to \$100 million the next year. Is that referring to the whole forward estimates period or only the years to which the slide refers?

Ms GOULD — That is partly yours and partly mine.

Ms KOSKY — It is planned, so it is commitment and cash flow.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Mr Clark picked up on the issue of the Growing Victoria allocation and how \$51 million-odd had been rolled over. Is that double counted in that \$822 million, or has that been excluded, given that it was in last year's budget and has been carried forward as the same money in this year's budget?

Ms KOSKY — I am assuming it is two separate figures, but I will just confer with Colin Twisse, who is the head of our facilities area. The total of \$90 million is included in the \$822 million commitment.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Sorry, the \$90 million — —

Ms KOSKY — The total of the \$90 million is included in the \$822 million commitment, but it has not been double counted.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It has not?

Ms KOSKY — No.

Ms BARKER — I would firstly like to thank the ministers for the \$1.6 million already invested in the Oakleigh electorate and the \$1.4 million to be invested in Murrumbena primary.

However, I would like to take you to your reference to lifelong learning. I note in the slide presentation you had as a goal having more adults take up education and training and increase the overall level of education attainment and literacy levels. I have a particular interest, as you know, in the adult and community education sector. I wondered if you could give the committee an outline of the commitment that the government is making to strengthen the ACE sector within that post-compulsory education environment, because I think it is extremely important.

Ms KOSKY — The ACE sector, or adult community education sector, are really the unsung heroes in terms of lifelong learning. They do operate right throughout Victoria and provide training within the national training framework as well as other adult learning programs. They are increasingly picking up some of the 15 to 24 age cohort for whom schools or TAFE is not the right place. They are going particularly well with that cohort of kids as well.

We have invested quite heavily since coming to office additionally in the ACE sector. There is now \$36 million going in in the year 2002, which is an increase of \$2.4 million on 2001. We have increased the average student contact hour rate for training. I will come back to that. We initially increased it by 13 cents. We have made another commitment, which I will mention in a moment, for the year 2003 and beyond. We have also put funding in for the ACE clusters initiative, which is clusters of ACE providers, particularly the smaller ones in more remote communities coming together and sharing resources. We have provided extra support there and also funding for the Learning Towns Network initiative. That is \$4 million annually for both of those areas. We have put in funding for mobile community libraries, which is \$1.5 million, which is essentially laptop computers that sit with the regional council; but the smaller ACE providers can access those laptop computers and provide learning direct to farms or to small rural communities. It really does broaden the learning there.

There has been the reimbursement of fee concessions. For those students who get a concession on fees that they paid, we have provided \$1.2 million for that. We have also put in \$3 million through the Community Support Fund for ACE capital funding. That was a first, which has been very well received by the ACE facilities. It is the first time they have ever received capital funding from government in a broad sense right across the ACE sector. We have also put in \$1.1 million for pathways planning for that 15 to 19 age cohort.

Recently I made an announcement of further \$2 million of funding for the ACE sector, beginning from 2003, which will increase the average student contact hour rate again by 50 cents, which means it will now be at \$6.11. Essentially the importance of the student contact hour rate funding is that it pays for direct delivery, but also that it is basically the money that helps run the centre. Increasing the student contact hour rate has been very important for delivery, but also for the viability of our ACE facilities. I understand that they have been incredibly pleased with that increase. This represents an 18 per cent increase in the average student contact hour rate since we have come to office. It is a significant investment we have made in the ACE sector, but it is for very good reasons, because they really do deliver.

The CHAIRMAN — Can I take Minister Gould to page 171 of budget paper 2, the education and training output initiatives. At table A2 a large number of initiatives are outlined both for the coming financial year and the out years, which I would believe means that there would need to be an additional recruitment of teachers in the coming years to ensure that those initiatives are capable of being implemented, and probably a quite substantial increase in the number of teachers. Could you detail for us how you would see those additional teachers being recruited into the system and what initiatives are being taken in that area to ensure that we get the recruitment of teachers at the time they are required. Also perhaps within that you might like to comment on the issue that has arisen recently about unqualified teachers and how that would also be addressed within that total recruitment area and deliver the significant number of teachers that I think would be required to implement those initiatives?

Ms GOULD — Sure. There are two issues. One is, in part I responded to Judy's question about the Victorian Institute of Teaching and teacher recruitment. They go hand in hand, and that is part of our commitment.

As I said before, with respect to teacher recruitment we have identified a number of initiatives for areas that we need to go to. There are also some areas that are just ideas at the moment. With respect to the initiatives that are in place, we have the scholarships, we have the institute of teaching — we have the scholarship schemes that support high-quality students with a scholarship of \$3500, we support currently unemployed teachers, and we have the institute of teaching which is a \$1.7 million commitment. The establishment of that institute is critical to our vision of giving strong recognition to the teacher profession, because that is part of the problem. That professionalism is

not there. A lot of teachers feel they were demoralised under the previous government with short-term contracts and a lot of issues associated with that.

The introduction of the institute will help ensure we have a new independent authority. It will be responsible for the registration of all teachers. As I indicated, Susan Halliday is the chair of that, and 19 council members are on it. We will support that institute, which will help raise the professional standards and ensure we get qualified teachers.

There has also been the issue associated with some of the reports that were made with the announcement of what our initiatives are and some of the areas we are looking at. With the announcement of the institute we are also considering a range of initiatives that may assist in meeting this increased demand. But I want to emphasise that they are only issues we are looking at. There is no government policy yet; these are only ideas and no decision has been made on them at government level. They are simply ideas that are worth investigating because we have a shortage of teachers and a shortage of spaces in our universities, which I have identified before.

The one that got some media attention about the so-called unqualified teachers is only being considered; no decision has been made, but that is under consideration. It is called the scholarship-plus initiative. The idea is about new ways of training student teachers. It would focus on those student teachers with the appropriate existing qualifications or degrees in industry. In the shortage areas we have languages other than English and the technologies and IT. It is those who already have qualifications but who have not finished their qualifications for actual teaching. It is for those shortage areas of the curriculum that we are aware of.

There is also the issue of possible overseas recruitment campaigns, but we know that if we bring in teachers from overseas that will only be a short-term fix and that we have to get the long-term fix of ensuring we have sufficient university places. I cannot stress enough to the committee that these are just ideas — no policy decision has been made to put on non-qualified teachers. We have a commitment to get more teachers to achieve our goals and targets, and we are looking at various options to ensure that we deliver on that. But I cannot stress strongly enough that there is not any policy decision on that area.

Mr CLARK — I have a question to Minister Kosky about truancy, which has been a topical subject lately. I understand that the Department of Education and Training keeps only very general figures on absenteeism and not any specific figures on truancy. Have you given any consideration to keeping detailed, centralised figures on truancy as part of the attempts to tackle that problem? If so, what is the position; and if not, why not? I also have a question about an initiative announced by Minister Kosky's predecessor Minister Delahunty on 16 October 2000:

Hit squads could be sent to patrol Melbourne shopping centres and amusement arcades to track down thousands of truants.

What has happened to that initiative?

Ms KOSKY — I will start with the way we break down figures. I should state from the beginning that we take truancy very seriously in schools. It is why we have made the major investment that we have, particularly in the middle years period, which is where kids tend to go missing, really. They either go missing physically or they mentally switch off. So we have put \$165 million in this last budget, intended for a four-year period, to really attack that area to make sure that schools are places that all kids want to be at and that we deal with the truancy issue from an educational perspective rather than necessarily just the policing perspective.

The truancy data, or the absence data, has been collected for some time, but for the first time under this government we have broken it down to like school groupings, so we can get much more information about what is happening within those school types. That means that we can develop much more detailed responses to deal with truancy as well as some other matters. As to the data from last year, for the first time we have broken the absence data down to be able to identify truancy as part of that absence data. That has never happened before, and we are now doing that. Those figures are not yet available on last year's data. They should be fairly soon, but I am not sure when that information — it is on last year's data, isn't it Michael?

Mr WHITE — Yes.

Ms KOSKY — Yes, when that will come through, but we have now broken that down and included that in the data. It is a brave government that does that in a way, because these figures can be used in a variety of ways and are not necessarily used in a positive way for what government is doing. But we are determined to tackle the truancy issue. So for the first time that data being collected will be made available. Obviously we will do that publicly — —

Mr CLARK — Could you give it to the committee when it is available?

Ms KOSKY — We will make it publicly available. I am happy to include the committee in that when it is available.

We have put in extra funding in this last budget for two programs, both the Access to Excellence program, which is just over \$81 million, and the innovations and excellence program, which is just over \$84 million. We are really focused on those middle years, as I said, to look at both innovative and excellent ways of doing things within schools. So we are really looking at how we can change some of our teaching — a lot of it is good, but we are looking at just changing some of it, refreshing some of it and I suppose making schools exciting places for kids in that year when they, hopefully, have the literacy and numeracy skills but are not starting to do the career planning that occurs in the later years. We are particularly focusing around those areas.

Our view was — and we had a lot of discussions — that we were probably better to focus on the educational end rather than necessarily the policing end, which you have referred to. Some other jurisdictions around Australia have focused on the hit squad method. I should say we have also introduced funding of \$15 million for managed individual pathways in schools. That is at the beginning of year 11, where pathway plans are developed for students. If they exit they are followed up until they get a successful placement. But we are really trying to focus on making sure that young people are engaged in education and training rather than waiting until they have taken the decision to leave and then trying to intervene at a time when it is probably fairly difficult to intervene.

Over the last few weeks we have had discussions and have had some pilots in place of a number of methods by which schools can both monitor school truancy and also respond very quickly to it — how to make sure that when kids are truanting you have absolute up-to-date information rather than letting parents know several weeks or a month later. A number of different pilots are in place, one of which was in the media over the last week or so — the palm pilot method. There are a number of other methods.

We want to make sure we support those different methods in schools: the collection of data and very quick reporting to parents so that intervention can occur at a much earlier stage. We want to make sure that we have the educational responses and mechanisms in place within schools to really work with students so that they do not disengage. Clearly some kids will disengage, but we are trying to limit that by giving them every reason to be at school rather than reasons not to be there.

Mr CLARK — The hit squad proposal, as it were, is absent and has been expelled; is that disengagement?

Ms KOSKY — That is probably true! We are focusing much more on the educational end rather than the policing end, although we are looking at different mechanisms we can put in place, and not necessarily trying to find out where kids are.

One of the issues is that some kids go to public places when they truant, but there are also kids who just stay at home. If you have a policing model and people going out to try to find the kids, unless they get search warrants to enter people's places, they cannot do so. We want to focus on educational aspects rather than putting what are always limited resources into the policing aspect. I should say too that we evaluated a lot of what was happening in other states in response to this issue, particularly those states that had looked at this approach.

The CHAIRMAN — Surely the overall objective is not just to get them to come back for an hour on the day they have disappeared, but to get them to be at school full-time?

Ms KOSKY — And to succeed at school, yes.

Mrs MADDIGAN — Following up success at school, I think it was an article in the *Age*, probably last week or the week before, that related to the research done by Dr Bob Birrell. In relation to ENTER scores for secondary school students, and particularly in relation to a comparison between public and private schools, I recall there was a fairly strong reaction at the time from state school principals as to how those figures were used. I was just wondering if you could give us your views on that research and if you see it as being of any value in terms of looking at the two school systems in the state.

Ms KOSKY — I always think there is value in research into what is happening in education. A lot of Bob Birrell's work was very important research. We can never be too complacent about the results; that is why, as a government, we have set goals and targets. We need to be focused on education outcomes, and it is clear that VCE results and entrance to university numbers are important outcomes. They are not the only outcomes, but they are important.

Some concerns were expressed — and I certainly expressed some at the time via the paper — about the interpretation of the data Bob Birrell had presented in his report. There were a couple of concerns. The first was that he focused on a median ENTER score. He did a comparison between government and non-government schools. Government schools take a whole range of students in years 11 and 12. They take students who want to go to university, and they take students who may not want to go to university but want to stay at school. We want those kids to stay at school. They may be wanting to go to TAFE institutes and on to apprenticeships or traineeships, or they may not be sure about what they want to do. We want to keep them engaged in school. By virtue of the fact that its parents pay, the non-government sector tends to be geared towards university entrance, and it does well at that. But if you look at a median ENTER score and then use that to say that a whole lot of kids miss out, you are misinterpreting the data. The median ENTER score in government schools is always going to be lower than in the non-government sector because government schools take kids who are interested in a wide range of educational pathways, and not only university. That is the nature of an average or a median score. The median ENTER score was then used to say that there were fewer students from government schools who were getting into university. That was the wrong interpretation.

The second part of Bob Birrell's work which also was misinterpreted was the fact the he used accepted offers to university as code for making an offer, but they are different. More government school students do not accept an offer than non- government school students. We need to look at why that is the case, but it is statistically significant. It was not appropriate for him to say that two in three students successfully completed year 12, but did not get into university; that was not the case. That data was analysed by Associate Professor Richard Teese of Melbourne University, some of whose work was used by Bob Birrell in his research.

In going through all the data, Richard Teese's work shows that 72 per cent of students from government schools who applied for university in 2001 did receive an offer. So 72 per cent in government schools is a pretty good figure. It can certainly be improved, but it is not a bad figure. A further 18 per cent of government school students received an offer from a TAFE institute; however, as I said, many did not take up the offer. That is something we need to look at, but it did create concern within the education community. Debate and discussion within the education community is important, and VCE results in government schools are as important as they are in the non-government system. That is why we have focused a lot on ensuring we have an excellent VCE system, but also that we look at some other pathways in years 11 and 12 for kids who do not necessarily want to go to university but want to remain engaged in education and training and want a recognised credential. In looking at broadening some of the pathways, ensuring that we have a range of quality credentials, we cater for all kids, but it is important that the data was not interpreted as saying that those students who wanted to go on to university from government schools did not necessarily get there.

Mr DAVIS — I refer Minister Kosky to the major pool of money that is used by schools for their maintenance: the physical resources management system (PRMS). Can you explain why since the 1999–2000 financial year only \$51 million has been spent by this government on PRMS funding, including not a single dollar in the 2000–01 financial year. By contrast, over \$100 million was spent on PRMS in the last four years of the Kennett government. Does this mean that we can take it as read that Victoria is again returning to the days of massive school building and playground maintenance backlogs like the \$670 million backlog that was left by the Cain and Kirner governments? The Kennett government promised to eliminate — —

Mrs MADDIGAN — Just a minute! I'll get the violin out; it's here somewhere!

The CHAIRMAN — Order!

Ms KOSKY — I cannot answer that, but my colleague Minister Gould will as it fits within her portfolio responsibility.

Mr DAVIS — I am happy, between the two of you.

Ms GOULD — To clarify exactly what happens with PRMS, the system which guides the maintenance in schools, was established by the previous government. It is a system that conducts maintenance audits every three years by independent consultants on all schools throughout Victoria. These audits identify the current conditions and urgency of maintenance requirements. The identified projects are prioritised on a scale from zero to five. Items that represent a risk to occupants or which are otherwise urgent are graded at zero. The zero end of the scale is for major works and the scale goes up to five. If you get a zero rating, that is an area of high priority that needs to be addressed. This system is then used as the basis for funding allocations within schools. It provides a strategy that supports the maintenance of modern, high-quality learning environments in our schools, because we know from all

the things that the government is looking at that, if you have a nice building to go to school in, rather than one that is falling down around you, the learning outcome is improved. PRMS, along with the government's funding initiatives since taking office, has reduced the maintenance backlog in schools to levels that can be dealt with on an annual funding cycle. In addition, each year — —

Mr DAVIS — That is why there was no funding in that 2000–01 financial year?

Ms GOULD — In addition, each year \$27 million is included in schools' global budgets for maintenance and half of this is for urgent and minor maintenance that is identified within the school, and the other half is used for maintenance that is identified through the PRMS audit.

Mr DAVIS — To clarify before you go on, PRMS is separate from what comes in as a global budget, as I understand it.

The CHAIRMAN — But I think the minister is explaining.

Ms GOULD — As I just informed you, \$27 million is put into the school global budget for maintenance. Half of this is for urgent and minor maintenance identified by the school, so if they go around the school and they see a problem such as a broken window they can get that fixed. Then there is what is actually identified through the PRMS audit; they can use part of that money to fix that. Then there is also the zero to five, and the zeros are the ones that this government has been funding. The previous minister announced supplementary school funding of \$52 million in the 2002 audit to fund the zero priority items, so because of this investment that the government has put into capital works into schools, which is the best way to ensure that our schools are properly equipped, the department advises us that every \$1 million spent on school modernisation saves \$150 000 in maintenance requirements, which are eliminated. So with the capital expenditure that this government has put in of \$413 million in school modernisation, that has reduced maintenance \$65 million every three years. It goes from zero to five, and zero is the worst, and all the zero ones have been identified in this budget.

Mr DAVIS — To clarify, the zero-to-five part of the PRMS funding — —

Ms GOULD — Just because you are on, say, a three it does not mean that in three years time you will be down to zero. It depends on what the issue is.

Mr DAVIS — It depends on other schools, I understand that. But can you give us a breakdown of the schools that have been funded in the last two financial years in the zero and one categories; is that possible.

Ms GOULD — I do not have that with me.

Ms BARKER — I can give you the ones in the Oakleigh electorate, if you like.

Mr DAVIS — I am interested in the broader picture. I am interested to find that, and what sorts of numbers. Do you have any idea of the number of schools in those categories?

Ms GOULD — I am not sure. I think there is an FOI request in for this information as well.

Ms BARKER — I wonder where from?

Ms GOULD — I am not sure. Anyhow, I am happy to give you the last couple of years that you are asking for. We can provide some of that information to the committee.

Ms KOSKY — It is worth mentioning that under the government's capital works investment one in every three schools across Victoria is getting money for capital works, so rather than replacing the gutters we are replacing the facilities, and that is a significant investment we have made which does reduce the maintenance.

Mr DAVIS — There are still quite a number of schools that have not had the broader renewal but do need PRMS money, and they are the schools I am specifically concerned about, the zeros and the ones which, as you point out, are quite urgent in their repairs and there does not appear to have been significant allocations in those.

Ms KOSKY — We will provide you with the detail.

Ms GOULD — All zeros have been funded in this budget.

Mr HOLDING — I would like to ask about the RMIT Vietnam campus program which I recollect was the cause of much public comment during the last parliamentary session. Are you aware of any new information that has recently been published about this project and, if you are aware of such information, what does it indicate about the project?

Ms KOSKY — I will give just a little bit of the history of the RMIT Vietnam project for those members who are not aware. This project was commenced by RMIT under the former vice-chancellor, David Beanland, quite some time ago before we came into office. I understand that the precursor to the RMIT Vietnam campus that is currently being developed was in fact opened or certainly visited by the previous government, so it has been a long project. RMIT has obviously increased its investment in Vietnam as those relationships, particularly with the Vietnamese government, have improved and continued.

The role of the government in this process is basically that we have to approve any loan borrowings by the institute or by the university, so we are not directly responsible for the project but we have to approve the loan borrowings, and we have to do that according to very stringent criteria about its capacity to service the loan borrowings. The Treasurer and I are both involved in that, the Treasurer obviously for various reasons and myself as minister with responsibility for higher education.

The loan borrowings were approved after the government requested quite detailed work from RMIT. It was asked to furnish a lot more detailed financial information about the project, and so it took us some time to make that decision. I understand that during that period the opposition met with RMIT, and the person representing the opposition indicated that we were taking too long and it was happy to take it to the media if we did not speed up our process. We wanted to make sure that the process was correct and that we had covered the detailed information that we needed in order to make a decision. In the last week of Parliament the Auditor-General, who has been looking into the detail of a number of the international projects with universities including the RMIT project in Vietnam, tabled a report which made some statements. He had audited the RMIT Vietnam holdings, and I will read through some of the comments that he made about that.

He indicates a positive operating result from the ordinary activities of \$4.597 million. His report also highlighted the sound basis for the implementation of RMIT's venture in Vietnam, and so really the Auditor-General has indicated that it is a healthy organisation at this stage. Obviously it will be monitored closely, I am sure, by the Auditor-General, as I am sure it will be by RMIT. It is a project that RMIT has been engaged in. The World Bank went through the details of the finances and also the Atlantic philanthropic trust, which provided funding for the project, went through the detailed finances of it.

It is probably worth mentioning that the project is really about ensuring that some of the excellence Victoria has in education in RMIT can be provided in Vietnam, which is a country that needs improvement to its education. The Vietnamese approached RMIT as an institute of high standing to provide that quality education. We will obviously be keeping a close eye on the project, as we do with a number of different commercial operations of the universities. We are not directly responsible but we are responsible for making sure that investment in public educational activities is not damaged in any way by these investments in international activities. So along with RMIT we will be continuing to look at those commercial operations, both overseas operations as well as other commercial operations of the universities. It is worth mentioning too that the previous Minister for Finance brought in a bill that meant that the Auditor-General would have direct responsibility for auditing controlled entities of universities, this being a controlled entity, so making sure that that clearly came within the ambit of the Auditor-General. I have had quite a number of discussions with him, and he clearly sees this as a very important role.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask Minister Gould about the asset investment program. Just before I do, could I get a follow up on the physical resources management system (PRMS) and ask whether you can provide a total of the current PRMS backlog with the other information you are providing to the committee. Would that be possible?

Ms GOULD — Backlog?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The outstanding amount that needs to be done on the PRMS program.

Ms GOULD — Yes, we will provide it. That is the normal practice.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Excellent. Can I ask you about the asset investment program contained in the departmental response. There is a table in the last two pages of the response which lists the project, the total investment, the variation, if any — and most of them do not show any variation — the expenditure as at 30 June

this year and the expected completion date. There are a number of projects there which coincidentally are in my electorate. I am curious about the figures shown for —

Ms KOSKY — We're doing the work — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — That is a very good point, Minister, and perhaps your colleague can clarify this. There are a number of projects there that show relatively minor expenditure as at 30 June 2002. For example, Hillsmead primary school, in the second set, shows expenditure of \$200 000 to 30 June this year for a \$4 million project. However it shows an expected completion date of 7 November this year, revised to April. I am just wondering, given that you have only expended \$200 000 at — —

Ms KOSKY — Expected expenditure, not actual.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Well, is this a fairly accurate figure? It is the department's figure.

Ms GOULD — Expected completion date.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Perhaps another one is the Berwick South secondary school, expected expenditure as at 30 June of \$800 000 for a \$4.5 million project which you say will be completed by November. I am wondering whether those are realistic figures?

Ms GOULD — Are you looking at the expected date or the revised completion date?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — We will take the revised date, which is actually earlier — it has been brought forward to November. Reading from this table, the department has spent \$880 000 — —

Ms GOULD — Are you referring to Hillsmead?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — No, sorry, I have moved on to Berwick South.

Ms GOULD — Berwick South secondary college; is that the one you are referring to?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The department is saying it has spent or expects to have spent \$880 000 as at the end of June and will spend the balance of those funds, some \$3.7 million, between 30 June and November. Is that correct?

Ms GOULD — We do not pay them to do a job before they start it. You pay them on completion. The normal practice is a third, a third and a third. Based on all the information we have from the builders et cetera and the advice I am receiving from the department, it will be — —

It is stage 3 of the project. The total project is \$4.5 million. You are talking about stage 3. There are already two stages in place, so some of that money has already been expended, so you are looking at the completion.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So as at 2 November, assuming that date is met, the total expenditure will be \$4.5 million. Is that correct?

Ms GOULD — Over the whole project, for this part of this particular project — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — To date, as at 30 June, only \$880 000 has been spent.

Ms GOULD — On the advice I am given, yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So the balance, the \$3.7 million, will be spent in the next four months.

Ms KOSKY — You are not complaining about that, are you?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I am just trying to seek clarification, and I have actually been — — .

Mrs MADDIGAN — But you don't pay for the building until it is completed. You don't pay before it starts.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I have actually been at that school with Minister Kosky. It is a very good school, and I am surprised that what we saw at that school was only \$880 000 worth of work.

Mrs MADDIGAN — No, because they haven't paid for it until it is completed.

The CHAIRMAN — It is the payments that have been made, not — —

Ms KOSKY — There are different stages of this project.

Ms GOULD — There is the planning, there is the construction. It is like your own home. You get your architect design, you get your lockup stage.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Presumably a school that is operating this school year has been paid for.

Ms KOSKY — Stage 1 and stage 2 have been completed and paid for. Stage 3 — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — And they were only \$880 000?

Ms GOULD — No, this is only on this stage, stage 3. The previous ones that have been paid for are not on here.

Mr CLARK — It is at the level of \$4.5 million — you have not designated this line as relating only to stage 3.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So is the \$4.5 million stage 3, or is it the total project?

Ms GOULD — Stage 3 — —

Ms KOSKY — Total cost of the project, total end investment is \$4.5 million — —

Ms GOULD — Of this stage — stage 3.

Ms KOSKY — Of stage 3.

The CHAIRMAN — And the current stage is what is outlined there?

Ms GOULD — Yes.

The CHAIRMAN — And the expenditure of that will be the \$4.5 million project completed.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I am more confused now. There has been more than \$880 000 spent on that school to date?

Ms GOULD — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So you are showing the total of the project in one column, but you are only showing stage 3 in the other column?

Mr HAMILTON — Showing what was spent, expected to be spent in the financial year 2001–02. Some had been spent in earlier years, some will be spent in the next financial year — so it is just a slice of this financial year.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are you able to provide the total which has been spent over previous financial years on these projects?

Ms KOSKY — We will even do a press release for you.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — That will be fine, thank you.

Ms BARKER — Lyn, I notice in the budget outcomes, assets, you have a line that says \$16.7 million for TAFE facilities. There has been a considerable investment by this government into TAFE facilities. I was wondering if you could give the committee some information on the impact of the investment that this government is putting into TAFE is having on their educational outcomes and some of the work that is going on within TAFE.

Ms KOSKY — We have certainly made a major investment in our training right across the state and TAFE institutes have obviously been an important part of that. It is worth indicating what we discovered when we came into office in relation to the TAFE institutes. The previous ANTA agreement, which is an agreement between

the commonwealth and the states, meant that growth in training would occur through efficiencies rather than through additional funding. So basically it was: do more for the same amount of money. So it meant that we paid right across the board, or the previous government right across the board paid less per student contact hour than it had previously paid.

I would be the first to admit that there were efficiencies that needed to be made in the system, and I think we are more efficient here in Victoria than other states are. However, what that agreement meant, and because of the major uptake in training here in Victoria it basically spelled disaster for our TAFE institutes in terms of their financial viability. When we came to office we made a major investment in the financial viability of our TAFE institutes really to make sure that they could keep their heads above water, as well as putting a lot of additional funding into training places right across the state and across the public and the private sectors.

It is certainly paying dividends. We have also made a major capital investment in our TAFE institutes to make sure that they are state-of-the-art facilities, and total capital works and IT infrastructure has received a boost of \$30 million in the 2000–01 budget, \$103 million in the 2001–02 budget and \$16.7 million in this most recent budget. So that is a major increase on what had previously been provided, particularly in the 2001–01 year. What it has meant is that our TAFE institutes are now much more financially viable. I think more importantly we are seeing incredible growth, particularly in apprenticeships and traineeships, and training right across the board.

As I mentioned before we have now hit the 120 000 — I think it is 123 000 — mark in terms of those who are currently in training for traineeships and apprenticeships, which is an Australian first. We are certainly experiencing the bulk of the growth here in Victoria, much greater than our population share in terms of training. The exact figure is 123 658, and that is at the end of May 2002. That compares with 74 057 in November 1999. So you can see we have gone up from just over 74 000 to well over 123 000. It is a significant increase. That includes both public investment and private investment from companies, but it really indicates that there is a very strong commitment by industry to training within Victoria. It means that they do have strong confidence in the system we have in place in Victoria. It really is achieving some very good results in terms of education and training across the state.

When we look at Victoria's performance compared with the rest of the country — I shall just run through a couple of figures here — 13.5 per cent of Victorian 15 to 64-year-olds participated in vocational education and training in 2000 compared with 12.1 per cent nationally, so it is above the national average, and that included both the males and females. Victorian participation in rural areas in all ages was 13.6 per cent higher than the national average of 10.3 per cent, so it was significantly higher. Participation in remote areas is particularly high, at 31.3 per cent compared to 11.1 per cent nationally. That is a real indication that in relation to participation in training, training is really providing a lot of the education and training support in our remote rural communities, far higher than what is happening nationally. They are really good figures.

Obviously it is important that we continue to make the investment that we are making, but also that we continue to put out the challenge in a way to our training system. We are doing very well in terms of the base level — what we are doing at the moment. Tomorrow I will be releasing a blueprint for the future for training which really talks about where we need to go in the future. There are a few tasters of that today, but it talks about where we need to go in the future to really make sure that we are ensuring that we have a very highly skilled work force for existing industries and also for emerging industries into the future.

Ms BARKER — You talk about the financial viability of TAFE, and of course one that has been of interest is Chisholm Institute of TAFE. Is there an opportunity to provide a little more detail about ensuring the financial viability of Chisholm?

Ms KOSKY — Yes. Chisholm institute, as you will know, was a major botched project when we came to office. Chisholm was an amalgamated campus of a number of other institutes done by the previous government. It started off with a deficit and things really got worse after that period. In 2001 I initiated a review because of the poor financial results in 2000 and a projected deficit for 2001 of \$8 million. I think that meant an accumulated deficit of close to \$15 million. It was just a situation that is I was not prepared to allow to continue.

It really did need a major investment, but also some major changes, so we had a review. That review resulted in the transfer of Moorabbin campus to Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. I have also approved additional funding of almost \$15 million to assist Chisholm to restructure and develop its capital infrastructure, \$5 million for restructuring, \$1.9 million for planning, and \$8 million for a new facility in Dandenong. Its latest audited financial statements for

2001 show an improvement in its position. The 2001 funded operating results show a surplus of \$0.6 million compared to a deficit of \$5.3 million in 2000.

We are closely monitoring the situation with Chisholm. The institute has identified staff surplus to its requirements in 2002. It will be offering voluntary departure packages for excess staff. It is a difficult period for Chisholm but it is really focused on making sure that it gets its act together. The working capital ratio now has improved from up 0.38:1 to 0.47:1 in 2001, so it is gradually improving.

We have still had to provide a surety to the Auditor-General. We have provided a cash-flow guarantee in the event that Chisholm is unable to pay its debts as they fall due. We have had to provide that assurance to the Auditor-General. But we are hopeful that over the next few years Chisholm will work its way out of the debt basically that it began with, and it really was never given the right support in the first place. It is a very large institute which was brought together from a number of different institutes, all with different systems. That was never sorted out at the beginning and it really was allowed to languish by the previous government.

We have made a major investment but also we have had that review and are putting in place the recommendations of the review to make sure that situation does not happen again. I should say that Chisholm provides very high-quality training right down that south-eastern corridor. It is a very important institute, and it is important that it is given the support so that it does not have to focus only on its financial issues and can focus on the quality training which it provides.

The CHAIRMAN — I move onto that other area of post-compulsory education that does not seem to grab the headlines the way that these do, that is, the ACE — adult and community education — sector, which nonetheless plays a valuable role in our community in providing education through things like the University of the Third Age and others in ensuring the opportunity for lifelong learning, I guess. As I said, it does not get the prominence that other education sectors do. Could you outline for the committee what is being done within this budget to support the ACE sector and particular directions that you are attempting to go within ACE?

Ms KOSKY — I am happy to do that. The ACE sector, as I mentioned before, is a sector that provides incredible training and lifelong learning right across the state. It really fits a niche, I suppose, where students who are wanting to return to study often come first. As I said it is picking up students in the 15 to 19 age group, some of those kids that are not particularly engaged in schools or TAFE institutes.

In the 2003 budget we will be investing an additional \$2 million to increase the student contact hour rate, which is something for which they have been crying out for a very long period of time. That moves to an average rate to \$6.11 per student contact hour in 2003. What that means for ACE facilities is that it particularly assists the smaller facilities that struggle with their administrative costs and do not have the economies of scale to provide for that broader support and the administrative support. As well, as I mentioned before, when we came to office they did not have the additional support for smaller ACE providers to come together so that they could share resources that they could pool, such as marketing ideas and the marketing of their facilities.

Peter Kirby is the new chair of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board. I was delighted when he was prepared to take up that role. He has been fantastic in visiting a lot of the ACE providers, but also working through what the future directions for ACE providers are. One of the areas that is currently being discussed with all the ACE providers is how they get their regional support. There has always been funding that has been put into regional ACFE councils that have determined where the funding goes across the sector.

He has been working, together with Sue Christophers from my department, very closely with them to look at whether that is the best model for regional support, particularly to the smaller facilities, and whether there are some other steps that they can take with the regional players so that the regional facilities are not so much focused on the funding issues but rather on policy and planning issues in a broader sense.

Discussions will take place over the next few weeks to look at some of those policy issues to identify some of the groups in the adult communities who are currently missing out, and also to identify some of the communities currently missing out. Areas in more remote places in Victoria are getting no educational or post-school training at all. They are looking at the possibility of using facilities such as the CFA as part of the way to provide training delivery to those very small communities. This is where the ACE sector is incredibly important, because it can fill the gap that other educational institutions do not fill.

When some commonwealth grants come through we are making sure that the smaller providers get them without having to write detailed submissions. We are making sure they get the funding straight away rather than putting in

submissions, because we know the bigger providers tend to benefit when submissions have to be written. We are trying to make sure we provide those resources across the ACE sector in the easiest way so that they can get on with the job they do best, which is teaching adults.

Mr CLARK — My question is to Minister Kosky. I refer to the Auditor-General's report on public sector agencies for 2002 and to his findings on the publication *Parent link*, which is issued by the department, and his findings that the publication contains material that could be regarded as party-political in nature. I also refer to the department's response to the Auditor-General's report in which it appears to attempt to defend the *Parent link* publication by saying that the items that were referred to by the Auditor-General were simply quotations from the Premier or minister and therefore they were okay. Do you accept the Auditor-General's criticism of the past content of *Parent link*, or do you line up with your department in rejecting the Auditor-General's findings? Do you intend that in future *Parent link* and other departmental publications comply with the proposed guidelines that the Auditor-General sets out in his report?

Ms KOSKY — I think in that instance the concern the Auditor-General raised was in relation to the term 'the Bracks government' as opposed to 'the government' or 'the Victorian government'. I do not find that offensive; I find it pretty exciting, really. But we have acknowledged the Auditor-General's comments and are looking at ways to make sure we properly inform parents about the investment we are making in education and training and about why we are making that investment and about the outcomes. We want to engage parents. We have taken on board the Auditor-General's comments. I should say that in taking on board the Auditor-General's comments, it means not repeating what the previous government did.

Mr CLARK — Do you intend to comply with the guidelines?

Ms KOSKY — We will be looking at ways we comply with the guidelines the Auditor-General has put in place and also making sure parents are aware of the investment that the government is making in education and training and the fact that we see it as a very high priority.

Mr DAVIS — Did you say you will or will not comply with the guidelines?

Ms KOSKY — I just said we will comply with the guidelines.

Mrs MADDIGAN — I note that budget paper 3 at pages 27 and 28 relates to notebook computers for teachers. It identifies that 86 per cent of all teachers and principals have notebook computers. However, the goal was for 95 per cent of teachers and principals to have notebook computers. Can you explain why there is a difference in that program and how it is operating?

Ms GOULD — I am happy to explain that. As you have correctly noted, the government's goal was to provide 95 per cent of teachers and principals with notebook computers. I am happy to report that we are making good progress towards that number. However, due to an increase in teacher numbers, we are not as far along as we would have liked. Because of our policy and our commitment to improve the outcome of education in Victoria, and all the things we have been talking about today, we have actually had to increase the number of teachers, so that is why the percentage does not come out the way it should.

We now have more teachers in the system that want notebooks. The uptake has increased on what was originally anticipated. We are responding to that increased demand, and an additional 3500 notebook computers will shortly be allocated to teachers and principals, which will put us on track to reach the 95 per cent target.

It is relevant to also point out — as we have been talking about Auditor-General's reports — that in his report on compliance with the conditions under the notebook computers for teachers and principals program, the Auditor-General states that this program has been managed effectively. So the Auditor-General acknowledges what we have done and that we have been doing it in an effective way. It has also been independently evaluated by Deakin University, which states that teachers and principals have enthusiastically endorsed the program. It further shows, as I said before, that teachers and principals are progressively acquiring the skills to use the new learning technologies.

I have visited a number of schools and teachers have told me that they are delighted with the new notebooks. It is an ongoing process and involves upgrading them, and there are also new teachers coming on and teachers who have not applied before but have seen how beneficial it is. Some teachers have said to me that they have gone native. They were not enthusiastic about computers and they now see how beneficial they are and are avid users of them — as we can see in this room today. It is an improvement by this government in information technology for

Victorian schools by ensuring Victorian principals and teachers have access to the best information technology available.

Mr DAVIS — My question to Minister Kosky also refers to a Labor Party promise. In the 1999 state election the Labor Party promised to cap primary school classes prep to grade 2 at 21. That promise was subsequently scaled down to an average of 21 students in prep to grade 1. I understand the history in that it was revealed that Access Economics had only ever been asked by the ALP to cost the promise based on an average, not a maximum class size of 21. The average of 21 students promised was to be fulfilled by 2003 — that is, the scaled-down promise.

However, the primary school class size data for 2002 shows that after more than two years of this initiative 56 per cent of primary schools — 719 Victorian primary schools in total — are yet to reach an average prep to 2 class size of 21 students, and 20 per cent of primary schools have actually experienced an increase in prep to 2 class sizes since 1999. As minister can you give a guarantee that every government primary school in Victoria will achieve an average class size of 21 students from prep to grade 2 by the school year 2003?

Ms KOSKY — It is worth running through some of the data about the average prep to 2 class sizes. I should mention that one of the reasons for having average prep to 2 class sizes is because schools make their own decisions. We have put in the extra resources and the extra teachers, but some schools, for educational reasons and the way they structure their education program, some because of the numbers they have in any particular year —

Mr DAVIS — That is a backdown from a cap.

Ms KOSKY — It is very difficult to provide 21 in every class unless you want three or four prep kids in a grade 4 class, which I do not think anyone would want. We have to take into account the organisational issues and the physical capacity in some schools. While we have provided a lot more capital to assist the provision of average prep to year 2 class sizes, some schools do not have the physical capacity on their sites to put in extra portables or have extra classrooms. That has been taken into account. With this most recent budget we have put in the funding that is required, taking into account that there was additional unexpected growth in the prep to year 2 group. We have provided additional funding in this budget to ensure that we do reach the commitment to the average prep to year 2 class size of 21 students from the beginning of next year.

It is worth doing a bit of comparison of what we have achieved since we have come to office. It is worth also mentioning that average primary class sizes have dropped across all year levels. The commitment and extra investment we have made have not in any way been detrimental to class sizes in other year levels.

Mr DAVIS — It is not the case in Burwood, I have to say.

Ms KOSKY — We have made the extra investment in average class sizes. As I said, we have put in the resources, and by the beginning of next year we will have put in the resources. I have made it clear to parents and principals that where the class size is above 21 students parents need to ask the educational reasons for that. Even though the prep to year 2 class size might be above that average of 21, if the teacher-student ratio is not coming down, then the regions are talking with schools about why that is the case. We want to ensure that the investment we have made is going into those prep to grade 2 years and making sure that it increases face-to-face contact between students and teachers.

To look at what has happened since 1999, the percentage of classes with more than 30 students in them for the prep to year 2 age grouping in 2002 is 0.1 per cent — under the Bracks government. It was 1.3 per cent when we came into office: 1.3 per cent of classes had an average size of more than 30 students for prep to year 2 and it is now 0.1 per cent under us. The percentage of classes with more than 25 students under us for the prep to year 2 age cohort is 9.7 per cent. Under the previous government 41.7 per cent of classes had more than 25 students in them in prep to year 2.

We have made a major difference in the size of prep to year 2 classes. We are committed to reaching that average of 21, understanding that schools make individual decisions, but where class sizes are over 21 students we have made the investment in terms of the number of teachers, so parents need to talk with the school about why it may not have achieved that 21 student limit in prep to year 2. It has not been to the detriment of class sizes in primary schools; as I mentioned, they have all come down. That is really because of the investment we have made in terms of extra teachers.

Why are we doing it? It is not because we like having extra teachers in schools but because we want to improve the literacy and numeracy standards, particularly in those early years, because that is the educational basis upon which students build other knowledge. That is why we are making the investment. We are doing the literacy and numeracy testing to ensure that our investment is resulting in the outcomes we want but we are committed to achieving the average class size of 21 students for prep to year 2 by the beginning of next year.

Mr DAVIS — The statistics relating to class sizes, will you release those to the committee as the year progresses?

Ms KOSKY — I think they are already on the public record.

Mr DAVIS — That is the previous year. The forthcoming school year for a start, can we get a commitment that you will release them?

Ms KOSKY — We cannot do it prior.

Mr DAVIS — There was a lot of difficulty getting them from the previous minister. It took a great deal of effort to get them; the *Herald Sun* finally got them. I want to understand that there is going to be smooth process here.

Ms KOSKY — The census data is collected from schools in the middle of February. The first thing we do is collate the prep to year 2 class sizes for obvious reasons — it is a major commitment. We then use that census data to determine the school global budgets and then we look at other class sizes. For example, the secondary class sizes are done at a later stage than the prep to year 2 class sizes — we do it in priority order. However, I make it available and I give the undertaking to make it available as soon as it is available to me. It is that February data. We do the prep to year 2 class sizes first in terms of the data that comes in while making sure that we go back to schools where there might have been absences, making sure that they have the most up-to-date data and that it is accurate. We are then absolutely happy to put it out publicly.

Mr DAVIS — What date is the secondary school data available?

Ms KOSKY — I released the secondary school data at the beginning of this week. That was collated at the beginning of June. I got a report last week and I released it on Monday. However, obviously we do not release the raw data because it is not collected in a form that is able to be published.

The CHAIRMAN — Can I just clarify? Mr Davis asked for the provision of figures for the forthcoming year?

Ms KOSKY — We will do it as soon as it is available.

The CHAIRMAN — I just want to clarify: I assume we actually mean the current year.

Ms KOSKY — No, I think the request was that I release it as soon it is available. Obviously the information for this year has been already released. The information for next year will be released as soon as it is collated and analysed. I give a commitment to release that as soon as practicable in terms of when I receive it; I will not be sitting on it for months.

The CHAIRMAN — Next year?

Ms KOSKY — Yes, next year.

The CHAIRMAN — Thank you.

Ms BARKER — Can I take you to the importance of improving educational and social outcomes for Koori students? Pages 171 and 172 of budget paper 2 refer to Koori educators and Koori home school liaison officers. Could you provide details of the initiatives that the government is taking to ensure that that improvement is continuous and expanding?

Ms KOSKY — Last year the Premier launched the Yalca strategy, which has been quite a long time being worked through with the Koori community. The Yalca strategy is essentially a partnership in education and training statement between the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. — which we commonly know as

VAEAI — and the state government. Basically it recognises that local Koori communities are the best able to determine the education and training needs of their students.

We put \$3.6 million in this budget over a four-year period for the appointment of 15 Koori educators and 6 home school liaison officers. They will have a particular focus on literacy and numeracy within the Koori community and trying to improve the standards there. Obviously the home liaison officers will be working very closely with parents to ensure that the Koori students are coming to school and understand the importance of education. They will also engage parents in terms of the ways they might assist at home and in being engaged in the educational process. It is probably fair to say that a lot of the parents of the Koori students in our schools did not really have positive experiences of school themselves. We need to make sure that we can build those bridges and develop the links in a way that the Koori community feels comfortable with. It has certainly been explained to me by principals that the Koori community sees it as a broader community: it is not just about going to school; they want a total community response to education. We need to ensure that the education we provide to engage Koori students and ensure they succeed fits within their cultural understanding and values.

If we do not do that, we are not going to have success in terms of Koori student outcomes. We have made that investment. We are currently working with the Koori community through VAEAI to look at where those Koori educators and home school liaison officers will be located and how they can best work. Then they will be put in place. It is an exciting initiative and is an initiative that the government is very serious about the Yalca strategy.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — My question is to Minister Kosky. The Schools Australia 2001 report was released by the ABS. It found that the gap in retention rates between boys and girls in Victoria was 14.5 per cent, which was the highest gap of any state in Australia. Clearly it is an issue of concern that so few boys relative to girls are completing secondary school. I would like to ask you what programs you have in place to address the issue of the low retention of boys relative to girls?

Ms KOSKY — You might remember when we put in place the Kirby review that Peter Kirby chaired, I did at that time release figures about retention rates across the board and broke them down to gender. You are right that particularly in some regions around Victoria the retention rate for boys — and for girls — was not at all good and we needed to look at strategies. But in some instances the drop-out rates for boys were appalling when we came into office.

The Kirby review made quite a large number of recommendations that we are putting in place about what we can do to ensure that we improve not only the retention rates but the completion rates of year 12, or its equivalent, which is a target we have established. We have put in place quite a range of different initiatives in order to ensure that we improve retention rates across the board, understanding that improving retention rates across the board means improving them for boys as well as for girls.

In this most recent budget we made a major investment of \$550 million for education and training across primary and secondary schools. We made a major investment in the middle years as well in the senior years. I will run through those initiatives. In the middle years, as I said before, we put in \$81 million for Access to Excellence over a four-year period, which is focused on those schools that are having difficulty achieving the government's goals and targets, which includes obviously year 12 completion or its equivalent. That funding will be targeted to schools that have poor attendance and truancy rates, as well as a number of initiatives, but focuses around those issues of retention, truancy, and the lack of engagement by students. They will be getting extra teachers, which is aimed at increasing student-teacher contact. There will be additional teachers in the classroom. They will be targeted to those schools that are having difficulty in showing improvement in terms of our movement towards achieving the goals and targets.

We are also putting in \$84 million for the innovation and excellence grants to schools. All secondary schools will have access to those along with their feeder primary schooling focused around the middle years, which again is about the active engagement as well as ensuring excellent outcomes. We do not just want kids to be at school. We want them to succeed at school and to do well at school. So that is \$165 million over a four-year period additional that we are putting in specifically around those middle year areas.

We have also put funding in this budget of \$47 million for the Victorian certificate of applied learning to expand VCAL, which is in years 11 and 12 — an alternative pathway to the VCE for students who do want to go on to university or who do not want to necessarily go on to a TAFE institute where the VCE is going to deliver that outcome for them. So, for instance, students who are interested in apprenticeship or traineeship or some other pathway through to TAFE institutes and who are more focused on an applied learning approach to education and

also a combination of school and work can do the Victorian certificate of applied learning. That will be rolled out progressively to schools over the next two years. That was in response directly to schools and to industries saying they really needed a more vocationally oriented pathway in those senior years.

It acknowledges that some kids get to the end of year 10, look at the VCE and they say it is not for them and they drop out. I have spoken with students around the state who are doing the VCAL trials this year who said that if the VCAL did not exist they would have left school. So it is another pathway for students that is focused on applied learning, links with work, but includes English and maths, or literacy and numeracy, in recognised areas, so either units from VCE or from the certificate of general education or from the international baccalaureate, or it might be from other areas, but recognised credentials. We want it to be a quality credential, but it has a different approach to learning and teaching. The VET modules fit within the national training framework, so they will count. A student who wants to do an apprenticeship can start to do part of the credits at school and have completed some of the apprenticeship before going out into the workplace. We are doing that in the senior years.

We have also put in funding \$16.5 million — \$15 million in schools and \$1.5 million in TAFE institutions and ACE providers for pathway planning for students, initially for students who are thinking of maybe leaving school and expanding to all kids at the beginning of year 11, developing career pathway plans with teachers about what it is they want to do and how they think they might get there, and really engaging the student in thinking about that. It does not matter if they change it 10 times; it is just engaging them in thinking about where it is they want to go rather than once they have left school thinking where in the hell they are going to do. We so are really looking at that. That is a major investment.

We have also put in funding for the local learning employment networks which are established right across the state. These are the networks that combine schools, TAFE institutes, ACE providers, industry and local government to look at where those gaps exist, either in skills area or students who are missing out at the moment — groups of students — and developing different responses to those. We have had some fantastic responses to that. There are some new programs that are being developed by local networks to look at how they can more actively engage some of those kids who have been dropping out of school. We have a whole range of initiatives. I suppose it picks up that issue I raised before, that we need to make sure we cover all stages of learning. We are particularly focused around middle years and the post-compulsory years to make sure that students are engaged in education and training.

I should also say that we have introduced the VCE in places other than schools, so we are trialling that with ACE providers at the moment. Some ACE providers are providing the VCE for kids who want to do the VCE but do not want to stay at school. That is proving successful for small groups of students. It is important that for those kids who are dropping out we develop some different responses. TAFE institutes are also providing the VCE so that we make sure we keep kids engaged in education and training rather than engaged in an educational institution trying to break down the barriers between the silos so that the system works for kids rather than working for the system.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I appreciate that hopefully most of those programs will have an outcome in terms of raising overall retention.

Ms KOSKY — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — And participation. But what I am particularly interested in is the substantial gap between boys and girls in terms of participation and retention. Are there any programs that are particularly targeted at closing that gap? Is there a government objective or performance measure related to closing that gap?

Ms KOSKY — We have got a clear government target, which is about by the year 2010 having 90 per cent of students completing year 12 or its equivalent. In order to achieve that target we have to make a difference for both genders. We have to make a difference for boys as well as for girls. It is not about closing the gap. It is about raising the retention rates for both girls and boys.

That is what we are doing. The local learning employment networks are developing very specific responses, so it might be a response in relation to boys in a particular community. Mornington Peninsula is a good — it is probably a bad example in a sense, because it is an example of where the retention rates for boys are not good. So the local learning employment network in that area is very much focused on developing responses for boys. But again, if you look at the VCAL and at students who want to do apprenticeships and want to go into some of those trade areas, that tends to focus on boys.

We are developing an educational response rather than necessarily — I suppose what you are suggesting — a gender response. But we have or are developing a gender education strategy for Victorian schools, which is to

develop a framework to improve retention rates for boys, acknowledging that that is an area of concern. But we are trying to improve the retention rates right across-the-board. If we do not improve the retention rates for boys we will never reach the target we set as a government. I should say that we are monitoring on a yearly basis on a number of different measures against those programs I have mentioned to make sure they are making the difference we want them to make, as well as looking at those overall outcomes on an annual basis.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I guess if you look at where we are now versus your target of 90 per cent, to achieve that target for girls you need roughly a 4 percentage point increase, whereas for boys you are looking at around an 18 percentage point increase.

Ms KOSKY — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So you are required to do a significantly different task for boys. I expect that that would require specific gender-targeted programs to address that 18 per cent improvement you require versus the 4 per cent improvement you require for girls?

Ms KOSKY — Not necessarily gender-targeted programs, but specific programs. For instance, our response for Koori boys will be very different to our response for, say, boys in the Mornington Peninsula. The response to boys in metropolitan Melbourne — say, in Footscray — will be different to the response for boys or for girls in Bright. What we are doing is developing local responses which address the needs of the groups of students who are currently missing out, and the fact that you have mentioned that boys are missing out means that those strategies have to respond to those groups of boys. But it will respond to them in terms of what is happening locally rather than just having a one-size-fits-all model.

Some would dispute that boys are necessarily missing out in a broader sense, but in terms of retention rates we need to find out where the boys are going and whether they are going on to other training institutes. Part of managing individual pathways is to look at where students are going. Certainly when we came to office, on the basis of Richard Teese's work, for I think about a third of students who left school before the completion of year 12 their destinations were unknown. So we need to find out their destinations. Some of them will be successful destinations, but some are dropping out and are not being picked up elsewhere. We need to know what their destinations are, which is why we have the pathways planning in place and they get someone who supports them until they get a successful placement — hopefully they stay at school, but if they do not, a successful placement with a TAFE institute, an ACE provider, or in work. It is trying to make sure that they remain engaged in education, but developing some of those local responses and understanding that not all boys are alike, as are not all girls. It would be a boring world if they were, really.

I should say that the retention rate is a narrow measure, because it is only about school retention. It does not take into account training. It does not take into account apprenticeships, traineeships or students who might go on to TAFE institutes. We are looking at developing a broader measure — obviously still including the retention rates, but looking at what happens with students in a broader sense, understanding that success in a range of education and training endeavours is important. We want to make sure that kids remain engaged with education and training to the completion of year 12 or its equivalent. We are developing that information and will be providing that publicly. The reason we have set targets is so as a government we can be measured against our achievement and our movement towards those targets. We want to be judged on that. It is probably a brave government that does that, but it is an important issue for us.

The CHAIRMAN — Does the retention rate figure pick up post-compulsory education age? In your presentation you talked about better outcomes for 19 to 24-year-olds, and so on.

Ms KOSKY — Yes.

The CHAIRMAN — They would not necessarily be included in the retention rate as it is currently structured, would they?

Ms KOSKY — No, the retention rate does not. It is only within schools. It does not pick up equivalent studies in other places. There is a breakdown between government schools and non-government schools, but it is only within schools. That is why we need to look at it in a broader sense, understanding that there are probably more boys who will go on to do apprenticeships and TAFE studies and training than girls in that particular age cohort, as I recall it. So we need to get that bigger picture. In terms of year 12 completion we are also looking at the equivalent in terms of the AQF training framework and what would be the equivalent of year 12 completion, so we can measure that in a broader sense.

The CHAIRMAN — I pick up another of those issues that seems to surface from year to year. It has certainly been raised here and on an electorate basis it has been raised each year — that is, the issue of school bus services. I should note that our absent committee member, Mr Theophanous, had a fair role in the review. Both in the presentation and elsewhere was reference to a changed program for school bus services. Budget paper 2 at page 171 indicates some increased moneys for school bus services, and at page 173 talks about funding being provided for enhancements to the conveyance allowances paid for private car travel, bus travel to schools for government and non-government schools, and travel for disabled students. I think you referred to that in your presentation. Can you give us some detail of how that money is intended to be spent and precisely what it will do within those groups?

Ms GOULD — Sure, I would be happy to. The bus review funding in this year's budget will have a very direct impact — excuse the pun — on Victorian school students, particularly in rural areas, and that is an area that has been neglected for some time. It will improve the nuts and bolts of access to education, which is critical to support the government's initiative that you have heard about today. We have a target for regional and rural areas; it is difficult for them with their isolation to actually get to schools, and that is part of the issues we are attempting to address. That is a significant challenge for the government — to address the whole provision of school buses. We have met that challenge head on and, as you have indicated, a member of your committee was involved in a bus review.

Ms BARKER — He chaired it.

Ms GOULD — Yes, Mr Theophanous chaired it and also put the review out, unlike previous reviews that have been undertaken, which were never released. This amount of money allocated in this budget will be directed towards both government and non-government schools, and that is important to note. State-funded school buses and allowances have existed in this state for many decades. A lot of people do not realise that they have been going on since around 1910. They have been around for quite some time. Do not hold me to the exact date, but it has been there a very long time. The primary focus is obviously for the non-metropolitan areas and providing free buses for students who live more than 4.8 kilometres — in the old measurement that is 3 miles — from their nearest government school.

This system also provides allowances for students who do not have access to a free bus service, and where there is a route available from where they live to their nearest school. This includes non-government schools as well. Students who attend non-government schools and who live more than the 4.8 kilometres from them can get access to an allowance to compensate them for getting to school.

The reforms we have put in place as a result of this budget will result in a more flexible and more equitable school bus system. Before these reforms it did not matter how far you travelled or how far away you lived from the school; if you were in excess of 4.8 kilometres you got the same amount. We have addressed those imbalances and taken out the anomalies that have been in place for decades. This is the first time this has happened.

First off, there is the private car travel reimbursement through which at the moment students get access to a free bus service. That will be reformed. Currently they get \$300 per student, and this is administered by the schools. You get \$300 per student no matter how far away you live. We want to address that inequity by improving it to \$700. It is actually an extra \$700 on top of the \$300, so it becomes a maximum of \$1000. In regional and rural isolated areas students have to travel long distances and, obviously, the costs associated with that need to be addressed. We have addressed that anomaly by increasing it by \$700. Similar increases will be made to allowances paid to non-government schools in rural areas to subsidise private bus services, so a non-government school may choose to purchase their own bus and run their own route and get the funding accordingly. Then they have the asset of using the school bus during school hours. That is their choice; it is one of the available options.

Mrs MADDIGAN — Do they pick up other people on the route while they are running the bus to school?

Ms GOULD — If there is a seat available, government school buses actually pick up non-government school students at the moment. This is to try and address that issue. I am sure you have heard stories about students being left at bus stops. I know it is an issue in your electorate, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN — I have heard plenty of stories!

Ms GOULD — As a government, we supply buses for government schools, and if it is a non-government school student and the bus has a vacancy, you can get on it. If there is not, obviously for health and safety reasons you cannot have excess numbers of students on buses. Using lateral thinking, this is another way of looking at

trying to address some of those areas for non-government schools. A new allowance has been established to assist deaf and blind students. This will provide car or taxi travel to the order of \$2000 a year. We are addressing the needs of our students with disabilities.

The number of non-government students in an area will now be considered when we start up a new bus route. Throughout Victoria there are something like 1600 bus routes that take kids to and from school every day. People do not realise that, but that is a helluva lot of different buses running around morning and afternoon. Until this initiative, the practice was that you had to have 15 students to create a bus route and they all had to be from government schools. We are now taking into account non-government schools and saying, 'If you have 11 government school students and 5 non-government school students who could run the same route, you can then establish a new bus route'. It is a bit more fair and equitable and will again assist in the non-government schools area. The implementation and planning of all of this and to introduce the recommendations that were in the report that Theo did — —

Mrs MADDIGAN — The Theophanous report!

Ms GOULD — The Theophanous report of the review — —

Ms BARKER — Theobus!

Ms GOULD — This will take place and be implemented for next year's school year. There is a review of the school bus implementation, and a reference group has been established which comprises this Department of Education and Training and, obviously, the Department of Infrastructure on the basis that its buses will run it. The Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria have also been represented, and there are obviously a number of stakeholder groups. We are keeping principals informed so that parents who have students starting school as soon as next year can talk to the principals and find out what is available. We have to have all this in place by mid-November because that is when schools will be finalising their numbers and all the information needs to be out to schools so parents can react to it. It is a great initiative and I am pleased we got the bus out!

Ms KOSKY — I would like to put on notice our thanks to Theo Theophanous, a member of your committee.

The CHAIRMAN — Thanks for that, Minister. I can look forward to the first three weeks of next year in my electorate. One of the other big and positive impacts in my electorate on school bus services will be the construction of Lara secondary school.

Ms GOULD — I was delighted to be there the other day.

Mr CLARK — A question to Minister Kosky about educational standards: I refer you to the second-last slide of your presentation in which you refer to 93 per cent of year 3 students meeting national benchmarks in literacy. As I understand it, that will be for the 2001 year and the corresponding national figure is 92.5 per cent of students meeting national benchmarks in literacy.

Ms KOSKY — Yes.

Mr CLARK — As I understand it, the previous time the national benchmarks were taken back in 1996, 73 per cent of students nationally met the benchmark, and so the very large increase from 1996 to 2001. I am told that one of the reasons, if not the sole reason for that increase nationwide, was not so much an improvement in student performance but a lowering of the benchmark standard. Are you aware of that and whether it is the case, and are you aware of further moves to change the national standards? Similarly, are you aware of any changes in the state benchmark levels for the LAP tests or other state-based tests that have changed over recent years. Obviously, the figures have been distorted if the hurdle or benchmark level is being changed rather than measuring against a constant benchmark.

Ms KOSKY — Thanks for the question. It is always the difficulty. I suppose it points out some of the difficulties with benchmarks. You can use them as trend data, but there is a lot of work that is done in order to get the national figures. Each state has its own testing regime which it puts in place. Then equating occurs within the states as well as between the states. It is a very lengthy and cumbersome process. I am not aware of the issues that you have raised.

As state ministers, we have had the discussion about ensuring that we have consistency in the national benchmark figures. As I said, the trend data is important to show whether we are showing improvement over a period of time. As states and territories have come on board in terms of the testing regime, it has taken some time to get the system in place. In Victoria of recent times we have had some issues in relation to the external firm which had done the testing. There were some issues around the ownership of IP with that, and it has been a long and probably tortuous process in negotiating that through, which has meant a delay in us getting information and data. As a result of some problems with that system, we brought the AIM test in-house and this year the testing will be conducted in-house. At a national level we are starting to have some discussions about how we ensure consistency in terms of the collection and analysis of data. There will be different views between states and territories about how that can best happen, but we in Victoria are committed to having the national benchmark as well as doing state testing. It means that we do have to be very confident about the validity and reliability of the data that we get, the interpretation that is made of that data and the comparisons that are made with other data. At the moment there are different understandings of the exemptions that are put in place in every state.

Trying to get some consistency in the testing is important. From a very personal point of view I would prefer that we had one national test. That is personal. I have not tested that across the government, but I know a number of other states are reluctant to do that. We will pursue the possibility of at least working with other states on that because the more you do the equating exercise, every time there is one either within the state or between states the reliability of the final data is challenged and you get a greater drift in the accuracy of the figures. It is very difficult to explain that drift when you do a public presentation on the figures, but it needs to be included.

As minister I am very keen to achieve over the next year a nationwide system where we can be absolutely confident about the consistency of the data that goes into it, absolutely confident about consistency in the way it is analysed and therefore absolutely confident about the final results that come out. If we are not clear about that, it is very hard to make those improvements in the areas we need to. When we collect the data in order to make some changes or improvements in the outcomes in literacy and numeracy, if we cannot rely on the data or the analysis of it, it does not assist us to do what we need to do.

Mr CLARK — Has there been no change in the government's position on not extending universal testing to year 7?

Ms KOSKY — We have made a commitment. We are progressing towards that. I mentioned before the difficulties we had in bringing AIM in house, partly getting access. There was a fair bit of challenge over the data and over the intellectual property. Bringing that data in house has taken longer than we had anticipated. It has finally been sorted out as I understand it, although there are still some discussions with the company. But we now have access to the information that we need.

It meant that at an absolute pinch we could have introduced the year 7 testing on literacy and numeracy this year, but I was not prepared to do it unless I knew that it would be reliable and valid and was properly in place. There has been quite an amazing effort by the people who have done the work within the VCAA — I was talking with them the other day to make sure that we will have the years 3 and 5 testing in place in August. It has been touch and go for a while. I have made a commitment that we will introduce that as soon as possible. I am anticipating that it will be in place for next year.

The CHAIRMAN — Thank you. That concludes the time allocated for consideration of the estimates that are the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Education Services. I thank both ministers as well as their various departmental officers for their attendance here today. The committee has a couple of issues that it will follow up with you arising from today's hearing and then perhaps some other questions may be forwarded to you in writing at a later date.

Committee adjourned.