

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2005–06

Melbourne — 21 June 2005

Members

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Ms J. Allan, Minister for Youth Affairs;

Mr T. Healy, deputy secretary;

Ms L. Healy, director, Office for Youth; and

Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

The CHAIR — I now welcome Ms Lill Healy, director, Office for Youth with the Department of Victorian Communities. Minister, it is over to you for a brief presentation. Twenty-five minutes has been allocated for questions.

Overheads shown.

Ms ALLAN — Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to present to the committee on the youth affairs portfolio. The slide in front of you shows some of the statistics. Young people in Victoria make up 19.2 per cent of the population and 74 per cent live in the metropolitan area of Melbourne. Interestingly 17 per cent of young people were born overseas and 83 per cent of these young people were from countries where English is not their first language. That has particular relevance as we develop our policies and programs in this area.

Across government respect continues to be the vision for the Bracks government in developing its policies and framework for young people. We also have our regional youth affairs networks (RYANs), which I think I mentioned at the committee last year — they were previously known as regional youth committees. We have had a name change but also looked at how we develop the RYANs in their work, the partnership work they do in local communities where they provide information about young people, but also strengthening the role they play in providing advice to me and to the government in program development.

We also have a very strong local presence through the Office for Youth through the Department for Victorian Communities local presence teams, where we have five youth liaison officers in regional locations around Victoria and two based in metropolitan Melbourne. They are an important link in getting feedback from the local communities into the department and into government.

This slide provides information and a bit of a snapshot on where we have consulted with young people across a range of issues over the last 12 months, whether it was issues around young parents or body image — which is related to the parliamentary inquiry — or events like the Commonwealth Youth Games that were held in Bendigo in November and December last year, where young people were actively engaged in developing the programs because there was a very strong youth cultural program that was developed as part of the youth games; or whether it was through areas like government reviews. We have there the review of school governance which we have been involving young people in. I know Glenyys has also been having her own reviews in her own communities so we have been wanting to make sure we get the voice of young people in that review. That provides a snapshot of where we have been actively involving young people in decisions in their local communities.

We have a range of activities that have given young people the opportunity to participate in their communities, whether it is National Youth Week that this year saw more than 25 000 young people participate in 100 events around their local communities, and also in the assessment of grants for the National Youth Week. We involved young people in the grant assessment, with a very strong belief that young people themselves know what will interest other young people, and that is why we get them involved in the grant process.

The Eureka 150 celebrations had a very strong involvement by young people, particularly where we got young people to tell their stories about what their views were around what Eureka 150 meant to them and their interpretation of both the events and celebrations of Eureka. I have mentioned before the Commonwealth Youth Games, which were an outstanding event and success. Young people from organisations and schools were volunteers and very active participants in the games.

To go through briefly, you can see the range of programs which I will hopefully have a chance to expand on during questions. I give one very quick example of the benefit of particularly the Advance program. I can give you a case study where we have had some feedback from a teacher at one of the schools that had been involved in the Advance program, who has told us of a particularly unmotivated student who, within a week of being introduced through the Advance program to the concept of working in partnership with community organisations and managing a community project, has become very active in organising things like fishing excursions and other physical activities for older men in the local aged care facilities. That is a great example of where through that program we have been able to make a connection for that young person with their community.

On the whole-of-government partnerships, there is a range of things we have been working on. I particularly wanted to make mention of the mentoring. We have developed a strategic framework in mentoring — and that has been backed up with \$2.9 million of funding that was announced through A Fairer Victoria, which is really looking at ways to support mentoring that happens across the state.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. Now we have 25 minutes of questions. My first one goes to FReeZA Central. If we look at page 248 of budget paper 3 we see that last year was the first year of its operation. Can you explain to the committee what are the objectives and how they are being achieved? It was with interest that the committee read the government response to our recent recommendation that evaluation was accepted by the government, so you might like to also add something on the evaluation that has been undertaken and the effectiveness measures for 2005–06 and how evaluation will continue.

Ms ALLAN — Certainly. FReeZA Central is an exciting new program. Last year was its first full year of operation. It is really building on the success of the FReeZA program but also looking at how we can help young people to develop industry-based skills in the music industry, which can be difficult for young people to break into. People who have passion, talent and commitment just need to be provided with assistance to make the connections with the industry. So they get to develop some skills, but they also get to participate in organising and running the FReeZA Central live music tour.

Some achievements from 2004 were that we held eight accredited training workshops, involving 471 young people across the state. There were masterclasses and mentoring by experts from the industry. Also there was accreditation from Victoria University and advice about working in the industry provided through that part of the program. We had 48 young people successfully complete their mentoring. One of the opportunities that came from mentoring was to work on the Big Day Out, which is Australia's largest music festival, and was a great opportunity. Then there was the FReeZA Central tour, which finished in March 2005. That held five all-ages gigs. It included local and up-and-coming bands, but we also managed to get a couple of more well-known bands, the Living End and 28 Days, to participate in that tour as well.

Chair, you mentioned the evaluation of the program. Victoria University has undertaken an evaluation of the first year of FReeZA Central. We have had some overwhelmingly positive results from the program. We are taking the findings of the evaluation to put continuous improvements back into the FReeZA Central program because it was its first year in operation and we want to take the benefit of the knowledge from that evaluation and put it into practice. Just to give you some of the quotes from the young people involved in FReeZA Central, one said, 'I think the FReeZA Central program motivates everyone to get out there'. I guess they mean through the events we hold. We also have some examples of young people who have been able to go on and make a pathway into the music industry, whether it is backstage, management — a lot of work goes into event management — or indeed as performers themselves. So it has been a great program with great opportunities.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, I refer you to page 249 of budget paper 3. The expected outcome this year is \$14 million against a target of \$12.8 million and the total output cost anticipated for the forthcoming year is \$12.9 million. You might care to take this on notice. I wonder if you could provide us with a little chart that shows the component parts of the original target of \$12.8 million, the expected outcome of those component parts — and also where the \$1 million is — and the component parts of the \$12.9 million? The final part of the question is: what source of funding did you use for the overspend?

Ms ALLAN — The overspend?

Mr FORWOOD — This year you are going to spend \$1.2 million more than you anticipated. Where does the money come from?

Ms ALLAN — We have a table ready to go, for you, in anticipation of your being interested in the breakdown of the program.

Mr FORWOOD — Excellent. Thank you.

Ms ALLAN — I do not know whether the committee wants me to — —

Mr FORWOOD — No.

Ms ALLAN — We can provide it at the end, if you like.

Mr FORWOOD — Thank you.

Ms ALLAN — You mentioned the \$1 million more spending than we had. That was the carryover from FReeZA Central, which made up part of that. I spoke to the committee last year about that; because it was a new program it took a bit longer to get up and running.

Mr FORWOOD — My understanding is that the carryover was included in the target.

Mr GREGORY — It was relating to a carryover from?

Mr FORWOOD — If you carry over funds this year, you add that in to your total output costs.

Mr GREGORY — You do, yes. So when the budget for 2004–05 was done, there was an expectation that we would carry over that \$1 million. Therefore when we actually got to our outcome we had to carry over \$1 million.

Mr FORWOOD — But you had the \$1 million in there already.

Mr GREGORY — No, so it was a higher carryover than we thought we would have at the time we did the budget before.

Mr FORWOOD — When you did your calculation, was any money built into the output cost for carryover?

Mr GREGORY — I believe not, no.

Mr SOMYUREK — Minister, I refer you to page 6 of budget paper 3, and the discussion of A Fairer Victoria. Can you please detail any new initiatives within A Fairer Victoria that are targeted at supporting young people?

Ms ALLAN — Certainly. I mentioned in my presentation the mentoring initiative that has been announced as part of A Fairer Victoria. Just by way of background for the committee I also mentioned the strategic framework on mentoring that we developed. We wanted to develop that strategic framework. To help guide us with that development we established a reference group that was chaired by our parliamentary colleague Rosie Buchanan. That involved philanthropic and community organisations and businesses to help guide us as we developed the mentoring program because we know that when a mentoring program works well it has tremendous outcomes and benefits for not just the young person being mentored but also the mentor and the community. We know that unfortunately when the mentoring program is not well thought through or well supported, that can have some quite negative effects for the young people involved in the program. So we have developed a framework.

As part of the funding that has been provided through A Fairer Victoria we are looking at developing a tool kit to provide information through the mentoring good practice guide to help guide local communities in the development of their mentoring programs. Not to replace what is already there in the case of well-developed programs, but really to help provide some guidance for communities looking at setting up their own mentoring programs. The \$2.9 million over the three years is also going to provide some targeted grants to support the growth of mentoring programs around Victoria. I am sure we all know of programs under way in our local communities that could do with a bit of support. Some of them, again, are already well established and can continue under their own steam. The principles that will guide us through the distribution of our mentoring grants will be those outlined in A Fairer Victoria, which is looking at how we provide support to those people and places that need it the most. As you know, the whole framework for A Fairer Victoria was around addressing disadvantage, identifying barriers to people's participation in the community. That is going to strongly influence the distribution of our grants through the mentoring program.

Mr CLARK — My question also relates to output costs for youth affairs. Does the output cost measure shown in the budget paper include some component of departmental overhead costs for the Department for Victorian Communities? If so, how much of the total output cost represents those overhead costs, and what is the basis on which overhead costs are determined and allocated to youth affairs and other output costs within the department?

Ms ALLAN — For 2004–05 our corporate costs for the Department for Victorian Communities out of the Office for Youth were \$1.3 million. It is estimated that it will be \$1.7 million for 2005–06. I might refer the question about corporate costs and what it contributes to Stephen or Terry.

Mr GREGORY — The main basis of the allocation is on staff numbers. A lot of the costs like rent and PC charges are centrally held. A lot of our services are outsourced to other departments and so they are allocated on a per person basis to those areas.

Mr CLARK — So roughly per capita to the number of staff working in each output cost area?

Mr GREGORY — Because it drives the rental size and the number of PCs in the area, and the power and those sorts of things, so it is really related to staff numbers.

Mr CLARK — Thank you.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, one of the items listed on the slide headed ‘Voice of young people in government’ is the parliamentary inquiry into body image. That issue has been recognised as serious enough to put in place a parliamentary inquiry into body image and eating disorders. Can you inform the committee about any actions that the government is taking in this area?

Ms ALLAN — Certainly. The parliamentary inquiry was initiated in late 2003 and it is anticipated that the committee will report to the Parliament in the coming months. The purpose of the inquiry was to both identify and get a deeper understanding of the issues relating to negative body image and its impact on young people. But it is also to look at good practice. Already a lot of people are doing great things in this area, helping to support young people and their families. But it is also looking at identifying that good practice, and how we can promote it more broadly. When you consider there are some alarming statistics around the impact, particularly of eating disorders, in our society where anorexia nervosa is the third most chronic illness among young women in this country, and at any one time — —

Mr FORWOOD — What are one and two?

Ms ALLAN — Asthma and, I think, diabetes. I would have to check diabetes, but I know that asthma is one of them.

At any one time 68 per cent of 15-year-old girls are on a diet. Those are alarming statistics which taken to extreme can have an impact on the future of young people. It can impact on their education, their employment, their community participation and indeed on their family supports as well. So it has a significant impact.

While we are waiting for the committee to report to the Parliament we have already undertaken a range of activities, through participation in International No Diet Day and Shaping the Future workshops where we got young women in to tell us about some of their issues. We have developed an eating disorders resource for schools in partnership with the Department of Human Services which has been distributed to secondary schools. We have encouraged young people directly to participate in the parliamentary inquiry through the development of a postcard. We wanted to hear directly from young people about their issues, and to make it easy for them we distributed these cards broadly throughout the community. Young people just had to put their thoughts on the back. It was addressed to me so that I could forward it on to the parliamentary inquiry. Over 300 of the cards were returned to the committee, and when I spoke to the members of that committee they said the information was very informative and it was very useful to have the voice of young people directly involved in the inquiry. I am happy to leave one of the cards for the committee.

Seven regional seminars have been held around the state with young people, their families and health professionals to hear about their concerns. We also established a reference group of experts to help guide my work in this area, and that has been a very informative group of people comprising academics, medical professionals, former sufferers and family members. They are important voices to have at the table, as well as peak advisory groups, service providers and philanthropic organisations. That is in addition to the hearings that the committee held in Shepparton and Geelong as well as two full days in Melbourne. I am looking forward to receiving the report from the inquiry. We already know from feedback from young people that they are not happy with things like the way that magazines do not reflect real women, and their concerns about the influence of the advertising industry. They would like to see more school programs developed to support young people’s self-esteem and resilience. They think there should be more information on healthy eating. A lot of these things already link into government initiatives like Go for Your Life or some of the resources that we are putting in through schools. We know that there is a lot of concern in the community about this which is why we initiated the parliamentary inquiry.

Mr FORWOOD — How many cards were printed?

Ms ALLAN — I am informed about 500.

Mr FORWOOD — So you had 500 printed and you got 300 back?

Ms ALLAN — Yes. As elected representatives working out ways of getting information back this has been really successful.

Ms ROMANES — Where did you place the cards?

Ms ALLAN — We distributed them through the networks established for the reference group through the regional youth affairs networks that I spoke about earlier. They have been a really valuable way of getting information out into the community.

Mr FORWOOD — I again refer to page 248 of budget paper 3 which are the youth services program grants, numbers approved. It has a new measure of 70 to 90 replacing the rather useless measure of 100 per cent allocated. I wonder if you could advise the committee — and probably take it on notice too — how many applications were received last year, and how many were allocated, to use the old word, to get to the 100 per cent, and at what cost? The same for this year. It shows 70 to 90; how much has been allocated?

Ms ALLAN — As you can see in the budget papers, the allocation is \$4.1 million.

Mr FORWOOD — \$4.1 million of the \$12.9 million?

Ms ALLAN — Yes, \$4.1 million.

Mr FORWOOD — There have been no carryovers this year?

Ms ALLAN — No, because as you can imagine it is funding that is totally allocated through the youth services grants. We have looked at the youth services grants and the funding that was provided in 2002 has been rolled over. It was an 18-month program and it was rolled over for a further 12 months as we undertook that realignment. So there actually has not been a grant round until recently. We recently went out with some new guidelines around the program. We have given the program a new name: it is called the Youth Participation and Access program. There is the same amount of money, but given the opportunity with the shift of the Office for Youth into the Department for Victorian Communities realigning the program in line with the principles of the department, looking at how we can best support young people.

Mr FORWOOD — When was the last round?

Ms HEALY — The last round was in 2003–04 and we rolled over in 2004–05.

Mr MERLINO — I refer you to page 248 of budget paper 3, and the Advance Youth Development program. I understand this program has been in place for a few years now, and that many local schools are involved. I think your overhead presentation showed that 78 per cent of all government secondary schools are involved in the program. Can you give the committee an idea of the types of activities that are occurring under the program around the state? What are the quantifiable benefits, and also how young people have provided feedback on the program itself?

Ms ALLAN — Certainly. I am sure a number of your schools are participating in the program. It is a very popular program, and the additional funding that was provided by the government of \$5 million over four years has enabled it to be made available to all government secondary schools. In 2005 we have seen 90 new schools come into the program for the first time. It provides that link I mentioned in the presentation between young people through schools with community organisations. It has provided a valuable link for young people and for the community. I think it reflects the importance the government places on providing opportunities and on promoting those practical partnerships between young people and the community. In 2005 we had 333 secondary school campuses participate in the program. That represents 78 per cent of all Victorian government secondary schools. While we made the funding available to all secondary schools, because of local priorities within the school not all secondary schools take up the program, but 90 new schools have come into the program this year.

I mentioned the benefits earlier, but if you look at some examples of the programs, through the Advance program at Donald High School, they are running a conservation project in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries where they are planting 4000 trees in the local area; I hope those trees survive with the drought. It is an important program in providing that link between young people and the local community. The conservation project was also seen as a vehicle to provide hands-on experience for young people out in the community with others in the community. Some of the students comments from that were, 'It taught me to respect the environment more', and 'Being cooperative gets work done faster'. They are a couple of snapshots from that school. We have a special school participating in the advance project. Nelson Park School's students have intellectual disabilities, but they get involved in the community through the Advance program and through the delivery of meals to the elderly and the sick. While this is developing services, we have seen it develop some strong friendships with individual clients and the people they are working with. I think that is a great example of where the diversity of our student population can be supported through the Advance program.

The CHAIR — You were quoting there; is that based on an evaluation or have these people written to the department? The committee is very keen to know about evaluation, if it has been undertaken and whether there will effectiveness measures in future budget papers on this.

Ms ALLAN — We plan to evaluate the program at the end of 2005 — that will be after two full years of operation under the new Advance program. We will be able to give further information once that evaluation has been completed. However, in terms of measuring the success, we have seen more young people and more schools participate in the program. If a demonstration of participation is a measurement of success, we are seeing very positive results.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to the Office for Youth web site. You may recall that Mr Forwood asked you about this last year and referred to your evidence the year before that where you said you had been planning to do some redevelopment. Last year you said the redevelopment had not taken place, but you referred to some new features you wanted to bring to it, and to the Queensland government's web site which allowed young people to talk directly to ministers through a chat room. I have had a look at the web site at it stands at present. It is different to when I last looked at it, but I would say it is not particularly user friendly because the navigation is very cryptic. Has the redevelopment taken place? If not, when? Your performance measure indicates you expect less page impressions in the year ahead than you have had in the current year, which is less than in the year before; what is the reason for that? Given what you said in your earlier evidence, will you be moving the measure from page impressions over to unique visitors?

Ms ALLAN — Can I just check you are on www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au?

Mr CLARK — I am on youth.vic.gov.au.

Ms ALLAN — If you can go to www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au, that is the new youth web site we launched on 10 December last year. I think you will see a marked difference and, I hope you agree, a marked improvement in our youth web site. This is now our key web site for the way we communicate directly with young people in addition to providing information about the important services they look for on the youth web site. I think you will see a remarkable difference. The web site was developed in consultation with young people — we involved young people throughout the development of the web site. We wanted to make sure it had a look and feel — —

What are you laughing at?

Mr FORWOOD — 'Meet your minister'. I thought we would meet all the ministers.

Ms ALLAN — We wanted to provide young people with a direct pathway to get information about government services and community services. What you will also see — —

Mr FORWOOD — You have taken your glasses off.

Ms ALLAN — What we have worked very hard to do, which I am sure will be of interest to the committee, is give young people responsibility for the content on the site. We have established 15 youth editorial teams around the state. Young people make up those editorial teams and they are responsible for putting content on the web site that is directly related to what is going on in their local communities. There is an opportunity for young people across communities to talk to one another, to post information about events that are coming up, so it

becomes a bit of a one-stop shop for young people to find out about activities to do in the community, ways for young people to talk to one another and provide information on a range of things, whether it is things like how to volunteer for the Commonwealth Games, information on health services or information on education. We have tried to make it both informative and useful, but it is also an opportunity for young people to be responsible for the content and the delivery of the information on the web site. You wanted to know about the performance measures?

Mr CLARK — Yes.

Ms ALLAN — The 2003–04 targets for the Office for Youth and FReeZA web sites for total page impressions were met. You will see a decrease in the traffic going to the Office for Youth and FReeZA web sites as more traffic goes into that new youthcentral web site; I think you have demonstrated this morning how one is far superior to the other and much more user friendly and informative. You will see over time that there will be more traffic going to the youthcentral web site.

Ms ROMANES — Where is the output measure for the new web site?

Ms ALLAN — The redevelopment of the web site was undertaken under the umbrella of the youth employment link, which is funding which comes through the employment programs area, but it was a joint project between employment programs and the Office for Youth. The key features of the youth employment link are there: you will see along the bottom of the front page the toll-free number for young people remains there; the information remains there. We wanted to enhance the information that is provided through the youth employment link to young people and see it as a way of helping them to get the information they need. You will find the performance measure is through the youth employment link.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. I place on record the committee's appreciation of your attendance here this morning and that of our other witnesses at the table. To those within the departments who have prepared copious notes, we appreciate your efforts also. There will be follow-up questions forwarded to you in due course and the Hansard transcript will be sent to you probably later this week. Thank you and good morning.

Committee adjourned.