

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Thursday 27 November 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Roma Britnell – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Matt Carrick, Secretary,

Heather Ridley, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services,

Georgina McCann, Deputy Secretary, Sport and Experience Economy,

Danni Jarrett, Deputy Secretary, Industry, Trade and Investment,

Lill Healy, Deputy Secretary, Skills and TAFE,

Dr Xavier Csar, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Development Victoria,

Julian Lyngcoln, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy, Programs and Coordination,

Claire Febey, Chief Executive, Creative Victoria,

Daniel Rodger, Chief Financial Officer and Executive Director, Finance, Investment and Procurement,

Craig Robertson, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Skills Authority, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions; and

Rod Bristow, Chief Executive Officer, Breakthrough Victoria.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government, courts and Parliament achieved in 2024–25 compared with what they planned to achieve.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and it is broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The broadcast includes automated captioning. Members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones are live during hearings, and anything they say may be picked up and captioned, even if they say it very quietly.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Secretary of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions Mr Matt Carrick, as well as other officials that have joined him here today. Secretary, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

Matt CARRICK: Thank you very much, Chair. Good afternoon, committee members. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands upon which we meet, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Visual presentation.

Matt CARRICK: My short presentation today sets out the department portfolio's size and purpose, the department's role in delivering *Economic Growth Statement* initiatives and our 2024–25 achievements. The department supports the nine portfolios which are shown on the slide. Together, these portfolios are focused on building a prosperous future for our state and its people, our businesses and industries and our communities and

regions. As at 30 June 2025, the department had 1743 staff working across 21 offices in Victoria. The department also has 23 international trade and investment offices, which are strategically located in Victoria's key export markets. The department is responsible for 46 entities, including nine public cultural institutions and 12 TAFEs. In 2024–25 the department met or exceeded 77 per cent of its 142 non-cost output performance measures. The department's core purpose is set out in the annual report 2024–25. Since 2024–25 the department has refreshed its purpose statement in the 2025 update to our *Strategic Plan 2023 to 2027*. In essence, we remain committed to supporting skills development, jobs creation and the growth and development of businesses and industries and to supporting vibrant regions and communities.

We are also playing a central role in implementing the Victorian government's *Economic Growth Statement*, announced by the former Treasurer in December 2024. All *Economic Growth Statement* initiatives were fully funded in the 2025–26 Victorian state budget. The department is leading the delivery of 22 of the statement's 40-plus initiatives. The results of the department's work in delivering these initiatives so far include the boosting Victorian exports package that was launched in December 2024. From December and extending to September 2025, the department has supported \$819 million in export sales and provided support to 2344 clients through the package. The investment front door initiative has received investment leads from a range of sectors, including the circular economy, renewable energy, digital technologies, advanced manufacturing and the creative industries.

In 2024–25 the department designed the new digital jobs program to support innovation and technology adoption in Victoria's advanced manufacturing and construction sectors, which I am pleased to say was launched in August 2025. We have seen high demand from industry for this program, with over 250 vouchers being issued for workshops and specialist skills courses in the first two months of the program. The skills solutions partnerships program continues to bring industry, education providers and government together to rapidly develop new short courses that address industry's most pressing skilling needs.

As of June 2025, 17 campaigns have been completed through the destination marketing initiative, with one further campaign, for a total of 18, completed as of October of this year, boosting visitation and Victoria's tourism sector. The Visit Victoria industry partnership program interim report of July 2025 found the destination marketing initiative has delivered more than \$20 million in economic impact to date. Building on the *Economic Growth Statement*, the *Victorian Industry Policy* was released in June 2025. The policy gives clear direction to both industry and government by nominating a range of focus areas under its four principles: skills for an evolving economy, growing our industrial base, strategic industry development and energy security and transition.

I will now highlight some of the department's major achievements in addition to those achievements being delivered through the *Economic Growth Statement*. Within the portfolios of economic growth and jobs and industry and advanced manufacturing, the department has stimulated the creation of more than 3000 jobs and facilitated capital expenditure of over \$1.1 billion in the Victorian economy, and we have secured 37 foreign direct investment projects that are expected to deliver more than 1800 direct jobs and more than \$200 million in innovation expenditure. One example of the investments the department facilitated is securing the Australian and New Zealand headquarters of Firstsource, a leading Indian global provider of specialist business process services. The headquarters will include a delivery centre and an AI innovation lab, creating 400 jobs.

In the regional development portfolio the department delivered in each of Victoria's regions. Across multiple regions the department progressed round 1 of the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund. This supported more than 20 projects that will deliver approximately 1000 worker bedrooms and almost \$250 million of investment in new housing in regional Victoria. This includes 10 houses in Irymple to support workers across the healthcare, education and law enforcement sectors. The department also oversaw the continued delivery of 32 projects under the Geelong City Deal to revitalise Geelong and unlock the potential of the Great Ocean Road visitor economy and enabled Latrobe Magnesium in Gippsland to deliver a waste product from coal-fired energy production through a first-stage magnesium production facility in the Latrobe Valley.

Across the tourism, sport and major events and the creative industries portfolios, Victoria achieved a record tourism spend of \$43.7 billion, driven by a 20 per cent increase in international visitor spend. The department launched the \$3.6 million First Peoples tourism industry strengthening program, and we recorded over 11.6 million attendances at cultural institutions, including a record 570,000 to NGV's *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition, the most ticketed art exhibition in Australian history. The department also invested in the VicScreen strategy,

which delivered a record \$502 million in direct Victorian expenditure and created over 8100 local jobs in 2024–25.

Across the skills and TAFE and the small business and employment portfolios, the department supported more than 47,000 students to save more than \$166 million in tuition fees through free TAFE in 2024. The department also delivered the *Victorian Skills Plan for 2024 into 2025*, which prioritises actions to deliver knowledge and skills that strengthen productivity and economic growth. The department also celebrated 15 years of the Small Business Bus, delivering business support services across all 79 Victorian local government areas and effectively helping businesses to start, grow and thrive.

In the community sport and outdoor recreation portfolios, the department provided \$129 million towards 152 community sport infrastructure projects to help communities transform sportsgrounds, build female-friendly change rooms and light up sports fields and courts across the state. Informed by the select committee inquiry into native bird hunting arrangements in Victoria and stakeholder and public consultation, the department also delivered the Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2024 to improve hunting practices and strengthen environmental and wildlife protections. And we distributed more than 41,000 vouchers through the Get Active Kids voucher program, supporting Victorian families with the cost of children's sport. Thank you, committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Secretary. The first 21 minutes go to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, secretaries. How seriously, Secretary, do you take the Business Council of Australia report that Victoria was the worst place in Australia to do business for two years running?

Matt CARRICK: Thanks for the question, Mr Welch. We take all inputs seriously from a variety of stakeholders right across the spectrum and indeed from individual businesses that we get feedback from. What I would say in response to the BCA view of the world is I think it does not take into account some really strong economic fundamentals that Victoria has going in its favour.

Richard WELCH: But on economic fundamentals – in the last year, per capita the state has contracted by 0.8 per cent. Were you aware that Victoria's economy was, on a per capita basis, contracting before the ABS figures came out?

Matt CARRICK: So before the ABS figures –

Richard WELCH: Were you aware that Victoria's economy was contracting?

Matt CARRICK: Well, I must admit, Mr Welch, I have a different view on the premise of the question, which is the state's economy is not contracting. The state's economy is in fact growing. It grew by –

Richard WELCH: So the ABS figures are wrong?

Matt CARRICK: 1.1 per cent in real terms in 2024–5.

Richard WELCH: But per capita it has shrunk by 0.8 per cent. Do you agree?

Matt CARRICK: Well, in terms of per capita, that is right. But that does not take into account some really important factors here. One is that the overall economy is growing.

Richard WELCH: Were you aware that, though, per capita the state was contracting before the ABS figures came out?

Matt CARRICK: Well, we take the figures from the ABS. That is the source.

Richard WELCH: So you were not aware?

Matt CARRICK: What I am aware of is that the Victorian economy is expanding. The economy grew in 2024–25.

Richard WELCH: But much less than you thought it would.

Matt CARRICK: It actually grew more than New South Wales.

Richard WELCH: What was your forecast?

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch. There is a point of order.

Mathew HILAKARI: The witness is attempting to answer your questions, but the constant interruptions are making it –

Richard WELCH: No, no, they are not constant interruptions.

Mathew HILAKARI: But I would like to draw your attention –

Richard WELCH: This is not a fireside chat.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Welch.

Mathew HILAKARI: You are right. I would like to draw your attention to the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes. If you could point to somewhere within the paperwork that describes that as being part of the inquiry, that would be helpful.

Richard WELCH: So, this is –

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, if we can just remain within scope for this session, and if you could just afford the Secretary the opportunity to answer your question. Asking successive questions on top of each other makes it very difficult for witnesses to be able to provide you with a coherent response, and I think the Secretary is trying to do that.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Secretary, how many quarters has Victoria been in a per capita contraction?

Matt CARRICK: Off the top of my head, I could not tell you. What I can tell you is that the economy grew in 2024–25, more than New South Wales.

Richard WELCH: But less than you forecast.

Matt CARRICK: What I can tell you is that businesses in Victoria grew by 2.2 per cent, that our GSP was \$637 billion, that our exports grew by 5.6 per cent and –

Richard WELCH: Thank you, but I am not asking that. That is not a question I am asking you. I ask you: you do not know how many quarters we have been in per capita contraction?

Matt CARRICK: Well, off the top of my head – but if you would like to explore the issue of per capita more, I can ask Mr Lyngcoln –

Richard WELCH: No, that was the question. That was all. I am not asking anything more expansive than that.

Matt CARRICK: Great.

Richard WELCH: Okay. What is the departmental strategy view on frontier AI development?

Matt CARRICK: So in terms of AI development –

Richard WELCH: Frontier development.

Matt CARRICK: Frontier development – do you want to explain that more, please?

Richard WELCH: I would have thought you would know.

Matt CARRICK: Well, I am asking you to explain it to me in terms of where you want to take the question.

The CHAIR: Mr Welch, in light of this not ending up in some kind of facetious debate about what this is, could you just clarify, perhaps for myself, what it is?

Richard WELCH: Okay. Anyone with a working knowledge of AI understands that there are several different trains of development in AI. Frontier development is the more experimental kind of AI. In most other jurisdictions, there is a distinct strategy for frontier AI development. Do we have one?

Matt CARRICK: I think what the Premier foreshadowed at an event today is that the Victorian government is about to announce its AI strategy, and she foreshadowed that would be happening forthwith. So I cannot pre-empt –

Richard WELCH: Have you provided advice on that?

Matt CARRICK: Yes, we have.

Richard WELCH: So do you favour model-side guide rails or deployment-side guide rails?

Matt CARRICK: Mr Welch, you know full well that I cannot possibly comment on the advice that we are providing to government.

Richard WELCH: But do you have a preference? Have you considered it?

Matt CARRICK: I think I answered. I think the broad question is: are we considering AI and different aspects of it? Yes, Mr Welch, we are. It is really important that we do. We have provided advice to government and, as I have foreshadowed with you, the Premier has publicly announced, within the last couple of hours in fact, at a CEDA event that she will be having more to say about the government's AI strategy in the short future.

Richard WELCH: That is very good. Has the department done modelling on the studies or the future potential of AI in Victoria?

Matt CARRICK: In terms of – we have done analysis on the importance of AI.

Richard WELCH: Could we see that analysis?

Matt CARRICK: Well, it is an input into some of the policy work that, as I flagged, is currently under development.

Richard WELCH: Certainly, but could the committee have a copy of that analysis, please?

Matt CARRICK: Well, if it has been an input into cabinet consideration, that is not normal practice, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Right. So you say that is a no?

Matt CARRICK: Well, I am saying I am following convention in terms of documents that are inputs into cabinet consideration being not generally released.

Richard WELCH: But analysis? Okay. How much financial or other support has been allocated for the deployment of an AI-ready workforce in Victoria?

Matt CARRICK: I believe the Premier will have something to say about that forthwith.

Richard WELCH: In the past year, has anything been done in that regard?

Matt CARRICK: In terms of AI enablement? Well, we have a number of programs that are beginning to look at AI, but the government will have more to say about AI shortly.

Richard WELCH: Did we do any in 2024–25?

Matt CARRICK: In terms of dedicated AI programs? We have had some programs that have touched upon it, including –

Richard WELCH: What were they?

Matt CARRICK: Well, including the digital skills program.

Mathew HILAKARI: We covered this off the other day. The Department of Government Services talked to AI two days ago.

Richard WELCH: I am sorry; this is my time, please.

The CHAIR: Excuse me. Mr Hilakari, cease interjecting, please. Mr Carrick.

Matt CARRICK: Well, I might ask Ms Jarrett to talk a bit more about the digital skills program.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Secretary. The digital jobs program was introduced in 2021, and it is intended to increase the skills profile across the workforce, particularly in digital, recognising that –

Richard WELCH: Could I just ask for clarity: is ‘digital’ a euphemism for AI, or is that AI-specific? Or does it incorporate –

Danni JARRETT: It is not specifically AI. There would be some elements within the delivery of the program that would touch on AI, but it is not a dedicated AI program.

Richard WELCH: Were there specific outputs from that work?

Danni JARRETT: The outputs in relation to the digital jobs program are specifically around job outcomes for people who participated in the program, who have increased their skills capability in the digital space.

Richard WELCH: Were there measurements so that we can see how successful that was?

Danni JARRETT: Well, the measurements are really in terms of the job outcomes for those participants, keeping in mind that a key part of the purpose of that program is also to help reskill people mid-career as well as –

Richard WELCH: Yes, so were there measurable outcomes that we can see?

Danni JARRETT: The measurable outcomes for those participants were employment outcomes. And so people receiving post program employment in the program as well as also within those targeted sectors that the program focuses on, such as manufacturing and construction and increase in digital capability.

Richard WELCH: Are they in a form that you can present to the committee so that we can see the outcomes?

Matt CARRICK: We can certainly bring you some more information. Absolutely.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. In the *Economic Growth Statement* there are some issues around supply chains and risks identified. Which risks have been mitigated as a result of the Victorian government programs?

Matt CARRICK: I will hand to Ms Jarrett in a second just to talk a little bit more around that initiative. One thing I would say about the *Economic Growth Statement* is that it was not just a statement for one financial year.

Richard WELCH: No, I appreciate that it is a broad statement, but I am very interested in the supply chain security. If we could just confine it to that, please.

Matt CARRICK: No, no, the answer will. But the point I want to make is that it was a statement that was released in December, and therefore the impacts of the statement will not be just within the financial year 2024–25 or, for that matter, the new financial year. It may be over time. While we will track the impacts,

providing quantifiable impacts at present, maybe, on some of the elements you might wish to explore – I just want to make the point that we might not have instantaneous answers for you.

Richard WELCH: So in 2024–25 did we conduct, rectify, mitigate any of those risks?

Matt CARRICK: Well, let us talk in terms of what the focus was.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you, Mr Welch, for the question. The focus of the *Economic Growth Statement* is really around identifying opportunities for economic growth across our key sectors rather than specifically addressing risks, but really looking for those opportunities for consolidating strength.

Richard WELCH: The *Economic Growth Statement* did mention risks in supply chain, so that is why I am asking: having identified the risk, what have we done?

Danni JARRETT: A good example of supply chain support that we have provided is in the defence sector, where we are working to support Victorian companies bidding in for defence projects, where we provide support to Victorian companies to increase their capability, both for skills capability to develop products –

Richard WELCH: Yes. I can see that is augmenting supply chain. That is not the same as mitigating risk within supply chain.

Matt CARRICK: As you say, it is augmenting, and that helps in terms of the defence supply chain.

Richard WELCH: Yes, but that is not what you identified as the problem.

Danni JARRETT: Another element of the *Economic Growth Statement* was around obviously industry policy and manufacturing capability for Victoria. In relation to a number of the initiatives in the *Economic Growth Statement* that do go towards supporting supply chain, which is often in the manufacturing domain, we have provided support for Victorian companies to be more competitive and to diversify their activities from an export perspective in terms of how they then are able to sell their products and identify key markets where their products are most attractive and the like.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. I would like to ask a couple of questions about Breakthrough Victoria. In March Breakthrough Victoria announced a \$37 million investment in US stratospheric balloon company World View. A manufacturing facility with 200 jobs was promised, as well as the set-up of a World View Asia-Pacific headquarters. What has been delivered to date?

Matt CARRICK: What I might do, if you do not mind, Mr Welch, is invite Mr Bristow, who is the CEO of Breakthrough Victoria, to the table. While he makes his way to the table, I would make the broader point that BV in 2024–25 exceeded its performance target of 10 companies or consortia supported by the fund, and I think the board approved 22 independent –

Richard WELCH: If I could just hear about this company, please.

Matt CARRICK: Yes. Sure. I was just allowing Mr Bristow to make his way to the table. They approved investments to the value of \$118 million.

Richard WELCH: Specifically, I would like to know how many jobs and what manufacturing is occurring.

Rod BRISTOW: Thank you, Mr Welch. I appreciate the question. World View Enterprises is part of the –

Richard WELCH: I do not want a description of the company. I would like to know: how many people is it employing and what manufacturing outcome is taking place?

Rod BRISTOW: I am happy to take the detail on notice. I can say though, just to give you some comfort, that in the period to 30 June this year a lot of work happened about World View building out their supply chain and establishing the precursor for their manufacturing.

Richard WELCH: It was promised that it would create 15,700 jobs over 10 years. After four years, how many jobs have been created?

Rod BRISTOW: Let me speak to that directly. World View itself was not quoted as employing 15,700 people. That was a reference, I believe, to the overall Breakthrough Victoria portfolio. Let me just give you a little bit of context on that specifically. We are definitely on track to create a substantial number of high-income jobs for Victorians, and –

Richard WELCH: And how many have been?

Rod BRISTOW: Let me just give you a little bit of context.

Richard WELCH: No, I would just like the figure, thank you. Just the number.

Rod BRISTOW: Yes. That is a forward-looking projection, so at this point I cannot give you a number as to what a final number of jobs would –

Richard WELCH: Would you be able to provide that on notice?

Rod BRISTOW: As I say, that is a projection. We have –

Richard WELCH: How many you have created to date. That is not a projection, that should be an actual.

Rod BRISTOW: We have just invested at this point into – we have made 69 investment –

Richard WELCH: No, no. Jobs.

Matt CARRICK: Certainly, Mr Welch, we can come back. Just to clarify so we are making sure that we deliver what you are after, you are after the number of jobs of companies that BV has invested into?

Richard WELCH: Yes, and also perhaps how many are being created from that company as well.

Matt CARRICK: That particular one as well. Sure.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Have you seen the final report of the innovation and commercialisation review?

Matt CARRICK: Yes, I have. So that review has been completed.

Richard WELCH: Do you know when Breakthrough Victoria are expected to learn of their future?

Matt CARRICK: In terms of the broader review around commercialisation innovation, that matter is currently under consideration by government.

Richard WELCH: You do not have a date as yet?

Matt CARRICK: No, I do not have a date for you. No.

Richard WELCH: Has any modelling or investigation been conducted in the case of a winding up of Breakthrough Victoria's operations?

Matt CARRICK: Modelling? I would not say that, and it is not for me to pre-empt either the findings of the report or the deliberations of government. I think built into your question is an assumption there which –

Richard WELCH: It has been mooted that it would. So no advance planning has been done in that regard?

Matt CARRICK: Well, as I say, the matter is before government. I know you are asking the question through the prism of Breakthrough Victoria, but it is actually a wider review into commercialisation and innovation interventions by the Victorian government.

Richard WELCH: In the course of their considerations they have not asked you for what the impact might be?

Matt CARRICK: Well, I mean, there is a whole range of things that we have offered advice on. But as I say, I am not in a position to provide a breakdown.

Richard WELCH: I am not asking what the advice was. I am just asking you whether they sought the advice.

Matt CARRICK: Sorry. If you could be specific.

Richard WELCH: If they are considering winding up Breakthrough Victoria, have they sought your advice on anything to do with that?

Matt CARRICK: In terms of the broad advice I have been asked to provide, which the department has provided, it is a sort of range of different options around what could take place in terms of future government interventions in the commercialisation and innovation ecosystem, and that is what we have provided. I think it is not reasonable for me to be more specific than that.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Thank you, Secretary. In relation to performance measures for DJSIR's 2024–25 annual report, why were the targets for the key performance measures of innovation expenditure generated, jobs generated and wages generated from international investment so significantly reduced in the 2024–25 targets?

Matt CARRICK: Sure. I will hand to Ms Jarrett to talk to that in a second.

Richard WELCH: Very considerably reduced, I might add.

Matt CARRICK: But I think by way of context it is important to note that there were some major achievements in terms of –

Richard WELCH: I am sure there were, but why were they reduced?

Matt CARRICK: Yes. I will hand to Ms Jarrett to expand a bit more on that.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Secretary. And thank you for the question, Mr Welch. When we look at our targets in investment we take a number of factors into consideration. We look at the investment pipeline. We have a pipeline that we manage of hundreds of investment leads that we monitor regularly. We also look at the global economic conditions, looking at increasing competition for FDI, as well as the types of investments that we are wanting to prioritise and target. With regard specifically to the targets for our investment, at that time we were reviewing we had experienced off the back of COVID a large increase in investments in the immediate post-COVID period but also were seeing that growth was moderating globally and locally, and we were seeing that jurisdictions around the world were also placing a higher priority on sovereign capability and decisions by multinational companies, which are many of the companies that we target.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. I have only got a little bit of time left, so I have got one more question I would like to get through. Innovation spending from international investment has dropped by \$420 million since 2022–23, from \$625 million to \$205 million. Have you or your department issued an alert to the minister about that? It is a pretty alarming drop in international investment.

Matt CARRICK: Mr Welch, do you mind just please –

Richard WELCH: If you want a reference, it is your annual report, page 41.

Matt CARRICK: Thank you. Yes. So to your question, 'Are ministers aware of that?', absolutely they are aware of that, and we are certainly redoubling our efforts in terms of working with overseas companies in order to –

Richard WELCH: Why has there been such a significant fall-off?

Matt CARRICK: Ms Jarrett, I might hand it to you on some of the detail on that.

Danni JARRETT: We look at a multiyear approach. Over the last four years FDI in Victoria has actually maintained a relatively stable level of around \$9.3 billion on average each year. In the 2024–25 year it was \$9.25 billion, so there was –

Richard WELCH: So you think it will recover next year?

Danni JARRETT: We are cautiously optimistic, yes.

Richard WELCH: Cautiously optimistic. Okay.

Matt CARRICK: And just on that, Mr Welch, the reason for that cautious optimism is in terms of when you look at our pipeline, what we actually see is – in terms of number of projects, value of potential projects, potential jobs and investment outcomes – that the figures are actually looking positive for the pipeline.

Richard WELCH: I have one last question, if I can sneak it in. Has Breakthrough Victoria's investment mandate changed since inception?

Matt CARRICK: That is a good question. Can I take that on notice, Mr Welch, and come back to you in terms of that?

Richard WELCH: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Welch. We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Secretary and officials. Thank you for coming along. Just to clarify something on my behalf, on those figures, that refers to international investment directly from government invested projects, not the total international investment figure. Is that correct?

Matt CARRICK: Absolutely. This is projects that the Victorian government has been directly involved in facilitating. It does not refer to the overall amount of foreign direct investment into the state of Victoria. As Ms Jarrett said, that has actually remained elevated in the recent period.

Michael GALEA: So the overall picture is actually still at that high level. Okay. Thank you. That is good to know. Secretary, I would like to ask about – changing gear a bit – sport and recreation and one of the outputs under your 2024–25 budget output initiatives, including in particular the 'Delivering community sports infrastructure and basketball hubs' line item. I understand that the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund is one of the units of delivery under this program. Can you talk to me about this specific fund and how the department has prioritised investment through this fund over the past financial year?

Matt CARRICK: Certainly, I can, but I actually might pass to Ms McCann, who is much more informed on the program than I am.

Georgina McCANN: Thank you, and thank you for the question. Yes, the 2024–25 Victorian budget provided funding for community sports infrastructure as part of the \$17.5 million delivering community sports infrastructure and basketball hubs initiative. The Victorian government invests in community sport and active recreation infrastructure to deliver real and positive outcomes for local communities, ensuring Victorians have access to safe, modern, inclusive and accessible facilities, and to support participation in sport and active recreation by all. This includes supporting Victorians, particularly disadvantaged communities and groups who participate less in sport and active recreation, to achieve better health, wellbeing and social and economic outcomes as well. As you would appreciate, delivering infrastructure also creates economic activity and jobs for planners, architects, engineers, project managers, builders, carpenters, plumbers – the list goes on. And of course also sourcing local materials enables many more Victorian businesses to thrive as well.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And how have the projects been spread across both metropolitan and regional Victoria over the past year?

Georgina McCANN: That is a great question. We obviously work hard to ensure that there is a really decent spread of projects across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. Through the 2024–25 Local Sports Infrastructure Fund, which is probably my favourite program that we deliver – it has been running since 1972, which is pretty remarkable – there were 28 projects that were supported in metropolitan Melbourne, with a total project value of more than \$17 million. Projects are expected to be completed by June 2027. Of the 28 projects that were funded, three were in low SES locations – we use the SEIFA index – 13 were for community facilities and 10 were for lighting. A broad range of sports were supported, with seven Australian rules football, seven active recreation, six cricket, six soccer and three tennis projects being funded.

In terms of regional Victoria, in 2024–25 the department ran the second stream of the Regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund program, which is a program that is funded under that regional package that was announced in July 2023. That was part of the \$100 million regional investment into community sport, which included \$60 million for the regional community sport development fund and \$40 million for the all-abilities sport fund. As well as that, of the 75 infrastructure projects that we had there – so that is 67 infrastructure and eight participation projects – 36 were in low SEIFA locations, 13 were for community facilities, nine were for women and girls and nine for all abilities.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Ms McCann. Also the country football–netball program I understand is covered by this output. Can you talk to me about any trends in the investment that have been made under this program in the last financial year?

Georgina McCANN: The country football–netball program is another longstanding program – very popular. We know that country football–netball clubs are often a really critical part of regional communities; anybody who goes to regional Victoria will know that. It is one that we deliver in partnership with the Australian Football League, AFL Victoria and Netball Victoria as well. In terms of outcomes overall, again, we have a really strong focus on ensuring that those who would not be able to participate can participate. Six were in low-SEIFA locations. There was one pavilion project, five oval projects and three court lighting projects that were supported, and there were six Australian Rules football projects and three netball projects that were supported. I am happy to talk through some of the examples of projects that we funded, if that is of benefit.

Michael GALEA: Sure, maybe a couple of brief examples. Thanks.

Georgina McCANN: Ballarat City Council was awarded up to \$150,000 to construct two netball courts with 200-lux LED lighting at Buninyong recreation reserve. Greater Shepparton shire council was awarded up to \$133,000 to deliver 100-lux LED lighting to the oval at Woodside Recreation Reserve. Indigo Shire Council was awarded up to \$61,740 for projects to deliver 50-lux LED lighting at the oval at Wahgunyah recreation reserve as well.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much. Secretary, I would like to turn to skills and training and specifically TAFE. Page 64 of the department's annual report shows an uptick in student satisfaction ratings over the past year in comparison to the previous three. We did actually have DEECA in yesterday, and they were talking about the Victorian energy upgrades program and how the free TAFE program is actually facilitating that as well. What do you attribute the increase in student satisfaction in the past financial year to, and is that partly to do with free TAFE as well?

Matt CARRICK: The short answer to that question is I believe it is, but I might hand to Ms Healy, who can expand some more on this.

Lill HEALY: Thanks, Secretary and Mr Galea, for the question. The uptick in free TAFE satisfaction is driven by a number of factors, and I will just call out three. The government has added literacy and numeracy support to the free TAFE program, and that has seen a real boost in fact in both enrolments and completions. Overall satisfaction – you could appreciate that as you are getting supported to complete your course you are naturally more comfortable when you complete and are satisfied with the program. The access because of free TAFE in terms of financial costs, reducing that financial burden for students, is also a really critical factor in satisfaction. The third thing I would call out are the broad supports that government provides and funds TAFE with under the TAFE services fund to enable students to have a range of needs met to complete their courses – for example, things like student counselling, financial scholarships, which a number of TAFEs provide, and access to additional mentoring support. There are a range of student services that TAFE are enabled to provide. All of those things combined really mean that that broader satisfaction is increasing.

I think also when you look at the free TAFE program, which of course now is taken up right across the nation, supported under the National Skills Agreement, it is because of that success. Right across Victoria, in both metropolitan and regional Victoria, we continue to see a growth in free TAFE take-up, and importantly, completions under free TAFE, of course, are on par with all other courses. Overall I think free TAFE – students will tell us, businesses will tell us and parents will tell us – is a really important addition to the VET system in Victoria and, again, is now emulated nationally under the National Skills Agreement.

If I could add just one more thing that is pretty important, it is the number of women who are accessing free TAFE. We have seen significant growth, and in fact women make up more than half of free TAFE completers. It is very much, I think, to do with that support for enabling people to come back into the workforce and reskill. We have got new entrants perhaps coming through school, but mainly women who are reskilling are a really solid part of the free TAFE story. If you put that next to the over 60 per cent, I think it is, people who have been out of work coming into free TAFE over that period of its life, again, it is another really important part of that story.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Ms Healy. In particular the increase in women taking up free TAFE is very encouraging as well. I want to pick up on something you said about the regions though. I note on page 19 of the annual report it says there were 25 per cent more commencements for regional students taking up the free TAFE program in 2024 compared to 2023. Can you talk to me a little bit about what is driving that increase?

Lill HEALY: That is in relation specifically of course to courses that are in the care economy, housing and construction programs – that significant uptick in those in-demand jobs where government has prioritised courses onto the free TAFE list. If you think about the care economy and regional towns, for example, we think about our courses. Whether it is in nursing or whether it is in early childhood or individual support, they are all growth areas and in-demand industries, so that uptick in those areas is key.

Overall the growth in free TAFE in regional Victoria was there between 2023 and 2024 more broadly across the board. When you look at the footprint of TAFE across regional Victoria, I guess the other key part of it is that the campuses right across key towns mean that there is access for people no matter where they live, and there are a lot of outreach services that are provided by TAFEs in related communities. The regional story, I think, for free TAFE is really positive, and we hope to see that continue of course into the future as we see more courses come online. We have recently had additional skill sets added to the free TAFE list in 2025. Things like a licence for plumbing, for example, you can now do as a skill set more broadly in the VET area. But for free TAFE, things like Auslan are a great example of where we have got specialist areas that are really niche and important, and they are now available on that list.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Obviously commencement is very important, but just as important if not more perhaps is completion. I see on page 67 of the annual report the completion rate for apprentices has actually gone up quite a bit, by just over 5 per cent, over the six-year completion rate period. The report identifies it is due to investments made, such as through Apprenticeships Victoria. Can you talk to me a bit about what those investments are?

Lill HEALY: Thanks, again, for the question. The completions story is a really important one. You have noticed the increase overall in apprenticeship completions. It masks in fact the special areas – things like electro tech in fact have an over 70 per cent completion rate; housing construction, again in the high 60s. The headline rate is a good one, but there are some other really strong stories around completions in apprenticeships. Full completions are fantastic, particularly if they are for entry into a job and licensing, but partial completions are also an important part of the story for students, because some students and apprentices may change their job during that time, so that technical element of a partial completion versus a full completion again is often masked in the data. But overall the focus on apprenticeships obviously is really critical because apprenticeships are essential to some of the critical growth industries in the economy.

The focus from Apprenticeships Victoria with their stakeholders – again right across the state, whether it is TAFEs, business and industry or whether it is things like the Apprenticeship Employment Network – brought together some critical supports for apprentices in the 2024–25 budget. I will call out a couple. Continuation of the apprenticeship support officer program is a fundamental, because when we look at why apprentices do or do not complete, we lose people mainly in that first year. It is around comfort in the workplace, relationships with employers, lower wages, et cetera – some of those things we can do something about, and the apprenticeship support officer program does just that. It gets beside first-year apprentices and provides them with information, referral, mentoring – just a point of reference when things perhaps are not going as well for them as they would like. It is a real boost to retaining people in their first year. Our 29 apprenticeship support officers that run through TAFEs right across the state have hundreds of appointments with those first-year apprentices, and that is really impactful. We know that when you get in early and support, that really drives to completions. The department has just, in June this year, commenced work for the Apprentice Helpdesk, and that was one of the initiatives that came through the Apprenticeships Taskforce work. The Apprentice Helpdesk

is really critical, because whether you are a parent or an employer or an apprentice yourself, there is a range of things that will come up, you know, questions or concerns or queries, so that help desk is there to enable those queries to be answered.

I am just going to read from my notes because the number surprised me. There have been over 1500 cases opened since June 2025 by our Apprentice Helpdesk, and the majority of those now are resolved. They have handled over 3000 calls since beginning. There is a 90 per cent satisfaction rate from those callers. Again, they are parents, they are apprentices themselves and they are employers, so quite a mix. Helping people navigate what can be a bit of a complex system really means that we will resolve issues and again enable apprentices to complete, and that is what businesses want. They want that workforce completed. Just to continue to help businesses too, there has also been an investment around mental health training, preparing both businesses to be better operators and enabling apprentices to have support if they require it. And there have been a number of digital resources online to enable apprentices to have information provided.

I could say more, but there is a suite of examples there where the Apprenticeships Victoria crew, working with the key stakeholders, have really heard what is required in the full system, for apprentices starting, for holding them, for training providers and for businesses. That work now is underway to really strengthen the overall system. Again, I would note if I could Victoria's leadership here, and that has now been picked up nationally through the National Skills Agreement, a broader reform piece of work around apprenticeships.

The final thing, if I could add, is that the underpinning, boring system work, things like legislation and policy settings, is also a subject of the taskforce's recommendation to government, and government has acted on that. The department is now working through thinking about the legislation and its contemporary nature and also thinking about what a modern and changed regulator just focused on apprenticeships could look like. That work continues in 2025.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. I was actually going to ask about the taskforce, but I think you have answered that in relation to the recommendation that was implemented by the help desk, which is good to see. But it also indeed good to see that the interventions to boost these figures up are not sort of a reactive end to the process. You are about to drop out what is going on, but you are doing that early work with these mechanisms to ensure that people are getting the help when they need it so a small issue does not become a big issue.

Lill HEALY: No. Absolutely right. And again, if I could just call out the focus around women in apprenticeships. I think it is an important one, because particularly for non-traditional trades we have got a good participation rate in Victoria, but we need everybody working and we need that real breakdown around gender. There has been a strong focus from Apprenticeships Victoria, again always working with stakeholders.

I would call out a tradie boot camp that was run in partnership with stakeholders, I think it was in the Geelong region, bringing women apprentices through really good early support and good skilling placement into roles, and 10 apprentices are all still in those roles. That support, again with other women tradies who have done the hard yards, means that women have role models to see and are encouraged to come in and give something a try. I was really excited by the story of Tash the Tradie – Natasha – who in fact was a bachelor-qualified person but was really looking for a bit of a change, and she was really inspired to look at carpentry because of seeing other women posting on social media about their trades. She was never directed of course in school to trades in those days, so she was not thinking about a career in construction. Seeing this work around the network, seeing it visible, again being able to see herself as a carpenter, she has taken on the training through TAFE. She has really enjoyed the tertiary training – a little bit different to her previous experience, I think. She also notes that as a woman in a male-dominated trade she wants to continue to give back and try and bring other women through and of course is always advocating for more support for women tradies. But again, right across the TAFE network that is a large priority, and there is terrific work going on to enable more women to be having a taster of non-traditional trades and, again, taking them up with gusto. We need a lot more of that in the economy.

Michael GALEA: Fantastic. It is great to see those results coming through. But also very important, especially in growing outer suburbs, is the provision of new buildings and TAFE campuses too. The questionnaire responses on pages 21 and 22 go through the Building Better TAFE Fund and specifically call out new campuses in Melton and in Sunbury, as well as some others. Can you talk to me about these investments and how they tracked and progressed over the past financial year?

Lill HEALY: Thank you again for the question. Yes, investment in TAFE infrastructure across the state is just obviously so critical, and the investment in the two new campuses through the 2024–25 budget is just terrific. You mentioned Melton and Sunbury, and thinking about the Melton campus and the \$55 million that was invested, it is away, it is out of the box and the architects are appointed. And that new TAFE campus plan for Cobblebank in Melton – in fact just near the train station, so really well located for students – is going to really deliver in one of the biggest growth areas in the state. The Kangan Institute of course is the lead there and is well placed to service that north-west corridor. Sunbury of course – the \$25 million funding that was in the previous budget, again, that is nicely placed in the activity centre there in central Sunbury, and the project is currently in design phase, planned for a 2028 open. So those are two examples of where modern campuses have a real, good focus around digital and strong care, strong apprenticeships. Thank you, Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. No prizes for guessing what I want to talk about: regional development. To start, Secretary, in the RDV annual report, grant expenditure has fallen from \$370 million four years ago to just \$118 million in 2024–25, which is a 70 per cent drop. And it was \$15 million less than that in 2023–24, but employee expenses rose 17 per cent. Why are we getting less money out the door but spending more on staff?

Matt CARRICK: Thank you for the question, Ms Benham. In a second I will hand over to Dr Csar, who can talk in more detail about RDV. But I think it is really important to note the commitment that we have to Regional Development Victoria and to regional development in general. So, Mr Csar, I might pass to you to talk a little bit more to directly address Ms Benham's question.

Xavier CSAR: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you for the question. Look, the employee expenses that you referred to are driven by the incorporation of the Latrobe Valley Authority staff through that financial year. So there were no substantive changes in the profile and therefore spend of the RDV staff over that period. They came on board, that was part of the transition as that entity's task had come to an end, and then they progressively moved over and out or across to other jobs, so they will not appear in the future. With regard to the profile of grant or output funding, if you like, that has remained remarkably stable either side of the substantial stimulus through the COVID period. So you will see in the profiles over the various years it goes up and then sort of tails out.

Jade BENHAM: So is that the \$370 million?

Xavier CSAR: Well, that does relate largely to that. And the other movements between years really relate to where the payments for major projects and programs occur. For instance, Geelong City Deals is a very big program over a number of years, with major payments as the builds rise from the ground, so movements occur either side of the financial year. The same also applies to the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund: \$150 million profiled over a couple of years, appropriated and then moved depending on when milestones are met. So that largely explains the variation.

Jade BENHAM: So how much money is available for regional grants over the forward estimates?

Xavier CSAR: I do not have the budget papers in front of me, I am afraid to say, but what I would say is –

Jade BENHAM: Could I take it on notice?

Xavier CSAR: Yes.

Matt CARRICK: Certainly. In terms of regional grants, are there any in particular you are talking about? Does that include investment grants or –

Jade BENHAM: Yes, I have actually got quite a few questions on the different programs. There are nine listed on the RDV website at the moment. Only one of them is open, which is Tiny Towns, which is a great program. Can we have a list as to what programs were open last year and who the Tiny Towns grants went to? That would be terrific. Just by government area is fine. But also the Regional Infrastructure Fund is still listed on the website, but it closed in August 2022. Is there funding available for that fund in particular?

Matt CARRICK: Just in terms of Tiny Towns – absolutely. We will come back with grants by LGA for you. We will get you that information. Dr Csar.

Xavier CSAR: Thank you, Secretary. Again, thank you for those questions. There are a few questions in there, so I will just step through them. On the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund, the second, and at this stage final round, has concluded. There are funds in the forward estimates to reflect the expected milestones and payments for those projects as they fall due. I do not have those details in front of me, but they can be provided.

Jade BENHAM: So the forward estimates grants are the ones you will provide on notice, Mr Carrick?

Xavier CSAR: That is correct, yes. That is where that 150 mill around the 370 mill of projects, about 55 of which – many of which you will be familiar with, I am sure. With Tiny Towns, the third round has just recently opened, so as you rightly pointed out –

Jade BENHAM: I am well aware. But the Regional Infrastructure Fund, is that going to be reopened again?

Xavier CSAR: There is in the RDV Act provision for a trust fund, an account called the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. It is an enduring trust in which moneys are deposited for the purposes of the grant programs and the various milestones, and that continues. It is not open for general application.

Jade BENHAM: It has not been since August 2022, though. It is still on the website.

Xavier CSAR: Well, that is true, and it is on the website for a number of reasons. It is a part of the Act. RDV was established under an Act of Parliament, and that stipulates a range of functions and places in which those functions can be performed. The trust fund, if you like, is an important part of that architecture and endures, and it has been a source in the last budget for the regional component of the Victorian Investment Fund – so \$50 million. That is an active fund. It is not open for general applications. What we do is we look for the best, most strategic, job-creating, economy-growing kinds of investments, and we will, over the next four years, progressively identify and fund them.

Jade BENHAM: So is that on a – I do not want to say an ad hoc basis, but if that fund is there, and it is \$50 million, you said, how is it determined where that money goes if it is not part of the program that is listed on a website?

Matt CARRICK: There are two things I would say. One is that it is a minimum of \$50 million. It is \$50 million that must be for regional Victorian investment projects. However, were there to be projects that in total require more than \$50 million, regional projects could access them. So there is that minimum. It is your classic investment grant program. Basically it would be looked at in terms of strategic importance, jobs and capital expenditure outcomes, and those sorts of metrics would be taken into account when negotiating with the company about what that support package would look like.

Jade BENHAM: How do the support companies apply for this money that is sitting there in a fund, if it says it is closed on the website? From a consumer or company point of view, how do they go about accessing that?

Matt CARRICK: Sure. I should clarify my remarks. That is separate to the fund you raised. This is the Victorian Investment Fund. Companies do that by talking to us, by talking to RDV or by talking to any other part of the department.

Jade BENHAM: So I can handball them to Dr Csar?

Matt CARRICK: Absolutely – or anywhere. Also international companies might be talking to our representatives overseas. Obviously we try and encourage people to invest not just here in Melbourne but importantly right across the regions.

Jade BENHAM: Is that the same for the infrastructure fund then? Again, that one has been closed, and I am curious as to why it is still listed there and is being promoted but people cannot apply for it. People want to apply for it, and I get contacted about it all the time. How do they access that?

Matt CARRICK: Dr Csar.

Xavier CSAR: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you for the question. Precisely like the Victorian Investment Fund, it is a strategic fund. Our operatives, led by our regional directors, many of whom you know, lead their teams in engaging with businesses. Businesses are referred to them directly, and your referrals would be most welcome. Working closely with local government and working closely with our Global Victoria partners, we are rolling through the best places to get jobs and investment. As you would be familiar with, we have got a range of employment precincts in regional locations like BREP, BWEZ and GLaMP in the Latrobe Valley and so on where we are really focused on attracting those kinds of investments and using those funds to make that happen.

Jade BENHAM: That \$50 million that you referred to, where is that located in the budget papers?

Xavier CSAR: It is in the forward estimates, profiled over four years, flat line.

Jade BENHAM: Do you know where it is? It is not listed under –

Matt CARRICK: Off the top of my head I do not, but we can come back to you in terms of that reference.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you. That would be appreciated.

Matt CARRICK: Just to supplement my answer to your question, Ms Benham, you asked specifically about RDV outputs. I think when we are talking about the investments being made in regional Victoria via this department, it is not just RDV. If you look at the regional package of initiatives, many of them were actually delivered through Ms McCann's area. So if you will –

Jade BENHAM: I am particularly concerned, because we get contacted about this, that there are grants listed on there that have not run for three years, and people are wondering why – I am wondering why – they would be listed there and not with another way to promote it. Why are we promoting a funding program that has not run for three years?

Matt CARRICK: Dr Csar?

Xavier CSAR: Thank you, Secretary. It is in some ways by design. Our intention is to have a wide funnel and meet as many opportunities as possible and engage with them across all their investment needs. Many of those investment needs do not necessarily require funding. Facilitation, planning assistance, the right introductions, the right places, the right people, the partnership with TAFE – that is what we call facilitation. The funds allow us to attract more interest and get more done. In fact in many ways our regional directors – our five senior regional directors in place – are the commissioners in those regions. They are great referral points that do that linkage. That linkage runs across government – transport and other services – but also within this department with the visitor economy, global exposure with Global Vic and trade more generally, so I would welcome referrals in region to our directors.

Jade BENHAM: You can look forward to referrals, Dr Csar. Referring to page 57 of the 2024–25 RDV annual report, are you able to provide the committee with a full breakdown of that \$118.5 million in grants that were delivered in the 2024–25 financial year, including the funding amounts by project, local government area and the program stream?

Xavier CSAR: I would like to take most of that question on notice, but I would point out a few things beforehand just to temper some expectations. Firstly, individual grants to companies are seldom disclosed, because we are not in the business of overpaying and being gamed by the system, so that is important. Also many of them are commercial in confidence, so the businesses are actually very keen and require us not to disclose them, so I do temper that expectation.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. They also do not like it when you mention it on social media, I have noticed, if I somehow find out. Regional worker accommodation et cetera, et cetera, which is a great program, but if we could get a breakdown of what we are able to by amounts by project, local government area and program stream, that would be very helpful. Great. Thank you. We have done Tiny Towns. The legacy projects – the annual report on page 55 lists 137 legacy projects under the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. How much money is there still to be allocated to these projects, assuming they meet all the milestones?

Xavier CSAR: Our intention if they meet their milestones is that they will receive all their contractual payments.

Jade BENHAM: I hope so.

Xavier CSAR: We have provisioned for them out of RJIF, which is the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, for that purpose. We would continue to manage those contracts. I could not give you a final figure about what is likely to go out, because it is not uncommon for proponents – local governments, community groups and businesses – to have to vary the terms at various times. We will manage that, but above all else, we will manage it with a view to getting the outcomes or the money returned or not paid if that is in fact the event.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Thank you. I want to talk about the staff as well, and this relates to budget paper 3. How many FTE staff were there in RDV as of 30 June this year?

Xavier CSAR: I will just look. Thank you for your question. At 30 June there were 152 individuals, equivalent to 148.7 FTE on payroll.

Jade BENHAM: 148.7 FTE. And how many were there on 30 June 2024?

Xavier CSAR: The figure has remained more or less stable. Actually, there were – individuals – 159.3 at that stage.

Jade BENHAM: What was the FTE for 30 June 2024?

Xavier CSAR: 141.3.

Jade BENHAM: 141.3. How many executives for the same periods?

Xavier CSAR: There were nine executives.

Jade BENHAM: In June 2024?

Xavier CSAR: Correct.

Jade BENHAM: Nine executives in June 2024. What about as of 30 June this year?

Xavier CSAR: Eight.

Jade BENHAM: Eight. Okay. Thank you. Leaving RDV aside, how many staff were there in the regional development section of DJSIR as of 30 June 2025? I understand that not everyone might be in RDV and might be scattered across the department.

Xavier CSAR: Was the question to 30 June 2025?

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Xavier CSAR: That figure is 148.7.

Jade BENHAM: So there are no other people working in the RDV portfolio branch in the department?

Xavier CSAR: If I follow your question, it is in terms of are there other people who are basically doing activities inside the department for regional development.

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Xavier CSAR: Yes, there are. Whether that is quantifiable – we are probably not structured in that way. For instance, within Ms Jarrett's area there will be investment and trade people who are working on projects with companies in regional Victoria that work very closely with Regional Development Victoria. But in terms of putting a precise figure, that is not the way we are structured. They might have a portfolio of companies or activities that are not equally divided or easily divided by geography.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, that is understandable. Secretary, the department has been advised of changes including redundancies required to RDV as part of the Silver review – true?

Matt CARRICK: No, not quite. The Silver review has not been released by government. That is still under active consideration. While it is fair to say I am privy to some extracts of it, no to your question.

Jade BENHAM: Will Regional Development Victoria continue as an agency?

Matt CARRICK: Two things: I cannot pre-empt any decisions of government as they relate to the Silver review. That is certainly – look, I will leave my remarks there in terms of that. The Silver review is under active consideration by government.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. Thank you, Dr Csar.

Roma BRITNELL: Thanks. I might have a few questions – I have got some time left in this session – around the free TAFE regime. At last year's hearing we learned that the four-year completion rate of the government's free TAFE program was just 53.7 per cent. Do you have an updated figure?

Matt CARRICK: If it is okay, I might refer to Ms Healy to talk a little bit more about that.

Lill HEALY: Thanks, Secretary, and thanks, Ms Britnell. The number that you have referred to was for starters who commenced in 2019. The updated figure I can give you is for 2020 commencements – because we do it on a four-year cycle; that is the way the national data centre measures it. The updated completion rate I think is 50.5 per cent. I am just going to triple-check my –

Roma BRITNELL: 54.5 per cent?

Lill HEALY: 50.5 per cent. I am just finding my right briefing to give you that. That is for four-year completions commencing in 2020.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. And can you tell me how that compares with completion rates for private RTOs?

Lill HEALY: Free TAFE completions are on par with other courses right across the system, whether it is delivered by a TAFE or delivered by a community RTO or delivered by a privately owned RTO. So the 50.5 per cent completion rate is again comparable. In my previous answer I referred to course completions, and I gave the example of electrotechnology being in the 70s. So when you break down courses, there are different course-level completion rates.

Roma BRITNELL: So for the free TAFE courses, and I just want to differentiate between the free TAFE courses and the RTOs that offer the same course and the completion rates. You are saying there is no difference whatsoever.

Lill HEALY: Course by course, I could not answer the question. I do not have that data with me. What I am saying is that at the aggregate –

Roma BRITNELL: Are you able to analyse that and provide that to the committee?

Lill HEALY: The national centre for education research produces the national data. I can provide the committee as much as we can get from them. If I could give you a couple of examples why this completion rate issue is really important to understand – underneath, not just at the macro. Privately run RTOs in Victoria deliver more fee-for-service training, for example, than government-subsidised training, and privately run RTOs are also the biggest deliverers of small courses – barista courses, first aid et cetera.

Roma BRITNELL: That is what I am asking though. What are the completion rates of the RTOs that have courses that are completed versus the TAFE courses that are not completed? Just compare the free TAFE with the courses the other RTOs run.

Lill HEALY: Again, I can only answer in the aggregate, which is the free TAFE courses are comparable to other courses.

Roma BRITNELL: All right. I will move on. There was \$131.4 million provided in the budget to ‘support eligible students to undertake accredited vocational education and training to enhance their skills and employment opportunities, including through Free TAFE and expanded eligibility in priority areas.’ \$75.64 million was provided as a Treasurer’s advance – page 34 of the questionnaire for your reference. What was that for, and was that due to additional enrolments?

Lill HEALY: The Treasurer’s advance that is referred to in the questionnaire, as you have referenced, is because when the funding is approved in the budget and not allocated, it is put into contingency, and the Treasurer’s advance is the mechanism to release that from contingency to continue the full financial year.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Miss Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you so much, Secretary and officials. I am actually interested in that completion rate. I was just having a look in the annual report there. Talking about comparisons, how does that compare nationally and how does that compare with universities?

Lill HEALY: Thanks, Ms Kathage, for the question. To start with the national part of the question, the national data, again from NCVER, shows that in 2024 total program enrolments in Victoria increased by 5 per cent, which was actually the highest increase in the country. In 2024 government-funded, both state and Commonwealth, enrolments increased up about 3 per cent, up to about 401,000. This is the NCVER data. The overall improvement in just government-funded data in 2024 has seen I think about 280 Victorian-subsidised enrolments in Skills First in 2024. The second part of your question?

Lauren KATHAGE: Comparing to universities.

Lill HEALY: Thank you. Back to completion rates. This is full completion rates not partial, again for the reasons I mentioned earlier. The comparable data for university completion is just around 39 per cent for a four-year qualification. As with all completions data, it is really important to get under the hood at a course-by-course level to really understand that. But the TAFE completion rate, both for free TAFE and for general courses, is well above that for a comparable university four-year degree.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great. Thank you. It is great to hear we are adding more students to free TAFE and that they are graduating at a higher rate than last year and indeed higher than university students – but such is youth, I think. Good luck to them all in their future careers, and their future careers are going to be so important for the Victorian economy of the future. You mentioned in your presentation, and I can see on page 20 of the annual report, the growth statement. DJSIR, I think you said, is leading more than half of the initiatives for the growth statement. We have heard from the very enthusiastic minister about how this is driving growth and stimulating investment. The initiatives that you have carriage of, that you have described – can you explain how they are going to support economic growth in Victoria?

Matt CARRICK: Absolutely. I might hand over to Ms Jarrett to answer the question.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you for the question. The *Economic Growth Statement*, as you mentioned, carries a number of initiatives, many of which sit within our department, and they span a range of different activities around trade and investment, industry development, medical research, digital jobs, employment outcomes and the like. In terms of touching on a particular project that is included in the statement, boosting Victorian exports, under the statement, got funding of \$34.9 million over five years, and in 2024–25 we saw export sales for Victorian businesses meeting \$819 million. It is a really nice and quick demonstration of the value of that initiative. That is supporting 2344 businesses. We have also through that program supported 10 outbound trade missions and one inbound trade mission. That has supported 290 Victorian companies with immediate export sales of \$18 million and projected sales over the next two years of \$1.64 billion.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is huge. Is that related to the investment network that is described on page 14 of the annual report?

Danni JARRETT: Yes. The Victorian government trade and investment network, which is the 23 offices that the Secretary referred to in the presentation, works very closely with the Melbourne offices and Melbourne teams back here, both in Melbourne and in regional Victoria. The focus of that network is very much on trade and investment activities. On the trade side it supports those Victorian companies that are looking to find

customers in key markets, providing advice to those Victorian businesses around the regulatory environment and approvals that exist in each market for them to understand how they need to navigate those regulatory environments in different markets for their products and services as well as looking to identify customers in those markets and how best to sell their products to those markets and likewise supporting Victorian companies to exhibit at key trade missions and trade conferences and expos internationally.

On the investment side the network we often call the ‘pitchers’. They look for the investment leads in markets, so really identifying the key companies that we see fit the profile that we are seeking to attract into Victoria, where they meet the sectoral profile that we are seeking to identify – the *Economic Growth Statement* lists those five key sectors that we prioritise in terms of investments that we support – and they are very much our ambassadors in market to identify those investment leads, work with those companies in market and then work hand in glove with the teams back here in Melbourne on how we can support and identify how best to secure those investments back into Melbourne. Last year, in 2024–25, the network contributed to the department’s achievements of \$834 million in export sales and supported 2725 businesses through those export programs. Alongside those export outcomes the network also played a key role in achieving and securing those international investments into the state, delivering 1847 jobs in Victoria, \$230 million in wages and \$205 million in innovation expenditure – achieved as a result of those international investments through facilitation and funding support by the government.

Lauren KATHAGE: We were hearing quite a bit yesterday about critical minerals and the potential for Victoria. Is your investment network geared towards that and thinking about what that will look like?

Danni JARRETT: Absolutely. We work very closely with Resources Victoria in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. We were very pleased with the announcement today around the exploration licence that was approved for Southern Cross Gold for their Sunday Creek project, and our team –

Lauren KATHAGE: Right near my place.

Danni JARRETT: Yes.

Lauren KATHAGE: I might dig up my backyard now, having seen that.

Danni JARRETT: We are really excited by that, and we have been working very closely with Resources Victoria as the regulator as well as with the company to understand what their ambitions are and how we can support them to not just understand the regulatory environment here but how we can understand what the opportunities are for that mining licence. Obviously gold but also antimony and critical minerals that Resources Victoria has focused on have a huge impact for the Victorian economy both through renewable energies and the technologies that are needed that rely on those rare earths – so there are opportunities for value adding there – and also the significant opportunity for export.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great. It is an exciting time.

Danni JARRETT: It is.

Lauren KATHAGE: I guess the road to importing or exporting can be quite tricky. I believe on page 16 there is information about the investment front door. Is that around simplifying things? Is it around reaching a critical mass? What is the purpose of the front door?

Danni JARRETT: It is really very much in the spirit of continuous improvement. At a simple level we have very much refined and enhanced our Invest Victoria website, which provides a streamlined single entry point for businesses wanting to engage with government online. Also through that front-door model and framework we work with any investor that knocks on our door, so to speak, to understand what their investment opportunities and aspirations are to then understand how we can facilitate that investment, which other parts of government they may or may not need to engage with and really hold their hand through that investment journey, and also understand how best to curate their growth ambitions. Likewise, for some of those projects and really tapping into the network that we have internationally, we also understand and identify in many cases whether they have export potential and how to support them as part of their export growth. We know that Victorian companies that also export have a higher economic impact for the state and also deliver higher jobs for those businesses as well.

Lauren KATHAGE: You were mentioning earlier, Ms Jarrett, the digital jobs program. What is that actually? Can we go back to the general principles around that, which is referred to on page 18 of the annual report?

Danni JARRETT: Sure. Thank you. The genesis of the digital jobs program was really identifying – and during COVID as well – that digital technologies have been at the forefront of economic growth for the last 50 years and are continuing to evolve and develop, but also recognising that many people mid-career are looking for a new opportunity but do not necessarily have the digital capability that they need to then make that next career move. Digital jobs really helps to support those mid-career Victorians to transition into the digital sector or into sectors such as financial services, advanced manufacturing or digital technologies, but through that digital skills lens. The program has most recently been funded through not just the state budget in 2024–25 but also in the *Economic Growth Statement*, funded for another \$4.25 million for another two years. The project really connects workers with companies who are wanting to have a workforce that is digitally competent and capable. It is intended to match participants in the program with businesses with the intent or aspiration that many of those employees or participants will continue to be employed by that company.

Lauren KATHAGE: These participants, are they from under-represented groups in the workforce, or is there a particular slant to how you are selecting participants?

Danni JARRETT: There has been a large cohort of people who have participated in the program from what would be typically characterised as under-represented groups of the workforce. It has been very successful for women, migrants and older workers who again, particularly in the digital space, do struggle to transition into new careers. In 2024–25 there were just over a thousand participants in the program. 61 per cent of those were women, 61 per cent spoke a language other than English and 38 per cent were over the age of 40.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is great to hear because I think the free TAFE also has a similar result in terms of regional Victorians and women getting involved in TAFE courses. It is great to hear that the digital jobs program has that sort of result as well.

Staying on women, on page 18 of the annual report it speaks about the women in security network partnership to deliver the summer of cyber pilot. I do not understand any of the words I just said, so what is that?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you again for the question. The summer of cyber pilot was co-designed with the Australian Women in Security Network. It was run throughout last summer and all the projects were delivered in April this year. The pilot supported over 110 women to transition into new cyber career pathways or into cyber leadership roles. Those participants were people who came from a mix of Victorian SMEs, tertiary students, recent graduates, as well as supervisors and industry mentors. The intent of the program was to really bring together people who have newly acquired skills as well as those with deep and practical industry knowledge and experience. The pilot involved those participants working in project teams with their industry mentors to develop greater security awareness and cyber capability and to develop more robust cyber skills and policy documentation and confidence to then step into positions of leadership but also recognising that some of these occupations can be more transient if they do not see like people. A part of the intent of this pilot was to really assist people to remain in those roles in that sector.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is great. There are a lot of new technologies coming up that we are hearing about that we are wedding with, I guess, the training approach that we have seen that works. One of them that I have read about in the annual report touches on the housing issue, which is the future of housing construction TAFE centre of excellence, which sounds amazing for *Grand Designs* devotees such as myself. We know that housing delivery is a massive priority for the government, and we were hearing about some of the results earlier this week. In terms of TAFEs then preparing or developing the workers for this future sector that is being delivered, how is that future of housing construction centre of excellence gearing us towards that?

Lill HEALY: Thanks for the question. We are all eager to answer it, but I will take it, and if it is okay, I might call on my colleague, Mr Robertson, the CEO of the skills authority. You have used the word ‘future’ – the Future of Housing Construction Centre of Excellence is all about future skills, and the \$50 million Future of Housing Construction Centre of Excellence investment – both Commonwealth and state investment at Melbourne Polytechnic, as that joint initiative – is located at Melbourne Polytechnic’s campus because it is really leveraging their capabilities in advanced manufacturing and their delivery of higher education courses

and engineering. The delivery of those future skills in partnership with industry is the speciality. I will hand to Mr Robertson.

Craig ROBERTSON: Thank you. Craig Robertson, Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Skills Authority. If we think about technology and changes that will be occurring across the building and construction industry, which in essence are here now, we know there are going to be different sorts of skills that will be required. I think about it in three ways. The first one, we are going to need to upskill workers to deal with new technology in the built environment as we think to make our energy more efficient in our built environment, so we need to make sure those skills are available to existing workers. Then we need to be able to make sure across many of our trades, as people get prepared for that industry, that they are alert to the new technology and approaches that will be required. Then thirdly are the modern methods of construction, which is really bringing a manufacturing approach to housing and construction, and we need to be able to make sure that there are skills prepared for that. The role that a centre of excellence will play will be the bridge between that innovation and industry and what will be the best way to think about the best form of training. That is the rationale of the centre of excellence. As Ms Healy said, it will be located through Melbourne Polytechnic, but the plan out of centres of excellence – they are national centres of excellence, so what is learned here in Heidelberg can be spread through and delivered through obviously the TAFE network here in Victoria, but equally those lessons can be shared across all of Australia.

Lauren KATHAGE: It will have to be quite nimble, won't it, to keep up with changes in the industry?

Craig ROBERTSON: That is right. That is really the trick about why we need to bring the industry together with educators to say what is the best way to think about educating people so that people have that underpinning knowledge, essentially, along with the skills they have and the experience they have to say, 'How can I adapt in my role that I have in building and construction?'

Lauren KATHAGE: We were hearing yesterday about plumbers upskilling as part of the Victorian energy upgrade program, because heat pump water systems are being installed. Is that under your watch as well, as the Victorian Skills Authority?

Craig ROBERTSON: We have a broad remit in terms of looking at future skills and what would be the role that digitisation and technology is playing. And it would be fair enough to say that we think AI is coming at a pace that maybe we had not anticipated. So we need to be able to think about what is the best way to prepare people to be productive in that process. It will be around how you give people essentially the knowledge and skills that will allow them to evolve as the technology evolves as well. There could be a little bit of criticism around at the moment that we tend to skill for current technology. We need to think about skilling a person with that knowledge to be able to adapt into the future.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes, it is amazing, isn't it, because there will be hits and misses, won't there, as the technology takes its own path that we cannot predict as yet. But it sounds like having that focus on housing is going to be good for the broader population, people that are working and not working. Are there any other broad areas that are being looked at by the Victorian Skills Authority?

Craig ROBERTSON: So we are also looking at the – thank you.

The CHAIR: The time has come for a very short break, I assure you. The committee is going to take a very short break and resume the hearing at 3:15 pm.

The committee will now resume its consideration of the Department of Job, Skills, Industry and Regions. I am going to go to Ms Benham. Secretary, I believe there was something you wanted to put on the record.

Matt CARRICK: Yes. There is a clarification we might have to a data point we provided earlier. If I can hand to Dr Csar.

Xavier CSAR: Thank you Secretary. Thank you, Chair. Yes. In regard to a question from the honourable Jade Benham regarding executive numbers at RDV between 30 June 2023–24 and 30 June 2024–25, I provided the answer that there were nine in the earlier period and eight later. That is correct in terms of the reports to me, noting that I am a Governor-in-Council appointee, so I do not actually count as an executive. I neglected to add

that in fact when I consider the directors within that, the number is actually 13 at 30 June 2023–24 and 12 in 2024–25.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you, Dr Csar.

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. Just a quick question on TAFE once again: how many vacancies exist across the TAFE sector in the reporting period?

Matt CARRICK: I might hand to Ms Healy to talk to that question.

Lill HEALY: Thanks for the question. TAFE institute staffing numbers are internal numbers to the institutes. We do not collect that individual data in terms of vacancies at the state level. So the annual reports –

Roma BRITNELL: So you cannot get that information about how many vacancies exist across the reporting period?

Lill HEALY: The annual reports of TAFEs would contain the individual TAFE's staffing data and that would be the point – it is not something that is aggregated –

Roma BRITNELL: So it is not obtainable, or I can get that data from each individual TAFE's annual report but I cannot get it collated. Is that what you are saying? It is available, but I have to collate it.

Lill HEALY: At TAFE level – at the individual TAFE's level. It is at that level, not at the state level. Every TAFE annual report is a public report –

Roma BRITNELL: Are you able to provide us, the committee, with the vacancies across TAFE in Victoria? I mean, they are public – paid for by taxpayer dollars. Is it possible to have the information on how many vacancies exist, please?

Lill HEALY: I am happy to take it on notice, if we can, and gather what we –

Matt CARRICK: Absolutely. We will have a look at the annual reports and collate that for you.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you very much. I now refer to page 79 of DJSIR's questionnaire relating to the health and medical research workforce action plan and carryover funding, which supported the delivery of six projects in alignment with the workforce action plan, all of which are currently in the monitoring phase. Secretary, when will the monitoring phase be complete for these six projects, and can you provide the committee with the details of each one?

Matt CARRICK: I will check with Ms Jarrett if we can. Otherwise, I might have to take that on notice, but I will check with Ms Jarrett whether we can convey some information right now for you.

Danni JARRETT: With regard to the workforce action plan, it is still in delivery mode, so we are still delivering the initiatives within the strategy. That strategy is a 10-year strategy, so it provides a framework for priorities, activities and investments in health and medical research from 2022 to 2032.

Roma BRITNELL: So you are still in the monitoring phase?

Danni JARRETT: Well, sorry, we are in – you are looking at page 79. Is that correct?

Roma BRITNELL: 79.

Danni JARRETT: And the carryover supported delivery of the six projects in alignment –

Roma BRITNELL: Yes, with the workforce action plan – currently in monitoring phase. When will that monitoring phase be complete?

Danni JARRETT: We will need to probably take that on notice.

Matt CARRICK: We will take that on notice and come back to you, yes.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. So with no funding for the hidden costs of research through the operational infrastructure support, OIS, program for medical research institutes for nine years and funding from this year's budget for only the next two years, how does the sector plan to invest into the future?

Matt CARRICK: In terms of OIS funding, as you are right to point out, there are a couple of years certainty in terms of funding there, and no doubt there will be future decisions made by government as to funding into the out years for those institutes. Ms Jarrett, is there anything you wanted to supplement my comments with on that?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, and thank you for the question. The OIS funding provides, as you say, annual funding in support of grants for independent medical research institutes. The funding that is provided is an annual allocation that is given to each of the institutes.

Roma BRITNELL: I am asking about forward sustainability if they have only got the two years. You are now saying it is actually annual, not even two years.

Danni JARRETT: I think there was additional funding that was provided in the 2024–25 budget for additional funding to the –

Roma BRITNELL: Do you want to perhaps come back to the committee if you are not confident now?

Danni JARRETT: We can do that.

Roma BRITNELL: Is that all right?

Danni JARRETT: Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: So you will provide that. Thank you. The *Economic Growth Statement* describes the sector as the beating heart of our economy. Secretary, what is the total amount of OIS funding that the sector requires to secure its ongoing financial viability?

Matt CARRICK: Well, in terms of financial viability, we certainly would be able to come to you with a figure for what that is, which helps maintain the viability of those research institutions.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. Why is Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre not included in the OIS program?

Matt CARRICK: Ms Jarrett, I might hand it to you.

Danni JARRETT: OIS provides grants to 12 Victorian independent medical research institutes. They are research institutes, by their very name, which are independent of any hospital as such. Peter MacCallum is considered, under the guidelines of OIS, as part of a broader hospital.

Roma BRITNELL: So it does not fit the criteria?

Danni JARRETT: Correct.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. All right. Secretary, page 33 of the DJSIR questionnaire points to the Melbourne arts precinct transformation and the additional funding of the \$395.44 million via the Treasurer's advance, of which \$289.79 million was spent. Will the Secretary confirm that the Melbourne arts precinct project, a very important project for the state, its tourism, its future, is now significantly over the budget and this advancement is to plug the gap? In particular, will you indicate the total value of the project with the additional funding delivered?

Matt CARRICK: Sure. I would not quite characterise it the way you have, but I will ask Ms Febey, the CEO of Creative Victoria, to comment on that. What I would say is you are absolutely right in terms of the importance of this project. This will be the single biggest cultural investment, basically, that the country has ever made. It is extraordinarily important in terms of what it will mean, positioning Victoria as a beacon for cultural visitation in the years ahead. But with that, I might hand to Ms Febey.

Claire FEBEY: Thank you. I think you were interested in the total estimated investment for the project. It remains that the Victorian government has committed \$1.7 billion towards the project, and that is inclusive of philanthropic commitments from the Arts Centre Melbourne and NGV. That TEI is as it was.

Roma BRITNELL: But I ask why it is necessary to make this whopping Treasurer's advance given maintaining sustainability and services levels is basic year-on-year funding, we would all have thought. It is basic funding.

Claire FEBEY: Thank you for clarifying. So you are asking me about the Treasurer's advance that obviously appeared in the questionnaire. That was money that is held in contingency for the project and that was released as it was needed. So that is the way that –

Roma BRITNELL: Can you outline, or perhaps you would like to provide it on notice, what that actually delivered and a breakdown of that?

Claire FEBEY: Certainly we can take on notice to provide an update on key deliverables in the project so far.

Roma BRITNELL: On the breakdown of what the Treasurer's advance was used for. Okay. Thank you very much.

Matt CARRICK: Just to back in Ms Febey's comments there, it is a very standard way of releasing funds for some of these big projects. It comes out of –

Roma BRITNELL: I thought it was for exceptional circumstances, not as a way of just sort of making up the difference.

Lauren Kathage interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: I think I am actually asking the Secretary. I do not really need help from the opposition.

The CHAIR: Well, Deputy Chair –

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, members. I hope I only have to say this once. Sometimes I am unclear, and I can see that witnesses are unclear, if the commentary is simply to yourself, Deputy Chair, or if you are directing a question to witnesses.

Roma BRITNELL: I think I have been very clear that I have been speaking directly to the officials in the room, and I do not need any assistance from the people on my right. But thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Deputy Chair, you will treat me, as the Chair, with respect.

Roma BRITNELL: I was not referring to you. Sorry, Chair.

The CHAIR: Now, did you have a question that you wished to ask the Secretary?

Roma BRITNELL: I think you have already said that you will provide that, and I appreciate that.

Matt CARRICK: Yes, we will.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you very much. One thing I would add: is the project on time?

Claire FEBEY: Thank you. The transformation of the Melbourne arts precinct will take place over several years, and at the moment the project is tracking well. The award of the head contract for The Fox: NGV Contemporary was in March 2025, and early works are well underway. Design is progressing, and any updates to the program will be known when design completion milestones fall due in the middle of 2026. So it is tracking well.

Roma BRITNELL: Excellent. All right. Thank you. My next question is about the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic orchestra and choir. I refer to the orchestra and choir which have been in existence since 1853 – a very impressive history. They are a significant part of Australia’s cultural history and our present and should be a part of our future. I note that in two weeks the Melbourne Philharmonic will present their world-record 246th performance, so they are a very impressive organisation. I draw the secretaries to the correspondence to the planning minister by the president of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, Anna Hoffman. The minister has decided to throw the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic out of their longstanding residence at the Drill Hall. I have got letters here, and they have been corresponding since July. Will DJSIR meet with the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic to save their current home, or will DJSIR assist in finding them a new home and support the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic orchestra financially to find themselves a place to reside if they are going to be chucked out?

Claire FEBEY: I am happy to take that question if that would be all right. Thank you very much for bringing that to the committee’s attention. We would be very happy as a department to meet with them to understand more what is happening and how they might be assisted.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay, so you will agree to meet with them, and you are unaware of all the correspondence they have been sending begging for assistance?

Claire FEBEY: It sounds like these are to the Minister for Planning. Was that what you set out?

Roma BRITNELL: They have been directed to the –

Jade BENHAM: To DTP.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes. So, you are unaware. That is okay. Thank you for agreeing to meet with them. I will move on to my next question. I would like to ask a question about the Formula One contract – to the Secretary, I imagine. Is this government in breach of its Formula One contract?

Matt CARRICK: Not to my knowledge – I might ask Ms McCann, whose area this falls into.

Georgina McCANN: Thanks for the question. No, not to any of our knowledge at this point. No.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. Does the failed legislation threaten the Australian Grand Prix contract, secured to 2037, being poached by New South Wales?

Georgina McCANN: The changes to the legislation – is that what you just asked? The legislation passed. The legislation has been passed.

Jade BENHAM: To extend from 7 to 21 days?

Georgina McCANN: Yes, the legislation, the *Australian Grands Prix Amendment Act* came into force on 22 October. It passed.

Jade BENHAM: Hadn’t it been suspended?

Roma BRITNELL: I thought so too.

Georgina McCANN: It went back through, and it passed.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. The Victorian taxpayer paid over \$102 million for the 2024 event. Does this funding come out of the tourism and major events funding, explaining the \$200 million revised budget for 2024–25?

Georgina McCANN: No. The difference in the output funding for tourism relates to events under the Major Events Fund. Because those events are acquired over the course of a year, they are then taken out and funded, so that is why the change in the output costs is what it is.

Roma BRITNELL: Has the annual payment to Parks Victoria for the upkeep of Albert Park increased in line with the 28 July media release? If so, by how much?

Georgina McCANN: That is related to the legislation, I believe. If you can just give me a moment –

Matt CARRICK: Just as Ms McCann does that, I guess there is probably a question we will need to clarify as to the passage of the legislation – when it takes effect – and the consequences for Parks Victoria payments.

Georgina McCANN: That is right.

Roma BRITNELL: Just one last thing on that too, perhaps to take on notice as well: what other non-sporting events were forecast for Albert Park to counter the increase in funding costs, which would fit into the same category?

Georgina McCANN: The new amendment Bill enables them to deliver events other than the Formula One Grand Prix, but no events have been forecast that I am aware of at this point. But that is a matter for the AGPC.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay, so you cannot help us with that information?

Georgina McCANN: No. That is an AGPC matter.

Roma BRITNELL: I will move on to events and tourism. How much money was spent on attracting and promoting overseas talent to Victoria?

Matt CARRICK: When you say ‘overseas talent’ –

Roma BRITNELL: Directed at overseas clientele, to attract them to Victoria as a destination.

Matt CARRICK: In terms of marketing spend and things like that?

Roma BRITNELL: Yes.

Matt CARRICK: Yes, sorry. Thank you for that clarification. I might hand to Ms McCann but just as we do that what I would say is one of the topics of conversation today has been around the *Economic Growth Statement*. As part of that there was actually a \$7 million allocation which was made for additional destination marketing expenditure. A portion of that was for overseas markets and also partnerships with local operators to basically boost the leverage that we would get, and that has delivered over \$20 million worth of benefits already. It is a good model, but I might hand to Ms McCann.

Roma BRITNELL: So it is a proportion of \$7 million is the answer? Or is that on top of another part of –

Georgina McCANN: No. In fact since 2021–22 the Victorian government has invested over \$121 million in Visit Victoria to deliver destination marketing activities. And you would have seen earlier this year the Premier announced \$43 million in destination marketing funding to go to Visit Victoria as well, so that was during her trip to China.

Roma BRITNELL: I am specifically wanting to know how much has been directed at the overseas market from that budget. Can you draw that out?

Georgina McCANN: Obviously that activity markets Victoria and Melbourne both from a kind of interstate, intrastate and international perspective, and some of that includes paid social media spend that would reach all of those audiences.

Roma BRITNELL: Well, I would really appreciate that information. Would you be able to provide that and the breakdown?

Georgina McCANN: It may not be possible to split that. I am sure that there are allocations within that funding –

Roma BRITNELL: If it is possible.

Matt CARRICK: Absolutely.

Georgina McCANN: However, there would be some activities that would target all of those markets, so it might not be possible to break them down.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes. Just as long as it is the overseas market bringing people to Victoria. You mentioned that some is for Melbourne and some is for the regions.

Georgina McCANN: Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: How much has been spent on promoting or supporting regional events in the budget?

Georgina McCANN: I can talk about the regional events program.

Matt CARRICK: Just while Ms McCann does that, just to clarify in terms of the information we will seek to come back to you with, it will be what was clearly allocated to overseas markets?

Roma BRITNELL: Yes.

Matt CARRICK: Then also we will try and clarify where there might have been activities that reached both domestic and overseas markets.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes. I understand.

Matt CARRICK: We cannot break it down. But just so there is –

Roma BRITNELL: So it will be Australian as well as overseas, and you will try and extrapolate them out as best you can, and you will also help me with understanding how much has been spent on regional events.

Georgina McCANN: No. I can tell you that now. We have the Regional Events Fund, which is a really successful program, and that funding of \$38 million was allocated over four years. The 2023–24 budget was part of the Regional Tourism and Events Fund, and that was part of that \$2 billion regional package that was announced in July 2023.

Roma BRITNELL: Will that continue in this next financial year? Will that be a similar figure that you have had in the past, like in the 2024–25 budget?

Georgina McCANN: I cannot comment on next financial year, but that funding is still available.

Roma BRITNELL: Have you got regional support in there, though? Because you are planning ahead obviously –

Georgina McCANN: Yes, we still have a regional event fund.

Roma BRITNELL: and these events do not just happen.

Georgina McCANN: It was over four years, so it was from 2023–24 for four years.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. So what we are looking at, though, is that to continue? Is that correct or not?

Georgina McCANN: I cannot comment on future deliberations of government, but we have it for four years.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. In 2023–24 funding of \$170 million was unveiled for regional tourism. That included \$20 million for regional tourism marketing. In the 2024–25 budget the funding was reduced to only \$15 million over three years for destination marketing. How can this reduction in funding from \$20 million to \$5 million be justified when the international visitors to regional Victoria spent a record of \$645 million, a 36 per cent year-on-year increase to December 2024?

Georgina McCANN: Just to reiterate my previous point, there was a further \$43 million in destination marketing funding that was allocated earlier this year, so that supplements the existing allocation. It is well and truly –

Roma BRITNELL: It has been brought back up, and there are no cuts?

Georgina McCANN: No.

Matt CARRICK: There has been that extra amount of funding that has been allocated. And it is probably good just to put on record now that tourism in Victoria generated a record amount – \$43.7 billion – in 2024–25, and that included a 20 per cent jump in international visitation in the 12 months to June 2025.

Jade BENHAM: Just on regional events and major regional events, you may or may not be aware – you probably are – that Lenny Kravitz is playing in Mildura tomorrow night.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. I will be there.

The CHAIR: Of course she will.

Jade BENHAM: Of course. Do we have the cost for bringing a superstar like that out? When we talk about overseas talent, what is the cost to bring an overseas talent out for a regional event like that?

Matt CARRICK: I would say it is probably commercial-in-confidence because we do not want to give it away. What I would say is I missed out on the Lenny Kravitz concert last night to prepare for this session, so I think that I would like to come to Mildura.

Jade BENHAM: Would you like to come to Mildura with me tomorrow?

Matt CARRICK: Yes, I would love to, excellent.

Jade BENHAM: You are more than welcome, Mr Carrick. We would love to have you.

Roma BRITNELL: I will just ask another question on Melbourne Polytechnic. In March 2025 TEQSA revoked several registration conditions on Melbourne Polytechnic, stating that the provider now meets the relevant higher education standards. What was DJSIR's response to TEQSA's original conditions, and how have you supported the institute to address those concerns?

Matt CARRICK: I might ask Ms Healy whether she can shed any light on that, and in the event that we cannot, we can always take that one on notice.

Lill HEALY: Yes, thanks. Thanks, Secretary. Thanks for the question, Ms Britnell. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority, TEQSA, as you have mentioned, regulates higher education delivery in the country. A number of TAFEs deliver higher education, not just vocational. TEQSA's individual work with TAFEs in terms of their reregistration is not in the purview of the department because it is a Commonwealth piece. We can certainly take on notice anything –

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. If you can take that on notice, I would appreciate it. Thank you, Ms Healy.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Secretary and officials. I have a few questions on medical research, and then we go on to international education, my favourite topic. I refer to the 2024–25 DJSIR annual report on page 37. Victoria is obviously lucky enough to be home to some fantastic medical research institutes which are regarded by many as leaders in this space. There is a specific focus from the government in the mRNA space, and I was wondering if you could detail some of the work done to support the building and scaling up of the mRNA manufacturing capacity in Victoria. Also, I would like to let you know I drove past the Moderna centre in Clayton just last night.

Matt CARRICK: Indeed I will hand to Ms Jarrett to expand on that. But one of the things I would say is when you think of Victoria and you think of Melbourne on the international stage and our prominence in the life sciences area, and if you look at mRNA in particular, to the best of my knowledge – and if this is wrong, I am sure Ms Jarrett will kick me under the table – we are the only city in the world where you have both

BioNTech and Moderna with mRNA manufacturing facilities. So it really is globally unique in terms of the capability that we are developing in terms of our life sciences sector.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes. Thank you.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Secretary, and thank you for the question. Just leaning in on that, obviously having such global international companies, mRNA companies, such as Moderna and BioNTech, is definitely testimony to Melbourne being one of the top destinations for both medical research but also manufacturing in the state and in the country. Obviously off the back of the development of mRNA, which is still a relatively recent area of medical research, and recognising that alongside having those global leaders it is very important for us to also build an end-to-end mRNA ecosystem in Victoria. Building our local capability and leveraging those existing strengths in medical research and advanced manufacturing, as well as delivering in major sovereign mRNA manufacturing facilities in the state, cements Victoria as a fantastic location for manufacturing and for investment attraction, as well as medical research – that end-to-end, from research through to clinical trials through to clinical manufacturing and large-scale manufacturing, which is where Moderna and BioNTech sit.

Taking that vision and taking that very strategic approach about building the ecosystem, within the department we have the mRNA Victoria team. They are very much focused on building out this local mRNA sector and capability through targeted research grant programs to support local industry, as well as developing workforce skills and clinical trials. Having the right skills for a clinical trial workforce is incredibly important – really focusing on that skill development as well as identifying and developing our international partnerships to, as I said before, attract those major international innovators to then accelerate local capability.

Then looking at the grants that we have supported in Victoria in the last three years, we have supported 63 research projects with investments totalling \$30.6 million. Those projects really unlock the new mRNA treatments and vaccines for diseases, including muscular dystrophy and Alzheimer's, as well as hard-to-treat cancers. If you think about some recent results from those research projects, a project that was funded in 2022 to develop an RNA-based drug to prevent lupus is now moving through the clinical trial stage, which will then provide hopefully a lot of hope and relief for thousands of patients, and it is looking to then receive global recognition for advancing breakthroughs in HIV research and the like. We are seeing the impact of those grants from the research through to clinical trials and then through to delivery. That is just a small example of some of those smaller research projects that the mRNA Victoria team within the department is supporting, and they are continuing to work with local manufacturing and researchers in that field.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. I refer to the same annual report on page 35. We know that Victoria is incredibly focused on the mRNA platform with the establishment of mRNA Victoria and its partnership with Moderna and BioNTech. In the last financial year your report mentioned the Monash mRNA Workforce Training Centre. Could you please tell us more about that training centre and the impact that it had on the ecosystems?

Danni JARRETT: Sure, absolutely. This project, alongside the work that we are doing with Moderna located at Monash University, is again one of the approaches that we are very focused and targeted on and proud of in terms of our partnerships with many Victorian universities and how we curate and facilitate those partnerships between both local companies as well as international companies with universities in doing that research and then spinning those out into products and services and companies. Specifically looking at the mRNA Workforce Training Centre at Monash, that provides access to a highly trained workforce in Victoria's pharmaceutical manufacturing sector, which then builds out on that end-to-end ecosystem that we were talking about before. The centre was launched in March 2023, so it is coming up to about 2½ years old, and that is really to support the next generation of workers in the mRNA vaccine and medicine field. It then helps us to not only back in and support the success of the Moderna and BioNTech investments, but it also supports other pharmaceutical companies, students and industry from across the region to come to Victoria and then deliver best practice education and training programs. Located at Monash University's Clayton campus, the centre has already trained and mentored approximately 50 participants in the last year from international partners, including Malaysia and Korea, which then connects those relationships and partnerships between Victoria and those countries. This is growing and self-fulfilling, generating new opportunities for us with researchers as well as manufacturers in those markets. Those courses that are delivered at the centre include mRNA manufacturing essentials, mRNA design and good manufacturing practice. Having that capability in good manufacturing

practice is absolutely essential for companies if they are seeking to get TGA approval, which is absolutely critical to them being able to have large-scale manufacturing capability and being able to export as well.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Just a follow-up question: you talked about partnerships with the biotechs. I refer to the same annual report on page 35. How will clinical trials be supported through the 10-year cancer clinical trials program?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you again. So BioNTech is a German company that is locating its facility at La Trobe University, and again we were very pleased to be able to identify and secure that investment for Victoria, as I said, which really demonstrates the strength and the opportunities of co-locating large multinational companies with universities to really develop those research and manufacturing activities and opportunities.

Specifically with BioNTech, they are establishing a research and clinical scale mRNA manufacturing facility and development and research innovation centre, which is very much focused on a cancer-focused clinical trials program. That clinical trials program will bring cutting-edge cancer therapies that are being delivered through the BioNTech company and provide up to 4000 Australian patients with access to those therapies over the next 10 years. They have already started to roll out the clinical trials across Australia and will provide access to patients to those treatments for a range of particularly hard-to-treat cancers, including melanoma, head and neck cancer, endometrial cancer, lung cancer, gastro-oesophageal cancer, breast cancer, pancreatic cancer and other solid tumours. As of October this year BioNTech already has 19 ongoing clinical trials in Australia, including 13 new trials initiated just this year, and they are already manufacturing mRNA vaccines at their research lab at La Trobe University as well.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Moving on to international education, Secretary, we have seen recent strong support from the Premier for our international education sector and heard from the minister at this PAEC hearing about the importance of it. It is great to see reference in the annual report to supporting our international education sector. I refer to the DJSIR annual report on page 40. How does the Yes to International Students Fund support international education?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you again for the question. I touched on earlier the strength and the activities of the VGTI network that we have across our 23 offices. I should have also referred to the importance of that network to our international education activities. International education as a sector is Victoria's largest export services sector and generated over \$15.9 billion in export revenue and supported 64,000 jobs in Victoria in the calendar year of 2024. Through that network we have a global education network of staff working across our international offices to identify prospective students offshore through our education services managers, particularly focusing in regions where Victoria is particularly competitive: Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Middle East, Latin America, India and China. We are seeing some fantastic recovery from COVID in the international education space, where in 2024 we had over 330,000 international enrolments in Victoria. Really pleasingly, Melbourne is rated as Australia's best student city for international students and the fifth best city in the world.

Mathew HILAKARI: It is no surprise, is it?

Danni JARRETT: No, it is no surprise, but it is absolutely encouraging. It is through initiatives such as the Yes to International Students program that we continue to generate and consolidate our reputation with international students, as well as working with Victorian universities and TAFEs. The fund was announced by the Premier on her trip to India in September last year and then it was also confirmed in the *Economic Growth Statement* that was released in December. It is a \$5 million fund, and it is supporting 16 universities and TAFEs to undertake a broad range of transnational education activities. That includes creating offshore campuses as well as new course development with overseas training providers, formalising new and innovative overseas partnerships and developing new transnational education strategies and frameworks as well as enhancing staff capability and student exchange programs, again, providing that opportunity for international students to do some of their study back home as well as having that opportunity to come to Victoria and participate in their studies here. Those projects are delivered also with, as I said, the Victorian universities and TAFEs as well as with reputable overseas partners across our international education markets, and we are expecting it to be completed by June next year.

Meng Heang TAK: Exciting times. I refer to the same annual report on page 23, which mentions the Study Melbourne hub. How does this Study Melbourne hub support international students?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you very much for the question. We have a Study Melbourne hub in the city, in Melbourne, and that goes to the many services that we do provide to international students. It provides a safe place, so to speak, for students to come and provides welfare and support services to onshore international students, and that includes providing information to students around their rental rights, their employment rights, legal referrals and sometimes complex casework for some students. Many of these international students are coming to a strange place by themselves. They are leaving friends and family, and they do not necessarily have that support framework and architecture here. That is something that the Study Melbourne hub provides for those students. It is a community away from home and provides them also with support and advice around looking for jobs, career development and leadership as well as very much looking at their wellbeing and future employability and the like. It is taking a very holistic approach to the way in which we work with education providers to not only deliver the courses that those international students are seeking to participate in and get those qualifications but while they are here they are having a very genuine and authentic experience living in Melbourne, in Victoria.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. A follow-up question: you mentioned the higher results for international student satisfaction with the Study Melbourne student program and Melbourne maintaining its position among the best student cities – Melbourne and Victoria. What has driven that improved program for Study Melbourne?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you again for the question. Obviously we see the economic value of having international students to the state. It also enhances our profile as a very international city. With that in mind we have taken a very intentional approach with having dedicated policy and funding support that has been provided by government. It sends a very strong message by having a strong policy that articulates our ambition for supporting international students. When Victoria was coming out of COVID and COVID had a significant impact on international education in this state, the state released *Victoria's International Education Recovery Plan 2025*, which was very much focused on how we recover the sector. That provided and articulated our visions and goals to support international education and how were going to support the sector's recovery. It has been very effective in demonstrating that commitment and, importantly, providing certainty to not only existing international students but also prospective students – so when they and their families are looking at where do they want to come and study, whether they are looking at Australia or other countries, how Victoria stands out as a destination that not only has fantastic world-leading education providers but also provides a fantastic experience to come and live here and study here and work here while they are studying. Having that vision articulated in a strategy as well as supporting that with services that we can provide through the Study Melbourne hub and the like just provides that strongly curated and heavily dedicated program that then we are seeing is delivering outcomes.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. I would like to take you to small business, Secretary, and the department performance statement on page 83, 'Visits to Business Victoria digital channels'. We can see that the performance measure there has been exceeded by quite a bit. What sort of support is available on the Business Victoria website and how has this performance measure been trending over the past few years?

Matt CARRICK: I might invite Mr Lyngcoln to respond to the question.

Julian LYNGCOLN: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you for the question and the interest in the good work of Business Victoria. Business Victoria was really created to deliver services and support Victoria's 718,000 small business sector. Obviously small business plays a really critical part in our economy. Those services have been keeping more than 137,000 small businesses updated on key business topics, available supports and services and regulations via the Business Victoria update newsletter, so there is a huge subscription to that particular newsletter with access to the information.

Mathew HILAKARI: Sorry, I missed that. How many people were subscribed to it?

Julian LYNGCOLN: 137,000.

Mathew HILAKARI: Is that all? That is amazing. Well done.

Julian LYNGCOLN: We are really seeing, as you pointed to in the question, those digital channels being really effective in terms of getting reach with our small businesses. We also provide other services around supporting capability uplift in those businesses through one-on-one business advisory sessions and supporting multicultural small businesses. We have seen a number of multicultural precincts. We are providing support into those to support those particular businesses in those precincts. And also, obviously, we are stepping in where business might be impacted by particular events, whether they be natural disasters and the like, to ensure that there is adequate support around those businesses. In terms of particular programs, as I said, we have got those one-on-one mentoring sessions. Not only can you get access –

Matt CARRICK: You are done.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Secretary, you are in the wrong job. You should be in my chair. But thank you very much for that. It is nice to meet someone who is a tougher timekeeper than me. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. Just to start off, looking at the department performance statement of DJSIR, page 89, for 2024–25, of the 130 community facility grants can I ask: what proportion of those were targeted towards upgrading women's sporting facilities?

Georgina McCANN: Was that with specific reference to the community sport components?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It comes under 'Sport and recreation'.

Georgina McCANN: Yes. Just give me a moment. In terms of what I would say about our investment in women and sport generally, since 2014 about \$1 billion has been invested in facilities that support women and girls participation in sport and recreation. We do target all of our investment to supporting participation of women and girls. I do not have a specific number in terms of the facilities that will have targeted women and girls through this current round, but as I said, all of our facility investment is prioritised to under-represented groups, whether that is low SES or whether that is women and girls or other groups that are less well represented.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Are you able to come back to the committee with a specific figure?

Georgina McCANN: Yes, that should be fine.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Perfect. Thank you. I will move on to another matter, VicScreen. Can the department confirm the total amount of funding that VicScreen received for 2024–25?

Matt CARRICK: I might ask Ms Febey, who is just returning to the table, to talk about the level of funding for VicScreen for 2024–25.

Claire FEBEY: In 2024–25 we allocated \$5 million, which was an additional investment into the Victorian screen rebate. Then in 2025–26, should that be of interest, there was a further investment of \$50.2 million over two years, so over 2025–26 and 2026–27.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is the total funding VicScreen received during the budget period?

Claire FEBEY: Certainly looking back over the forward estimates there were previous investments that had continued into the last financial year that you asked about, 2024–25. I am not giving you a breakdown by the year, just what the investment was in that year, in the budget.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Can I ask: does the department benchmark its investment into VicScreen against other states' screen industry funding levels in any way?

Claire FEBEY: We certainly keep a very close eye, and I would assure you that VicScreen keeps an even closer eye, on investment in other jurisdictions.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Great. Thank you. Can I ask: what proportion of funding was specifically targeted at digital games?

Claire FEBEY: I would take that on notice. Is there a particular time of interest for you? Are you asking in that particular budget period?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: For the budget period.

Claire FEBEY: So 2024–25? Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Perfect. Thank you. Has the department tracked the number of Victorian-developed projects under VicScreen that have gone on to shoot or complete production interstate over the past three years?

Claire FEBEY: Sorry. Could you repeat that question?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes. It is the number of projects that have been developed in Victoria that have ultimately gone on to shoot or complete their production interstate over the last three years.

Claire FEBEY: I could not say if we have tracked that. Given how dynamic the screen ecology is in Australia and the strong roles that Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland would all play, along with other state jurisdictions, I am sure that we see work that is created in one place having inputs in another, so I am sure that that is the case. I do not know if we would track it in detail, but I could take it on notice to see if there is anything we could provide on that.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you; that would be much appreciated. As you would be aware, the federal government has announced new local content quotas for streaming services. It is expected to increase production right across the country. Looking at the figures from this budget period, does the department expect that the workforce consequently will need to grow to meet those quotas?

Claire FEBEY: As you say, that was only recently announced by the Commonwealth government. It is really terrific news, and it is another factor that is going to help continue the strong growth that is here in screen now.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: But the workforce in place for this budget period – would that be sufficient to meet those quota demands?

Claire FEBEY: I think that across the creative economy, including screen, there are always skill shortages and opportunities to make sure that we have more of the right people with the right skills for projects at any given time. I guess that is just one thing that would influence the need to keep an eye on skill gaps and make sure that we are growing at the right pace.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On digital games, can I confirm: is it the case that for VicScreen funding streams for digital gaming, the applicant needs to be an incorporated entity?

Claire FEBEY: I do not have the details of those particular grant application requirements in front of me, but I could come back to you on that and take it on notice.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. It would be good to know if there are any funding streams to which that provision does not apply and consequently how many streams it therefore does apply to also. Thank you. Is it currently a service on offer from the department that there is any kind of auspicing avenue for smaller projects where the applicant does not need to incorporate?

Claire FEBEY: Again, that is a level of detail I do not have in front of me, so I would take it on notice. I think you are interested, though, generally in how we make sure that small, medium and independent digital games proponents have opportunities within the funding landscape. That is what you are interested in?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is where the question comes from, yes, but it is particularly relating to the need to incorporate as an applicant for VicScreen funding when it comes to digital games.

Claire FEBEY: Okay. Thank you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Another matter that has been raised with me by new digital game developers is that they are having to personally contribute at least 50 per cent of the overall project cost through in-kind

work, applicant cash, external funds or some other combination in order to receive state funding. Is the department aware that in practice what that is leading to is that for a lot of people it is unpaid but 'in-kind' work that is occurring in the workforce?

Claire FEBEY: You are absolutely right to say that it is important to us from the creative industries portfolio – across all of the parts of the creative economy our goal is to get artists into paid and sustainable work, so thank you for raising your questions about the way that government grants interact with the work of artists and small businesses. Again it is something that I would take on notice, certainly to see what we can respond to here but also to have further conversations with VicScreen to understand the feedback that you are sharing here at this table.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I might move on to another matter. Museums Victoria met their performance measure attendance target from their annual report for 2024–25 – target being 2 million and the actual result being 2,017,000. Nevertheless, though, Museums Victoria has received top-up funding for their operations since 2020–21, and in 2024–25 DJSIR received a \$30.6 million Treasurer's advance and a \$27.4 million contingency advance for supporting our creative agencies and cultural institutions. Can I ask: what is the reason that Museums Victoria required supplementary funding?

Claire FEBEY: We are very pleased that in the most recent budget, the Victorian government allocated – I think the figure is \$475 million to our creative agencies, and that includes Museums Victoria. What that has enabled is an uplift to the base funding of around \$100 million on average per annum across the seven largest cultural agencies that are public facing, and again that includes Museums Victoria. The annual base funding for Museums Victoria has increased through the budget and also some other fixed-term amounts of funding, for example, the ones that you are referring to have ceased, but overall their base funding has increased.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: But if they are meeting their performance measures like their attendance targets, why do they need a Treasurer's advance?

Claire FEBEY: During the process of reviewing the work of the creative agencies and reviewing the base funding that was allocated to them, one of the things that we asked of them was to maintain, in general, the current service level that they had and not make any immediate changes. So that meant that we provided some supplementary funding for that period of time, and now they are working within the new budget allocation that has been set for them over the forward estimates.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Is there any other work that the department has undertaken for this budget period to improve the finances of Museums Victoria?

Claire FEBEY: We work every year very closely with the creative agencies, and that has been particularly the case over the last four or five years while their business models and revenue models were quite significantly disrupted. Each year we are working with them to understand their financial performance and financial outlook and to use that to inform budget about priorities and investment.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I will move on to another matter. Healthy Loddon Campaspe is a proven initiative that has over I believe seven years delivered measurable improvements in health and wellbeing to communities across that region of Victoria. For 2024–25 I understand there was additional funding to build on the regional package from the previous year, including \$186 million that was allocated for 2024–25 for rural and regional health care. Are you able to inform the committee if any of that \$186 million has been used to support a Healthy Loddon Campaspe program?

Matt CARRICK: I think that might not be within our departmental remit. I will quickly check with my colleagues, but to the best of my knowledge I think that might be better directed towards our health colleagues.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It is one of those ones I am concerned might fall between two different departments. Are you able to take it away and check for me? Is that all right?

Matt CARRICK: We will certainly check about where responsibility lies and let you know.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, that is much appreciated. I will move on to another matter. Can I ask what investment attraction activities have been undertaken by the department to establish data centres in Melbourne over the budget period?

Matt CARRICK: In a second I will hand to Ms Jarrett, who can talk to this in more detail, but I think what we are seeing at the moment, by way of context, is with the rise of AI and just the raw consumption of data, what that means is there is a massive increase in demand for data centres across the world but also here in Australia. What that also means is that Victoria, and I would say Melbourne in particular, has competitive advantages about why many companies are looking to locate data centres here in Victoria, and that we are an attractive investment proposition. The reason for that is we have cost-competitive industrial land and also cost-competitive power and water costs, and access to skilled labour as well. There is no doubt that this is an emerging and important area for us, but I will hand to Ms Jarrett who can talk to that much more eloquently than I can.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Secretary. As the Secretary mentioned, absolutely we are seeing data centres as a key piece of infrastructure for economic growth for the state. It is a complementary piece of investment alongside developments and advances in AI, for example. For us to really be able to leverage and get the most out of any investment in AI, we will need to have very strong and capable data centre capability proximate to where that activity is being done, whether it is in manufacturing, whether it is in financial services, all other sorts of digital technologies and the like. At the moment Victoria has 48 data centres located here, and we also have a very large pipeline of other data centres that we are talking to to see how we can support them, whether it is alongside looking for land as well as assisting them and facilitating the various regulatory approvals that they need to undertake in terms of establishing their data centres in Victoria.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. My next question goes to that pipeline you have just referred to. Can I ask: for the budget period, how many data centres received approval?

Danni JARRETT: I would need to –

Matt CARRICK: We will probably take that on notice, I think, for 2024–25.

Danni JARRETT: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: A list of those for the committee would be excellent if you could provide it.

Danni JARRETT: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. What oversight sits with this department for management of water and energy resources for those centres?

Matt CARRICK: We work really closely with our colleagues at DEECA around that because they do have significant power and water needs, so making sure that that can be balanced is something we are in ongoing, regular discussions with them about.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. But in terms of oversight it sits with this department or with DEECA?

Matt CARRICK: From an investment attraction point of view it is with us, but certainly energy and water are the remit of DEECA.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you.

Danni JARRETT: I might add to that. Recognising obviously data centres use high energy and water, a key part of many of the data centres that we talk to is recognising the importance for them to also develop their own energy-efficient and renewable – rely on renewable energy that they themselves generate as well as recycled water and so forth. There are active advancements in technologies by the data centres to look at how they can reduce their reliance on energy and water as well.

Matt CARRICK: The other thing I would supplement there is that at the moment lots of companies essentially have their own services on premises. What we are seeing is an evolution whereby, as organisations become more data reliant and their data needs grow, they are locating centrally with data centres as opposed to

doing it themselves. That has really interesting implications in terms of what that means for energy consumption because, done at scale, data centres are much more efficient than company-by-company servers. That is a really interesting development in terms of the industry. It is yet to play out fully.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. I might move on to another matter. It was in the opening slides and it is also in budget paper 4, on page 72: the 10-year Geelong City Deal announced back in 2019. It included a commitment to upgrade the Geelong train station precinct. Given there are four years before the deal is set to expire, when can people expect to see those upgrades begin?

Matt CARRICK: I might hand to Dr Csar about this. As a former CEO of V/Line, I am really interested in the answer to this question. Dr Csar.

Xavier CSAR: Thank you, Secretary, and thank you for your question. Just to confirm, planning around the precinct surrounding Geelong train station is certainly part of the central Geelong CBD reinvigoration package as part of the city deal but not the conducting of that itself. That planning has been underway. There are some elements that still need completing, which should come online about the time that the broader CBD and the waterfront work will come to its completion next year. To add, we are doing that with Development Victoria. We are the project owners; they are the ones conducting that work.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just to understand I have heard you correctly though: would we expect the upgrades to actually commence after the 10-year deal is completed?

Xavier CSAR: No. The planning will have been completed. It is a future decision of government as to the timing of that work.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Right. Okay. In terms of the planning that you have spoken to, can you confirm that the upgrades will include accessibility improvements?

Xavier CSAR: Well, in line with current and best practice, that is an essential feature of all those design elements, so I would expect so.

Matt CARRICK: Certainly I can, at the risk of wearing a former hat of mine – you have seen massive investment in recent years in terms of station upgrades along the Geelong line and down in the south-west, and to your point, a really critical and key element is the uplift of accessibility services for customers. If you look at what has happened at Marshall and other stations, that has been absolutely central and essential to giving the travelling public with accessibility needs the services they deserve.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. I might move on. Looking at the *Economic Growth Statement*, page 10 refers to securing opportunities in AUKUS. Can I ask, during this budget period, what opportunities were secured in relation to the AUKUS agreement?

Matt CARRICK: I will hand to Ms Jarrett in a second. I think what it has been fair to say is that, given the broader global environment, there has been a much greater focus in terms of our defence industries and the defence capabilities and sovereign capabilities there. That is why, both in terms of the recently released industry policy and also the *Economic Growth Statement*, there has actually been a focus on defence. I might hand to Ms Jarrett just to expand on that.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you. We touched on this earlier in terms of the budget allocating funding to support Victorian companies to bid for AUKUS-related projects, noting that those projects are developed and dare I say released by the Commonwealth, so Victorian industry is bidding for projects that the Commonwealth Department of Defence releases, as such. Our interest is to support those Victorian companies that may be interested in bidding for packages of work that defence primes will be bidding for, for the projects in AUKUS. To the best of my knowledge defence has not yet released those packages as such – AUKUS is a multigenerational project – but we are certainly working very closely with all of the defence primes that are located in Victoria and are bidding and working on AUKUS projects, such as the submarines project and the like, and understanding what the needs will be of those primes that have been named as delivering on projects, such as Rolls Royce with the submarines project, and then understanding what their requirements will be so that that is well understood by Victorian companies to ensure that they have got the right skills and capability to feed into the project.

Matt CARRICK: Yes, it is probably worth mentioning – that is a really good example in terms of Rolls Royce. While tenders have not been released or anything like that, the state recently entered into a memorandum of understanding with Rolls Royce, which hopefully will position Victoria well should Rolls Royce be successful in basically getting a job out of AUKUS-related work going forward. So we are trying to develop our relationship with some of these companies that may have something to offer to the Commonwealth.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: When you say ‘position us well’, what does that mean?

Matt CARRICK: Well, that hopefully, in terms of, we know that a lot of the metal-bashing will be done interstate in terms of some of the AUKUS projects, but the smarts are here in Victoria, the supply chains are here in Victoria, and we want to make sure that the value-added work and the benefits that accrue are here in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. We will go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much, Secretary, deputy secretaries and officials. I might be calling up Deputy Secretary Lyngcoln, because he was just on a real roll about small business, so I might bring him forward. I am sure, Secretary, you could go through these, but the passion was extraordinary, so I might wait till he comes forward. I love small business, and Business Victoria websites are really helpful for the community I represent. Of course 99 per cent of businesses in the community I am in are small businesses, and they really appreciate that effort. I have had the minister in the community a number of times and that has been very appreciated. I was hoping you could talk through some of those other supports that Business Victoria runs and some of those areas that are really well used on the Business Victoria website, if you could speak to that.

Julian LYNGCOLN: Thank you for the opportunity to return to the table to talk to small business matters.

Mathew HILAKARI: You cannot have the full 21 minutes is all I am saying. I have got other questions.

Julian LYNGCOLN: I see the clock out of the corner of my eye. Thank you. In terms of some of those key stats, the Business Victoria website, which I referenced earlier has, got a lot of that information – the online webinars. And also there is access to the other supports that people can book – the Small Business Bus and the like. There were 4.786 million total visits in 2024–25 and 5.9 million total page views, so we are getting really good hit rates on that Business Victoria website. The newsletter that I mentioned has 137,000 subscribers, and we had 23 editions of that newsletter that went out. Again, that newsletter provides reminders of where businesses can go to get support, mentoring and any changes in regulation. But also it is a chance to profile many of the small businesses, and for businesses starting out, seeing other businesses succeed is really critical as well.

I mentioned the Small Business Bus. That bus really gives the chance all over the state for people to get that one-on-one advice. It got out to 110 locations in 2024–25, 43 metropolitan and 67 across regional Victoria. That one-on-one coaching is for any stage of a business: for a business that is just starting out, with the things that they need to be thinking about there, whether they are looking to upskill or how to put together a business plan, or whether it is a business that is looking to expand, that coaching and mentoring can provide support around that. And then of course where businesses might be impacted – we did get the Small Business Bus out to Porepunkah and the Alpine shire recently with the incident out there and its impact on business, just to support those businesses there with things they need to be thinking about for the resilience of their business as well.

We also ran a series of workshops for businesses; 43 of those were delivered over the course of 2024–25. Again, 22 of those were regional, right across the state, with 679 participants. On the Business Victoria website there is a whole series of webinars that businesses can undertake at every stage of the business life cycle. There are 40 different webinars delivered through that – we had 980 participants – and then there is a whole range of other self-guided learning as part of that.

We are also supporting small business through grants. I mentioned the multicultural businesses that we are trying to support. Through the multicultural traders and precincts funding commitment, there were 17 grants to trader groups. Trader groups are a really great source for local businesses to group together to learn from each other.

Mathew HILAKARI: We had a trader group set up in Point Cook recently after the minister came and visited. That was a really great thing, and they have been doing some great work locally, so it is terrific. They will be applying for a grant soon, I am sure.

Julian LYNGCOLN: Yes. We have great contact with our trader groups and our business chambers and industry associations. They are really critical, including in those multicultural precincts, where we have provided that grant support. We have also recently released guidelines around multicultural precincts – things that can be done on shopping strips and the like. We work with local government, and we have got grant programs that have been opened so local governments have been able to make bids for multicultural precincts with the support of their local businesses and business chambers. We are currently assessing grant applications around that as well.

We have also had things like advisory services, as I said, in response to emergency events. In terms of the business recovery advisory service for floods, we had 258 businesses engage with that particular service.

Mathew HILAKARI: What is the feedback that those businesses give? Whether it is the Small Business Bus up into the alpine region or post floods, what do they think about that support? Is it the right support at the right time?

Julian LYNGCOLN: What we find, particularly with regional businesses, is they want that face-to-face support. To be frank, they are not necessarily looking for someone from Melbourne to tell them what to do. They want that local engagement. Regional Development Victoria officers are really good at doing that on-the-ground engagement with the businesses as well: the kind of coaching and mentoring that can be helpful for businesses that suddenly have had a cash flow impact, one, to help them understand what supports are available – they are not always aware of those – so where there are grants that we put in place, what those grants are, what they need to do to apply for them and how they register to get information about those grants, and to be thinking about different ways that they might work their way through a challenging period. So really that one-on-one face-to-face support and guidance is very much appreciated.

In terms of the BP3 measures, we do track all these things about the engagements on both the digital channels but also on client satisfaction. In terms of client satisfaction on the business information, the advisory services, we had a target of 90 per cent satisfaction for 2024–25; the actual was 93, so we are beating that figure. We have got dispute resolution services where we had a 25 per cent target in terms of success through mediation, and we are at nearly 33 per cent on that, and in terms of overall satisfaction with that mediation service, 80 per cent against a target of 70. So for those measures that we have been putting in place against those particular services, we are seeing really good engagement, really good numbers and really good satisfaction from the businesses.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you for the passion that you bring to this part of the department. It was really appreciated. I am going to take us from the small business bus to major events. Because it is outside the period, I cannot talk about Oasis and the cricket and everything being on in one weekend. We will get to talk about that next year.

Matt CARRICK: At least I got to go to the Oasis concert, twice.

Mathew HILAKARI: That was a terrific concert; it was fantastic. But I will take us to those major events, both sporting and cultural. I am just wondering: what is the secret sauce that Victoria brings to the table and the department helps facilitate to get these big, major events to Victoria?

Matt CARRICK: I might hand over to Ms McCann to talk about the secret sauce.

Georgina McCANN: Thanks so much.

Mathew HILAKARI: Do not give too much away in case anyone interstate is listening.

Georgina McCANN: Exactly. I think I was going to say, ‘That’s commercial in confidence.’ Thank you for the question. Obviously, Victoria’s world-class major sporting, arts and cultural events are the envy of the world. We attract significant visitation to our state, support local jobs and make Victoria just a really vibrant and exciting place to be. In terms of the kinds of events that we have been able to attract and support in 2024–

25 – and I think this really does go to what is special about Victoria – we have had 23 events delivered with the support of the Major Events Fund, and that is above our BP3 target of 21 events, which was really pleasing to see. It is a broad array of events. It is everything from the Formula One Grand Prix to the Australian Open tennis, as well as the *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition, which delivered a record-breaking 570,000 visitors.

Mathew HILAKARI: Did we expect that beforehand? Because that is just an extraordinary number of people.

Georgina McCANN: It is the sort of thing that Visit Victoria, who are our major events company, will project, and that is the basis upon which they will seek to attract these events to the state, to drive that kind of visitation and attendance. But of course it is always really pleasing to see when the numbers come in. We are consistently seeing record-breaking attendance. We saw it at the Australian Open this year, we saw it at the F1 grand prix, and then we saw it as well at the NGV. So that has been really terrific.

Mathew HILAKARI: I do want to talk a little bit about regional Victoria as well. I know we might cross over Lenny Kravitz again, but maybe some of those events that we held in 2024–25?

Georgina McCANN: Do you want to talk about –

Mathew HILAKARI: Yes, regional Victoria, the events and the effect that they had on regional communities, their tourism operators, hotels and accommodation, the wineries – all the wonderful things that are supported through programs.

Georgina McCANN: Absolutely. We work really hard, obviously, to support regional Victoria tourism. There are a range of supports that the department is responsible for delivering, as well as Visit Victoria. Those span a range of things; it is not just events. Obviously we have the Regional Events Fund, which we were able to talk about a little bit earlier, but it is also significant investment in infrastructure development as well as industry development, marketing and events. When we talk about the visitor economy, we talk about the supply side of the visitor economy and the demand side of the visitor economy. The supply side is those things that we do to make sure that when people go to our regions they have a really terrific experience. Obviously, a key thing there is our investment into infrastructure. Over \$380 million has been invested in infrastructure in regional Victoria to build sector capacity, to create jobs, to leverage private investment and to maximise visitor economy benefits, and that includes visitation and overnight stays. There has been more than \$21.8 million –

Mathew HILAKARI: What sort of infrastructure is that? Are we talking things like the Bendigo showgrounds, Eureka stadium and those sort of things? Or are we talking about others?

Georgina McCANN: Yes. Bendigo showgrounds and Eureka stadium are two projects that are funded under the regional sports infrastructure program, but as well as that, we have a range of tourism infrastructure programs.

Mathew HILAKARI: Could you give some examples of those, if that is okay?

Georgina McCANN: Yes, for sure. I am happy to. In terms of some of the specific projects that we have delivered in Victoria, and I can even go by region: Loddon Mallee – more than \$33 million in funding has been provided across 36 projects in the Loddon Mallee to support tourism infrastructure, and that includes Bendigo science and technology museum, which received \$250,000 to deliver an upgraded Bendigo planetarium right there at the station; you might have seen it. The project increased total income by 44 per cent to the financial year immediately prior to the commencement of the project. So you see really terrific outcomes. The new planetarium received 76,918 visitors in the first two years, and annual member visits doubled. So these are the kinds of really tangible benefits that you see from these kinds of investments, and there are literally hundreds of these projects that are happening right across the state.

Mathew HILAKARI: You are right to point out Bendigo. That is a very smart idea. Keep going.

Georgina McCANN: In Gippsland, more than \$75 million in funding is supporting 34 projects in the Gippsland region to support tourism infrastructure. That includes the ever popular Phillip Island Nature Parks, which received \$5 million to deliver a new boardwalk and penguin viewing platform. I was just down there the other day; it is absolutely gorgeous – looks spectacular. Following completion, the penguin parade sold out for

52 nights in a row from December 2024 to February 2025, and a further 26 nights in a row it sold out in July and August.

Mathew HILAKARI: How many in a row for that second number?

Georgina McCANN: Twenty-six.

Mathew HILAKARI: Twenty-six – that is amazing. I do not want to stray too much into this year, but are we expecting the same?

Georgina McCANN: The investment is ongoing. We continue to have investment into the sector.

Mathew HILAKARI: I mean selling out for the penguins. I just want to know if I need to get my tickets right now.

Georgina McCANN: For the penguins? Yes, I hope so. It has been a really pleasing result. Metung Hot Springs is another one. It received \$1.5 million to establish the Metung Hot Springs, and we are seeing hot springs emerge as a real priority area for the whole state, which is a good thing, isn't it? I might go to a hot spring after this actually. The project generated 45 ongoing jobs, and in the 2024–25 financial year Metung Hot Springs had over 50,000 visitors, generating a revenue of more than \$3.5 million.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is an extraordinary return. So a \$1.5 million investment, and that is a one-off investment, and then we see 45 jobs at the back end of it.

Georgina McCANN: Exactly. And that kind of visitation to a regional town is tremendous. In the Grampians, more than \$78 million in funding has been provided across 46 projects. One of those projects is Grainery Lane, which received \$450,000 to deliver a new hub for distilling and brewing in Ballarat. The project generated 82 jobs, including 20 full-time ongoing roles, and it is had 1200 visitors per week, with 750 visitors per week travelling from outside Ballarat. So it is again driving that visitation, which is what we want to see. It is an awesome, awesome series of investments. In Hume more than \$60 million in funding has been provided across 33 projects in the Hume region to support tourism infrastructure. An example there: Dal Zotto Wines received \$320,000 to renovate four existing rooms and construct four accommodation pods. That project increased visitation to the winery by 33 per cent over 12 months from completion and generated 10 new full-time ongoing jobs at the winery.

Mathew HILAKARI: Okay, so we are doing some great investments, and they are really paying dividends.

Georgina McCANN: I have got so many more. I could see you out.

Mathew HILAKARI: You could; I will not let you. I will take us to the Victorian Institute of Sport, though.

Matt CARRICK: You asked about the secret sauce, though – about why Victoria is special –

Mathew HILAKARI: We said were not going to give it away entirely, just a little bit of it.

Matt CARRICK: No, no. But I think part of it is about the accessibility of major events, especially as they pertain to regions. This is cross-government, not just this department, but if you look at the recent fare cuts to regional transport fares, what that has meant – and a big shout-out to V/Line on this – is that you have got people from regional Victoria who now are able to better access major events and exhibitions here in Melbourne, and also that allows Melburnians to travel to the regions and basically spend their money in regional areas. It just builds the economic value and therefore the social fabric by having this. So you have got great events and cost-effective ways of getting there. It is a really good mix. It is part of that secret sauce.

Mathew HILAKARI: And there will be another uplift in that as the seniors weekend free travel goes statewide as opposed to the two adjoining zones and then for carers as well, which was just announced this week. That will be a big deal. So we will keep seeing some more success in that space. Victorian Institute of Sport: I was just hoping we could have a conversation about the types of sports we are supporting and athletes.

Matt CARRICK: Certainly. Ms McCann, I might get you on this.

Mathew HILAKARI: Back in the hot seat.

Georgina McCANN: Yes, still with me unfortunately. The VIS obviously is one of our leading entities, and they do an incredible job every year. That is why the investment continues to flow to the VIS to support them to do all the incredible things that they do. I will just find my page, if you do not mind. What we have seen essentially is outperformance on all of the BP3 measures for the VIS, which has been really pleasing. So the number of sports with athletes on VIS scholarships, with a performance variation there of 6.67 per cent, which is terrific, outperforming the target there. VIS scholarship holders on national teams and squads: there was a target of 40 and we saw 72. So punching well above their weight there – a performance variation of 80 per cent. And categorised athletes supported by the VIS, again, outperforming there – so a target of 85 and an actual of 97. That is really pleasing to see, and when you go down to that facility you see the kinds of incredible work that they are doing to support athletes across all of the sports – and high-performance sports as well. In addition to that, I think what has been really exciting at the VIS is we have seen a really great commercial focus in terms of some of the things they are thinking about doing internationally, so exporting some of that capability as well without giving it away.

Mathew HILAKARI: Okay.

Georgina McCANN: Right? Do not give away the game, but in terms of some of that capability that they are able to export internationally to generate an additional revenue stream, that has been a really great strategic move there under their new CEO.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic. Thank you for that. I am going to move on to creative industries, Secretary. From budget paper 3, page 58, there is significant investment in Victoria's creative agencies. I am just hoping you could go through some of those significant investments and how they contribute to the economic circumstances of the state.

Matt CARRICK: Happy to. I might hand over to Ms Febey, but as she prepares to answer the question, I think one of the really important things to recognise – as you have, implicit in your question – is the role of creative agencies and the creative sector more broadly in terms of the economic fabric of the state. Like, it really does set us apart from other parts of Australia and indeed most other parts of the world.

Claire FEBEY: Thank you. That is right. The creative agencies, there are 11 in the portfolio. They are major tourism drawcards of course, but they are also providing incredible education facilities, playing an important leadership role in the industry, and they platform and develop local talent. In terms of 2024–25, so the financial year, it was an extraordinary record of attendance, at 11.6 million people coming through the doors of our creative agencies. Beyond that, Fed Square also attracted more than 10 million visitors, including to diverse community festivals, outdoor cinema and, as you would remember, some really popular live music events. The extraordinary effort of Yayoi Kusama has been well canvassed, so I will not revisit that. But NGV welcomed a total of more than 3.1 million visitors just in that financial year alone. It makes it certainly the most attended gallery in Australia and it makes it among the top galleries in the world. State Library Victoria of course broke its attendance record for the third consecutive year. They had 2.8 million visitors in 2024–25.

Mathew HILAKARI: Where does that place it amongst libraries in the world?

Claire FEBEY: Yes, the third most visited in the world, which is such an extraordinary achievement. Also taking us into regional Victoria, in its first full year following its \$180 million redevelopment Geelong Arts Centre was incredibly pleased to attract a record 269,000 people to more than – incredibly – 1685 performances and events across its stages and spaces, so an incredible first year. In terms of education – I touched on that as being an important part of the work of our agencies – 670,000 students participated in education programs at our agencies. This included the NGV Kids on Tour, for example, an outreach program which visited 150 destinations across the state. That is the largest delivery of that program to date. This is just touching on a few of the highlights of our creative agencies. I could go on.

Mathew HILAKARI: I might bring you to VicScreen, then, and digital games in particular, and how that adds to the economy in Victoria. I am always blown away by just the incredible contribution that our own people make.

Claire FEBEY: We do have an extraordinary strength in digital games. I wonder if I can start with some of the headline figures for VicScreen. It has been an incredible period of growth, and I really want to celebrate the work of Caroline Pitcher and the team at VicScreen. They do extraordinary work in partnership with the industry. Looking back, in terms of the VicScreen strategy over the last four years, \$1.7 billion is the headline.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Secretary and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and I would like to remind you that responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

I would also like to thank all secretaries and officials who have given evidence to the committee today, Hansard, the secretariat and parliamentary attendants. I would also like to thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff, who have looked after all of us today.

The committee will resume its consideration of the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes on Friday 28 November at 9:30 am.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.