

# CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into 2004–05 budget estimates

Melbourne – 18 June 2004

#### Members

Mr W. R. Baxter

Ms C. M. Campbell

Mr R. W. Clark

Mr L. A. Donnellan

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Chair: Ms C. M. Campbell

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Forwood

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms M. Cornwell

#### Witnesses

Ms J. Allan, Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs;

Mr T. Healy, acting secretary;

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

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

**The CHAIR** — I welcome our new witness, Ms Lill Healy, director, Office for Youth, from the Department for Victorian Communities.

**Ms ALLAN** — Lill has been our director for the past six months.

**The CHAIR** — It is over to you, minister.

**Ms ALLAN** — I am sure I will get the chance through questions to talk about these things in a bit more detail, but I direct your attention to the first slide, which talks about the Respect framework. Respect is the framework under which we operate all our policies and programs. Our vision is for young people — and they are defined as people between 12 and 25 — to be supported and to be part of their communities. As you can see on the slide, they need to be valued and respected; supported through social, educational, cultural and employment opportunities; able to live healthy and satisfying lives; and able to reach their full potential. The Respect document outlines that framework very clearly and in a lot more detail.

The next slide gives a quick snapshot of young people: they are aged between 12 and 25; they represent around 20 per cent of the population; 73 per cent live in metropolitan Victoria, which I guess is not surprising given the broader range of educational opportunities around metropolitan Melbourne; around 17 per cent were born overseas; and, finally, a number of them do make a very active contribution to their local communities. The age group 12 to 25 is actually the second-largest group of volunteers in our community, so they really do make an active contribution in that way as well.

The youth affairs portfolio provides us with an active focus on the needs and aspirations of young people to make sure, importantly, that they are included and considered through all our processes across government. We work hard as a government to make sure that young people are provided with more opportunities to actively contribute to civic life and their local community. I get the chance to meet with local young people around the state, and it is great to see that more municipal councils are expanding their youth councils and that a growing number of community organisations are running initiatives to support and encourage young people.

The Office for Youth is the agency responsible for coordinating the government's efforts around young people, and it provides me and the government more broadly with policy advice, research and strategic planning across the policies, programs and service delivery for young people.

Programs and service delivery for young people: again, the office operates within the Department for Victorian Communities. As part of that responsibility we focus on whole-of-government progress, and we measure that against the milestones identified in Respect. We have released this information in a report called *Young Victorians at the Centre*, which captures our achievements as well as our future plans for young people. If you want a copy of the report we can forward it. It has been only recently — very recently — distributed, but we can get a copy of that report for members.

We also provide funding to two key peak youth bodies in the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, which provide key strategic advice to me and to government on issues affecting young people. We also hold regular consultations with young people, run by the Office for Youth, and I aim to be involved in as many as I can. The Office for Youth also has a regional staff of youth liaison officers across the regions to work with young people at the local level.

**The CHAIR** — If we are to finish at 3.15 it would be good if we could move straight into questions, unless there is something you particularly want to mention. These overheads are excellent; they are self-explanatory.

**Ms ALLAN** — If we can get the chance to talk about most of those issues during the course of questions there will be no worries.

**The CHAIR** — Budget paper 3 on page 242, which is also referred to in your overheads, states that whole-of-government coordination and advice is your responsibility, which I imagine makes it quite difficult to have performance measures. How do you measure the success of the overall portfolio objective?

**Ms ALLAN** — We can measure success through the programs that we are directly responsible for such as Freeza, Advance, the Youth Services program and National Youth Week. We provide funds for over 450 programs

for young people across Victoria, programs that we are directly responsible for. We also have two new initiatives that have come on line this year: the Advance Youth Development program and Freeza Central, which we will soon be rolling out as well. There is the collaborative work that we do across the youth sector, whether it is with the organisations we fund such as YACVic and CMYI or other organisations in local areas. Whenever I visit either regional areas or areas in metropolitan Melbourne we very much try to meet with young people in either informal or formal ways here to talk about the work they are doing in their local areas.

I guess you have identified one of the challenges, which is having that whole-of-government responsibility and what areas we can focus on. One of the priorities that I have set and we are following through this year is to look at the issue of negative body image for young people, which is focusing in on an area that has a whole-of-government focus. We have a whole-of-government responsibility in the Office for Youth, and this falls within that area quite well, because we need to work with the bigger departments that provide service delivery such as Education and Human Services, and we need to be creative about how you address issues such as body image. We have called for a parliamentary inquiry to investigate this, and it is already making a number of significant contributions to this issue because it is not just about the issue of body image; it is quite a deep issue. It is a mental health issue, an education issue. It is how we support young people, their families and friends, who are all dealing with this.

**The CHAIR** — You have talked about what you directly run and the Advance Youth program and Central Freeza. Does YACVic, for example have key performance indicators in its funding and service agreement? Does Freeza Central have measures by which you are able to decide, year on year, whether those programs are delivering what you want the funding to provide?

**Ms ALLAN** — As for CMYI, I might ask Lill to provide more detail. The performance indicators are from the budget for Freeza, and it would be measured by attendance at events.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Some 130 000.

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes, 130 000. The anticipation is that Freeza will exceed that target for 2003–04, which demonstrates that Freeza is a hugely popular and well-known program.

We measure Advance by the number of students participating in the Advance program, and the reason that is higher than in previous years is that we have increased funding to this area. It used to be known as the Victorian Youth Development program. We have increased funding for this area by \$5 million over four years to enable every government secondary school to participate if it wants to.

**Mr FORWOOD** — It is going from \$1 million to \$1.2 million?

**Ms ALLAN** — It is \$5 million over four years.

**Mr FORWOOD** — But the increase is only \$1 million over four years.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is \$5 million, yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Yes, so it was not \$1 million; it was \$1.2 million. It is not all new funds.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is new funds.

**Mr FORWOOD** — It is not all new, though.

**Ms HEALY** — The \$1 million is for this current year and it goes to \$1.2, and it is incremental for the next two years. It adds to a total of \$5 million over four years in new funds

**Mr FORWOOD** — My point is, it is not all new.

**Ms ALLAN** — No, not a year. It is not \$5 million a year.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, we have established that. On the key performance indicators you have been able to identify that you do have measures, which is particularly what this committee is interested in, and YACVic does have KPIs as parts of its funding and service agreement. That is what I wanted to identify.

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — On the same topic I have my normal question. The target is \$12.8 million in the upward group for the forthcoming year.

**Ms ALLAN** — For the budget?

**Mr FORWOOD** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — On the Youth Services program?

**Mr FORWOOD** — On youth affairs, the output group. If you look at the department's response you can see that Freeza is going to get half a million of it and the Advance Youth Development program is going to get \$1.2 million. We know that some funds will go to the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and some will go to the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, but we do not know how much for either of those. It would be good if we could have the chart that shows how the \$12.8 million is being spent, including the overheads and the number of staff et cetera. Stephen knows what we are after.

**Ms ALLAN** — Okay.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Perhaps you could advise the committee why the expected outcome for 2003–04 is half a million dollars greater than the amount budgeted, which was \$12 million.

**Ms ALLAN** — Do you want me to briefly run through how the \$12.8 million breaks up?

**The CHAIR** — That would be helpful.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I am happy for you to take it on notice.

**Ms ALLAN** — Of the \$12.8 million, talking about the Advance funding, there is additional funding that comes through the Community Support Fund, and that takes the total up a bit more. But we can provide you, Chair, with that information.

**Mr FORWOOD** — That is shown in the slide, is it not? The Community Support Fund, but that is not the \$1.2 million shown on page 7 of the department's response, is it?

**Ms ALLAN** — I do not have the department's response in front of me.

**Mr FORWOOD** — On page 7 of the department's response it shows the total budget for 2004–05. This is the new outputs initiative 2003–04 chart.

**Ms HEALY** — It is \$1.2 million in additional — —

**Mr FORWOOD** — Yes, it is \$1.2 million. Is that the same place?

**Ms HEALY** — The \$1.2 million is the additional funding from the Community Support Fund for the Advance program.

**Mr FORWOOD** — It is coming from the CSF?

**Ms HEALY** — And the \$12.8 million is the appropriated amount.

**Mr FORWOOD** — So this figure here, the \$12.8 million — —

**The CHAIR** — Hang on. You will have to explain where the figure is in budget paper 3.

**Mr FORWOOD** — On page 243 of budget paper 3 the \$12.8 million are only the funds that are appropriated?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Now it really is getting confusing because, for example, this morning when we were here in some of the output groups what you have is the total amount to be spent, not only by appropriation but by retained receipts, by other sources of income and by federal government grants. So in one case now we have you

saying that the figure in the budget paper for the output group is not \$12.8 million but \$14 million, whereas in other departments we have dealt with this week — and we have done a lot of them — you have had the whole amount aggregated into one output group. Could you explain why?

**Mr GREGORY** — Usually the CSF is reported through the outputs of the CSF, so the funding that goes out from the CSF is usually reported through that. When we talked about the output price of community building we talked about the total payments out of the CSF, the net balance of which would include funding to youth.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Okay.

**Mr GREGORY** — So it is about double — —

**Ms ALLAN** — Accounting, yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — You put down on page 242 as an output measure a measure that does not relate to funds in the output group?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I look forward to getting the chart. Does that not mean — —

What funds were spent on the Advance project in the year just finishing now?

**Ms ALLAN** — To complicate matters a little bit further, it was pre the start of this, because it runs on the calendar year because it is a school-based program and it was known as the Victorian Youth Development program. The targets operate for the calendar year preceding the financial year. Unfortunately schools do not operate on a financial year basis; they operate on a calendar year. That is the reality.

**Mr FORWOOD** — But that means that the target figure for 2003-04 of \$12 million did not include that program, under whatever name it is known, and the \$12.5 million for the actual outcomes did not include that either.

**Ms ALLAN** — It was \$3 million of Advance.

**Mr FORWOOD** — So last year the funds that you had available to spend through this output group were \$15 million and not \$12 million?

**Ms ALLAN** — If you include the CSF funding.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Right. Were there any other funds that you had control of that came from the CSF or elsewhere that are not included here?

**Ms HEALY** — No.

**Mr FORWOOD** — So we go back to the original question. Could you give us a break-up of the \$12 million, the \$12.5 million and the \$12.8 million and forget about the CSF funding?

**Mr GREGORY** — We will put it as an attachment at the bottom so you can see the total funding. In relation to your question about the \$0.5 million, it represents a carryover into this year.

**Mr FORWOOD** — But are not my other questions about carryovers in past years? If you could — —

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes, no problem.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Terry knows what we want.

**The CHAIR** — Right; excellent! If Hansard can work that out, well done!

**Ms ROMANES** — Minister, in your presentation you have a slide headed 'Taking young people seriously'. Obviously one of the ways consultation works is through the regional youth committees which are outlined as one of the performance indicators on page 242 of budget paper 3. That is an important measure, but can

you tell us more about whether that is an effective measure in terms of engaging young people in issues of importance to them? Can you tell us more about the key themes that came out of the regional youth committees for the previous financial year and how these have influenced government policy on youth affairs? And can you tell us any other measures that you have for working through whether or not you are effectively engaging and consulting with young people? I am sorry, but there is a lot to it.

**Ms ALLAN** — Youth consultation is absolutely crucial. It is an important part of the work we do in the Office for Youth, particularly with the whole-of-government focus on young people. There is the question of how to measure consultation with young people. Obviously we do it through the regional youth committees, because they are our funded regional network of youth service providers, local government and other organisations with an interest in young people. They provide policy advice and also have the opportunity to look at what is really happening in the local area, provide some direct advice for me and work with us on identified priorities. We do that by setting out some key areas for the RYCs to work on.

We also try and consult with young people through a great diversity of ways in recognition that not all young people will necessarily have the opportunity to be engaged through the RYC network, because that is a network of youth service providers and to varying degrees they may involve young people in their own local organisations. That is why we have a consultation strategy that has three key components around assisting communities to talk to one another. We are trying to foster and encourage people within local communities to encourage young people to have a voice at the table and to be active participants in local decision making.

We are also investigating partnerships with other agencies and how we can assist other agencies on how to do youth consultation and understand the importance of youth consultation in making better decisions. We also provide leadership. We are providing leadership by practising what we are preaching in this area and trying to hold our own youth consultations in a number of different ways.

We do some other things. I have mentioned the parliamentary inquiry into body image, which has its own consultative process both through an expert group that has been established to advise me and assist through the parliamentary inquiry and the formal parliamentary committee inquiry process as well.

This year through the community cabinet program and in conjunction with the community cabinet meetings we are holding youth forums as part of the community cabinet program. I was keen to see this happen because it is a recognition that young people are very much part of their local communities. So when cabinet is going out to talk to a community it is important that it provides a forum for young people to be listened to and to have their voices heard as part of the formal community cabinet process. We have modelled that on the way the Minister for Women's Affairs runs her women's round tables, but we are doing it in a slightly different way. We are trying to use different approaches. I think you could do them with a little bit of a contemporary approach and being a bit more interactive. Lill does a great job at hosting those forums; I am more of a participant. We want to be there to listen to young people and to give them the chance to express their views in the way that they want to express them.

**The CHAIR** — There are a couple of supplementaries coming.

**Ms ALLAN** — I want to quickly mention a couple of things which have been important to our consultation. In March of this year we held Young Women Shaping the Future. It came out of the Premier's women's summit last November, where a few young people in attendance said that was not the forum for them and wanted to know where they got the chance to express their views. We piloted a summit for young women this year, and I think we had about 150 young women turn up for that. We worked very hard with local organisations to get a great diversity of young people. We had different ethnic groups represented, country and metropolitan, people with disabilities were there, young mums — we were really trying to dig a bit deeper and have a lot more different voices heard than we might normally get through your normal channels of youth consultation.

**Ms ROMANES** — Where did you hold that?

**Ms ALLAN** — We held that at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. It was part of International Women's Week.

**The CHAIR** — We are going to have to keep moving.

**Mr FORWOOD** — The forums you are running — are they sort of a replacement for the old round table thing?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes, they are. I think I might have mentioned this last year. The youth round tables were — —

**Mr FORWOOD** — Quote, ‘Incredibly successful’.

**Ms ALLAN** — I knew you were going to quote that back at me.

**The CHAIR** — These are even more successful.

**Ms ALLAN** — They were successful. However, times move on and young people’s views do change. Young people want to consult in different ways, so rather than stick to a rigid formula and a formula which is similar for each round table, we are holding different consultations. The community cabinet consultations are very different to what goes on through the regional youth committees and to what goes on at things like Young Women Shaping the Future or the other work we are doing.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I guess I am leading to the question of where is the measure.

**The CHAIR** — What is the measure and where is it in the budget papers?

**Mr FORWOOD** — We used to have a measure in the old budget papers listing ministerial round tables, number held, people attending et cetera. Do you have a measure?

**Ms ALLAN** — Not for the round tables, because we do not do them anymore.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I mean for the forums.

**Ms ALLAN** — No, we do not.

**Ms HEALY** — Our intention is, consistent with the rest of the department, to look at changing the measures for the next series and to get some measures in here which are actually relevant to the consultation. Our RYC measure is the only one we have at the moment.

**The CHAIR** — By way of supplementary, you will be getting this in the correspondence anyway: the action the Office for Youth is taking to implement the state disability plan — I would be curious to know how many of the regional youth committee members are classified as having a disability? How many attending the young women’s seminar were classified as having a disability. Not everybody self-classifies, but it is important to ensure that we have a range of people and that all Victorian young people have an opportunity to be involved. It may mean doing things differently to include everybody.

**Ms ALLAN** — That is exactly why we wanted to move away from the round table approach and do things differently. It does not have to be the same.

**The CHAIR** — Do the regional youth committees have as one of their key selection criteria to ensure that there is a person with a disability on them?

**Ms HEALY** — No, it is not prescribed.

**The CHAIR** — After all those supplementaries, back to Mr Forwood.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I refer you to page 243 of budget paper 3 with the youth web sites total page impressions. I remind you last year that you said:

... I have asked the Office for Youth, not in the last 30 seconds, to do some work on revamping our web site and making it a bit more hip, to use one word, exciting to use another, and cool and funky are another two.

**Ms ALLAN** — And we are doing all that.

**Ms GREEN** — Someone called him a fuddy-duddy yesterday.

**Mr FORWOOD** — They called me a fuddy-duddy.

**Ms GREEN** — No, someone did, not me.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is not that hard to believe.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I note that the measure is you do not expect an increase in the number of hits on your cool and funky web site. Did the redevelopment take place? I am not sure it has.

**Ms ALLAN** — No, it has not. The Office for Youth is doing some work with the employment programs area through the youth employment link, which is a web site we have to provide young people with employment and training advice. We do not want to duplicate other services which are already out there, but we want to provide a web site which is very user friendly, provides good feedback and is very interactive. If anyone has time to look at the Queensland government's youth web site, it is a good example of what we are wanting to move towards. The site allows young people to talk directly to ministers through a chat room. They can get some feedback on issues, they can discuss with each other how to take action in areas that might be important to them and they can get information. Lill calls it the 360 interactive web site, which really means if a young person puts information up there, they will get a response. It will be much more interactive than what is there at the moment. That work is under development at the moment. We also have a youth participation project as part of this, where we are having an advisory group of young people to help us develop the web site. I am really excited about that.

**Mr FORWOOD** — You will get the same question next year.

**Ms ALLAN** — I think I will.

**Ms GREEN** — I have the privilege of representing one of the youngest electorates in the state, so this is an area which really interests me. You spoke before about the overall objective of the portfolio being a whole-of-government coordination role. It is described that way on page 242 of budget paper 3. Could you explain in more detail how you go about specifically addressing policy issues which may fall in other portfolio budget areas?

**The CHAIR** — By way of what will be a supplementary, what are your key performance indicators on that?

**Ms ALLAN** — In terms of how we influence and work with other departments, we do not have any KPIs in our area for that. That is something we can take on board in light of the discussion we were having earlier. The policy advice is not just policy advice that is limited to coming to me. The Office for Youth has responsibility to look at the whole-of-government work. You see that if you look at some of the initiatives to be implemented in the next financial year in other government departments, whether it is the reduction in the tertiary concession card — seeing that go from \$87 down to the equivalent of a secondary student card will be very valuable for young people — or all the initiatives in education which are really about supporting young people. I know the Office for Youth was involved in giving some advice and feedback and working with the Office of Housing on the youth homelessness plan. We had \$8 million over four years of extra funding through the Office of Housing. The Office for Youth played a key role in advising the Office of Housing on some issues and giving feedback on that strategy. Then there is the Attorney-General's announcement in the Parliament more recently about lifting the juvenile justice age from 17 to 18. That has been very well supported. It will be of benefit to young people, particularly as we look at how we support young people through our juvenile justice system, which, as an aside, we are also looking at in our employment portfolio.

We also work in partnerships. We have a partnership at the moment with Crime Prevention Victoria and last week held a forum in conjunction with CPV around the exploration of youth gangs and the issues in that area — what is the level of youth gang membership or activity in the state, and how do we address it? The Office for Youth also contributes to the Koori education cross-sector task force and a number of other education and training initiatives. It is obviously working very closely with Education and Training, considering we work with very much the same group of people, being young people in Victoria.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Last year you told us that Freeza Central was a new program and would receive \$500 000 in 2003–04. Did it receive the \$500 000 in 2003–04?



**Ms ALLAN** — Yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I take that as a yes. If you look at page 242 of budget paper 3 you will see that the number of young people attending Freeza Central is zero. So how come you spent \$500 000 and did not get anybody to go?

**Ms ALLAN** — As you can imagine with a new program, a lot of development needed to take place, and that took a lot longer than we anticipated when we set those early budget targets. Next year we hope to come back to you and talk about our first 12 months of a very successful Freeza Central program.

**Mr FORWOOD** — How can you spend \$500 000 on development?

**Ms HEALY** — We have not spent \$500 000 on development. The issue was about time. There was some investment in the tender process, which has just finished, and we had a carryover into next year. The program has started with the achievement of the target of 500 young people attending Freeza Central intensive workshops. Those workshops are actually the second phase of the project, so they will be happening later this year, which is why the target is a carryover into the next financial year. I might refer to Stephen to talk about the funds that will be carried over.

**Mr GREGORY** — Post-budget we were advised of a saving in that area, and so we applied to the Treasurer, because we have to go back to the Treasurer by the end of this week in relation to any other carryovers. So we have gone back to him to say that we will underspend this amount and we need to carry it over into next year.

**Mr FORWOOD** — We just need to go back. The minister said that the \$500 000 had been spent — —

**Ms ALLAN** — Sorry.

**Mr FORWOOD** — The answer is that it has not been spent. Some of it has been spent on development work and some has been applied for for carryover?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes, it was budgeted to be spent in the budget papers, but post those times, because we finalise those numbers in March, we have been advised that we will not spend all that money and have applied for carryover.

**Mr FORWOOD** — If you could include that in your diagram of the carryovers et cetera?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes.

**Mr FORWOOD** — And the development costs were how much?

**Ms HEALY** — Again I will take that on notice if I may. I have an aggregated figure in front of me. I do not want to quote the wrong figure.

**The CHAIR** — By way of supplementary, does either the Speaker or the President know that you have unexpended funds in relation to Freeza Central. I am sure they would love to know that in view of Parliament's 150th celebration approaching soon.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Have you been consulted about the rock concert?

**Ms ALLAN** — Are we putting on a rock concert?

**Mr FORWOOD** — That is what I said. That is when they called me a fuddy-duddy!

**The CHAIR** — We are informing you that Mr Forwood has decided to don a Midnight Oil tee-shirt and be the lead singer.

**Ms ALLAN** — There is a performer in all of us.

**Ms HEALY** — That may lead to other places, but we are working in partnership with the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Arts Victoria on a range of 150th celebration activities, of which rock concerts may well

be a component. The funds that we have talked about here bear no relation to that, but there is an opportunity — and we are exploring it with our tenderers — that the Freeza Central tour, which is a key part of the Freeza Central program, and it is young people on the ground running the tour themselves and getting that experience, may in fact tour through the city at about the same time. So we are looking for that opportunity.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I just think that if they are going to put on a rock concert, they ought to consult with the experts, and that is probably you.

**Ms HEALY** — Indeed.

**The CHAIR** — Yesterday he said it was himself!

**Mr FORWOOD** — Not me.

**The CHAIR** — I want to take you to the Advance Youth Development Program, which is on page 243 of budget paper 3, where there is an expected outcome for 2003–04 for young people participating of 5856, and then moving to 2004–05 increasing to 7088. How do you intend to achieve that very specific outcome?

**Ms ALLAN** — I mentioned before that we have increased funding to that program through all Victorian government secondary schools if they want to participate in the program, and also in terms of the targets matching up with school years, which makes it a bit more interesting as we go through it. The target of 7088 is for this year and is an increase on previous years because it reflects the fact that there are now 243 Victorian schools participating in the Advance program around the state.

**Ms ROMANES** — Does that indicate that there has been a demand from schools, that they have heard about the program? What is contributing to the success of the program in individual schools?

**Ms ALLAN** — One of the key reasons for the success of the program is that it involves community partners. Some of the Advance schools that have been operating under the previous model had very strong links with organisations like the Country Fire Authority. Orbost Secondary College had the CFA as their community partner, and because some of those kids had gone through the program and had the skills and the training, they went out and fought fires in their local community during the bushfires last year. It is a program that works with a community partner which gives young people some training and leadership skills. They can see how that makes a valuable contribution back to their local community, and they get value and feel very valued as active members of their local communities.

With the rollout of the new program we are trying to encourage schools to make partnerships with organisations with a bit more of an environmental focus such as the local Landcare group. We know that young people are very interested in environmental projects and want to do more to protect the environment. Tyrrell College at Sea Lake involves the community environment committee. That is one of our newer programs that has been quite innovative in that way.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I think it was in the last week of the sitting of Parliament that a member for Geelong Province raised the issue of whether the voting age should be dropped to 16. Is any work being done by the Office of Youth in relation to lowering the voting age?

**Ms ALLAN** — No. It might come up during youth consultations because young people raise all sorts of things, including the age for a driving licence and lowering the age that they can drink.

**Mr FORWOOD** — So how do you respond when issues like that come up? What is the policy response?

**Ms ALLAN** — The policy response is that it is not a matter that is being considered before government at the moment and that I have responsibility for youth affairs not for things — —

**Mr FORWOOD** — Do you advocate that position?

**Ms ALLAN** — We pass on to other ministers what young people are telling us. That is a form of advocacy.

**Mr FORWOOD** — But young people are not telling you that they want the voting age lowered?

**Ms ALLAN** — I am not — —

**Ms HEALY** — There are a range of different young people who have very different views on that, as you would know, Bill. They are not a homogenous group. I hear things like that when I am out around the traps, and I also hear opposite views. If that comes through strongly in our consultations, then we take an approach with the Department of Justice to consult formally on it. That has not happened to this point.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Thank you very much. I will tell Mr Eren.

**The CHAIR** — That concludes consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolios of employment and youth affairs. We will forward correspondence to you in relation to follow-up questions.

**Committee adjourned.**