

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne—Monday, 23 May 2022

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor



**WITNESSES**

Ms Gayle Tierney MLC, Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education,

Ms Jenny Atta PSM, Secretary,

Mr Anthony Bates PSM, Deputy Secretary, Financial Policy and Information Services,

Ms Lill Healy, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education and Skills,

Dr Xavier Csar, Chief Executive Officer, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery,

Dr Simon Booth, Executive Director, Policy and Strategy Division,

Mr Craig Robertson, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Skills Authority, and

Mr Cameron Baker, Executive Director, Apprenticeships Victoria, Department of Education and Training.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open these hearings of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Because my voice sounds clearly terrible, I will hand to the Deputy Chair. Thank you.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

I welcome the Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education as well as officers from the department. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement presentation of 10 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you, Deputy Chair and committee members. Good morning, everyone. I also wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we are meeting here today, the Wurundjeri people, and I pay my deepest respects to their elders both past and present and to emerging leaders and to all elders and Aboriginal people joining us.

I would also like to acknowledge the commitment of the entire post-school training skills and education sector during what has been yet another difficult year.

**Visual presentation.**

**Ms TIERNEY:** When this government was elected we promised to rebuild the vocational education system. Our aim was to create a strong system that was fair, accessible, relevant and easy to navigate for all Victorians. Seven and a half years later, I am proud of what we have achieved. The Victorian government's \$3.2 billion investment in TAFE training and skills since 2015 has achieved strong and future-focused outcomes, which are highlighted here on the slide that is before you. This government's investment in training and skills has laid the foundations for a world-class system, with TAFE as the anchor. This time line offers an overview of the major reforms we have initiated, focusing on quality, integrity and connecting the sector. It demonstrates our cohesive approach, culminating in the provision of skills and training and major initiatives, such as free TAFE and Apprenticeships Victoria, which have changed lives and are building a stronger future for Victoria.

Since 2020 we have reset the training and skills system so it delivers the pipeline of skilled workers that the government and industry needs. The VET sector has supported the people hit hardest by the pandemic by providing better access to training and pathways to a good job and a great career. From the North East Link to the Footscray Hospital to South West TAFE's Warrnambool library and learning hub, skilled people trained at TAFEs are rebuilding our state.

As you would have heard from Minister Stitt earlier this morning, we also have TAFE-trained early childhood educators delivering our nation-leading kindergarten reforms and VET graduates caring for people with disabilities, nursing the elderly and growing our food. Free TAFE has removed financial barriers for school leavers and people who want to retrain, upskill or re-enter the workforce. Apprenticeships Victoria is matching apprentices and trainees with the industries and training providers that are right for them. Our Learn Locals are working with communities and industries to ensure that the skills needed are delivered at a local level. And the Victorian Skills Authority is driving a united approach that will benefit the training and skills system across Victoria. And of course the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, OTCD, is driving best-practice collaboration across the TAFE network. I am proud that these key responses to the Macklin review are being realised and are driving change and excellence now and into the future.

Free TAFE is a centrepiece of our reforms. Free TAFE started with 48 courses in 2019, and now there are more than 60 to choose from. It has saved students more than \$240 million in tuition fees since it was introduced, and it has been helping more than 100 000 people access the education and training they deserve. That includes over 16 000 people enrolled in diploma of nursing, over 3500 people enrolled in certificate IV in mental health and over 7500 people enrolled in certificate IV in cybersecurity. Free TAFE has trained people who are an important part of the workforce in delivering the government's Big Build and social services reform. As this diagram shows, free TAFE has increased access to training for women, people with a disability, unemployed people, regional Victorians and our multicultural communities. Free TAFE has been an absolute game changer.

Inclusion, equity, industry alignment and stronger training opportunities to preserve Victoria's Aboriginal heritage define this budget. We are investing another \$103.1 million so that more Victorians can get training for the jobs that they want while giving employers the skilled workers they need to grow their businesses.

As we continue to transform TAFE into a world-class skills and training and vocational education network, we have also introduced a new funding model for 2022 and 2023, as shown here. This budget includes over \$83 million to support a coordinated TAFE system, including more than \$66 million to support the new TAFE funding model, which will boost the delivery of critical training; over \$11 million to strengthen the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery; and more than \$5 million to increase work placements for TAFE students.

This budget has a core focus on improving access and engagement for people living with disability. Firstly, I am proud of our commitment to support the capacity of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. That is why we are investing more than \$4 million to add the diploma of Auslan and the advanced diploma of interpreting to the free TAFE list. This great inclusion on the free TAFE list will not only broaden how many people can learn Auslan, it will also address a strong workforce demand for Auslan interpreters. I am also pleased that we are investing almost \$800 000 for an access audit of the TAFE network to ensure our TAFEs are welcoming and accessible for people of all abilities.

Our government invested over \$31 million in the Marrung Aboriginal education plan in the last budget. Across TAFE and training, this included over \$6.5 million to support the expansion of Koorie liaison and Koorie student support officers and the inclusion of the new certificate II and III in learning an Australian First Nations language. This budget invests a further \$2.8 million to deliver a new certificate IV in teaching an Australian First Nations language. I am proud that TAFE is playing a lead role in delivering these courses that are so important on a cultural and educational level.

This government understands and values the importance of apprenticeships and traineeships. They provide strong industry pathways that lead to jobs and qualifications that are a career passport for life. Apprenticeships Victoria continues to break down barriers and support people to gain apprenticeships working on some of the state's biggest projects. It is driving great learn-and-earn career opportunities for so many Victorians. And as you can see from this slide, there has been a strong increase in people taking up apprenticeships and traineeships, and we are here to help them succeed. That is why this budget also includes \$12 million for the apprenticeship support officers program. Apprenticeship support officers are very important in assisting people

to transition from trainee into a fully qualified apprentice. They are a great resource, and they are a great resource to employers as well.

Another great initiative has been the establishment of the Victorian Skills Authority. In less than 12 months the authority has done so much to bring together the sector. Whether it be industries, employers, unions or communities, everyone has had a lot of engagement with the VSA. The authority's first major task is to develop the Victorian skills plan, and after extensive consultation the authority is analysing all of the research and data before finalising its first skills plan. The skills plan will provide vital insights into where occupations are in demand across Melbourne and of course regional Victoria.

Chair and Deputy Chair, I do thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. As you can see, this government has really done some heavy lifting in the post-school training and skills sector. It has transformed into a high-quality, inclusive and relevant system that responds to the needs of the Victorian economy and the people that drive it, and this budget furthers our commitment to Victoria having a world-class training and skills system that will benefit Victoria now and into the future. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Newbury.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Minister, how is the government supporting industries in the often-overlooked sectors like floor laying and carpentry?

**Ms TIERNEY:** In terms of the industry sector, we have an industry engagement architecture that is very active, and it falls within the umbrella of the VSA. The VSA has had a lot of engagement with a whole range of industries, just generally, but more so in terms of where there are particular issues. An industry can go to the VSA, provide the data, the evidence about the issue that they might have, the shortages that they might be seeing, and they can sit down with the VSA and work through those issues, and we are seeing that time and time again. I am very pleased to have Craig Robertson, who is the CEO of the Victorian Skills Authority, with us today, who I am sure would like to add to your engagement program with industry query.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. I guess my question was in relation to the often-overlooked sectors or occupations and what the government is doing in relation to that. I mean, I mentioned floor layers but boilermakers, fitters and turners et cetera—what specifically is the government doing in relation to those often-overlooked sectors?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thank you for your question. I am Craig Robertson, the Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Skills Authority. As the Minister was saying, the prime purpose of the VSA is to reach out and connect, primarily across all industries, to get a handle on what are those particular occupations that are in demand and that are sometimes overlooked. The findings from the Macklin review that give rise to the establishment of the VSA found that the previous model had, sometimes, providers competing against each other and dropping out courses that were vital to industry but were not necessarily important to those providers, and collectively those important courses were overlooked. For example, saw technicians are vital of course at the front end of the supply chain, but it is very difficult to get training for those saw technicians. And believe it or not, if we lose that skill, we lose the skill long term. So the approach of the VSA is to engage through our pre-existing 10 industry advisory groups, who represent most industry sectors in Victoria, and to get a very clear view from them about what skills are in demand and then look at what should be the training response to be able to make sure those skills are really continued on into the future, particularly where they are important for industries now that are all looking to grow, post disruption.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. If I can pick up a point that you were raising, to either yourself or the minister: in terms of skills and training, how many TAFEs are implementing micro-credentialled courses?

**Ms TIERNEY:** I think, Mr Newbury, the best person to possibly answer this is Dr Booth.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Oh, thank you. Sorry.

**Ms TIERNEY:** In terms of skill sets, a lot of work has been done over the last 18 months.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Yes. It was a genuine question, I can assure you.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes, yes. No, I take that. Dr Booth?

**Dr BOOTH:** Thank you, Minister. The Victorian government has a funded skill sets list, which includes a broad range of, effectively, accredited micro-credentials. In 2021 we had a bit over 10 000 commencements on that list. There has been a significant growth in activities. If you look back to the levels of activity in those short forms of accredited training, back a couple of years, we have seen growth of over 100 per cent. Now, I do not have the breakdown of, by TAFE, who is doing what in front of me, but we have seen—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Would you mind taking that on notice if possible?

**Dr BOOTH:** Yes, I will check if that data is available. But as I say, we have got over 10 000 skill set commencements in the last year. They have all been validated through industry engagement processes, and I suppose just to make what I think is an important point for the committee: we have been very careful to test which short courses the government will fund and provide advice on that with industry to ensure there are meaningful and genuine employment opportunities at the end of it. So we have got an approach there which is really about validating and leveraging—making sure we have got strong quality assurance mechanisms wrapped around those skill sets to ensure that students are getting good outcomes, it is genuinely meeting employer need and the providers are going about it in the right way.

**Mr NEWBURY:** I guess perhaps this is more of a broader ministerial question: noting that there is a chronic skills shortage in a number of industries, is the government appropriately matching the need for that type of microtraining in those sections to fill those shortages that currently exist? That is, is there more opportunity perhaps to tone what we are doing to make sure some of those chronic skills shortages are better met?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes, look, I think there is plenty of opportunity. We have taken up some of it, and it is active in terms of the VSA's interaction with their industry engagement program. The Victorian skills plan I would suspect will also highlight opportunities. In respect to the overall view of skill sets or micro-credentials I think there are a number of things that we just need to be quite mindful about. One is that we do not want to see the return of bad behaviour, but we do need to have accreditation so that industry themselves recognise and understand what that part of study included and how relevant it is for their business. So it needs to talk a language back to the industry as well as the student; I think that is really important. The other thing is that there needs to be, I think, a breakdown in the way that we approach micro-credentials and skill sets. There are a lot of skill sets that can be done that are more entry level into employment which would be fairly short courses—very short courses—that just enable people to be more job ready. Then of course there are skill sets that can build towards the broader qualification, and then there will be skill sets or micro-credentials that might be needed where there is a gap in skill for someone who was fully qualified but their industry has moved on. Technology of course is a driving motivator in all of that. So I think it is a matter of making sure that we have those very genuine, deep conversations with industry to work out exactly what they need in various levels and where it fits in terms of upskilling and job-ready and stackable micro-credentials.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Maas.

**Mr MAAS:** Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to your team for their appearance this morning. Minister, if I could take you to budget paper 3 outcomes, particularly pages 157 through to 160, I was hoping you could take the committee through the outcomes that have been achieved in the BP3 measures for training and skills.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you. The outcomes show that when you essentially invest in TAFE and the training system and when you back TAFE in you can deliver an outstanding training system. The outcomes in the BP3 measures are a clear testament to that, and I think that what the TAFE system in particular has done, and the VET system more generally, is an amazing job, particularly given how they worked through the pandemic. Again a big shout-out to everyone in the skills and training sector. I mean, they were able to continue through, make that transition in terms of online training, reach out, make those phone calls and take those emails of students who might have needed that extra bit of guidance and also to check in on their health and wellbeing. I must say I truly appreciate exactly what they have done, so I am absolutely proud of the vast majority of BP3 measures that have been exceeded—actually exceeded. Whether it be the higher student enrolments, including strong enrolments in regional Victoria, the student satisfaction with their VET or the improved employment

status, we can be incredibly proud of how Victoria's TAFE and training system is delivering for the workforce and of course for the Victorian economy.

Now, in relation to the specific BP3 measures, we have exceeded the outcomes in the following areas: the 'Number of government subsidised course enrolments', the 'Number of government subsidised course enrolments in the TAFE Network', the 'Number of government subsidised apprenticeship course enrolments', the 'Proportion of government subsidised enrolments related to qualifications that will lead to jobs and economic growth', the 'Number of government subsidised course enrolments by students living in regional Victoria', the 'Number of students without Year 12, or Certificate II or above, enrolled in a government subsidised course at Certificate III or above', the 'Number of enrolments in the Free TAFE for priority courses initiative', the 'Proportion of VET completers who are satisfied with their training', the 'Proportion of VET completers with an improved employment status after training', the 'Proportion of VET completers who achieved their main reason for training' and the 'Six-year completion rate for apprentice commencements in government subsidised AQF qualifications', so I think that demonstrates the great work that people have been involved in, because these are seriously great outcomes.

I want to particularly focus on the important progress that we have made in the apprenticeships space. We have set up Apprenticeships Victoria. That was towards the end of 2021, and we wanted to increase the number of apprentices and trainees in study and completing their course. It has been just over a year, and we have already seen their work starting to seriously pay off. With the NCVET report, the latest one which takes us to September last year through the previous 12 months, there was a 100.5 per cent increase in the number of apprentices and trainees in Victoria, and Victoria was leading the charge. We are the pacesetter in terms of the number of apprenticeship commencements in this country. Again, I think a lot of good work has been done, and it is paying off for a whole lot of younger people but also people that are taking on apprenticeships later in life to have a career change. We are actively signing up students. Apprenticeships Victoria is connecting apprentices with support services, particularly if they are having challenges, and of course that commitment, the \$12 million in the ASOs, will also help to provide that wraparound service that many young people in particular that are transitioning from cert II into the apprenticeship system really need for a variety of reasons.

But I might actually call on Cameron Baker, because I note Cameron is the head of Apprenticeships Victoria and is probably in the best situation to give us more of an update on exactly the work of Apprenticeships Victoria and what we are doing in that space.

**Mr MAAS:** Sure. Thank you.

**Mr BAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, committee. In relation to the establishment of Apprenticeships Victoria, it was part of the 2020–21 budget cycle, so we are now fully established at 271 Collins Street in our metropolitan office. Our first regional office will come online in the second half of this year in Warrnambool. The minister has already mentioned that we have \$12 million of continuing funding for the apprenticeship support officer program. That actually services 28 apprenticeship support officers across the entire state. We have some dedicated support too for group training organisations.

**Mr MAAS:** Terrific. Thank you.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thanks, Cameron.

**Mr MAAS:** A supplementary question on that: how have previous budget initiatives contributed to the outcomes in the BP3 measures?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you, Mr Maas, for that question. It is an important one because strong outcomes do not just happen by accident, do they? We know that consistent investment and the consistent investment in our TAFEs and our training system are paying off. We just cannot say, 'Well, here's a budget, and this is what it's all about'. No. It has been eight years of solid investment in the TAFE and training system, and this year's budget is a continuation of that trajectory. In terms of lifting VET students, this has been a long time coming. We do know what happened before we came to government—from 2010 to 2014 we saw a decline of almost 100 000 students attending TAFE. Students were not wanting to study VET because—I dare say it, and let us just call it out—the reputation of TAFE had been severely damaged. We came in on an election commitment to save TAFE, and we did that, but we also cleaned out a lot of the bad behaviour that was being performed by a range of private providers. We introduced free TAFE, and we are making significant investments in things like

TAFE campuses, equipment and teachers. People are now proud, I put to you, really proud to be studying vocational training, and TAFE students are really proud to be on TAFE campuses. TAFE enrolments now are higher than in our first year of government.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt you there, Minister, but the member's time has expired. I will pass the call to Mr Barton.

**Mr MAAS:** Thanks, Minister.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, good morning.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Good morning.

**Mr BARTON:** I refer to your presentation, in which you outlined a \$3.2 billion investment in Victoria's training system, which includes the establishment of the Victorian Skills Authority. How is the Victorian Skills Authority engaging with the transport industry, and what are the specific skill needs that the Victorian Skills Authority is identifying for the vehicle industry, including the commercial passenger vehicle industry?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you, Mr Barton, for your question. I am very much aware that the transport/vehicle industry has had a number of communications with the VSA. And in fact on reflection I think it is a demonstration of exactly why the VSA is there, and we can only get better at it. This is particularly in relation to the commercial passenger vehicle issue, is that correct?

**Mr BARTON:** Yes.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes. I know that the Victorian Skills Authority was originally set up of course to tackle the challenges that industries have, particularly those that are complex and require industry to come together. Whether it be employers, unions, community members, we want all of them having a say and describing exactly what their issues are. The VSA will continue to drive industry engagement through the industry engagement framework, a framework developed originally by the Victorian skills commissioner and the advisory group for the transport industry. The VSA engages with the transport and logistics industry advisory group under this framework, so there is a specific peak advisory group there, which I know that you are more than aware of. The VSA has been engaging not just with the IAG as such. My understanding is that it has also brought in two organisations representing the rideshare sector but also that there are two taxi operators representing. One is a large national provider, and the other is a large regional provider. I am assuming that you well and truly know about that.

We believe that this is an ongoing issue that requires a lot of work, but we believe that we will not just be able to deal with this issue that you raise but we will be able to unblock and unlock a whole range of skills that are the right skills for the issue that is presenting itself. Some of them are new issues, or they are old issues that no-one has really dealt with before. I think that we will be able to deal with the particular issue that you raise; it is being dealt with. I am going to ask Craig Robertson, the CEO of the VSA, to provide advice on the specific skill needs that he understands are needed in the transport industry, Mr Barton, if that is okay.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thank you, Minister. In respect of commercial passenger vehicle drivers, we have engaged with a number of industry representatives, as the minister was indicating. Some of those companies already do training for new and returning drivers, but there do appear to be some gaps. So we are engaging both with the industry and the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, because there are some units of competency in the national register that would be appropriate for passenger vehicle drivers.

In respect of the broader transport and logistics industry, as you can imagine, there is real demand for drivers, because during the periods of disruption due to COVID lockdowns we have all in many shapes and sizes relied upon transport to bring goods and services to the household. So there has been increased demand for that, and as consumption returns to the economy, you can imagine that long-haul or truck drivers are in high demand as well. Our research is indicating that demand, and that will form part of our advice into the Victorian skills plan to say, 'What is it that the system can do to encourage skilling in that area?'. But at the same time there is transition taking place, and we would all understand that. There are electric vehicles, hydrogen-powered

vehicles and the like, and there is more technology involved in mass transport. So it is no longer enough to say, 'Let's teach somebody safe driving'; it is safe driving and the ability to use technology. They are some of the challenges that are facing the sector. The idea of the skills plan is to frame those to engage with the industry sector to get a real sense of the priority skills that are required, because often it is a balance between the relative strengths of those skills in a training program, and that would be provided to the department to think through how that can be facilitated.

**Mr BARTON:** Can I just go back to the commercial passenger vehicle sector, because certainly within the industry itself there is an acknowledgement that the training is very patchy between some groups and other groups and all that—there is no consistency through there. Are you considering possibly a TAFE course to train the trainers or to train individuals or moving to something down those lines? Because quite frankly at the moment it is probably worse than pre the reforms of 2017.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is the case. Our investigation has shown that there obviously are some units that are relevant in that area. As I was mentioning, some companies do have a training program. What we are doing is investigating—

**Mr BARTON:** But where are the standards set, then? They can have a training program, but if they say, 'Have a cup of coffee and tick these boxes', that is hardly a training program.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** What we are investigating through the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, along with several TAFEs, is developing some of those bespoke courses to really lead the way, because as consumers we all want to feel safe in a car, and we can do a lot of things by providing that training and leading the way through the TAFE course.

**Mr BARTON:** Yes. Well, it has certainly got to be safe, that is first—safe for the drivers, and training about driver fatigue and all those sorts of things. Thirteen seconds—I will leave it at that. Thank you.

**Dr BOOTH:** Could I add one other—

**Ms TIERNEY:** Go on.

**Dr BOOTH:** Sorry, Minister. It in fact follows on from the other question too: we have a workforce skill set pilot program, which is in place really for exactly this sort of situation. Where there is a need to bundle existing units of competency in a new way or also to work with industry and develop new units of competency at a high-quality standard, that can be delivered consistently; there is a set of funds available to do that.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes. And can I just add too—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry. The member's time has expired. I will pass the call to Ms Richards.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister and departmental officials, for your time today and the work that you do. I would like to explore Aboriginal languages, Minister, and I will take you to budget paper 3, pages 3 and 5. I am interested in perhaps understanding what the funding for Aboriginal languages in the budget is going to deliver.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Great. Thank you, Ms Richards, for your question. The funding for revitalising Aboriginal languages here in Victoria has been one of the things that I have been proudest of, I have got to say, as Minister for Training and Skills. Look, we cannot change the past, but we can take steps to now try and right the wrongs. An important part of that is to save and revitalise Aboriginal languages. In this year's budget we are investing \$2.9 million to support the delivery of a certificate IV in teaching a First Nations language. This course will be delivered at TAFE. The funding this year builds on funding from last year's budget where we provided funding for the delivery of certificates II and III in learning a First Nations language. The certificates II and III are very much focused on learning Aboriginal languages, and it is not just one language that is taught. Students in the courses generally learn their own traditional language, and that obviously varies. The certificate IV allows graduates to apply for permission to teach through the Victorian Institute of Teaching. This professionalises the workforce and recognises the individual skill through formal recognition and access to appropriate salaries.

It is all about revitalising Aboriginal languages, but it is also about pride in culture, and it is about teaching non-Aboriginal students about Aboriginal history and language. It is such a great initiative and something that this government is incredibly proud of—to have worked with Lionel Bamblett and the VAEAI and other organisations.

In terms of the specifics of the funding itself, the funding goes towards developing the curriculum for the course and providing students with scholarships to complete the course. But I will hand it over to Deputy Secretary Healy, from the department, to go into more of the specifics of the funding that is associated with this great initiative.

**Ms HEALY:** Thanks, Minister. This course was developed with the Tauondi Aboriginal college in South Australia with our department here; with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, VAEAI, which the minister mentioned; and also with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, and was designed to be able to be tailored in states but with that national perspective. Here in Victoria the investment made by the government through the budget—\$100 000 of that is focused on paying for licensing of the course here in Victoria. Three hundred thousand dollars will be used to contextualise the course as well as develop course materials, again relevant to the situation here in Victoria. And then \$300 000 will be used to then conduct the course, initially starting with one course at the beginning of 2023 and catering for up to about 20 students, and we anticipate then there will be two more courses each year thereafter. And then the final amount of the funding, \$300 000, is around an evaluation, and we think 2024 and 2026 are the points of evaluation for this new initiative. Thanks, Minister.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thanks, Minister. I understand that prior to committing to this funding there was a pilot into the initiative, so I am interested in exploring how successful that pilot was.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you. I have been very interested in it as well. Can I say that I was afforded the real privilege of sitting down and talking to Corrina Eccles, who is an Indigenous leader in and around the Geelong region. She is also on the board of the Geelong TAFE and a very good contributor, and she does a lot of the welcome to country ceremonies in our region as well. She was part of the pilot program, and we were able to sit down—Corrina and I, and Chris Couzens—and she was able to explain to us exactly what happened in the pilot program, what the learnings are and what needs to be incorporated into the certificate IV to make it even better than what we were envisaging already. So I thank her for that and her ongoing leadership. She is actually employed at Moolap Primary School, which is on the Geelong–Portarlington road as you head out of Geelong. It is just amazing. If you walk through the gates of that school and hear the kids talking language, it is absolutely amazing. I have been to a preschool where people have sung the Australian anthem in a different language and a First Nations language, but to actually see it as an ongoing way of communicating in the classroom but also in the playground is just seriously amazing.

We are really pleased with the outcomes of that pilot, obviously pleased enough to sit down and develop a certificate IV. It will mean that there will be a serious career path and a serious profession attached to First Nations language. We believe that the funding of these three qualifications will also reinforce our government's commitment to inclusion and equity so that everyone can participate and build strength and confidence and culture. So yes, it has been very well received, and we are very, very happy to be playing our part in it.

**Ms RICHARDS:** That is lovely. Thanks, Minister. I noticed in this year's funding the Victorian government is going to deliver on the Marrung strategy. I am interested perhaps in understanding a little bit more about that.

**Ms TIERNEY:** The Marrung plan and strategy has been developed for some time, and we build on it and it is updated on a regular basis, and that ensures that we have got a strategy and a plan and a program in terms of the whole education journey that an Aboriginal kid, a First Nations kid, will have. And of course we have, as I said, in the last budget made a contribution of close to \$31 million in respect to that, and part of that in the area I look after, training and skills, was I think \$6.5 million for Koorie liaison officers. As you know, in most TAFEs now we have got Koorie cultural centres so that Koorie kids can actually have the support that they need to continue their studies and get the necessary information that they need within their own culture. I think—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to cut you off there, Minister. The member's time has expired. I will just pass the call to Mrs McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. My question is for Mr Baker, Executive Director of Apprenticeships Victoria. On apprenticeships, Mr Baker, the apprenticeship support officers program will receive funding of \$5.9 million in 2022–23 and \$6.1 million in 2023–24. How many support officers will that employ?

**Mr BAKER:** Mrs McArthur, that carries forward the funding for 28 apprenticeship support officers. We have one apprenticeship support officer dedicated to the Big Build apprenticeship program, which is funded through that program. So that sustains the funding for 28 apprenticeship support officers.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay, thank you. How will you evaluate the success of the officers and the program, and what improvement in completion rates do you expect with that \$12 million worth of funding?

**Mr BAKER:** The program has an evaluation built into the budget implementation approach, so we will be evaluating the program close to its conclusion from that two-year funding program. We have introduced compulsory professional development processes for the group of 28. So we have standardised the ASO offering, and that enables us to benchmark performance across the ASOs as well.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay, good. You need \$12 million to do it. So perhaps you could continue on. What are the completion rates for Indigenous people?

**Mr BAKER:** I do not have that information to hand, Mrs McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Could you take it on notice?

**Mr BAKER:** Yes.

**Dr BOOTH:** We will see if it is available.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** You are indicating that they may not be available, the completion rates?

**Dr BOOTH:** No, we certainly have completion rates, as of course you will be aware, in the performance statement. But it just depends how that data can be disaggregated. So that is what I will need to get some technical advice on.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay, so if you would like to take that on notice, and while you are at it perhaps you can give us the completion rates for women in trade apprenticeships. You will take that on notice too?

**Ms TIERNEY:** May I just add to that—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Sorry, could I just ask you to say yes for the record rather than just nod.

**Dr BOOTH:** I am so sorry. Again I will need to go and assess the extent to which we can disaggregate this data, but subject to that data being able to be disaggregated, absolutely.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, we are going to invest in \$12 million worth of officers to ensure that there are completion rates, so surely you must know what completion rates you currently have.

**Dr BOOTH:** Yes, sorry. So as you will note on budget paper 3, the six-year completion rate for apprentices is 62.8 per cent, which is—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So can we have that completion rate split by industry—how many women completing trade apprenticeships in plumbing versus electrical, for example?

**Dr BOOTH:** So to return to my earlier answer, subject to that being technically feasible it is something the department can look at. I do not have that department here, and I will need to get advice from the data team on how that data can be disaggregated.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So what specific programs at TAFE and industry level, excluding mandates, have you implemented to improve the take-up of apprenticeships for women?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Sorry, can I answer this? There are currently 10 projects that are underway, because we do know—and everyone knows—that in terms of women in non-traditional trades the level, outside of catering and hairdressing, is low, and that has been the case for some time. So we have made a deliberate attempt to provide a number of projects that are being done in a variety of areas. I will give you a couple, Mrs McArthur: accelerating women in auto, partnering with the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce; WAVE, women in electrical, partnering with the ETU; Women in Plumbing, partnering with Master Plumbers;

CareersPlus, partnering with Tradeswomen Australia, and I think everyone knows Tradeswomen Australia—they are pretty active across the country as well as in Victoria; Women in STEM, partnering with Ai Group; the Sprinks female-specific apprenticeship pathways, partnering with the National Fire Industry Association; Women and Their Trade, partnering with the National Electrical and Communications Association, NECA; the women-only multitrade preapprenticeship, partnering with Apprenticeship Employment Network; and also there is another program called Women on Track, partnering with Downer, for the rail industry. And can I take this opportunity, if anyone is slightly interested in this area, to encourage people to encourage young girls and women into these areas. The more that we can have, the more that we will have equity.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Perhaps we do not need advertisements, Minister.

**Ms TIERNEY:** It is not about advertisements it is about equity and the importance of ensuring that women have their rightful place in all industries.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay. Well, thank you, Minister. We note that the two-year completion rates are less than 50 per cent and that target completion rates are also less than 50 per cent. Why do you aim so low?

**Ms TIERNEY:** We do not aim low at all.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, you achieve low.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Excuse me. You did ask a question; I am attempting to answer. In relation to completion rates, they have historically been low. We are building up that, and you can see that in terms of the BP3 measures. But one can lose sight that in terms of completion rates of a university bachelors degree, Mrs McArthur, we are on par. We are on par. So why—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Good. Excellent. What are the completion rates for people with a disability?

**Ms TIERNEY:** I do not have that level of detail with me.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Could you take it on notice?

**Dr BOOTH:** I can answer some of these questions actually. I have just been able to get some data together. That two-year completion rate—the measure in the budget is people who either complete in the year they started or in the following year. Often there are a number of courses that continue on beyond that. But for people with a disability, 44 per cent will complete it in less than two years.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So below 50 per cent.

**Dr BOOTH:** But, as the minister was saying and referring to before, over 19 per cent of students are also continuing on beyond that. And a number—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes. Well, we look forward to the figures on women and Indigenous people.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt, Mrs McArthur and Dr Booth. The member's time has expired. Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here today. I note, Minister, that you did speak earlier somewhat regarding the Victorian Skills Authority. I was wanting to know, for the benefit of the committee, how have the Victorian Skills Authority jobs and skills centres met the needs of regional Victoria. And, secondly, can you tell you more about the \$12.4 million of ongoing funding for jobs and skills centres and efforts to engage regional Victoria?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you, Ms Taylor, for that question. Skills and job centres have been with us for a few years now. They were very much a part of the original Skills First framework because we wanted to make the connection between TAFE training and actually getting a job. The best place, we believe, for skills and job centres to be is at TAFE where students are enrolled or their friends are involved and they can come to a skills and job centre at their local TAFE and get the information not just about that TAFE but the whole VET system. It was a great way of just getting people on campus. They have proved to be incredibly successful. There are over 30 skills and job centres across the state, and can I also give a shout-out to those that work in the skills and job centres for the great work that they do.

The other thing we have done is, particularly in terms of our rural areas, noted that there are sometimes geographical barriers to getting to your local TAFE because it might be 2 or 3 hours down the road et cetera, et cetera. Recently I was at Robinvale secondary college and we launched a fleet of skills and jobs vans that are going out to a whole range of places as far away as Charlton and Kerang but also other smaller towns. But it is also about making sure that local schoolkids at the secondary colleges do have immediate access, that they do not wait to go to TAFE or be taken to a TAFE, that it is part and parcel of their toolkit of information—understanding what is available at their local TAFE, what courses they deliver—so that if they wish to, they can stay in town, because they are the next generation of leaders and of course the next generation of people that will be coaching our football and netball teams and making sure that we have got good quality swimming pools in our towns et cetera, et cetera. So these mobile fleets are I think a game-changer, and it is heavily supported in terms of not just the skills and training sector and local industry but the regional partnerships under the portfolio of Minister Mary-Anne Thomas. They fully support this approach, and in fact it was an initiative jointly with SuniTAFE and the regional partnership to bring that to bear.

We also have this amazing orange bus called the GOTAFE bus, and it has a timetable that is online so people know when the GOTAFE bus is going to be in town. It has a proper schedule so they can organise their diaries in advance, and that provides a whole range of things: not just information but also skills on how to prepare your CVs, making appointments with employers—you name it. It is kitted out to actually go into the bus and do mock interviews for job interviews and a whole range of things. Again the feedback that we have had from communities has been overwhelming, and, rest assured, no-one is going to miss that bright orange bus around the GOTAFE campuses and beyond in central Victoria.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Very good. Something particularly close to my heart, can you tell me about the progress of the clean economy skills and jobs task force and how it will contribute to the *Victorian Skills Plan*?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes. This was one of the recommendations or it was an initiative that was alluded to in the Macklin review, and in the last budget we set aside I think \$10 million for this. This is a body that sits under the umbrella of the VSA again, and it has got all the players that are involved in alternative energy. It has met several times, and it is working on a workforce plan for the clean economy. What I really like about this initiative is that it seriously, in one hit, deals with all of the known issues in technology that we need to work out what skills and employees we need for various streams of the clean economy, so it is almost like a thought incubator to translate the thought and the need for the skill into actually delivering what is needed. A lot of the skills—not all of them, but a lot—have not necessarily been placed in the AQ Framework, so a lot of it is new territory. A lot of the work is about making sure that we have got all the key industry players around the table, that we have got a good mixture of people that understand hands-on learning as well as ICT and even AI and that we have got curriculum development people that know their stuff as well as people that understand the AQ Framework and skill sets, so that work is definitely underway. As I said, it is exciting because it is almost like the new frontier of skills and training, one that obviously is at the heart of many Victorians and indeed, from Saturday's result, the heart of Australians as well. But I will hand over to Craig to give us an update on the clean energy task force, please.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thank you, Minister. As the minister said, the clean economy agenda has the potential to transform many parts of the economy. We are alert to, of course, that the target by the early 2030s is clean energy, and that will be the driving force for other parts of climate adaptation including the recycling economy and the like. The task force has brought together representatives who are experts in this field both from clean economy dimensions as well as skill interventions and the like, and they have really been giving some incredible insights into what will be the capability that we will require in Victoria. The real advantage is, as the minister indicated, whilst the matter is urgent we still have some time to be able to make sure that we appropriately skill the workforce. Now, the issue is that some of these skills are not known yet, but we know that we can get pretty close to that, and so that will be the priority of the task force in establishing a strategy.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and team. Secretary, can I ask—or perhaps Mr Bates, I am not sure whether it would be yours or not—last year we asked about five of the 12 TAFEs across the state requiring letters of comfort. Are you able to tell me whether any of those have requested that again from the government this year?

**Mr BATES:** Mr O'Brien, I think Dr Csar has carriage of that.

**Dr CSAR:** Thank you for the question. You might recall I think last year—in fact, as a matter of fact last year eight TAFEs required letters of comfort.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Right.

**Dr CSAR:** The pressures of the pandemic, impacts on revenue and uncertainty generally led to that requirement. In the year that has just completed—the training year, the calendar year of 2021—four TAFEs sought letters of comfort for a range of reasons. William Angliss, you would probably be familiar, has a very big exposure to international students and of course with the borders closed and lack of mobility and the uncertainty about when that would return they sought a letter of comfort, and that enabled them to have an unqualified set of accounts.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. That is fine. The four are there, yes? Thank you. Can I ask perhaps Dr Booth—no, in fact I should go to the minister on this—Minister, the output for your portfolio has been cut by 4.5 per cent, or \$117 million. How many students will miss out on courses or jobs be cut because of the \$117 million cut?

**Ms TIERNEY:** There has been no cut. There will be no student enrolments cut and there will not be—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Sorry, Minister, you are—

**Ms TIERNEY:** No, excuse me, you have asked me a question and I am attempting to answer it.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Your answers are required to be relevant to the question.

**Ms TIERNEY:** I am being very relevant.

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** If you would like to go to page 139, Minister, of budget paper 3—

**Ms TIERNEY:** I have seen it.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay, well, then you know that it says that there is a \$117 million reduction. It is there in black and white: 'Training, Higher Education and Workforce Development'—4.5 per cent cut. So please do not tell this committee there is no cut when it is there in black and white in your budget papers. Now, what will be the impact of that cut?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Mr O'Brien, you clearly also did not read what is underneath that on that page, because it talks about a one-off initiative that this government made during the pandemic, which was a \$350 million commitment, a fund called the Victorian higher education investment fund for the university sector. It was not necessarily there to continue at all. It was there because the federal government at the time refused to support the university sector whilst it was going through its hardest time. It would not even afford the sector JobKeeper. Now, it was this government that understood the importance of the university sector. We understood that they were having difficulties and so we established this \$350 million fund so that we could marry up government priorities and the capabilities and the capacity of the university sector to get on and do a whole range of activities that were really important for our economy. And of course there has been significant research that has been undertaken—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So we started with 'There's no cut' and now we acknowledge that there is.

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien!

**Ms TIERNEY:** There was also a lot of work and research in pharmacology, which obviously was incredibly important, and there were also a lot of health and allied health types of projects that have been approved and are being undertaken within the university sector. We also provided a deferral of payroll tax so that the universities did not—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** That was not out of your portfolio, Minister.

**Ms TIERNEY:** I am talking about alleviating the issues that were confronting the university sector.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Hang on. Last year you refused to answer questions from me about the Treasury portfolio; now you are trying to use it as an excuse for the cut.

**Ms TIERNEY:** There is no cut—and you are misleading this committee. You are misleading this committee.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You cannot have it both ways.

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien! Thank you.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. Can I move on. Minister, page 158 of budget paper 3, 'Number of government subsidised course enrolments': the target is 317 000 for 2022–23, yet in 2016–17 it was 389 000. Why have you reduced the number of enrolments by 71 000 in the last couple of years?

**Ms ATTA:** Sorry, Mr O'Brien. Can you just repeat the performance measure.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** The very first one. Budget paper 3, page 158, 'Number of government subsidised course enrolments'—317 000 was the target; it was 389 000 four years ago. I might say, it has been reduced consistently over the last couple of years, so there are less people in training in government-subsidised course enrolments.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Actually, Dr Booth, can you check on that while I just check my note.

**Dr BOOTH:** Yes. As you would know, Mr O'Brien, training in Victoria operates under a training guarantee, and those settings remain unchanged. So any Victorian who is upgrading their qualifications, upskilling, continues to have access to a government-funded place.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Why have you reduced the performance measure targets then?

**Dr BOOTH:** The target is based on the forecast level of activity based on the labour market conditions in which we find ourselves. It is important for the committee to note that the training guarantee remains unchanged. We want Victorians to access training, and all eligible Victorians continue to be able to access training and their access has not changed. The way we have to budget for that, to be responsible in our budgeting, is to anticipate what we think the demand will be and provision for that, but if the level of activity exceeds that over the course of the year those settings remain unchanged. So no Victorian is seeing a reduced access to training under these budgets.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. The 2020–21 actual was 297 000; the expected outcome this year is 328 000. So there is still significantly less than what was targeted four years ago. Can I add, too, the regional targets. The number of government-subsidised course enrolments by students living in regional Victoria has also reduced from 104 000 to, this year, 81 300. You mentioned that they are set by market conditions. We all know there is a massive skills shortage. How can it possibly be that we are looking to train less people now that we were three or four years ago when unemployment is so low and people are struggling to find workers?

**Ms TIERNEY:** The answer simply is that you cannot actually force people to enrol, but what this government understands—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Surely there is massive demand, though, Minister.

**Ms TIERNEY:** is that we remove the barriers. So free TAFE has been incredibly important in increasing the enrolment numbers. As I said, from our first year in government the enrolment figures are up. We have got rid of the fake enrolments—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** They have been down for the last few years, Minister.

**Ms TIERNEY:** that happened under the previous government. Indeed the member is just quite conveniently forgetting that we have had over 100 000 Victorians undertake the free TAFE courses, and he is also conveniently forgetting that we have also had a pandemic. We have a very proud record when it comes to skills and training in this state.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Everything else is going up, Minister, but it suits you to have this one.

**Ms TIERNEY:** We are very pleased with the performance.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you, Minister. The member's time has expired. Mr Richardson.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and department representatives, for joining us again this morning. I want to take you to the topic, Minister, of TAFE investment and take you to budget paper 3, page 9, which outlines the Victorian government's additional funding in the 2022–23 Victorian budget for the training and skills portfolio. For the committee's benefit, are you able to explain the benefits of this package and how it complements previous government investment in this area?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Thank you, Mr Richardson, for that question. The additional funding identified in this year's budget goes to show the importance of, as I have said before, consistency and consistent investment in TAFE and our training system. It has been this government's approach to invest in areas where there is demonstrated value and to increase the value generally on skills, and I think we are making some significant headway there. When I look back, we had a situation where VET's and TAFE's reputations were in tatters; we now have a situation where we can have serious conversations with students and parents about VET being equal to university entrance. This is a genuine pathway that leads to not just a great job but a fantastic career. It means that you can if you want to go off and create your own small business, or large business, employ other VET graduates and have a very healthy business to make a contribution to the Victorian economy, but you also can do further higher education that will connect up to a whole range of other things that you might not have thought of when you originally enrolled at a TAFE institute.

That value proposition, I think, is really gaining some strength, and as you would have heard from Minister Merlino, the secondary pathways work. That is very much part of this budget because in so many ways it is that piece that needed to be built to connect the secondary school system to the post-school system. By making sure that we have got an embedded allocation of funds that is significant and a new way of going about providing pathways in a real, real way for Victorians, it will mean that more people in Victoria will see the value of a TAFE course or a VET course that will give them that fantastic job and career, and for many of course they also will not be encumbered by a HECS debt. But it is a very genuine and deliberate way of doing things. I often say to people, 'Yes, it's great, and yes, we do have skills shortages, but can you imagine a Victoria without free TAFE and us not introducing free TAFE in 2019 before COVID hit?'. In terms of other states, we are pretty well placed to do what we need to do to fill those shortages. Whether it be in terms of free TAFE or VET generally, I think the future is bright.

That is not to say that we have not got more work to do; we have got a lot more work to do in skills and training. I want to get that alignment between delivery and industry tighter, even more than what it is at the moment. I want to be able to see all the dots connecting between people undertaking courses and going into well-paid jobs, I want the curriculum improved, I want to see a greater exchange of staff from industry and from our TAFE sector so that we maintain a very relevant training system that caters for the needs of individuals as well as industry and I want to create that level of excellence that often is just the domain of universities. I want it in the VET sector so that we can actually build that pride of that craftspersonship attached to that higher order skill that people have from using their hands as well as their minds and to also get a greater connection between hands-on learning and theoretical learning, so that we have a true melding of the best capabilities of our young people as well as those that are in the workforce that want to change their careers.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** That is fantastic, and linking it with the VCE, VET and VCAL reforms is a massive piece of work. I want to dive into TAFE capital, Minister. In light of the significant contributions made in recent years, are you able to provide an update for the committee on the capital investments that have occurred in the context of the Victorian budget?

**Ms TIERNEY:** We have invested something like—I stand to be corrected, but I think it is around about \$457 million in capital works. There is a long list of TAFEs that have been rebuilt, and it is nothing for me each week to go and check on progress and/or open a whole range of different capital works. They are exciting, because the capital works that are undertaken on our TAFE campuses now are absolutely on par with a university. When I think of Kangan at Bendigo, my goodness, that was such a sad and sorry story. Now you go right up to the top of the latest building that we have completed and you look down, and you think, 'My God. This isn't a university campus? This is an amazing TAFE campus'—and that is replicated all over the state.

But we are not just dealing with TAFE capital, we are also working with local government as well. One of my key projects is the Warrnambool learning and library hub, where we have got TAFE students actually building it. There is a banner on the construction site that says, 'Local TAFE students building your local library', and there is a significant investment there. We just opened, not all that long ago, the new Morwell trades centre—again, an amazing building. That was on top of the early learning and nursing building that we opened across the road from it the previous year.

GOTAFE has had a significant investment, particularly at its Seymour campus. We have also done some serious refurbishment work at SuniTAFE and Wodonga. Chisholm—we turned the sod out there only two weeks ago, again for their next stage. Again, if you have not seen what we have already built, please go and have a look. Their dental assistant laboratory is state of the art. It is absolutely world class. It has got the latest equipment, and I would encourage anyone from the community to go there. And while they are there, they can also go downstairs and maybe have a haircut and go to the beauty salon as well, which again is world class.

There are so many capital works that I can point to that we have invested in, and we have made sure that regional Victoria, regional TAFEs and the port of Sale have also got some well-deserved capital works in their local community. I am very pleased, very proud, and again I encourage anyone to go to any TAFE they wish, to come and have a look at this amazing program that is underway.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and your team, for appearing today. Can I first go to a project of importance to my electorate in Prahran. Obviously you would be well aware that there is a real shared vision across our community for an arts and education precinct on the Prahran TAFE site.

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Are you able to provide the committee with an update in terms of the latest information on the acquisition of that site?

**Ms TIERNEY:** Yes. Look, thank you, Mr Hibbins. It is of no surprise that you inquire as to where things are up to. As you would be aware, the Victorian government has reached an in-principle agreement with Swinburne to purchase the Prahran campus, securing its future as a vibrant education and arts precinct with ongoing access to training. As a condition of the proposed sale the Victorian government will secure a commitment from Swinburne to invest almost half of the sale proceeds back into its other TAFE campuses, its VET component—as you know, Swinburne is a dual-sector university. The purchase will allow the Victorian government to secure the future for world-class training at the site and engage in a comprehensive master planning process to determine the preferred mix of uses in collaboration with the stakeholders, including existing tenants, students, trainers, industry and local government.

Swinburne has not been used as a training delivery site itself since 2013, when it was gifted by the previous government, but Melbourne Polytechnic has delivered high-quality vocational education and training over this period. I have been out there three times just even in the Auslan area, which is pretty exciting, and I am very pleased to have seen not just their work recognised in the budget but many Auslan teachers from Melbourne Poly being at RMIT the other morning when I announced the advanced diploma. In terms of further information, I think I would ask Dr Csar to provide some further information.

**Dr CSAR:** Thank you, Minister. Discussions are continuing with Swinburne on the terms. Of course ultimately it is a commercial deal, and that will be informed by assessments by the valuer-general. But concurrent with that we will be undertaking a master planning process with the existing users and other users, being mindful of the adjacent school and ensuring that the final form meets that educational precinct environment that we are seeking to achieve.

**Mr HIBBINS:** And what is the time line for the master plan?

**Dr CSAR:** We will commence the master plan in the second half of the year. The timing really does depend on our negotiations with Swinburne and so on.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes. And how long do you foresee that master planning process will take?

**Dr CSAR:** We should have a fairly reasonable idea towards the last quarter of the calendar year.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay, great. Thank you. I would like to ask now in regard to developing skills to meet the demand for EV mechanics in the future. Obviously this is a growing market, and the demand for EV mechanics is obviously going to increase. Is there anything in this year's budget or any in the foreseeable future to address the future demand for EV mechanics?

**Ms TIERNEY:** What I can tell you is that that is part of the discussions of the clean energy workforce task force. But more time relevant is that recently I announced I think it was a \$1.6 million grant, and that is specifically for EV employees in the bus sector who are quite concerned about losing their job. There is a project that is being developed with BKI that will assist in this regard. I was at BKI Docklands very recently and saw that funds that we have been able to provide have provided for the third EV laboratory. They are pretty amazing to see. They are at the cutting edge not just here in Australia but across the board, and there is a lot of international interaction in terms of EV initiatives. I think Cameron Baker might be able to provide even more information on what we are doing in relation to EV.

**Mr BAKER:** Thank you, Minister. In relation to EV and the transitional arrangements we are doing, it is covered with skill sets as well—we are focusing in on nationally endorsed skill sets. There are three within the automotive service and repair package, so we are looking at rolling that out. I am working with Dr Booth on that particular aspect. With the heavy vehicle transition to EV, working with BKI they have their specialist centre in Docklands at ACE, and they are equipped to run that pilot program. From an Apprenticeships Victoria perspective too, it is really important that we are looking at a post-trade skilling pathway as well for existing heavy-diesel-qualified mechanics but also for the apprentices that are going through ACE, and working with those bus franchisees to get access to those new skill sets and that new equipment and training.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay, terrific. Thank you. Finally, Minister, do you have information in terms of what the current recurrent hourly VET funding rate is across the entire sector?

**Ms TIERNEY:** I will defer to one of my colleagues, but I know that it was increased in the previous budget, the hourly rate. Dr Booth.

**Dr BOOTH:** So there are a range of hourly rates. They are published as part of the funded course list. So there are slightly under 700 courses on that list, and they all have a published hourly rate. Those rates vary quite significantly according to the cost of delivery, so I would refer you in the first instance to that funded course list, which shows the range of rates. Because VET is a competency-based completion system, each individual student can take either a little or quite a long period of time to finish, based on their existing level of skills. So that needs to be read—

**Mr HIBBINS:** Do you have one for the entire state? Do you have it all put together in terms of—

**Dr BOOTH:** Yes. The funded course list has the hourly rate, and then there is the purchasing guide that specifies the maximum payable hours for any given course. So they are all publicly available. We are happy to provide you information on where you can access those rates.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Right.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of these estimates with you today. We thank you for appearing before the committee. We will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a 1-hour break before resuming consideration of the estimates with Mr Carbines. Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**