

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Inquiry into 2019-2020 Financial and Performance Outcomes**

Responses to Questions on Notice

1.

Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	Jenny Atta and David Howes
Committee member:	Richard Riordan
Page/s of transcript:	5

Relevant text:

Mr RIORDAN: So they are some examples of how the teachers were helped, but I am just trying to get a sense of whether there is any quantifiable amount of young people that were assisted over what was a very tough year?

Dr HOWES: Well, one of the points of data that I can provide to you is the support that is also being provided by the GPs in schools program, which of course was established before the Mental Health Practitioners. Over the period of time since that program has been established there have been 33 500 consultations and 40 per cent of those, or 13 400, have been for mental health issues. So the level of support that is being provided—

Mr RIORDAN: But once again you are not able to quantify that over this lockdown period when the schools were closed.

Ms ATTA: If I could, Mr Riordan, there are a few programs in this category. So we could have a look at if we could provide that for you for the mental health initiatives that we rolled out—the work of the GPs in schools program; the department’s partnership with Headspace is important here as well, an investment that enables referral to direct, one-on-one counselling, which also took place via telephone and video in a remote sense, where students could not access that in a one-on-one sense. We could see if we could.

Mr RIORDAN: Yes. If you could take that on notice and perhaps compile something....’

Answer:

Mental Health Practitioners conducted over 2,200 consultations during flexible and remote learning in the 2019–20 financial year. These consultations involved direct student counselling and related activities including family support and referral to specialist services. Over 1,000 individual students were supported by Mental Health Practitioners during flexible and remote learning in the 2019–20 financial year.

Over 3,000 students saw a Doctor and over 10,000 consultations were delivered in the Doctors In Secondary Schools Program in the 2019–20 financial year. Between April and June 2020, in response to remote and flexible learning, the program delivered over 400 consultations, including via telehealth.

Victorian government secondary school students also have dedicated access to counselling provided by headspace centres through the Department of Education and Training’s partnership with headspace. Secondary school students can access face-to-face and telephone counselling services from headspace. Telehealth appointments were provided during remote and flexible learning. From April to June 2020, when schools were providing remote and flexible learning, headspace held over 4,200 counselling appointments to support students in government secondary schools.

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2.

Portfolio:	Higher Education and Training and Skills
Witness:	Lee Watts
Committee member:	Danny O'Brien
Page/s of transcript:	14-15

Relevant text:

Ms WATTS: Thank you, Secretary Atta. Mr O'Brien, could I also go back just for one moment to talk about the TAFE financials, just to—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, Ms Watts, I am running out of time.

Ms WATTS: Apologies.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am happy to take some further advice on notice if you would like to provide it.

Ms WATTS: Thank you, I will.

Answer:

Further to the advice provided in the hearing, the Department can advise that, in 2019, the Victorian government provided \$652.6 million in combined training, TAFE support and capital funding revenue including an additional \$78.2 million in government funding training revenue, maintaining similar government funding levels across 2017, 2018 and 2019.

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Portfolio:	Higher Education and Training and Skills
Witness:	Lee Watts
Committee member:	Danny O'Brien
Page/s of transcript:	14-15

Relevant text:

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I move onto the outcomes themselves. We have had a year of free TAFE now in the period we are talking about. Do you have completion rates for students undertaking free TAFE, and could I get those by TAFE and by course across the state?

Ms ATTA: Yes, let me just check with the Deputy Secretary what reporting is available.

Ms WATTS: Thank you, Secretary Atta. Mr O'Brien, could I also go back just for one moment to talk about the TAFE financials, just to—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, Ms Watts, I am running out of time.

Ms WATTS: Apologies.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am happy to take some further advice on notice if you would like to provide it.

Ms WATTS: Thank you, I will.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Likewise, I am not sure if you will have this data on completion rates by TAFE and by course. If you are able to provide that on notice if you do not have it.

Ms WATTS: We will provide it on notice.

Answer:

Free TAFE for Priority Courses began on 1 January 2019 opening TAFE to Victorians who previously were excluded from training and is building a pipeline of skilled workers in priority areas. At the end of its first year almost 40,000 students had commenced in Free TAFE courses, which is 88 per cent higher than commencements in the same courses at the end of 2018.

The Department of Education and Training generally reports on a two-year completion rate for non-apprentice commencements in government subsidised Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications. The two year duration is chosen as it accurately reflects the timeframe that it takes for the majority of students to complete their AQF qualifications. There are, however, on average a further 3 to 5 per cent of students who complete their course in the third year of study and beyond.

The two-year completion rate for Free TAFE is the proportion of course enrolments commencing in 2019 that were completed (or inferred completed) by the end of the 2020 training year. The two-year completion rate for Free TAFE is not available at this time.

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4.

Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	Tony Bates
Committee member:	Sam Hibbins
Page/s of transcript:	18-19

Relevant text:

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. Now, within the agreements themselves it allows for 4 per cent of the expenditure to be claimed on non-school-based expenditure. For the 2019–20 year what was the actual amount spent on the non-school-based expenditure, and did you go up to the 4 per cent?

Ms ATTA: I do not know if Mr Bates has that detail. There was about \$1.45 billion in school expenditure in the 2019–20 year, the overwhelming majority of which contributed to the state’s targets with this agreement.

Mr BATES: Thanks, Secretary. That was the additional expenditure, so the 4 per cent is of the total spend. I do not have the non-school percentage at hand, but we could provide that on notice. It is things like the cost of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. There are a number of support services that are crucial to the operation of the system that are not actually delivered from schools, so we can pull together some of the stuff that we have included in our return to the commonwealth for that year.

Answer:

Section 32 of Victoria’s bilateral agreement with the Australian Government under the National School Reform Agreement states that Victoria’s funding contributions is measured according to the existing Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) financial data reporting methodology for Net Recurrent Income Per Student (NRIPS) plus the following adjustments contained in section 32a-c:

Section 32a:

- *Up to 4 per cent of the total Schooling Resource Standard for:*
 - *depreciation of capital assets; and*
 - *the School Bus Program for rural and regional Victoria.*

The Schooling Resource Standard in 2019 for Victoria was \$10.461 billion therefore Victoria could include up to \$418 million (4 per cent). In 2019, depreciation of capital assets for school outputs was \$416 million and the School Bus Program for rural and regional Victoria was \$222 million, totalling \$638 million, which exceeded \$418 million therefore Victoria claimed the full \$418 million (4 per cent).

Section 32b (curriculum and regulation activities):

In 2019, Victoria claimed \$63.8 million in costs for the government schools portion of curriculum and regulation activities including:

- *the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority; and*
- *the Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority.*

Section 32c (reform costs):

In 2019, Victoria did not claim any reform costs under section 32c because these costs are captured in the ACARA NRIPS calculation.

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Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	Chris Keating
Committee member:	Sam Hibbins
Page/s of transcript:	19

Relevant text:

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. That would be great. Thank you. I would like to ask some questions now about school cleaning contracts. If you can provide this information on notice, if need be, but just the list of current school cleaning contracts—I understand with the changes you have got about eight contracts—and the total value of those contracts?

Ms ATTA: Yes, Mr Hibbins. That is for metropolitan Melbourne, but I might ask Mr Keating if he can confirm that.

Mr KEATING: The way cleaning contracting is working at the moment is there are eight metropolitan areas for which five companies hold the contracts. In regional Victoria there are still contracts for each individual school, so in aggregate there would be a lot more. I think you are focusing on metropolitan Melbourne?

Mr HIBBINS: Yes.

Mr KEATING: We can provide an estimate of the total value. I have got to check whether there are commercial-in-confidence aspects, because each contract was competitively won and would have been awarded on a competitive basis. So we could give an estimate in aggregate, potentially we could not give you the individual contract values because it would be commercially sensitive.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. But then aggregate across the state?

Mr KEATING: I suspect that would be fine.

Answer:

For schools in the metropolitan model, the cost incurred for cleaning contracts during the 2019-20 financial year was \$79,434,195 excluding GST (\$87,377,615 including GST).

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6.

Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	Chris Keating
Committee member:	Sam Hibbins
Page/s of transcript:	19-20

Relevant text:

Mr HIBBINS: How do you measure satisfaction among schools in terms of cleaning performance?

Mr KEATING: We do two things. So one, we run a hotline. Particularly in the early stages of the reform when schools were calling a lot, we would characterise every single call—about whether it was for information or concern or advice. Separate to that we also then have I think it is a monthly or it might be a bimonthly survey to get feedback on performance. In the early days particularly, given it was such a big change to the way schools operated, we were primarily using the actual queries from schools to really guide the levels of interest and concern.

Mr HIBBINS: If there is a survey, would you be able to provide that survey information to the committee?

Mr KEATING: Yes, we would be able to provide information coming out of the survey. Again, the only thing that I would probably just caution in advance is we do get survey information for individual providers. Probably commercially I may not be able to provide the individual provider's performance, but in aggregate, probably.

Mr HIBBINS: Overall? Yes, that would be great.

Answer:

The Department has a comprehensive approach to performance monitoring as part of the arrangements for metropolitan service providers, including regular performance reporting from each service provider and Department audits of cleaning service standards. In addition, the Department seeks feedback from schools, including monitoring and responding to issues and concerns raised by schools, such as about security and cleaning performance. This feedback data is tracked. Since the model was introduced in July 2018, there have been progressively fewer issues raised by schools and overall service performance has improved. At the end of 2019-20, issues were raised by 1.48 per cent of schools per week on a four-week rolling average basis. Since July 2020, the four-week rolling average of issues raised per week has been below 1 per cent of schools.

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Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	Tony Bates
Committee member:	Sam Hibbins
Page/s of transcript:	20

Relevant text:

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. All right. Thank you. I just want to ask some questions in regard to additional school costs. You referred to some various programs that the Victorian government are funding to address school costs incurred, but does the department actually keep data in terms of just what are the additional costs for public school students and families and in terms of also the overall funding received from schools for additional costs? I mean, I think there was an Auditor-General's report in 2015 that put the figure at around the \$300 million mark. Does the department actually keep those figures itself, and does it have them for the 2019–20 year?

Mr BATES: Yes, we do. We collect the information from all schools, in terms of what they have asked parents to contribute, so we know both what they have requested and what they have received. So we know that in terms of things like book lists and other payments that they put out, and we also separately collect other revenue that they get at the school level. A lot of schools contract out the operation of their tuckshop—tuckshops, hall rentals and basketball clubs, a lot of those things—so we also collect information on all of that revenue.

Mr HIBBINS: And are you able to provide that figure to the committee?

Mr BATES: Yes, I think we can on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. Just on that matter as well, do you also aggregate the cost to individual families and parents in terms of what is the average additional cost for students at public schools?

Mr BATES: We do not do it at the family or student level. We collect that data at an aggregate level for each school, so we can see totals by school but not what is going down into individual children or families.

Answer:

Locally raised revenue in schools for 2019-20 was \$400.1m. This consists of payments for items and activities related to the school's standard curriculum and which students take possession of, consume or participate in, revenue related to camps, excursions, incursions, travel costs, sports and other school-based activities; as well as school trading operations revenue from canteens and uniform shops, charges for out of school hours care programs and voluntary financial contributions.

Parents have the option of choosing to purchase items where appropriate outside the school or to provide their own. The cost of purchasing outside of the school is not included in the amount as there is no financial contribution to the school.

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8.

Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	Tony Bates
Committee member:	Bridget Vallence
Page/s of transcript:	25-26

Relevant text:

Ms VALLENCE: I 100 per cent agree, and if they are having kids into state schools, I know how important that is. I am just intrigued to understand why some of those—as you say, your words—basic safety measures, why we would need to draw down so expansively from the advance for that. Are you able to tell the committee that now or, if not, take that on notice?

Mr KEATING: The decision around the advance is something that I probably cannot comment on in terms of the Treasurer’s decision-making there, but certainly we had provided advice about the opportunity to provide significant additional investment through advice of, ‘Here’s what you might need to spend’.

Ms VALLENCE: So that was not budgeted for originally? You had not sought a budget allocation for basic safety standards in schools?

Mr KEATING: Every year through the budget process we provide advice around what the funding standards might be, what the risks in the portfolio might be, and it is effectively that information that was drawn upon to make decisions about that investment.

Mr BATES: Ms Vallence, can I just check the reference, because I think Mr Keating might be confusing a couple of different—

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, sure. It is the financial report 2019–20, page 163. So it is the Treasurer’s advance, exclusive of activities attributable to COVID—and I appreciate getting the breakdown on notice. But it is just really around seeing that that is for essential maintenance and compliance. What briefings had you provided to the minister? Could you perhaps provide that to the committee? And costings: was that not fully taken up in terms of the budget allocation?

Mr BATES: So that is the \$112.6 million amount.

Ms VALLENCE: Pardon?

Mr BATES: On page—sorry.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, so it is the top line item.

Mr BATES: Yes, so \$112.6 million. I think that is the maintenance blitz. Sorry, I thought you had read out a much larger number.

Ms VALLENCE: If you could provide that breakdown, and also what is the nature of the works engaged. And if there is any briefing that you had provided in terms of those basic compliance and safety measures that were needed in schools—whoever is appropriate to take that—could you provide that to the committee? Is it a matter that that information and advice that you had put forward to the minister was not then included within the 2019–20 budget?

Mr BATES: So I think as Mr Keating said—

Ms VALLENCE: To rephrase my question: is it that you had done your audit, you sought to conduct that basic audit and you blew the budget, or you needed to do more than was provided for within the budget? I think that is really what I am getting at.

Mr BATES: So that additional funding became available after we signed the bilateral agreement with the commonwealth. That is why it has come as a Treasurer’s advance and was not in the original budget, because we did not sign the agreement until August. That \$112 million was announced in the budget update,

so it is not a question of we suddenly discovered lots of broken doors and windows; the additional funding became available from the commonwealth agreement.

Ms VALLENCE: So that is commonwealth funding?

Mr BATES: Well, it is a combination of state and commonwealth funding. There is a matching requirement. So it is mainly state; it is a 75-25 or—

Ms VALLENCE: Great. So on that then, to add to the breakdown of where all of that money was allocated, if I could have a breakdown of what was commonwealth and state, that would be great. Is that okay?

Mr BATES: I think we can—

Mr KEATING: We can absolutely provide a breakdown of what the money was for in terms of programs, the intent of the programs and what it delivered in terms of where the money came from—

Mr BATES: It all goes into the one appropriation pot, so at the school project level we do not distinguish between commonwealth or state.

Ms VALLENCE: That is fine.

Answer:

In September 2019, the Victorian Government announced that all government schools would share in \$515 million over five years in funding to carry out essential maintenance works.

The additional funding has increased funding for schools' maintenance and grounds upkeep activities, including occupational health and safety and regulatory compliance items.

Of the \$515 million, \$112.6 million was spent in 2019–20 as a Treasurer's Advance (since it was approved after the confirmation of the 2019–20 Appropriation Act).

This was due to the National School Reform Agreement between the Commonwealth and States being finalised after the 2019–20 State Budget.

The \$112.6 million Treasurer's Advance expenditure included:

- *\$3.2 million to the Planned Maintenance Program*
- *\$15.0 million to the Maintenance and Minor Works Funding for Schools Program*
- *\$26.8 million to the Essential Safety Measures Program*
- *\$24.4 million to the Annual Contracts Program*
- *\$10.6 million to the Make Safe Program*
- *\$2.1 million to the Safe Trees Program*
- *\$1.4 million to the Gas Supply Upgrades and Safety Switches Program*
- *\$29.1 million to other programs.*

Commonwealth funding for the Department of Education and Training (DET) under the Quality Schools package is retained by the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF). The Commonwealth funding is pooled together with State sourced funding and is then provided to DET through the State Budget and Treasurer's Advances (as one pool of funding). Therefore, funds for individual programs cannot be traced directly back to either the Commonwealth or State.

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9.

Portfolio:	Education
Witness:	David Howes
Committee member:	Bridget Vallence
Page/s of transcript:	27

Relevant text:

Ms VALLENCE: I specifically asked about underperformance in maths and science. And I noticed—just picking up from what Ms Taylor was asking and your commentary there around the program for international student assessment that you mentioned earlier—I think you were describing how Victorian students compare. How did Victorian students compare in the last assessment? Wasn't it the worst ever?

Dr HOWES: No, it was not the worst ever.

Ms VALLENCE: It wasn't?

Dr HOWES: No, not if you look at NAPLAN data. It was not the worst.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. So perhaps to help the committee as we undertake an assessment of the evidence in these hearings, could you provide—and I am happy for you to take it on notice if you do not have it in front of you—an assessment of that performance against NAPLAN and against international standards?

Ms ATTA: We can follow that up, Ms Vallence. I did want to make the point that it is not accurate in any way to say it was the state's worst performance in 2019, and there are specific measures in the *Report on Government Services* that show us improving on different measures of learning outcomes.

Ms VALLENCE: If that is the case, and hopefully it is, if we can have that provided to the committee specifically in relation to the PISA data—

Ms ATTA: In relation to PISA data, which—

Ms VALLENCE: Not NAPLAN, PISA. Can we have that provided to the committee?

Ms ATTA: We certainly will provide the analysis of our PISA results. I am not sure if that was referenced in the ROGS report, but in any case we can certainly follow that up and provide you with that.

Answer:

PISA is an international sample assessment. As such, care must be taken when comparing results across states and territories within a single year, and over time, since measurement imprecision must be accounted for. PISA results were reported publicly when they became available, and the interstate comparisons were outlined in the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (RoGS). More detailed results are published in Australian Council for Educational Research 'PISA 2018' report.

In respect to PISA Reading Literacy, the 'PISA 2018' report shows that Victoria's 2018 performance was better than its 2006 performance, improving by 7 mean score points.

In respect to PISA Mathematical Literacy, nationally, the proportion of students achieving the national proficient standard (Level 3 or above) was similar to the results in 2015 but lower than in 2012. However Victoria's results in PISA are stable. This means compared to the Australia-wide results, Victoria's performance is better. In 2018, only the ACT outperformed Victoria (and their performance has been stable over the last three cycles).

In respect to PISA Scientific Literacy, the proportion of Victorian students meeting the national proficient standard (Level 3 or above) has been similar across the all PISA cycles since 2006.

In 2018, only the ACT outperformed Victoria (and their performance has been stable over the last three cycles). Only Victoria, ACT and NT have maintained stable performance across all cycles; in all other jurisdictions (and nationally) the proportion of students achieving the national proficient standard in Scientific Literacy has declined since 2006.