

THURSDAY, 1 AUGUST 2019

ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE—EDUCATION AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Estimate Committee Members

Ms LM Linard (Chair)
Mrs JA Stuckey
Mr N Dametto
Mr MP Healy
Mr BM Saunders
Mrs SM Wilson

Members in Attendance

Mr JP Bleijie
Ms SL Bolton
Mr MC Berkman
Ms FS Simpson

In Attendance

Hon. G Grace, Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations

Ms S Durham, Chief of Staff

Department of Education

Mr T Cook, Director-General

Mr J Hunt, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services

Office of Industrial Relations

Mr C Allen, Deputy Director-General

WorkCover

Mr B Watson, Chief Executive Officer

The committee met at 9.00 am.



CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this hearing of estimates for the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee open. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Leanne Linard. I am the chair of the committee and the member for Nudgee. Mrs Jann Stuckey, the member for Currumbin, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are: Mr Michael Healy, member for Cairns; Mrs Simone Wilson, member for Pumicestone; Mr Bruce Saunders, member for Maryborough; and Mr Nick Dametto, member for Hinchinbrook.

The committee has granted leave for non-committee members who sought leave to attend and ask questions to do so. Visiting members present are: Mr Jarrod Bleijie, member for Kawana; and Ms Sandy Bolton, member for Noosa. I also acknowledge my colleague Brittany Lauga, the member for Keppel, who is in the audience. Other members may be present over the course of today's proceedings.

Today the committee will consider the Appropriation Bill 2019 and the estimates for the committee's areas of responsibility. The committee's hearing is broadcast live, televised and photographed. Guidelines for camera operators will apply to this estimates hearing. Copies of the guidelines are available from the secretariat staff. I ask that mobile phones or other electronic devices be turned off or switched to silent. I also remind all present that food and drink are not permitted in the chamber.

The committee will examine the portfolio areas in the following order: education from 9 am to 12.45 pm; industrial relations from 1.15 pm to 2.30 pm; employment from 2.30 pm to 3.45 pm; small business from 4 pm to 5 pm; and training and skills development from 5 pm to 6 pm.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2019 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations. The committee will examine the minister's portfolio area of education, including the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, until 12.45 pm. The committee will suspend proceedings for breaks from 10.45 am to 11 am and from 12.45 pm to 1.15 pm.

I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament also apply in this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, argument or opinion. I intend to guide proceedings today so that relevant issues can be explored fully and to ensure that there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members. I ask that all members abide by the intent of these standing orders to ensure that the hearing today is both respectful and productive for all present.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, departmental and statutory officers, and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental and statutory officers to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of education and industrial relations open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, welcome. I now invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Chair. I welcome the opportunity to address the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee. I, too, acknowledge my Assistant Minister for Education, Brittany Lauga, the member for Keppel.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to giving every Queensland child a great start in life through a world-class education. In the past 12 months I have visited schools from Saibai Island, the northernmost point of Queensland, to Mount Isa and Roma in the west and to the Gold Coast in the south and witnessed the world-class education being provided to young Queenslanders. As education minister, I am committed to not only maintaining this world-class education but making it even better.

The 2019-20 state budget includes a record \$13.8 billion funding allocation for the Department of Education. This allocation includes funding for an additional 1,000 teachers and 200 extra teacher aides over the next 12 months—part of our commitment to employ 3,700 extra teachers over four years. The budget also includes a massive \$1.464 billion investment in state school infrastructure and an additional \$100 million in capital assistance grants for non-state schools. This is up more than 50 per cent on 2018-19. This funding will deliver eight new state schools for the start of the 2020 school year and five new state schools in 2021 which, when open, will take the total number of new schools delivered since the election of the Palaszczuk government to 26.

A substantial investment is also being made in refurbishing, renewing and expanding existing schools in communities right across Queensland, ensuring that our kids are learning in world-class facilities. The budget also includes \$100 million over four years for priority state school air-conditioning projects which brings total funding for air conditioning to \$191 million over five years. This investment will allow for the urgent replacement of air-conditioning units in schools in the Cooler Schools Zone and other priority school air-conditioning projects, which will be informed by a review of state school air-conditioning needs.

Complementing our investment in air-conditioning is our \$97 million Advancing Clean Energy Schools program. Phase 1 of this program is underway. I am proud to announce that solar audits have been carried out at more than 60 state schools, and 20 schools have already been equipped with solar panels.

I am particularly proud that the budget includes additional support for students with a disability. The budget delivers an additional \$136.2 million over four years to provide additional support for students with a disability which will deliver around 150 additional teachers and 90 extra teacher aides this year alone. There is also \$63.6 million over four years to continue funding for early childhood development programs and services for children with a disability aged from zero to five years. I was thrilled to visit the ECDP at Vincent State School in Townsville recently to see and hear firsthand about the vital role this program plays.

The early childhood component of the education budget features increased investment for kindergarten delivery and regulation including an additional \$30.4 million over two years to support universal access to kindergarten in the year before school for every Queensland child; an additional \$26.5 million over two years to ensure the quality and safety of early childhood services investment; and a further \$3.1 million to continue our great program of remote kindergartens in up to 68 schools across the state where there is no other kindy service nearby. This investment is all about giving all our kids a great start with quality education and kindergarten, no matter where they live in Queensland.

The Palaszczuk government continues to deliver for rural and remote Queensland, with a \$100 million strategy to support schools in rural and remote areas. As part of this strategy, the \$31 million over four years has been used to establish four centres for learning and wellbeing in Roma, Mount Isa, Emerald and Atherton. These centres will provide support to a network of state schools and provide professional development including coaching and mentoring through face-to-face and virtual delivery.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to my department for its response to disasters that have impacted school communities in recent months. Widespread and historic flooding in North Queensland in February saw 61 state schools closed, impacting around 22,000 students and their families. Most of these schools were reopened within days of the water receding. However, Oonoonba State School was forced to close for eight weeks to allow for significant cleaning and repairs. Having seen the damage firsthand, I can say that it was an amazing team effort involving school staff, parents, Building and Asset Services in the Department of Housing and Public Works, contractors and the Australian Defence Force to get the school reopened as fast as they did.

In southern Queensland we saw devastating fires impacting the Morningside, Upper Mount Gravatt and Warwick East school communities. Again, my department responded with distinction. Sites were cleared and temporary classrooms installed with minimal or no loss of learning time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make an opening statement today. I am now happy to take questions from the committee.

CHAIR: We will first go to non-government questions, and I invite the member for Kawana to open.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Chair, and good morning to the committee. Good morning, Minister, Director-General and departmental staff. Director-General, if I can refer you to the new Inner City South State Secondary College, please. When was the preferred site chosen for the new school at Dutton Park?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that the new site was chosen in 2018. I think the original announcement might have been about this time last year at estimates in terms of when it happened, and the final site was in September 2018.

Mr BLEIJIE: Was that based on a business case recommendation? Has the business case been released publicly? I remember there were alternative sites at West End on the table for this as well, so was this site chosen because of the business case recommendation and was that business case public?

Mr Cook: The potential sites were identified based on available properties within the Brisbane State High School catchment as well as school enrolment, demographic projections and the development of data for inner South Brisbane. Three potential precincts were identified at the time: Davies Park, Kurilpa and Dutton Park. The identification assessment was undertaken on a precinct level rather than a site level. The precincts were assessed against a number of criteria, including: ownership and land use; delivery in terms of costs and impact; ability to cater for current and future growth; precinct constraints such as heritage, natural environment and flooding; social and urban renewable benefits; access to transport; and partnership opportunities.

In terms of consultation, I believe there was a consultation paper released publicly. Consultation activities included: two community information sessions at Dutton Park and West End; two community information displays held at Boggo Road busway and Davies Park market; 12 school community

information sessions held at Brisbane State High School, Dutton Park State School, West End State School, East Brisbane State School, Buranda State School and Junction Park State School; five school community sessions for Parents and Citizens' Associations; two workshops for key stakeholders; one school community reference group meeting; and written submissions were also asked for from the community. The consultation process ran from 9 February 2018 and closed on 30 April 2018. My understanding is that on the Building Futures website there is further information in relation to the actual site location as well.

Mr BLEIJIE: Was there a business case done and has it been made public? Is it publicly available?

Mr Cook: The business case was approved by Building Queensland early this year. My understanding is that the CBRC approved that, and as a result it is a CBRC document.

Mr BLEIJIE: So it has not been released?

Mr Cook: That is my understanding, as a result of CBRC.

Mr BLEIJIE: This is with respect to the same issue, the Inner City South State Secondary College catchment area. I know that we have the Inner City North State Secondary College as well, and I note there is a press release about the catchment area. I cannot find anything with respect to a media release issued when the final catchment area was announced and what process was undertaken, please.

Mr Cook: The Department of Education released the proposed catchment and enrolment management plan for Inner City South Secondary State College on Thursday, 6 September last year, and undertook more than five weeks of community consultation. During the consultation period 278 responses were received. Almost 20 per cent of these submissions supported the proposed catchment without change. All of these responses were analysed and categorised into key themes: 38 per cent of respondents to the proposed catchment suggested an increase to the proposed Inner City South Secondary State College catchment; 19 per cent of respondents supported the Inner City South Secondary State College catchment without change; 18 per cent of respondents suggested a reduction to the catchment size; and 15 per cent of respondents provided feedback on the proposed equidistant principles which, as you would be aware, is the process that we use to make decisions around catchments.

As a result, the following changes were made to the catchment: a small proportion of the proposed catchment in Highgate Hill will be retained within the Brisbane State High School catchment; the eastern boundary will be extended along Logan Road from Stanley Street south to Denman Street; the southern boundary will be aligned to roads with a slight expansion along the majority of the southern boundary; and in response to feedback the department has realigned the catchment boundary to avoid splitting streets in half. In some cases we have actually split a street in half. We have made that change to follow main roads to allow for a more logical boundary division. The final catchment was released in September 2018 and has been available on the project's website since that date.

Mr BLEIJIE: Sorry, what date was that?

Mr Cook: December 2018.

Mr BLEIJIE: For the final catchment area?

Mr Cook: That is right.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, is Abdingdon Street in the new catchment area?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that it was in the original proposed catchment area and it remains in that catchment area.

Mr BLEIJIE: In a joint press release with the Deputy Premier last year the minister said—

We know that Cross River Rail will generate significant social and urban renewal in the area and this precinct also offers opportunities for future growth and expansion.

When the education department builds schools, do you find there is a general uplift in property values when you have a new school in an area?

Mr Cook: I do not have any data to indicate that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Would the business case have looked at that issue in terms of uplift? Because we have statements from the minister and the Deputy Premier talking about the precinct. You talked about how one of the reasons this was chosen was because of the precinct opportunity. There has been talk about collaboration with the university across the river and so forth, and there is been quite a lot of

discussion in the estimates about Cross River Rail and the uplift in property values, so I am keen to know. When Education Queensland builds new schools, do they do any assessment based on an area and if there is a general uplift in value or decrease in property values?

Mr Cook: No.

Mr BLEIJIE: They do not?

Mr Cook: The impact of schools on property would not be part of a Queensland business case. That is a market issue.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, what modelling has been done on the impact of the catchment area for the new school and the impact on enrolment growth at Brisbane State High School, please?

Mr Cook: I would ask for clarification about 'modelling'. Is there something specific you are asking?

Mr BLEIJIE: We know there have been issues with Brisbane State High School and parents. There was a body set up, the inner city coalition, to look at alternative sites as well. They said last year there was limited consultation in terms of school selection sites, so I am keen to know what impact the modelling of this new school will have on the enrolment numbers of Brisbane State High School. If you recall, there were issues at Brisbane State High School. There were allegations of fraud with respect to enrolments, so I am keen to know how that will impact on enrolments in the catchment area for Brisbane State High School.

Mr Cook: I am aware of those issues, and the department did provide additional support to Brisbane State High School in relation to those issues to help them with those particular programs. In terms of the modelling or the data, certainly there is a reference group that we have established in relation to the catchment area. That reference group has looked at the data that is available to them in relation to relief for Brisbane State High School. The new school is intended to provide relief over the medium term for Brisbane State High School. I guess the final information in relation to that would depend on the number of parents and families in that particular area who have children.

Mr BLEIJIE: Has the Deputy Premier had any involvement in the preferred location of the new school? By that I mean was she given ultimate say in the location and the budget associated with the inner city south school?

Mr Cook: No.

Mr BLEIJIE: Has the department had any discussions with the Deputy Premier's office with respect to the school? The reason I ask that—and it is not a trick question, Director-General—is that there are many press releases issued jointly with the Deputy Premier, being the local member, and also the minister. It is odd that a local member would issue press releases about a substantial sum of money for a new school without ministerial involvement, so I am keen to understand what involvement the Deputy Premier had with the inner city south school in terms of your department's concern.

Mr Cook: With any school that we build we regularly meet with the local member, no matter who that local member is. We have met with all local members as part of the department to keep local members up to date with any new school that might be built, as with changes of positions like principals. I am aware that my regional directors are often in contact with local members to give them information about a change in a school or a change in a principal appointment or in relation to P&C meetings. I have seen evidence of that. I have seen emails in relation to that from members of my department.

In relation to the Deputy Premier, as you know she sits on the CBRC. Other than that, there is nothing that we would do that we would not normally do for a local member in relation to consultation with a school.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, the website with respect to the catchment area was updated on 29 April. Your website says that the Building Future Schools website was updated in April. We understand that the Deputy Premier bought a property in Abingdon Street on 27 March. She issued a press release in her own name about this school on 29 March, which was two days after she signed a contract on a purchase of a property in that catchment area. Has the Deputy Premier disclosed to the education department since 27 March, since contract signing, any conflict of interest that she may or may not have had with respect to this school?

CHAIR: I do not think there is any relevance, I am afraid, member for Kawana, to the department or the area of appropriation and service delivery.

Ms GRACE: I think this is really outside the realms.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect, Madam Chair, the Deputy Premier issued a press release about this particular school. As the director-general has already indicated, the Deputy Premier is not only the Treasurer who funds the school but also the local member. She issued a press release on 29 March stating 'New high school at Dutton Park coming to life!' and there was no mention of the education minister in there.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I appreciate that and I am hearing what you are saying about a press release. I am not questioning your integrity or honesty in regard to having a press release. What I am questioning is how it is relevant to the service delivery of this department and the appropriation we are here for.

Ms GRACE: Point of order, Chair. We have just heard that all of these arrangements were announced last year, in 2018. Catchment areas were on the website as at December 2018. We are now into 2019. These are questions that have been answered and done.

Mr BLEIJIE: This is not a point of order.

Ms GRACE: I do ask about relevance.

Mr BLEIJIE: The minister is arguing the point.

Ms GRACE: No. I am asking about relevance because questions have been answered in relation to the key dates you have been asking about and these were all locked in in 2018. I do not see the relevance.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, the relevance is that the Building Future Schools website was updated with the final catchment area in April of this year.

CHAIR: Again, that is understood but, member for Kawana, what you are not clarifying for me as the chair is how your question as to whether the Deputy Premier could have a conflict of interest is relevant to the service delivery of this department and a school in that area. I do not believe that the question is relevant to the appropriation that we are here to look at today.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I think if a member of parliament who funds the construction of a school through Treasury has a direct financial interest in a school being built by this department, it has quite a relevance to this committee.

CHAIR: So you are asking the director-general if the Deputy Premier indicated there is a conflict of interest—which she would not do to the director-general of the Department of Education in this regard anyway. Again, I come back to—

Mr BLEIJIE: Treasury—

CHAIR: I am not going to debate it with you, member for Kawana. I believe that you also know it is not relevant. The director-general cannot answer that question. It is not relevant to his delivery and requirements of him as the director-general of Education. Could you please move to a question that is relevant.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Director-General, you said that the catchment area was finalised at the end of 2018. As I indicated, the website was updated with the final catchment in April 2019. Director-General, you no doubt are aware of the catchment area for the new school. This map shows the inner city south state school and the Deputy Premier's house just there, which is a short walking distance from the new school. I take the point, Madam Chair, that you have ruled on relevance so I will not make any more points with respect to the potential conflict of interest that may or may not arise. Minister, did the Deputy Premier advise you that she purchased a property in the catchment area on 27 March 2019?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. There is no requirement for the Deputy Premier to advise me. These are matters before the CCC, as the member knows, and these will all be investigated at the time. Can I say that the website was updated because of a change of a program or something like that, from what I understand. There were no changes to the catchment area from what was up there in December 2018 to when the changes were made I think in April 2019. I understand what the member is trying to imply. I understand that there is mud being thrown around here. These questions have been answered. The dates all align. There have been no changes or anything like that, but obviously it does not stop this line of questioning for education, which has a \$13.8 billion budget.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Minister. The building of the Inner City South State Secondary College is pretty important. Your department is investing a heck of a lot of money with respect to it.

Ms GRACE: We are very proud of those inner-city schools.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am concerned, as this committee should be, of potential conflicts of interest. It is the committee's right and it is my right to ask these questions.

CHAIR: Is this a question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes, it is. Minister, did the Deputy Premier advise you that she was issuing a press release in her own name on 29 March 2019, two days after she purchased a property in the catchment area? Did she tell you that she was issuing that? Why was the minister not in the press release?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. The Deputy Premier is the local member for that area. She is also the Treasurer. She put out a press release informing about a brand-new high school, one of the first in 50 years built in the inner city of Brisbane. I am way over that age and I can tell you that the growth that has happened in Brisbane over that time is remarkable. We are now delivering two new inner-city schools. One of them is on a site in the north which was up for sale by the LNP. We stopped that sale and we are now building the first state-of-the-art, vertical school on the north side of Brisbane in 50 years. One will open in 2021 and mine opens in 2020. We have a brand-new school. It is great news. It is fantastic news. If I was the Deputy Premier and that school was being built in my area, I would be putting out press releases as well.

Mr BLEIJIE: I note that the press release I spoke about was under the Treasurer's name, not the local member's name.

Ms GRACE: Well, she is the Treasurer and the Deputy Premier and she is free to issue press releases in her area as she sees fit to announce a fantastic new high school being built in her area in collaboration with the University of Queensland. I am sure that all members—

Mr BLEIJIE: And she is buying investment properties in her area too—good on her.

Ms GRACE: I am sure that all members put out press releases when they know new schools are happening in their area. I am well aware of it. Many on both sides of the House who put out press releases about new schools on the Sunshine Coast or on the Gold Coast generally do not include me in their press releases either.

Mr BLEIJIE: But not subject to crime and corruption investigations at the same time, Minister.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, can you please ask relevant questions.

Ms GRACE: That is totally irrelevant. I would have to say that that is a matter that is being investigated and it does not require any underhanded kind of comment from the member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you for your advice. I will decide what I ask.

Ms GRACE: It is under investigation. We should not be having sly comments when something is being looked at from an independent body.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is quite a serious matter, Minister.

Ms GRACE: It is a serious matter and it does not require sly comments from the member for Kawana.

CHAIR: Minister and member for Kawana, I think we have done this line of questioning. Member for Kawana, do you have a relevant question to the portfolio?

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, when did CBRC sign off on the Inner City South State Secondary College?

Ms GRACE: As I said, the announcements were made. This was looked at by the Building Services Board. It went to the CBRC and I am not sure of the exact date. I am trying to find that for you. It may have been April 2019 that it went to the CBRC. I am not sure of the exact date. I think it was for final sign-off after we had made the announcement and the catchment was all done. Then the process is obviously to have a final sign-off and I think that would have been about April 2019.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, if it was April 2019 that the Cabinet Budget Review Committee signed off on that, the Deputy Premier purchased her property in March 2019. Did she declare a financial interest in the property at the CBRC?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, we are going down the same line of questioning.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect, the minister just advised—

Ms GRACE: I am not on the CBRC.

CHAIR: It is not relevant to the minister's portfolio.

Mr BLEIJIE:—that the CBRC have signed off on this matter after the Deputy Premier bought a house.

CHAIR: I appreciate that you have a line of questioning that you wish to follow, whether relevant or not to this hearing, but we are here for a purpose and a purpose that you understand to be questions about appropriation. Do you have a question for the minister?

Mr BLEIJIE: Indeed, and the appropriation is when the government signed off on the new school.

Ms GRACE: No, it does not work that way.

CHAIR: No. You do understand what falls within the purview of what the minister can and cannot answer in regard to her portfolio. Please ask questions that relate to that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Minister, when did the Department of Education, your department, attend the CBRC meeting and put the final documentation for CBRC sign-off?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. I am not sure whether my department actually attended that CBRC meeting.

Mr BLEIJIE: The education department did not attend the CBRC for a new school?

Ms GRACE: A lot of work occurs in relation to that. This school was announced quite some time ago. As we said, the site was announced more than 12 months ago. All of the catchment area was announced. The CBRC submission is to enable this to occur. When they know all the papers are in front of them and all the information is given, they can agree to those materials without the need for me or the department to go for further clarification.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you for that, Minister.

Ms GRACE: This had been eminently looked at. It was an election commitment back in 2015. All the t's have been crossed and all the i's have been dotted; everything had been provided. The Building Future Schools Fund, building Queensland schools fund—all of those were in the budgets and they knew the amount of money that needed to be there. This was merely advice or information about the CBRC process.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, we have a situation where the Deputy Premier has issued press releases without you and you did not attend a CBRC meeting about your own school. Have you had any involvement with this new school, or is it all being run by Jackie Trad, the Deputy Premier?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, there were imputations in the question. Minister, do you wish to make any final comments?

Ms GRACE: Yes.

CHAIR: I think it has been asked and answered three different ways.

Ms GRACE: I think there are a few final comments to make. These schools were announced as part of the election commitments that were made before this government was elected. We have been through a comprehensive consultation with regard to both of the schools. I even had a community reference group that started when I knew where the site would be, because we saved it from being sold by the LNP. Quite clearly, the community gets the local member involved in terms of discussing all the requirements for the local community, which I am sure the Deputy Premier did as well.

This happens to be in her sights and it happens that the Minister—me—and the Deputy Premier and Treasurer live in two of the fastest growing areas of the state in the inner city. We are building two high schools, the first in 50 years, in areas that have grown exponentially. I understand what the member for Kawana is trying to do here, but this information was all readily available and was part of election commitments. Of course I have been involved as minister since I was appointed in 2017. It is ridiculous to suggest that I have not been. In fact, I think I even met a group from West End who came to see me as part of the community consultation. Others whom I see out and about in schools have made comments in relation to how great the school is, where they thought it would be and the collaboration with the University of Queensland. Of course I have had involvement.

If the member wants to continue with this line of questioning, these are matters before the CCC that were referred by the LNP and, of course, the Deputy Premier herself. If the member for Kawana has any issues that he feels need to be looked at, I suggest he takes the appropriate action and refers them to the CCC.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Minister; we have. Minister, on 2 August 2018 you issued a joint statement with the Deputy Premier about this particular school in which you said—

We know that Cross River Rail will generate significant social and urban renewal in the area and this precinct also offers opportunities for future growth and expansion.

Minister, what modelling did the department do with respect to this school as far as it relates to Cross River Rail and its connections?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for the question. The department always looks at the population growth. They work with the government statisticians. They look at movement of people into areas. They look at the growth in those areas. Based on this, they formulate their decisions and their recommendations in relation to where new schools need to be built, such as on the Sunshine Coast at Palmview or on the Gold Coast around the Coomera area—the fastest growing areas. They look at the demographics. They look at who is moving in. They look at an abundance of information to guide their planning on where purchases of land should occur, new schools should be built and what is happening in those schools. Of course, they talk to the schools about enrolments, how they are going and whether their enrolment management plans are being enforced. Obviously the information that has come forward is that this is a new area that is being built. We can see the buildings that are going up in the inner city, particularly in my electorate and the electorate of South Brisbane. We often use new and urban knowledge. We look at the corridors, we look at where people are moving in. We look at all of the information so we can then look at where schools need to be built.

This came to our attention a few years ago. We made election commitments regarding them—35 schools in the inner city—because of the growth. Over the period that I have been a member inner-city schools have grown exponentially. We have expanded some in purchasing new land and we have poured millions of dollars into refurbishments and additional classrooms. These are all matters that are taken into account when looking at the allocation of new schools.

CHAIR: We will move now to government members' questions. I would like to refer you, Minister, to page 6 of the SDS and its reference to the Advancing Clean Energy in Schools program. Could you please advise how this program will be rolled out and how solar and energy efficiency measures will be installed across Queensland schools?

Ms GRACE: Let me say that this program is one of the most eagerly anticipated ones in my portfolio and has really sparked the interest of our school communities. Not a week goes by without schools being interested in the Advancing Clean Energy in Schools program because they want to get solar panels on their roofs. We know that Queensland state schools are one of the government's largest energy users; I think they now have about \$70 million per annum in energy costs.

Our ACES program, as we call it, will help reduce those energy costs in over 870 state schools through solar and energy efficiency measures and it will save our schools around \$10 million a year on energy costs. This represents around a 20 per cent reduction. Not only is it a great cost saving but it is also a significant contribution to Queensland's 50 per cent renewal energy target by 2030. The program includes the installation of new solar panels on school roofs and moneys to install energy efficiency measures such as LED lighting and timers on hot-water systems. It also looks at the best location for the solar panels and how schools can get the most out of the equipment. It is a fantastic program and we are looking forward to making sure we have quality contractors going out on school sites. We have a very thorough contract process because we want to ensure they can deliver all of the efficiencies that have been promised and they do so in a very efficient manner. We also want to make sure health and safety standards are upheld when contractors are working in schools.

The ACES program will be rolled out in three phases with phase 1 already on the go. In fact, as of today we have 20 schools with solar panels. Yesterday I had great pleasure in visiting Petrie Terrace State School and speaking with Principal Sandra Hackshall and the student leaders at that school. They are so proud that they have a whole roof covered in about 120 solar panels. The energy efficiency measures now connect them to a program where they can actually see how much power is being generated as well as the usage by the school. They are working towards making sure that the power generated and the power usage align. They are working with the children as part of the curriculum on how they do that as a school. It was wonderful to see that the children were excited about it as was the principal and the school community.

We expect that that school alone will benefit greatly from that. The principal was confident that her school will see real improvements in energy use and their environmental footprint. The system is expected to generate 44 megawatt hours every year. Obviously they are now looking to see how they can align their usage with that generation.

Other schools that already have panels installed include: Camp Hill State School, Gatton State School, Coomera State School and Acacia Ridge State School. Phase 1 will continue in which 200 schools will have panels installed. It was always going to be a three-year program and phases 2 and 3 will see it all completed. I ask every member to be patient. The schools that have been identified to receive solar panels will be getting them. The contractors cannot do them all at once as much as we would like them to do that. They have to roll them out efficiently and properly. Everyone will get their turn and they will all be done within the required time.

CHAIR: It is a great initiative, and certainly my schools locally on the north side are very excited about it. Minister, page 5 of the SDS references your record \$1.4 billion infrastructure budget that will benefit our wonderful state schools and students. Can you advise what other infrastructure funding programs are being used to deliver functional, fit-for-purpose facilities like the wonderful prep playground that you will be building at Boondall State School?

Ms GRACE: I am glad we are doing so. I know just how much the project means to the students of Boondall State School, as all the projects mean a lot to schools right throughout Queensland. Every electorate is getting additional money to ensure their schools have quality facilities. In your case, the project will provide a much needed upgrade to a playground for prep students. Sometimes it is the smaller projects that make a big difference. Recently I attended an upgraded playground. I think the kids loved it more than anything else. It is good to see.

The Palaszczuk government is determined to deliver new schools, new and enhanced classrooms, school halls and other school facilities that Queensland students need. We are investing an incredible \$1.464 billion to build, maintain, improve and update our state schools—a record investment that will support well over 4,200 jobs in construction.

Our signature programs such as Renewing Our Schools, 2020 Ready and the Building Future Schools Fund provide our big-ticket infrastructure projects—our new schools, our classroom buildings and our multipurpose halls. The Building Future Schools Fund has been boosted by \$532 million in this budget, taking it to a total of \$1.3 billion over eight years, to deliver new schools in the growth areas where they are needed. The bulk of the funding is in our Renewing Our Schools initiative that we will be delivering this financial year to refurbish and renew some of our oldest state schools. Our 2020 Ready program will wind up this year. In 2020 over 60 secondary schools will be ready in time for day one to accommodate the full cohort from that date. It has been wonderful seeing those new classrooms come out of the ground.

Schools also need projects that can repair and repurpose existing school buildings and infrastructure. Quite clearly, we want to ensure they are functional and fit for purpose. The department's School Infrastructure Enhancement Program refurbishes and modernises school facilities. This year we are investing well over \$84 million on school infrastructure enhancement funding. Some of the many ways that our SIE funding helps school include classroom refurbishment and libraries, wonderful outdoor learning spaces, refurbishment of sports facilities such as tennis courts, and of course repairs to pathways and walkways. Depending on where you live, sometimes they get a battering from the weather.

Many projects are being done. We look forward to delivering all of the programs and all of the funds. I commend my department. They do an incredible job in getting infrastructure money out the door—delivering projects on time and on budget. They work very well with local school communities to ensure that, whatever we build and whatever we refurbish, the school is involved—they are participating to outline their needs and give their views. Often we change projects because of that wonderful input. The department does an excellent job in delivering a fantastic infrastructure spend in our schools right throughout Queensland. We are revolutionising the way Queensland schools look through the funds that this government has been putting into schools.

CHAIR: I thank the minister and the director-general and their wonderful team, including Kevin and his team, who do such great work. He has just finished my Virginia pool. Thank you for supporting my Boondall preppies. I really appreciate your work.

Ms GRACE: I think Kevin Mara was saying that he had not slept for 12 months, but I do not believe him!

Mr HEALY: Minister, I have been reading the Service Delivery Statements with great delight. I have pushed all of my preferred reading to the side. This is just exciting. How did we perform in NAPLAN in 2018?

Ms GRACE: Queensland really is the shining star when it comes to NAPLAN. We are committed to delivering a world-class education for all students, regardless of where they live. I must share an anecdote with you. When the director-general and I were in the Torres Strait, NAPLAN was being conducted. Beside us on the ferry was a principal with a NAPLAN box beside him. There were a couple of them delivering NAPLAN Torres Strait style. It was great to see those students participating.

Our 2018 NAPLAN results have reaffirmed our ongoing investment in educational reforms over the past decade. It is paying dividends. Our long-term trends of lifting literacy and numeracy outcomes have continued for Queensland state schools. We have again seen improvement across all year levels and many test strands, with reading and spelling being standout areas of improvement. Our year 9 students also achieved some of their highest results ever in spelling, grammar, punctuation, reading and numeracy. That is great to see.

The 2018 results confirm that Queensland is one of most improved states since testing began a decade ago, in 2008. Importantly, we are closing the gap in schools that have traditionally had challenges with literacy and numeracy. One of the aims of NAPLAN was to grow those schools and to grow the learning of those students. These are the two key things we now want to report on and it is wonderful to see that we are achieving what all the experts say we should be achieving in a good education system.

These are great results for Queensland. These results have been noted by the independent Grattan Institute. The institute's state-by-state report card on student progress described Queensland as a star performer. These are not my words but come from the Grattan Institute's report on a state-by-state comparison. Grattan commended Queensland on its emphasis on lifting standards in teacher professional development and its unrelenting learning focus on improving literacy and numeracy. We have seen this emphasis in years 3 and 5 students making on average two months more progress in reading and one month in numeracy than students in other states. In fact, they are looking at what Queensland is doing that is getting these results because, as I said, the growth in the students—not comparing the schools—through teaching is the important part that we should be reporting and measuring. Queensland is putting it out in spades.

It is important to acknowledge that NAPLAN is a point-in-time test and just one of a number of tools used to monitor students' progress. It is not the be-all and end-all of the great work that teachers and staff do in our schools every single day. It measures at a point in time. Parents can be confident that the work students and teachers do every day prepares students well. Our teachers work tirelessly to support their students' wellbeing and learning, which empowers students to reach their full potential.

I thank our students for their hard work every day. I thank teachers, school staff, parents and carers for supporting and encouraging them to do their best. That is not to say that I will take a step back. After 10 years we need to do a fundamental review of NAPLAN at the national level. I am very proud to have linked up with two other states to look at this. We have already had meetings to discuss how we can go about doing this in the absence of the federal government taking a lead role in this review.

Mr HEALY: Congratulations on those results. They are spectacular. As you said, the Grattan Institute recognises them. Minister, we also recognise the importance of health and wellbeing. I notice that page 6 of the SDS references the health and wellbeing of principals and teachers. We know how hard they work. We know of their long hours. Can you elaborate on that?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government respects and strongly supports our school principals, teachers and all staff who work in schools. The work they do is critical to Queensland's future. These jobs can be challenging ones. This government is backing them 100 per cent. This year I launched the government's \$136 million Teaching Queensland's Future strategy, a five-year strategy that will ensure we have capable and confident teachers and school leaders, now and into the future. Included in this package is an \$8 million nation-building partnership between the Department of Education and Associate Professor Philip Riley of the Australian Catholic University to develop a principal health and wellbeing strategy. Professor Riley is a respected researcher in the fields of educational leadership and the wellbeing of school leaders. His research not only paints a picture of the demands and impacts of school leadership but also presents some strategies for improving the occupational health of school leaders. I have met with Professor Riley to discuss the progress of his nation-leading work with Queensland and to hear his feedback after discussions with over 500 school leaders.

It was great to hear about his work and where he is heading. This partnership with Professor Riley has been welcomed by school leaders and their representative associations and I look forward to their involvement in the development and implementation of the strategy. We will also invest \$10 million

to develop a comprehensive leadership framework for school leaders and a further \$500,000 annually to continue—this is a really good program—the existing partnership with Headspace. Everyone I talk to really welcomes that partnership, which currently provides mental health and wellbeing support to school leaders.

The initiatives included in the Teaching Queensland's Future strategy will build on a range currently in place. I have also mentioned our \$31 million for centres of learning and wellbeing, and I congratulate the department on this. I have really enjoyed opening the centres in Mount Isa and Roma, and it was fantastic to have the local member for Warrego present at the opening of the Roma centre. I intend to visit Emerald and Atherton. These centres have satellites and they are their on-the-ground support for principals, teachers and students and their parents in rural and remote parts of Queensland doing an excellent job.

I saw firsthand a virtual reading program—a program that the teachers were really enjoying—to help students who may have reading problems, particularly students with dyslexia for example. There is also an investment of more than \$100,000 for four new online positive psychology modules. This is a holistic approach to teacher wellbeing and support and I am very proud to be rolling these out. The department looks at the outcomes of what they are producing and it is great to see this money spent in those areas, particularly in regional and remote Queensland as well.

Mr HEALY: Absolutely. Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: ACU, of course a stakeholder in my electorate, is very proud to be working with you on that project, so thank you for your support.

Ms GRACE: Yes, it is really great.

Mr SAUNDERS: Good morning, Minister. It is good to have you here today and thank you for all of the good work that you are doing in the Maryborough electorate. In relation to page 3 of the SDS with reference to providing children with access to quality Early Childhood Education and Care, can you give us an outline of our government's support for remote kindergartens and schools and other measures to ensure that Queensland kids—as you know, I come from the bush—have access to a quality kindergarten program regardless of where they live in the state, particularly in regional and rural Queensland, which is something that I know you are passionate about?

Ms GRACE: It is such an important thing, so much so that the Palaszczuk government has made a priority in its Advance Queensland priorities of giving every child a great start, and this includes providing access to a quality kindergarten program. I do not think there is a primary school that I go to where teachers would not comment on the difference having a child who has attended a kindy or a playgroup of some sort—and I am sure the member for Pumicestone would agree with her experience—or that kind of access to early support and education compared to a child who has not. There is such a difference for teachers when kids enter prep or year 1, so it is such an important area. The sheer size of Queensland does present challenges in achieving this aim, particularly in those remote parts, but as a government we have tackled the issue head-on with specific targeted initiatives and a further targeted investment of \$5.5 million this year alone to better support kindergarten access in remote communities.

We have established a remote kindergarten pilot in schools and since that time this initiative has enabled 387 children to access face-to-face kindy in areas where the market is not delivering and there is no other kindergarten service. For around these 400 kiddies, they are getting that great start that will then equip them for prep and year 1. As a result of my decision to expand the number of schools last year and make the pilot an ongoing program, from 2020 we are looking at 68 state schools prescribed to deliver remote kindy. It is currently being delivered in 57 and from 1 January 2020 we will have 68 that will be delivering this remote kindy program in state schools in locations such as Camooweal, Dingo, Jericho, Laura, Thargomindah and Urandangi. For those very remote areas, we are linking with the local schools and giving kiddies access to remote kindergarten which is absolutely fantastic. This complements the existing provision of 31 kindergartens in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well, and I visited some of those. I am the ministerial champion for Napranum and the kindy service they have in Napranum—and the DG and I were there just last year—was absolutely second to none. It is a beautiful program and the children are really enjoying it.

Under the remote kindy program, kindy is delivered in composite class settings. Enrolments at each school obviously vary depending on the needs. As of 21 May 2019, 57 schools, as I said, are currently delivering the program and there are 177 children in attendance in those very remote areas. Together with the kindy programs delivered in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, there is a total of 645—around 650—children who have had access to a face-to-face kindy program that they would otherwise not have had access to, and that is giving those kids a great start.

I am delighted that this budget continues our funding for this. We know that in some cases children have to travel large distances. We also have an eKindy program happening. That is delivering kindy to about 211 children across the state. The government is further investing in the establishment of eKindy pods in 22 rural and remote locations, so they do eKindy but then there is a pod where they can all come together. There are some really great things happening. Money is being invested in this area and I look forward to rolling out the \$5.5 million in 2019-20 to advance remote kindergarten and having a place based solution for children and parents living in these very remote locations. I am very proud of our work in this area.

CHAIR: We will have one final question from the member for Maryborough and then we will go back to non-government questions.

Mr SAUNDERS: That is good news, Minister. Minister, in relation to page 6 of the SDS and its references to providing \$100 million over four years for priority state school air-conditioning projects, could the minister tell us how the additional funding will be rolled out across Queensland?

Ms GRACE: Obviously air conditioning of classrooms is not a new issue. It is one that governments of all persuasions have grappled with over the years, including the previous LNP government where—

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Ms GRACE:—they did not decide to do it—

Mr BLEIJIE: All of it.

Ms GRACE:—as at December 2014, but all of a sudden they found \$2 billion with no costings over 10 years to air-condition classrooms. More than 3,500 classrooms—

Mr BLEIJIE: Every classroom will be air-conditioned.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, you will get your turn.

Ms GRACE: I hear the interjections from the member for Kawana and it would be lovely to know eventually how they intend to fund everything that they are saying that they are going to fund.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will tell you in November 2020.

Ms GRACE: That is a little bit presumptuous, I think, to suggest that they are going to be there in November 2020. Hubris is never far when it comes to the member for Kawana. More than 3,500 classrooms and 390 state schools in the hottest and most humid part of the state already have air conditioning. Outside of the Cooler Schools zones schools make decisions in consultation with their community about air conditioning and many have installed air conditioning in classrooms using minor works allocations, which the deputy director-general says to me that they can certainly do, and we have assisted those P&Cs. For example, we visited the Petrie Terrace State School yesterday which is totally air-conditioned and part of their solar panels is to assist them with the power bills that come from air conditioning that school and they use funds allocated by the department towards that, which they are allowed to do.

The 2019-20 budget includes an increase of \$100 million over four years for priority state air-conditioning projects, bringing total funding for air conditioning, including the previous year, to \$191 million over those five years. The budget allocation will include the urgent replacement of air-conditioning units in schools in the Cooler Schools zone and other priority school air-conditioning projects to be informed by a review of state school air-conditioning needs. I know that the department is already linking with the Department of Housing and Public Works and Building and Asset Services, BAS, to assist this review in schools outside the Cooler Schools zone, and I know that you would be interested as the member for Maryborough. The member for Cairns already has air conditioning in all of his schools, but I am sure the member for Maryborough would want to know how this will be done.

We will obviously be looking at heat discomfort data, weather data and a combination of apparent temperature data and the number of school days with hottest months. There will be a process for doing this. The review will inform future investments in air conditioning classrooms outside the Cooler Schools zone and provide support to schools and the department in future investment. In addition to this, the department will continue to provide air conditioning on a case-by-case basis in response to specific issues such as medical conditions in the use of air conditioning.

The department and I are very keen to roll out this funding. We are certainly starting the work in relation to how this will be done. This is money that I will gladly spend in these areas. We are doing it properly. It is fully funded. Unlike the LNP promise, ours is fully funded. It is in the budget. It is provided for, and we will roll it out in consultation with school communities and get the best value for our dollars.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, did you have more questions for the minister?

Mr BLEIJIE: Plenty, but not enough time to do it. Director-General, are you aware of an alleged rape of [REDACTED] recently at [REDACTED] State School?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. I am aware of an incident at [REDACTED] State School.

Mr BLEIJIE: Why is it that the alleged perpetrator is still at the school?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that that is not correct.

Mr BLEIJIE: When was the perpetrator taken away from the school?

Mr Cook: Taken away from the school? I ask you to clarify that.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will rephrase. Why is the alleged perpetrator still at the school? You said that is not correct. When was the person told not to attend school?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that the particular student in question has not been at school this week. My understanding is that a suspension was issued this week—I understand in the last 24 hours.

Mr BLEIJIE: In the last 24 hours? Director-General, the alleged victim's parents rightly contacted their local member, the member for Theodore, who referred the matter to the Minister for Child Safety. On 22 July 2019, the member for Theodore received a phone call from the Minister for Child Safety's office advising that they had referred it to the Minister for Education. We are advised by the family that they had not heard anything and then on 29 July wrote to the Premier. On 30 July they received a response from the Premier, referring the matter to the Minister for Police and the Minister for Education. When was the department first made aware of the alleged rape at [REDACTED] State School?

Mr Cook: Chair, I wish to answer these questions carefully. These questions are dealing with individual students and their families.

Ms GRACE: And they are [REDACTED] years old.

Mr Cook: I do not think it is appropriate for me to discuss the detail of a particular case, as I would not normally do.

Ms GRACE: Point of order, Chair. Can I reiterate that these are grade [REDACTED]. I do not know whether the terminology of rape—

Mr BLEIJIE: I am using the terminology from the parents.

Ms GRACE: It is a very sensitive issue. I think you need to frame it in that way—using that when we are talking about vulnerable children in schools—to put it into context.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Your point is taken and it is a good point. I warn the member for Kawana, as I am sure he is more than aware, that this is a topic on which we would tread very carefully and lightly.

Mr BLEIJIE: Indeed, and I have not identified anybody.

CHAIR: Director-General, I appreciate that you would not provide details of a particular incident. Member for Kawana, I understand that you are asking for a particular date?

Mr BLEIJIE: I am after the date that the department first became aware of the alleged incident that I referred to.

Mr Cook: The awareness of the date in relation to the incident was when the school was made aware of it. I do not have that information to hand. What I can say is that both the school and staff from the relevant regional office are working closely with the families involved. School staff are required to report any incident of allegation of harm or suspected harm to relevant authorities as a matter of urgency. My understanding is that the school undertook that immediately when that information came to hand to the school. Students and families have been offered guidance, counselling and ongoing support from the school, from the guidance officers involved and from the regional office.

Mr BLEIJIE: The date, Director-General?

Mr Cook: Immediately that it happened, absolutely. Again, I am cautious around dealing with a particular incident that you are raising for a range of reasons. I do not want any issues impacting on any further information that needs to come to hand with the authorities.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, the question I am asking is because the family believe that the Department of Education has not sufficiently dealt with the issues they have raised. You say to the committee that you immediately found out about it. I am asking: when was the immediacy? What date are we talking about? When did the incident happen?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that it was in June. In regard to a budget committee, I am not sure what my references are to the committee.

Mr BLEIJIE: I seek leave to table documents. I have copies for the committee.

CHAIR: Are they related to the same matter?

Mr BLEIJIE: Correct.

CHAIR: We will have a look.

Mr BLEIJIE: The documents, I can confirm, have been deidentified.

Ms GRACE: Chair, can I raise a point of order while you are reviewing that? I think we have to really look at this—about how this is relating to the budget, whether the documents relate to the budget and, obviously, the sensitivity of those documents when dealing with grade [REDACTED] children.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, point of order.

CHAIR: Sorry, member for Kawana and Minister, again, hearing your point of order. I think it is relevant insomuch as—and the director-general has spoken to this—the processes that are used within the department to deal with these sorts of matters when they are raised. Director-General, I believe, in my view as chair, that you have spoken directly to that and appropriately to that. As for trying to raise a very specific matter—and you have given an email, thank you; I will not have the chance to read through the detail but I am very happy to do so at the break—I would like to defer consideration of the email that you sent, which outlines quite a bit of information in regard to a very specific matter, and we will deal with it thereafter. Could you move to a new line of questioning? Certainly I will advise you about the ruling when we have had time to adequately consider that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. I will await the ruling on that.

CHAIR: Absolutely.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect to the point of order raised by the minister, the SDS talks about student welfare and wellbeing. This is exactly what I am asking about.

CHAIR: I truly do not need clarification because, as I said to the minister in response to her point of order, it is relevant to the appropriation insomuch as it speaks to the processes engaged and used by the department to deliver the education services that they are required to and the director-general has spoken to that. I appreciate that you are seeking to be more specific in regard to this matter, but we will deal with that after the break.

Mr BLEIJIE: That is fine. I am happy for that document to be dealt with after the break. Minister, as I indicated to you on this issue, the Minister for Child Safety advised the member for Theodore that they had referred the matter on 22 July to your office. When did you first become aware of this matter? Was it 22 July? Why did the family not receive anything from your office or the department until after 30 July?

Ms GRACE: Obviously we receive information in relation to many incidents that happen at school. I know that the department acts immediately and, as the director-general has said, the school reported and took all necessary action in relation to this matter. We are dealing with very young children. These are [REDACTED] and in [REDACTED]. When I became aware of this—the first time that I became aware of it with the department in looking at this matter and ensuring everything had been done—I met immediately with the director-general and other senior members of my staff. Immediately the opportunity was there to ensure that this matter was thoroughly investigated, that we were providing all of the support to everybody involved.

These are [REDACTED] children. They have to be handled sensitively and delicately and the school is doing that. The area office is involved in this as well. They have instructions from me that anything that we need to do to assist this family must be done—any counselling services, any assistance, any outside help—and they responded to me that already those issues have been looked at in this very sensitive and delicate situation. I met with them immediately that I became aware of it. I became aware of it on Tuesday and I met on Tuesday afternoon.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, the Tuesday being—

Ms GRACE: 30 July.

Mr BLEIJIE: The Minister for Child Safety said that she referred it to you on 22 July. Why did your office not do anything for eight days?

Ms GRACE: My understanding is that this was referred directly to the Department of Education and then from the education department to my office is my understanding, although I can check that for you. It was handled immediately by the department. When the referral came and it was drawn to my attention I acted immediately on the day that I was notified, straight away. I do not even think time went past where this was not handled absolutely immediately for me to make sure that every t was crossed and every i was dotted as far as any support and investigation into this matter. Remember, member for Kawana, we are talking about children who are [REDACTED] so, please, sensitivity around those children needs to be paramount. Their welfare and wellbeing is paramount in my mind as, too, of course, are the family, the carers and the teachers who are facing this very difficult situation.

Mr BLEIJIE: I do have them in my mind. The family came to us because they believed the education department did nothing for a period of over two weeks and they heard nothing.

Ms GRACE: I think the terminology 'do nothing' is a little bit combative.

CHAIR: It is, yes.

Ms GRACE: That is not the information that has been given to me and I think it is an insult to the department, the teachers—

Mr BLEIJIE: The family believe the department's response was inadequate.

Ms GRACE: I understand and I feel for the family but, quite clearly, to suggest, after how the director-general answered this question and the work that has been done—remember these are minors. I think you have to be 10 years old for the police to even take action. These are [REDACTED].

Mr BLEIJIE: They are [REDACTED], but these are serious allegations.

Ms GRACE: These are very serious and I feel for the family.

CHAIR: Minister and member for Kawana, I am going to call the hearing to order and ask you to follow a new line of questioning. I have already indicated that I would like to seek advice from the Clerk, or whomever is appropriate, in regard to this matter to protect the family and children. You have already given enough information that could assist in identifying them and I think that that is inappropriate. I appreciate that the minister and director-general have been very circumspect in that regard, as I appreciate you are raising a matter that was brought to you, but for safety sake could you please pursue a new line of questioning until I can seek that advice.

Mr BLEIJIE: Before I proceed, the minister said she is happy to look into those dates so I would like the minister to take that on notice in terms of when she was told.

Ms GRACE: I think I have given you the dates. I am not sure what dates you are referring to.

CHAIR: I do not think the minister made any such comment.

Mr BLEIJIE: The date the child safety minister referred it to your office.

CHAIR: I have indicated twice, I will not indicate a third time, that we are moving on. I will seek advice. Minister, if I have misheard you—

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, point of order.

CHAIR: I am giving a ruling. I do not interrupt you. Minister, was I wrong? Did you say you were taking something on notice? I do not recall that.

Ms GRACE: If the member for Kawana wants me to clarify some dates I am happy to do that.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order. I require your guidance as to how these questions offend the standing orders.

CHAIR: I am happy to give you guidance. What I have indicated is that I am seeking guidance to ensure that what you have tabled and are seeking to distribute and then ask more questions on is okay, because as we table documents obviously they then become public. I will be doing that at the break as I am rightfully able to do and then will advise you accordingly thereafter. You have until approximately 25 past 10 to ask any questions. Could you move to a new line of questioning.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-general, I refer to a Facebook post from Labor member for Mansfield—

CHAIR: Please do not use props. Just ask the question. That is the second prop you have used.

Mr BLEIJIE: I refer to the Facebook post from the member for Mansfield where she said her constituents had expressed alarm at the recent and poorly publicised changes to the catchment area of the Mansfield State High School and these changes are being made without community consultation. Why did the Labor member have to go public on this issue?

Mr Cook: I seek clarification. You are asking for an opinion?

Mr BLEIJIE: Why would the member have gone public on this issue? Was it that the department did not consult her or that she did not believe the minister was capable of responding to these issues?

CHAIR: The only relevant element of that question is in regard to consultation, which would be of a factual nature. The rest asks for an opinion which you know is out of order. Do you wish to make any comment in relation to consultation?

Mr Cook: I am aware of the case you are referring to. Our normal practice every year is to review catchment boundaries. We do that as a result of changes in terms of road management, in terms of streets, in terms of demographics, in terms of population. My understanding is that there was a proposed change made for Mansfield. That change was discussed with the school and the community. There has been some alteration I think to that change and it remains this year and further consultation will continue with the community.

Mr BLEIJIE: Has the member been consulted with now in terms of responding to her issue that she raised publicly?

Mr Cook: The member is always consulted with, thank you for the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Sorry, the member?

Mr Cook: Local members are always consulted with by the department in relation to these issues.

Mr BLEIJIE: But the member for Mansfield said she was not consulted. Was she consulted? I will ask it more directly: when was the member for Mansfield advised by the education department of the changes to the catchment for Mansfield State High School?

Mr Cook: I will take that on notice and get that to you later today.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

Ms GRACE: I am happy to respond to it. My understanding is that there are reviews made—

CHAIR: Minister, sorry, I apologise. I know you would have value to add. As the member has asked the director-general, it is up to the director-general to answer, but it is for you to decide whether you will take that on notice as the director-general has indicated.

Ms GRACE: Can I clarify? Often these things get a bit muddy. Can you clarify exactly what you want to me to accept to be taken on notice?

Mr BLEIJIE: I think the director-general knew exactly what I was asking.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, the minister has sought clarification as the only person here who can take something on notice. Could you please just clarify what she is to take on notice?

Ms GRACE: What exactly is it that you want us to take on notice?

Mr BLEIJIE: I want it taken on notice the date the member for Mansfield was consulted with respect to the changes in the catchment area for the Mansfield State High School.

Ms GRACE: We will take that on notice.

CHAIR: I note that the member for Maiwar has joined us.

Mr BLEIJIE: I refer to page 123 of Budget Paper No. 4 in relation to the \$100 million commitment over four years for air conditioning. I note the minister in response to question on notice No. 14 failed to respond directly to a few of the issues that we raised. How many schools in Queensland do not have air conditioning at the moment?

Mr Cook: More than 3½ thousand classrooms in 390 state schools have air conditioning installed as part of the Cooler Schools Zone program. As you would be aware, because the minister indicated in her earlier response, schools, however, may choose to air-condition using their own resourcing. Those schools are not required to provide information to the department about the number of classrooms that they have actually air-conditioned. Therefore, as was indicated a number of times on various questions on notice—public information—schools are not required to provide that information to the department.

What I can tell you, as the minister indicated, is there is an additional \$100 million over four years from 2019-20—\$25 million per year—for priority state school air conditioning projects including urgent replacement of units in the Cooler Schools Zone and other air-conditioning projects outside Cooler School Zones as well.

Schools across Queensland, as I indicated, many of them change from a day-to-day basis in terms of air conditioning. All schools I have attended so far in the time I have been here—I think every one of those schools—has had some form of air conditioning, which is either through the Cooler Schools Zone program or through what schools themselves have funded.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect to the \$100 million commitment the government has made over the forward estimates, how many of these are replacement units as opposed to brand new units?

Mr Cook: As I indicated previously, \$100 million over four years from 2019-20 for priority state school air conditioning projects, including urgent replacement of units in the Cooler Schools Zone and other priority air conditioning projects outside the Cooler Schools Zone. There is an investment of \$191 million, which I think is referred to in the SDS, over five years: \$23 million of that money will be spent on air conditioning in Queensland state schools, which is an increase from \$21 million: \$18 million will be for upgrades and replacements; and \$5 million will be for maintenance. There will be \$42 million on air conditioning in Queensland state schools in 2019-20: \$12 million of that original funding will be for replacing of units in the Cooler Schools Zones; \$5 million will be for funding for maintenance of air-conditioning systems in the Cooler Schools Zone and \$25 million additional funding for priority state school air conditioning projects in the Cooler Schools Zone and other priority air-conditioning projects.

As the minister indicated earlier, we are currently working with the Department of Housing and Public Works to assist with the review of air-conditioning installations across Queensland state schools outside the Cooler Schools Zone. When we have that data we will then be in a position to make decisions about the mix between replacements in the existing Cooler Schools Zone and new air-conditioning units outside that zone. We will do that when that data is available. That data will be available later this year.

Mr BLEIJIE: Page 123 of Budget Paper No. 4 also refers to the review to be undertaken, which you have just mentioned. Who is doing the review and when will it be finalised?

Mr Cook: I think we have answered that question, with respect. We talked about the Department of Housing and Public Works Building and Asset Services working with us in regard to the review of air-conditioning installations across Queensland state schools outside the Cooler Schools Zone.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is the government department, the Department of Housing and Public Works; it is not an external provider?

Mr Cook: That is right. We are working with Building and Asset Services as part of that process.

Mrs STUCKEY: Director-General, on behalf of parents and teachers I have previously asked the minister about acquiring additional land for school parking at Tallebudgera State School. This is a major problem and it is worsening. The minister stated that the department has undertaken to investigate it and noted what we already knew about its features. How long will this investigation take? How much would it cost to purchase this parcel of land?

Mr Cook: Mr Hunt might be able to give us an update about the specific school in question. In terms of time, the timing depends on the land and it depends on the issues in relation to the land. Those are the things that will have to be considered. Road management would have to be considered as part of that process as well.

Mrs STUCKEY: It is an issue that has been raised over several years. I am sure people are very familiar with the fact that it is a piece of Energex land. The conditions are worsening. If possible, I would like to know roughly how much it would cost.

Mr Hunt: Members of the committee would understand that school parking arrangements are often a point of contention, particularly in the hour before school and the hour after school. That presents a number of challenges in communities right across the state. Wherever possible, we work with local councils to negotiate the parking arrangements and to have in place safe transport arrangements for students of the school. In this particular case, we are continuing to work with those local authorities with regard to the parcel of land in question. I cannot give you a timeline at the present time. I am not sure we are in a position where we can give you an evaluation. I can assure you that we will continue to work with the school to seek an appropriate solution.

Mrs STUCKEY: I ask that you also include the local member.

Mr Hunt: Certainly. I look forward to it.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. I have not been to date.

Ms GRACE: Member, as an aside, you would not have any parking problems like I have in my inner-city electorate.

Mrs STUCKEY: I welcome you to visit, Minister.

Ms GRACE: And you are welcome anytime.

Mrs STUCKEY: That is why I live on the Gold Coast. My next question relates to school budgets and funding, and page 5 of the SDS, service area highlights. I refer to the teacher sick leave scheme, the TRS. Teachers receive 10 sick days per year, high schools only receive 1.9 days of funding per teacher per year, I am told, and schools had to wait six months for the 2018 sick leave overruns to be reimbursed. Minister, can you guarantee that this leave will be fully funded in 2019?

Ms GRACE: I think it might be best to refer to the deputy director-general, Jeff Hunt. These are operational matters. The manner in which they are funded is done there. I do not deal day to day in those operational matters. If you do not mind, I think Mr Jeff Hunt would probably be better equipped to answer the question.

Mr Hunt: The Teacher Relief Scheme, TRS, has been in place for many years. I have been involved in the department for over 30 years and the TRS scheme has been there for the whole time. In high schools in particular, an allocation is made each year based on the level of staffing that schools are allocated on the back of their day 8 enrolments. High schools have a particular staffing formula that includes internal relief that reduces the need for external teachers to come in and replace teachers on classes. There is already an allocation within their staffing allocation on the back of day 8 staffing allocations.

With regard to the sick leave overruns, there is a safety net scheme. If schools are in financial distress and where particular numbers of teachers have had in excess of the allocation of TRS usage required in that particular year, schools may make application for TRS safety net funding. That is assessed by the department in terms of the full school budget and looks at things such as underruns in other parts of their staffing operations, their bank account balances and the like. The members of the committee would expect that the department is judicious in its assessment of those applications. The assessment of those applications, having done them many years ago, is quite complex in looking at the numbers of transactions happening in particularly large high schools, which I imagine you might be asking about on the Gold Coast. As I say, we do that judiciously to make sure that the payments we are making are warranted and are then paid in a timely manner.

I can assure you that high schools have some significant bank account balances. I do not think there is any high school on the Gold Coast that is in financial distress. I do not imagine the timing of that payment would have caused any distress at a local level financially.

Mrs STUCKEY: In essence, there should not be an issue with 2019?

Mr Hunt: No.

Mrs STUCKEY: I know that my high schools are fairly high capacity and that there are also large building works going on.

Mr Hunt: I think what you might be asking about in regard to this is not necessarily the TRS but what we call credits and usage, where schools have not needed or not taken their full staffing allocation and have sought to cash out some of that staffing allocation to put to other programs. In those particular circumstances, again, the same sorts of processes are at play to make sure that schools are only claiming what they are entitled to, so that we can ensure the staffing allocations are appropriate and just right across every school.

Mrs STUCKEY: We would not like to see a detriment to other programs in a school as a result of that, would we?

Mr Hunt: I can assure you that high schools right across the state are not in financial distress. We continue to work with them and make sure we make those payments as quickly as we possibly can.

Ms GRACE: Deputy Chair, if there are any issues that you would like to raise specifically, I am more than happy to pass them on to the deputy director-general for urgent consideration. However, I can assure you that the budget fully accommodates what we have done for many years to ensure that schools get the teachers and the staff they require.

CHAIR: We will move to government questions. Minister, in relation to page 17 of the SDS and its reference to enterprise bargaining outcomes, for the benefit of the committee can you please outline the outcome of those successful negotiations related to Queensland state school teachers?

Ms GRACE: It is really important to acknowledge that our teachers do a tremendous job each day helping to shape Queensland children into the global citizens of tomorrow. That is a big phrase, but we really turn out students who are the global citizens of the future. The Palaszczuk government backs

our teachers 100 per cent. We want them to have secure, rewarding and meaningful careers in the Queensland state education system. I am pleased that the government and the Queensland Teachers Union have reached in-principle agreement on the new pay deal for the state's educators. It is a three-year agreement that will provide Queensland teachers with some of the best pay and conditions in Australia. We were able to reach the deal before the expiry of the previous agreement. It shows a shared desire for us to make sure that we meet the needs of our teaching profession while at the same time make sure that we address the issues that have been raised.

As I said, the agreement delivers a number of benefits to our teachers including annual pay increases in line with our wages policy of 2.5 per cent. There is a one-off sign-on bonus, which is not unusual, of \$1,250. There are improved conditions for parental leave for primary care givers and improved gender pay equity for part-time teachers, the overwhelming majority of whom are working women. Often a part-time worker needed to work the equivalent of full-time hours to progress through the stream. Now they will get pro rata pay based on an annual increment on a pro rata of the hours they work. That is a significant step in the right direction to address a predominantly female occupation.

We are simplifying and enhancing the classification and progression process for senior teachers and experienced senior teachers. We have new classifications there. We are boosting incentives for beginning teachers in rural or remote locations by providing them with a one-off \$1,000 payment on commencement in the position, which is available from the start of the 2020 school year. There is a new classification structure for school leaders such as principals and deputy principals. This is a big exercise under the PPCR, the Promotional Positions Classification Review. It was something that in the last agreement we worked towards for this agreement. I am pleased to say that that has now been completed, and it acknowledges the fine work that our leaders do in schools every day.

I also acknowledge the issue of workload, which is a concern. Under the agreement, primary and special school teachers in their first year will receive an additional 60 minutes of non-contact time. Those working in secondary schools will gain an additional 70 minutes.

There are a number of additional non-contact time provisions which will come into effect during the course of the agreement. As part of the in principle agreement a workload advisory council will be introduced and set up. They will look at issues as they come to light rather than wait to the end of the three years. As issues come forward we will look at those to see whether there needs to be system changes, changes in the way jobs are done or changes in terms of the allocation of staff. All of those things could obviously be looked at as part of this workload advisory council.

These negotiations have seen major gains for our state school teaching workforce and will give our system even greater strength over the three years of the agreement. I am looking forward to hearing the outcome of the ballot. I understand that the QTU is in balloting at the moment and that it closes tomorrow. I am looking forward to hearing the outcome of that. The government will obviously progress to its voting system after that time.

Other states are struggling with this issue, particularly Tasmania, South Australia and, as I understand, Western Australia. We have been able to respond efficiently and effectively to deliver great outcomes for teachers and leaders in our schools right throughout Queensland.

CHAIR: They are worth every cent.

Ms GRACE: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Minister, in relation to page 6 of your SDS and its reference to the Early Childhood Development Program, can you please advise what the government is doing to support students with a disability, including the contribution of funding for the Early Childhood Development Program which assist preschool aged children with impairments to make a positive transition to schooling?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government has a proven track record of supporting school students with a disability. I am proud that this budget continues that support. The budget includes a four-year \$136.2 million funding boost to provide additional teachers and teacher aides in state school special education services across Queensland.

The number of students with a disability enrolled in Queensland schools is growing. I remember opening a new school extension—a beautiful new building—on the Sunshine Coast. One family there came from northern New South Wales. They had moved to Queensland and they said that the provision of education for their daughter at that special school on the Sunshine Coast was second to none and absolutely amazing. They were beaming about the manner in which their daughter was growing because of the education our special schools deliver every single day. I take my hat off to those teachers and teacher aides who work in this area and do a wonderful job. That is one example of many.

We are investing in facilities in special schools. The quality of education is fantastic. We are looking forward to employing an additional 150 teachers and 90 teacher aides next year alone in order to give our students the special support they need. The numbers are increasing greater than in the mainstream. We will have a four per cent increase over the next five years compared with around 1.5 per cent in the mainstream. There is a growth in that area.

The budget includes facilities such as a new special school to open in 2021 at Palmview on the Sunshine Coast and completion of construction of a new secondary special school at Caboolture, opening in term 1 of 2020. I was very proud to visit with the local member, Minister Mark Ryan, a couple of weeks ago to see the progress of that school. It will be state-of-the-art for its students. The school will welcome up to 160 year 7 to 12 students in term 1 of 2020. It will be a game changer for the Caboolture community. Well done there.

One of the budget highlights is \$63.6 million over four years to continue the successful ECDP across Queensland. I know many parents are very happy with that announcement. There were issues in relation to how the NDIS would interplay with the service. This service is honestly second to none. You could not build that service again to what is delivered in this state should it ever be lost.

The government made a very proud decision that over the forward estimates we would continue that funding. ECDPs in the 102 areas in which they are delivered will continue. Currently around 1,770 children are registered. The 102 ECDPs will remain open for registration. I have seen firsthand the quality work they do in giving zero to five-years-old a great start in life and getting them ready to attend whatever school they decide to go to.

It is wonderful to see that as well this year we are providing \$600,000 in ECDP Great Start Grants to provide professional development and further support in that area. This is a very proud moment. When visiting the Vincent State School ECDP in Townsville the parents, teacher and others at that centre were so happy. It was great to be there with Minister O'Rourke, the member for Mundingburra, and see how relieved they were. To see the learning environment and how the teachers interact with these students was wonderful. It is a great program. I congratulate everybody involved in ECDPs right throughout Queensland. I am very proud that this budget locks in the funding for them to remain.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, in relation to page 27 of the department's SDS and its reference to tertiary entrance, can you advise on the investment this government has made to ensure a positive transition to the senior assessment and tertiary entrance system—the biggest reform to senior secondary education in over 20 years in this state?

Ms GRACE: It is one of the biggest reforms in education in 20 to 30 years. The Palaszczuk government is determined to ensure that all Queensland kids get the best possible education. As part of this determination we have implemented a new assessment and tertiary entrance system for senior school students and investment of \$192.4 million over four years for the development of the new state system and its ongoing delivery.

The biggest change associated with the new state system is replacement of the OP, the overall position, score with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank, ATAR, from 2020. The ATAR is a standard measure of overall school achievement used in all other Australian states and territories. In effect, we are now joining the rest of the nation. It is a rank indicating a student's position overall relative to other students. Instead of an OP, which is one to 25, the ATAR will be expressed on a scale of 99.95 being the highest to zero, with increments of 0.05—five basis points.

For example, a student who would be eligible for an OP 1 would potentially receive an ATAR of between 98.85 and 99.95. An OP 10 is roughly equivalent to an ATAR of 78.00. The government recognises that successful transition to the new state system will require more than just updating IT systems and developing new processes. Teachers have been supported. I commend the QCAA and CEO, Chris Rider, who is happy to assist during estimates should it be required, on the excellent job they have done in preparing our teachers and schools.

As part of professional development, the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority, QCAA, has provided over 670 face-to-face workshops throughout Queensland. I visited a couple of those. It has also provided online professional learning opportunities to prepare over 21,500 teachers and curriculum leaders for the new system. The department is providing a range of additional resources to support schools, including implementation plans, curriculum resources and resources to support reporting in the new system. Scaled subject data will not be available until 2020 when the first Queensland students qualify for an ATAR in the new system.

Everywhere I have travelled with director-general we have asked about the process. The vast majority of teachers are either satisfied or very satisfied with their preparation to date. This is an enormous change. I am sure that there will be some teething problems, but the QCAA right on it.

The task force is still meeting. I have met with them to iron out any further issues in relation to this. The task force is made up of a number of stakeholders across all schools. It is very well represented. Any issues raised are being addressed. We are hoping for a smooth transition for those students who have started their course in year 11 this year, but obviously will be the first to be given ATAR scores next year.

CHAIR: I would have moved to the member for Maryborough for another question. Instead, I would like to take the committee into a private hearing for five minutes to consider the matter that I ruled out earlier, to either confirm or change that ruling, and then we will move into the break. I will advise of the outcome when we return from the morning break at 11 am.

Proceedings suspended from 10.39 am to 11.06 am.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing will now resume. I apologise for being a few minutes late. As I indicated before the break, the committee met in private session to consider the tabling of a document. To advise the member for Kawana, who sought to table that document, and those present, the committee has resolved not to grant leave for the document to be tabled as there were concerns that it might identify either children under a protection order or a potential legal process, so we will not be accepting the tabling of that document.

I remind members that questions need to be relevant to the appropriations before us and tread particularly carefully in regard to standing order 35, which is the subject of what we are referring to here, and that is identifying children and those who may be subject to the Youth Justice Act et cetera. I now move to non-government questions. I believe that I am again inviting the member for Kawana to ask questions.

Mr BLEIJIE: Before I proceed to the question, Madam Chair, for the benefit of the committee, of which I am a visiting member today, I would like for you to confirm to the committee whether that vote for me not to table those documents was a unanimous vote of the committee or a majority.

CHAIR: It is a private proceeding of the committee and it is confidential.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Director-General, I refer to page 5 of the SDS with respect to sources of revenue. Commonwealth revenue is noted at \$1,846,123,000. Do you see that reference there on page 5 under 'Sources of revenue'? The Commonwealth revenue in this budget is \$1,846,123,000. Director-General, can you confirm what the Commonwealth revenue was last year compared to this year?

Mr Cook: The advice I have is that the Commonwealth funding for state school programs in 2018-19 was \$1.699 billion.

Mr BLEIJIE: So there has been an increase in Commonwealth revenue in this year's budget?

Mr Cook: That is correct, as there has been with state revenue as well.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, can you please advise the policy for political campaigns and union campaigns on school sites, on fences? Can you advise what the policy is for Education Queensland?

Mr Cook: The policy that you would be referring to would be the Queensland Government Advertising and Marketing Communication Code of Conduct.

Mr BLEIJIE: How are complaints handled, Director-General? For instance, there has been a Fair Funding Now! campaign by the Australian Education Union and the Queensland Teachers' Union. There are signs plastered all over the assets of the Department of Education. For instance, Clontarf Beach State School has the Fair Funding Now! campaign. We have had situations where the Fair Funding Now! campaign has been sent home in school homework. Redcliffe State High School posted about the Fair Funding Now! campaign on their Facebook site.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, this is the third time I have mentioned the use of props. Please ask your question without the use of props.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, why is it that the Queensland Teachers' Union can run political campaigns on the assets of state schools?

Mr Cook: I understand that the signs in question occur in many schools across Australia. In relation to the policy—

Ms GRACE: They are in New South Wales as well.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, we are talking about Queensland schools here.

Ms GRACE: They are right around the country, and you know it.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Director-General.

Ms GRACE: They are right around the country.

CHAIR: Director-General.

Mr Cook: In relation to the policy, campaigns must not use political argument or mention the party and the government by name. They must not be party political. In relation to those signs in question, the principals are asked to make a decision about whether they are party political. The principal makes that decision. If the principal needs advice, they consult with their regional office. If the regional office needs advice, they consult with the central office.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, are you aware that the website of the Fair Funding Now! campaign, which many of the signs refer parents to and which is run by the unions, talks negatively about Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government? It talks about funding cuts federally. You have confirmed, Director-General, that funding from the federal government to your department has increased in this year's budget. How can Education Queensland allow signs that are clearly political signs to be on their assets? There were interjections before by the minister that this is happening all around Australia. That does not make it right and it does not make it right in Queensland.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, are you asking a question or making a statement?

Mr BLEIJIE: There is context to the question to better inform the director-general what is happening—

CHAIR: Director-General, do you have enough context to answer the question?

Ms GRACE: I have a point of order. There is an imputation that this is deemed as political advertising. There has been no suggestion that has been deemed to be the case. That is a clear imputation.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am asking the director-general the questions.

Ms GRACE: I am raising a point of order.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, the minister or anyone may raise a point of order. I take the point of order on board. As well as making a statement, you are obviously working as many imputations into the long statement and question as you can. I believe that you did put a question at the beginning of the statement. Director-General, do you need the question restated or are you happy to answer?

Mr Cook: I am fine, thank you, Chair. The point made by me in relation to being aware that these signs also operate in other jurisdictions is that other jurisdictions would also have policies similar to us in relation to being apolitical in nature. In terms of the particular sign, I am not aware there is a website reference for that sign. I am not aware that the sign itself references a website. I stand corrected, but I am not aware of that. The test for principals of schools and school communities is in relation to the policy in relation to the reference to particular political parties.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, the Fair Funding Now! campaign is a political campaign. The Fair Funding Now! campaign website talks negatively about the federal government. How is it that the education department does not deem that to be a political campaign in our Queensland schools?

Mr Cook: Principals make the decision in relation to the policy. The policy talks about party political signs, and I do not believe that the signs have party political signs on them.

Mr BLEIJIE: Are you aware that in 2016 the former director-general of education dealt with a similar matter, the Gonski signs, which did not mention party political branding or union advertising? Are you aware that in October 2016 your predecessor wrote to all principals demanding that the Gonski signs be taken down from school gates?

CHAIR: The question is out of order. It has nothing to do with the current appropriation before the committee.

Mr BLEIJIE: Has the policy changed from 2016, when the former director-general wrote to all schools—

CHAIR: Member for Kawana—

Mr BLEIJIE: Obviously there is a policy change. I do not know how we can go from—

CHAIR: The question is, as I understand it, Director-General: has there been a policy change?

Mr Cook: My understanding is there has been no policy change.

Mr BLEIJIE: For the benefit of this committee, Director-General, will you investigate the Fair Funding Now! campaign? If the conclusion of the investigation is that there is in fact political—

CHAIR: It is not within the purview of the appropriation hearing, member for Kawana.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, the director-general can direct schools to take political advertising off fences.

CHAIR: Indeed, he can. How is your question relevant to the appropriation that we are here to hear about?

Ms GRACE: It is not political advertising on fences!

CHAIR: How are the director-general's investigations relevant?

Mr BLEIJIE: I am asking why the director-general will not take the signs down off school fences.

Ms GRACE: Because it is not political advertising; that is why!

CHAIR: I think the director-general has answered that three times.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect, Minister, I am asking the director-general these questions.

Ms GRACE: And I am answering your question.

Mr BLEIJIE: I do not need you to answer my questions, Minister; I am asking the director-general.

CHAIR: Order! Order! Director-General, do you have anything to add? I believe the question has been asked three times and I believe you have answered. Do you feel the question has been answered? Is there anything you wish to add?

Mr Cook: All principals in our schools are aware of the policy. The policy is clear in relation to party political advertising. I do not believe the Fair Funding Now! campaign mentions particular political parties on it. I make no comment about what any predecessor of mine has made decisions on, as I would not in any space they have made a decision on. I am comfortable with the position in relation to principals, regional directors and people in my department making decisions that align with government policy.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, with respect to the government's Advancing Clear Energy Schools initiative, can you please advise how many projects were delivered as part of that initiative in the 2018-19 period?

Mr Cook: As the minister indicated earlier today when she made a statement in relation to ACES and as you are aware, the process relates to the solar panels on roofs program. Up to 800 state schools across Queensland will be able to participate in this particular program.

In relation to the procurement of that program, I asked for additional work to be undertaken, particularly in relation to safety, on the basis of reports being made available in the *Australian* at the time around some of the issues and some of the cautions that we have around solar panels on roofs. I asked for the extension of the tendering process, if you like, to enable us to ensure that we had safety issues dealt with and that we looked at the safety records of tenderers who might apply for these particular jobs to ensure that the installation of these panels on our roofs would be done in as safe a way as possible. As a result of that, up to June this year there were no panels installed. Since the end of June my understanding is that there are 20 schools where panels have been installed.

Mr BLEIJIE: The budget for the 2018-19 period, as I understand it, Director-General was \$47 million, yet am I correct that only \$1 million out of \$47 million was actually spent? Why was there a massive underinvestment in this program?

Mr Cook: I believe I have just answered the question. It was \$3 million that was spent in the last financial year. The reason for the shift in time lines was so that I could be assured that all safety issues had been considered in the installation of those panels. Those safety issues involved extensive checking of records of any tenderers to ensure their safety records were intact. That has now been completed. As a result of that we now have 61 assessments being undertaken across schools, and we have 20 schools where panels have been installed.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, do you take responsibility for the spectacular failure in delivering this program?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, that is totally out of order. You have time for one more question. If you would like to ask one that is within the standing orders please do, or we will move to government questions.

Ms GRACE: I am happy to answer.

CHAIR: There you go, member for Kawana, the minister said she is happy to answer.

Ms GRACE: I do not think there is any spectacular—

Mr BLEIJIE: Failure?

Ms GRACE:—error, failure or whatever the member for Kawana wants to say. This is a fantastic program. It was always to be delivered over the four-year period. The department rightly spent time to make sure we went through the contractors to ensure they are safe, they can deliver and they can give schools the efficiency advice they require. I am sure that all the crossbenchers would be well aware, especially the member for Maiwar, that they can save on their electricity costs and contribute to the carbon footprint. It has been an excellent program—

Mr BLEIJIE: No-one has solar yet. There are none on the roof.

Ms GRACE: There are 20 of them that have solar that have them on the roof, plus 61, and they will be met on time and on budget, member for Kawana. They will be delivered in a safe manner. They look fantastic. I suggest you go and have a look at the schools.

Mr BLEIJIE: You could buy a solar panel at Aldi and safely put it up.

Ms GRACE: They are having a fantastic implementation period. I understand also the department got quite a few contractors—more than what was expected. There were quite a large number that they needed to go through. Quite clearly, the department do not rush this. They want to make sure the contractors can deliver the results and deliver them in a safe manner. They take a very proactive course in assessing these. The director-general wanted a rigorous assessment on health and safety standards and the ability to deliver real outcomes for these schools, and that is exactly what we are getting.

We are in line with our budget requirements. We will spend those funds this year on the over 200 schools that will get them. Phase 2 will have them the following year and completed within the time frame that we set as a government. Even though they may have taken a little bit longer, the commitment was for three years to give the contractors. I do not think there is any spectacular failure on any part. That is an absolutely ridiculous imputation.

Mr BLEIJIE: No. I said 'your part'.

Ms GRACE: I do not give out contracts. This is all done independent to me, member for Kawana. I do not involve myself in those areas.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is your policy.

Ms GRACE: I have full faith in the department rolling out this program and implementing a very successful Advancing Clean Energy Schools Program in our schools. There are 20 with panels already, there have been 61 schools audited and there will be 200 finished within this year. We are very much on track and doing very well.

CHAIR: We will now go to government questions.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, in relation to the SDS and its reference to the \$235 million four-year Renewing Our Schools program, could you provide an update on progress for the 17 identified schools, including the marvellous Maryborough High in my electorate which will be enhanced and upgraded, as well as any other schools that will benefit from this program? I thank you, Minister, for the great performing arts hall.

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for Maryborough for the question. I know just how keenly he has been working with the principal and the staff of the department to achieve the best possible outcome for Maryborough High from this program. This school will receive four projects under Renewing Our Schools, including two new buildings including a special ed. unit, the refurbishment of learning and open spaces and connectivity between campuses, which I know is particularly dear to the member for Maryborough's heart for the safety of the students. It is great to see that connectivity will be part of this. It is really revolutionising Maryborough State High School. By the end of it, it will be a wonderful state high school as you said, as it is today.

I also acknowledge other schools in the electorates of those members present involving this program. Cairns State High School will receive a new multipurpose hall and refurbishment of the teaching block to create a special ed. teaching space. That is very good news. In Maiwar, Indooroopilly State High School is receiving a new multipurpose hall and drop-off zone.

The \$235 million Renewing Our Schools program was announced in 2017 as part of the Building Better Schools policy. The investment will deliver both new and upgraded modern learning facilities over four years from 2018-19 to improve teaching and learning facilities and create opportunities for stronger engagement in school communities. Over recent months the department has been working with the 17 identified schools in the first phase. For these schools, this will be the most significant benefit they have seen in decades. I do not want to go through all of them, but they are spread right across electorates—from Heatley Secondary College to Proserpine, Sarina, Springwood, Toowoomba and the tropical north. It really is an excellent program.

We are working with those communities, as we have with the member for Maryborough and that school community, on the best way they would like to see these funds spent and the best outcome we can get for those schools. It is great to have their input. Like I said, they will deliver a broad range. They will support about 682 full-time jobs, which has been previously identified. I am also happy that, because we have worked with those schools, we know what we are looking at spending now. There is additional funding in Murgon State High School. The director-general and I visited Murgon and they were desperate for a new hall—and this is in an opposition member's electorate—and it will be funded under this program as well. We visited in November last year, I think, and we identified the need for that hall, and we are using some of this funding now for that new hall.

Other schools that will benefit include: Woodford State School, which is receiving a million dollars to upgrade their STEM facilities; Lawnton State School, which is desperate for a new hall and they will be getting that; and Toowoomba East State School, which is getting replacement amenity facilities. We are really proud to be investing this money in these older schools. We are enhancing them and giving them the facilities they need. The schools have been welcoming them. We have been working with them. Some budgets have gone up and some have been adjusted. As Mr Jeff Hunt will tell you, every school always wants to add more. It is an issue of trying to work out the best way we can spend the funds so we can get the best outcomes for the students. I think we have worked very well with those schools to identify their needs and we will be rolling out those programs over the forward estimates. It is a great program. I am glad to see it being delivered in so many schools right throughout the state. In particular, we have added some new schools and we have identified their needs as well.

Mr HEALY: I thank the minister. I want to say that the principal of the Cairns State High School and I had a look at the plans the other day. The children are excited, as are the parents—everybody. It is fantastic. I do feel compelled to make the comment, in light of some of the questions this morning, that I did put out a press release and I did not put you in it. I wonder if I will come under the same scrutiny as the Deputy Premier.

Moving along, in the Service Delivery Statements there is a reference to providing children with access to quality early childhood education and care. Could you outline the government's support for universal access to kindergarten the year before school? More importantly, can you outline any developments at the national level that could put this at risk?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for Cairns. I would not doubt that you, as the wonderful member for Cairns, would have put out a press release about the wonderful funding your school was getting in your electorate. I do not mind at all that I was not mentioned in that statement to the media.

Mr HEALY: Thank you. I can rest easy.

Ms GRACE: When it comes to the Palaszczuk government committing to give all kids a great start, as I have said, there is universal access to high-quality kindergarten for all Queensland children in the year before school. We are now talking about the year before school. This is universal access to kindergarten, regardless of their circumstances or where they live. We know that quality kindergarten helps children to develop confidence, resilience, problem solving, language and communication skills so they can have that great start. What a difference it makes when they do enter prep after that. I must talk about the success of prep, which we have not mentioned. What a wonderful Labor initiative, and it has been wonderfully received by parents. Prep is a fantastic additional year to schooling in this state and is producing remarkable outcomes for students.

We are focused on ensuring Queensland children can access kindergarten wherever they live—from Coolangatta to Coen, Maleny to Mackay, Birdsville to Brisbane. We are funding this, but what is really excellent are the percentage increases over the last decade since we have concentrated on this area. In 2009, I believe 29 per cent of kids attended kindergarten in the year before school. Now we have 95 per cent of children attending kindergarten. In a decade we have increased that from 29 per cent to 95 per cent. In Indigenous communities we have had just as much increase. I believe it was around 26 per cent and now I think we are around 94 per cent. That is an incredible widening of the gap in relation to that.

There are great programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Our total investment for kindergarten is \$185.7 million over the next two financial years. There are 68 remote communities that will have remote kindy, e-kindergarten and pilot programs to increase participation for refugee and asylum seeker children. There are kindergarten inclusion support schemes and statewide marketing and communication strategies, such as the Elders as Storytellers for these young children and Deadly Kindies which will promote and encourage participation in early learning. These are great programs but we cannot do it alone.

The trouble is that for the last large number of years since the federal government have been in power we have had one-year extensions to funding. The industry and the stakeholders who deliver a lot of kindy programs are very frustrated. It is very hard for them to plan long term. This is now the sixth short-term one-year funding extension coming from the federal government in an area that is so important to give every child a great start. It is amazing that the federal government can lock in funding for a series of things, but education in the early years is something the federal government have not been able to commit to since they were elected. We are talking about the sixth one-year funding extension in a row since the LNP have been in government, since 2013.

This is no way to run a very crucial part of the program that gives every child a great start. As I have said, in all my discussions with Goodstart, C&K and Lady Gowrie, all of them expressed frustration at the lack of long-term funding not only for their staff—and we need quality teachers in this area. If these teachers see that this is not being funded long term, would they become a teacher in early childhood or would they become a high school teacher? These are the decisions that people make every day based on long-term secure funding, but we cannot get that from the federal government.

I once again urge them to do so. Come on board with us as a government. We are extending this. We know the benefits. Every member in this state knows the benefits of kindergarten and early childhood education and care, and yet we cannot get beyond a 12-month extension of the funding agreement from the federal government. It puts all this in jeopardy. This is far too important. I once again implore the federal government to do the right thing and give us long-term funding.

Mr HEALY: On page 24 of the Service Delivery Statements there is a reference to natural disasters. As you would appreciate, particularly in our part of the world, large areas of Queensland have been impacted not just by fires and floods but also by the ongoing drought. Could you please give us an update on what the government is doing to assist in these areas?

Ms GRACE: We know many families in rural and remote parts of Queensland are doing it tough because of the devastating effect of prolonged drought and obviously the flooding earlier this year. The record-breaking floods across North Queensland in January saw significant damage to homes and businesses and community infrastructure like schools as well. Oonoomba State School, which I mentioned, was the hardest hit by the flooding event in Townsville with all buildings inundated with floodwaters. The school had to be closed from late January, with Wulguru State School and William Ross State High School taking in Oonoomba students until the beginning of term 2.

I say thank you to those schools. It was such a smooth transition. Those kiddies went to both of those schools and it was fantastic. They operated as a school within a school and it was seamless. They did a great job. I visited Oonoomba and I saw the amazing community spirit that Queenslanders are renowned for with teachers, parents, officers from the Department of Housing and Public Works and even the Australian Defence Force involved in the cleaning and repair of the school.

Through the Department of Education's flood assistance package, over \$1.4 million has been paid to families to support the replacement. For families in flood affected communities whose children attend a state run boarding facility, we scrapped any kind of expense for those families that were affected by the flood. We have extended that to drought as well for the 2019 school year. A further \$3.7 million has been paid out of the educational drought supplement in the drought and rural assistance package. In March—and I give credit to Minister Dan Tehan, the federal Minister for Education, for seeking a commitment from the Australian government to assist. I believe he visited some of those areas, and there was some assistance given.

As we know, there is a \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund that is applicable to non-state schools in relation to specific needs. I believe that was available at the time. I do not know whether the appropriations had been made for that fund. The federal government did have funds and I asked them if they could release some funding, which they have done, to assist the non-government schools who had attendees—children—from families affected by the floods during that time. They had made approaches as well, and I spoke to those non-government school peak organisations and we backed it up with correspondence. It was good to see that some money came in to assist those families as well.

I will continue to lobby the government. We thought that as we had a \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund for non-state schools—we know that many state schools are also affected by natural disasters and the like, which form part of the Choice and Affordability Fund. It would be nice to see a fund like that for the non-state schools as well to assist the families that are impacted by disasters in drought and flood areas. Unfortunately, that has not been forthcoming.

Mr HEALY: We can only hope, Minister. On page 6 there is reference to additional facilities for the state's secondary schools. I wonder if you could outline that a little bit, taking into account preparing high schools for 2020, when the first full cohort of students across the six secondary year levels will occur? It will be busy.

Ms GRACE: This was a big project and once again I commend the department for its delivery. In 2018 we committed funding to boost the \$250 million over two years to build additional classrooms. We are now in the stages this financial year with money allocated to ensure that the 2020 Ready Program is ready for 2020 in over 60 state secondary schools across Queensland. The 2020 Ready Funding boost will continue to roll out. We want to make sure that the full six cohorts—and it will be the first time we have six full cohorts—have the classrooms they require to continue to receive that education. I think most members would see additional classrooms and additional buildings being built in their electorates to cater for the 2020 project.

We embarked on this major educational reform with the introduction of prep and when we moved year 7 into high school. Our original prep students, who started school as a smaller half cohort back in 2007, are set to graduate. From next year we will have that full cohort. Parents, carers and families just loved prep so much. We had a small cohort in the beginning and now everybody has embraced it; they see the benefits and they absolutely love prep. We have a full cohort coming through. The department has done a wonderful job in making sure that all of these are in place. I believe that we have delivered. I think I have a bit of an update on numbers. I may have been a little bit out. The total figures are: 71 projects now in 61 secondary schools. I think I said 60, but it is now 61, and I see the deputy director-general nodding. It has included a large number of multistorey secondary learning spaces in all of the electorates. I have the list of schools here, but there would be too many to list.

I have looked for the member for Kawana and I can tell him that Kawana Waters State College has received a fantastic new building there on the Sunshine Coast. I know there were classrooms that the member for Currumbin mentioned before that have been happening on the Gold Coast, a very fast-growing area. In all of the electorates there have been new classrooms to make sure that we are ready for this. Some have successfully reached completion and other projects are ready for completion at the start of 2020.

I commend the department for the delivery of this program. We need those classrooms for the six full cohorts. It is estimated that this has supported something like 725 full-time jobs right throughout Queensland in the building of these facilities. It is great news all round for the students, the schools, local members and of course the workforce as well.

Mr HEALY: Thank you, Minister, and well done to the department. That is a great set of figures.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, in relation to page 6 of the SDS and its reference to Centres for Learning and Wellbeing, can you give us a bit of an outline of what the government is doing to support rural and remote education? As I said earlier, you are very passionate about that.

Ms GRACE: I know that you are very passionate about this, too. This \$100 million investment by the Palaszczuk government is really about assisting schools in rural and remote Queensland. I say to those members who represent rural and remote schools that several of them have come to see me in relation to issues that they often experience in small towns. Sometimes teachers and students, because they are in a small environment, have that additional difficulty in dealing with issues that may arise. We as a department have taken those very much on board.

As part of the government's \$100 million advancing rural and remote education plan, \$31.1 million has been allocated to establish these four Centres for Learning and Wellbeing. They are very much to assist those school leaders and students in those regional and remote areas. As I have said, I officially opened two. It was great to see the member for Warrego, Ann Leahy, there. We saw the benefits of a centre like that for teachers in rural and remote areas as well as students.

There are satellites from these as well. I am looking forward to visiting Emerald and Atherton to meet the new lead principals in these centres for learning and wellbeing. They have five key functions: developing leadership capability; mentoring and coaching beginning teachers; coaching mid-career and experienced teachers with a focus on reading, inclusion and multi-age teaching; building resilience of

staff new to rural and remote settings—we want to really help the staff in those settings; and facilitating interagency wellbeing support for staff and students. Importantly, these centres will have qualified teachers to staff them.

The Roma centre will have a satellite service in Kingaroy. The Mount Isa centre will have a satellite in Normanton. Atherton will have satellites in Weipa, Cooktown and across Cape York and in the Torres Strait. They are doing a great service and benefiting the staff. As I said, I saw firsthand some of the teaching that has been happening. Our centres for learning and wellbeing go a long way to providing students in rural and remote areas with the same opportunities as students in the cities and towns along the Queensland coast.

Under the strategy we have allocated funding to improve staff housing in this area. It is also complemented by \$4.5 million to enable greater internet connectivity throughout these regions. It is a great program. I am very proud of it. I really look forward to visiting Emerald and Atherton in the very near future.

CHAIR: We will move now to non-government questions.

Mr DAMETTO: I thank the department and the minister for coming along today to answer our questions. I also thank the department for the investment it is making in the Hinchinbrook electorate at the moment. We have some new schools being built and finished off, as the minister would know, and there is also some investment in air conditioning.

Minister, small schools are the backbone of some of Queensland's most rural and remote communities, providing education to those who find themselves vast distances from large educational facilities. Will you outline what investment the Palaszczuk government is making to keep open some of Queensland's smallest and most remote schools? Are there any plans for small school closures in the 2019-20 budget?

Ms GRACE: Obviously, we do what we can to support schools in regional and remote areas. I know that the director-general has a particular passion for them, being a Dalby boy who lived in country Queensland. He has visited some of these regional and remote schools, as I have. We do all we can to make sure the school is running efficiently and effectively and they have the staff and resources necessary to deliver quality education no matter where they are located.

Quite clearly, if there are no students at a school it is pretty hard to keep that school staffed. Generally we then make sure the school is maintained. We do not want vandalism and so on happening in those schools. You never know when they may be required again.

We have no plans to close any schools. A lot of it is governed by the number of children in those particular areas. We kept a school open on Hamilton Island after the devastating cyclone. There were no students there for some time. We kept the school site safe and then when there were two students we again provided schooling.

The department does a wonderful job making sure that regional and remote schools address the needs of their local communities. We do not earmark any schools to close. It is fully dependent on their enrolments. Often if there are no enrolments we just make sure the site is looked after until a longer term strategy is developed. Of course, if a school has no children enrolling for a few years and the likelihood from the demographics is that children will not be enrolling, the department will make recommendations in relation to what we do. I do not know whether the director-general or the deputy director-general want to add anything, but that is the manner in which we operate to make sure we operate effectively.

Mr Cook: The other side of it is the support in terms of curriculum. As you know, a lot of these schools are one- or two-teacher schools. My first school was a three-teacher school. Being multi-age is a great challenge. It is about being able to teach the curriculum across a number of year levels. I was at Ilfracombe a couple of weeks ago. That school had nine students and those students went across all primary school year levels. We provide additional support and guidance to small schools, particularly around teaching multi-age. We have developed additional materials. In fact, we have a cluster at Longreach at the moment helping us work with this. We are providing additional support for teachers and teaching principals about the Australian Curriculum and how they can be teaching the Australian Curriculum across multi-age. As you would be aware, we provide additional support for teaching principals. They have additional time for the admin side of school. Additional teacher aides and teachers come into those small schools to help them.

When I go to national meetings, the thing I notice is that Queensland is the most decentralised state. No other state really has what Queensland has. Western Australia does not have what we have in terms of the number of small schools that go across the size of Western Australia. We have had to

respond to that. I am really pleased to say that, generally, the performance of our small schools is outstripping that of comparable small schools across of Australia as a result of the extra support we are providing.

Mr DAMETTO: As you can probably appreciate, some kids excel in the small school environment and some excel in a large school environment. We have had instances in the Hinchinbrook electorate where students have gone from a big school environment to a small school environment and have excelled. We would love to see some of them kept open as long as possible.

Every Queensland teacher deserves to feel safe in their workplace—free from bullying and free from having to deal with common assault. With the reported increase in violence against teachers by students in Queensland schools, particularly in the Townsville region, will the minister outline what the Palaszczuk government is doing to protect teachers from young violent offenders in schools?

Ms GRACE: It is a good question. Acts of violence against our teachers and school staff are simply unacceptable. We say that all the time. Our teachers, principals and school staff deserve and should receive courtesy and respect from all sides—not only the students but also the families and stakeholders who use the schools. I support schools taking the strongest possible action in response to assaults or threats of assault against teachers or support staff.

We introduced the Respect Our Staff, Respect Our School program. This was an awareness program about how respect should be taught and manifest itself in a school environment. The program is an awareness program which empowers staff and teachers to call out violent and abusive behaviour in the school setting. It was specifically aimed at not only raising awareness but also assisting people to come forward knowing that they would be supported and their needs would be addressed should they be subject to anything that is unacceptable in the schools.

What we found—and I tend to agree with comments that have been in the media recently—is that teachers and staff are very much now feeling supported and the culture has changed in that there is more reporting in relation to these incidents where maybe once they may have not. It is a bit like our program across the political sphere when it comes to domestic violence, and I know that is supported by all sides of politics. We find that women and men now feel much more comfortable in coming forward with domestic violence in terms of seeking help, knowing that it is not something that should not be spoken about. We have brought it out into the open like we have with Respect Our Staff, Respect Our School. Some of the increases that we are seeing represents the supported nature and the culture change about coming forward.

As I said, we have a number of wellbeing programs that are in place. We have a wellbeing framework delivered by the department. The director-general is well aware of all of those that we have. We have \$374,000 funding allocated for Headspace for any mental health. We have mental health coaches. We have announced additional funding for an enhancement and expansion of Headspace services. There is money in relation to wellbeing for school leaders. Our centres for learning and wellbeing are all about that—how to handle them, how to come forward, how to feel supported. From an operational sense, maybe the director-general could give you a little bit more about how the department works day to day, day in and day out, delivering the funding that we have delivered in this budget for those welfare services.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Minister, but before the director-general answers, coming back to the question, I want to be quite clear that I am asking how we are going to protect these teachers, because there are some pretty rough schools out there. I am alluding to perhaps security or some way to intervene when students are being unruly. A teacher should not have to be that liaison officer or security guard.

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. As the minister indicated, we have a range of supports in place. We also have zero tolerance—that is, an occupational violence procedure that we released in October last year which is very clear that there is zero tolerance from the department in relation to occupational violence, whether that be from students and also, unfortunately, increasingly from adults. In fact, principals have legislative powers in relation to the hostile people on school premises part of the legislation which enables principals to prevent adults from being on school grounds.

We have a number of categories of those. We have a direction to leave and not enter for 24 hours. We have a direction about the conduct and movement for up to 30 days in relation to adults. We have a prohibition from entering premises for up to 60 days and we have a prohibition from entering a school site for more than 60 days but not more than one year. Principals obviously take that power

very seriously. I will note, however, that some of those instances of issuing those notices is increasingly because the principals are having to respond to some of the behaviours that are being brought into schools by adults as well as by students.

You asked the question about protecting our teachers. Obviously principals make decisions about suspensions and exclusions as relevant if there are issues around physical violence or other forms of inappropriate behaviour in the school. That is the key issue as well as the preventative work that we are doing with our teachers. In relation to working with students who might be at risk, we have new youth engagement programs in place as well. We are looking at issues or particular programs such as FlexiSpaces which will enable schools to identify some students who might be at risk and to effectively have a school within a school to support those students.

Ultimately we know that while suspensions and exclusions are part of a tool that a school has, really the best place for kids is in school, so how do we better support them with some of the particular issues they might have to keep them in schools? One of the announcements in the budget—you will see it in Budget Paper No. 4 I think—was looking at flexischools or FlexiSpaces which will help some schools where the data tells us they might need some additional support. The school gets additional funding. They get some capital funding to enable them to identify a place in a school to support those students in a different environment within the school itself. The minister talked about some of the other work and funding that we are doing around Headspace to provide support for teachers but also training for teachers in relation to managing with the range of students they might have in their class as well.

Ms GRACE: Just a couple of extra things, there are responsible behaviour plans for all students in schools—and they are made aware of those—and they are implemented. If there is a serious issue, obviously police are always on site and I understand that if security is required at those particular points in time we provide security in those schools. In addition to that, we have been rolling out additional fencing for a number of schools, and I always think about the member for Thuringowa. Some wonderful schools in his electorate around that Townsville area have had additional fencing to stop outsiders infiltrating into the schools and that has worked very well. There are a number of strategies we have in place.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Director-General.

Ms BOLTON: I have two quick questions to the minister, and I am quite happy with short answers or it can be taken on notice because we are running out of time. I refer to page 5 of the SDS relating to Teaching Queensland's Future strategy. Within the \$136 million budgeted for this strategy, will the concerns of teachers regarding rural accommodations, mentoring and extra time needed for programming, as examples, be addressed to improve the teacher retention statistics in Queensland?

Ms GRACE: My understanding is that all of those will form part of this and all of those issues are taken into account. There is additional funds, as I said, in the regional and remote strategy at the same time which also is about accommodation and looking at issues that are raised and assisting them with learning and wellbeing, workforce planning, attraction, talent management and capability. All of those are all part of that funding. If there are any schools that require anything additional, please let me know and we can pass it on to these heads of department here and they will be happy to implement anything that is required.

Ms BOLTON: Fantastic. My next question refers to page 2 of the SDS and the government's objective to keep Queenslanders healthy. Given the urgency to address statistics relating to anxiety and obesity in our school-age children, what requested increases, if any, in funding will be made available for successful programs such as Life Education and our localised Sunshine Coast Individualised Learning and Support?

Ms GRACE: The budget is there in relation to those additional services that schools require, and often it is a combination of schools coming together in clusters, which is one of the requirements for certain programs, where they work together about how they can extend those wellbeing programs and those engagement programs and healthy eating and all of those types of things that can be rolled out in schools. A number of applications have come in for programs. I do not think that there is a day that I do not get a meeting with someone who has a wonderful program that they would like to introduce to a school which is along the lines of your questioning.

Quite clearly we have experts on panels and there is an expert panel in your area in particular, for example, that looks at the applications that come in. The programs that are looked at are peer reviewed. They look at the benefit to the school. Schools often commit to get the value by putting in

additional funding from their sources and then they provide what they believe is necessary for their areas. We do not dictate it, but I know, member for Noosa, there is a wide variety of programs that are available to schools to be implemented on a case-by-case basis.

Ms BOLTON: Just to clarify, have there been increases?

Ms GRACE: I am not sure whether there have been increases, but the increase in funding for your area is an operational matter and maybe the director-general might be better with those specific amounts.

Ms BOLTON: Can you just take that on notice so we can move on?

Ms GRACE: Yes, we can do that and we can get some funding arrangement to you, but I know that there has been no reduction in funding. More people want to have some of these services—more schools—but my understanding is that there has been no reduction. I am sure there would be a slight increase across-the-board but I am just not sure exactly what that figure is, but if you would like that figure for your specific area we are happy to provide it.

Ms BOLTON: Thank you.

CHAIR: Final question from the member for Maiwar.

Mr BERKMAN: Minister, you know I have been pushing for a new school in the inner west for some time in light of overcrowding and population growth concerns. I have really appreciated your assistance so far, particularly our meeting back in budget week. Going back further to February, you mentioned in response to a question on notice that the department is conducting an options analysis to investigate primary school capacity in the inner west.

Ms GRACE: Yes.

Mr BERKMAN: Minister, can you share the results of that analysis and which options have been considered?

Ms GRACE: Obviously, we are always looking to see whether we have to do a new school or whether we continue to infill or add additional classrooms and those kinds of facilities at your schools. We had a wonderful meeting, I know, where we talked about this. I know that many of your schools have received funding.

In relation to where that is at, my information is that it might be still ongoing. As soon as we have completed that analysis and that research for the schools in your area, we would be happy to share that with you, as was a commitment that I gave when we met. I think it is still going. As soon as it is completed, Mr Jeff Hunt will make sure, I am informed through the director-general, or however, and we will be in contact with you straightaway.

Mr BERKMAN: That is very much appreciated. You discussed NAPLAN earlier today. I have heard regularly from parents and kids who find the NAPLAN test incredibly stressful and from teachers who say that it wastes valuable time and forces them to teach to the test. Earlier today you referred to a review of NAPLAN across three states. Are you willing, as an outcome of that review, to consider scrapping NAPLAN completely?

Ms GRACE: I am not going to pre-empt any outcome of any review that we are going to do. Quite clearly, after 10 years it is important that we have a look at whether NAPLAN is achieving what it was set up to achieve. I think 10 years is a good time to have a look at it. We cannot get this through the Education Council. Only one member of the Education Council—the federal government—is refusing to have a look at this in depth.

Following our last meeting, and following on from our surveys, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland decided that we would come together and put together some terms of reference to have a look at those broader issues—all of the issues that you have raised—and whether we look at NAPLAN and what that might look like and what it is going to be in the future. I think New South Wales sees a completely new thing coming—whatever that may be. Victoria and Queensland are really wanting to have a good look at whether it is achieving the outcomes and what impact it is having on students and families. These are all very healthy things that we need to look at.

I will not pre-empt the outcome, other than to say that we have taken it upon ourselves, as three states, to do what the federal government refuses to do. I am looking forward to using our survey in those terms of reference. I know that the directors-general have already met to have a look at the terms of reference. I am looking forward to working with New South Wales and Victoria—the three of us, the big eastern states—to have a look at where we go with NAPLAN and give it a good review after 10 years.

Mr BERKMAN: Given the outstanding brevity, I wonder if I might try one more.

CHAIR: I think it is very entertaining that you are trying, but I am afraid you have had two questions and we must move to the member for Maryborough. I would have been disappointed if you had not tried, member for Maiwar!

Mr SAUNDERS: In relation to page 6 of the SDS and with reference to the government's response to the NAPLAN review, can you give us advice on the progress of the response to the review and what that will mean for families and students?

Ms GRACE: This is really good timing. I thank the member for Maryborough for the question and also the member for Maiwar. When I became education minister, everybody was talking to me about NAPLAN and everybody had a view. After 10 years, we believe that it is time for a review. As I have said, I think we have every state and territory around the country willing to have a review and what that might look like. The only obstacle in the Education Council, in which there has to be 100 per cent consensus, is the federal government, which is not interested in conducting this at this point in time.

I know that we have had some glitches with NAPLAN online, but that is a different situation. That is more of an IT thing. We are talking about a much broader look at the review. I think the last time it was, 'Let's get the glitch right before we look at the review.' We say that we can walk and chew at the same time. I am sure ACARA has the ability to look at what the glitch was for NAPLAN online this year, which disrupted many students in taking the test online. At the same time, we can work out a fundamental review.

Having had that response from the federal government, as I said, the three states got together. We are looking at doing this. We are providing leadership in this area. I have been calling for this for quite some time. Our response to the survey was incredible. We had 7,500 parents and carers and 3,000 students. I think ACARA conducted one and the response they had in comparison to Queensland was something like 1,200 parents nationwide. We had 7,500 respond to our survey. Three thousand students responded to our survey—they had 1,200 parents nationwide—as did 5,800 teachers and principals and 200 education stakeholders. If you add them all together, thousands of people responded to our survey and reported that testing is causing anxiety and a range of unintended consequences stemming from what was supposed to be a low-stakes test, which is now becoming a high-stakes test. There were different expectations of the purpose of NAPLAN. A bit more education is required on what NAPLAN is all about.

When we received the work done by the ACT on the reporting of NAPLAN results, clearly it came that we should be reporting students' growth and student outcomes to those students and the growth in the schools. It should not be used as a league table to compare schools against schools. NAPLAN was there and I understand the outcome was in relation to growth in schools and students. That is where we are now looking at ACARA to look at how NAPLAN results are reported so that we can all agree, as we did among the states and with the federal government, to look at the reporting based upon those two principles.

We want to ensure that information gained is used for the right purpose and not used just to compare schools with schools. Comparing a school in the Torres Strait with a school maybe in inner-city Brisbane is very difficult. The growth in those schools and the growth in those students are equally important. We want to make sure that NAPLAN is meeting the needs and is not having any unintended consequences.

Once again, I call on the federal government to join Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, which have agreed on a comprehensive review. We have already started our discussions. We are looking at the terms of reference. We have listened to teachers. I have listened to school leaders. I have listened to students and I have listened to parents. I was at an event during the Commonwealth Games with two parents. The only thing they wanted to talk to me about was NAPLAN. The school across the road was doing something that they did not agree with in relation to it and they felt that it was gaming the system and not cooperating in the spirit of what NAPLAN was supposed to be.

Surely, after 10 years of NAPLAN testing, it is time we had a good look at it. If we cannot do an Australia-wide review, the three states—Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland—are coming together. We are from across the political divide, but we are coming together to look at the issues and how we can address them in the vacuum of the federal government coming on board with us all to do a nationwide review.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, in relation to page 5 of the SDS and with reference to record infrastructure spending, can you advise how the department assisted Morningside State School, Upper Mount Gravatt State School and the Warwick East State School when fire virtually destroyed them?

Ms GRACE: I thank the member for Maryborough for the question. It is a great question because not only do we have the \$1.46 billion funding allocation for infrastructure in schools this financial year but also we are often hit with disasters, whether that is through flooding or through fires. We want to make sure that we get these schools up and running. We have had some very tragic circumstances with fires at Morningside State School, Upper Mount Gravatt State School and recently Warwick East State School. Infrastructure solutions are often needed urgently. The damage caused by these fires at these schools inspired amazing support from the Department of Education. I commend the director-general, Tony Cook, and the deputy director-general, Jeff Hunt, for the manner in which they get these schools up and running.

It is absolutely amazing to see the support not only from the department coming to assist these schools but also from the public. I visited Upper Mount Gravatt State School after the fire. One of their classrooms was literally full of materials and resources that had been donated to that school by the public and they were sorting it out for the benefit of the children of that school. The works conducted at these schools in the face of significant damage, especially at Morningside and Mount Gravatt, represent interdepartmental cooperation at its best. These schools were up and running with minimal disruption to learning. Obviously, they use temporary buildings—prefabricated buildings—but the prefabricated buildings at Upper Mount Gravatt are a different type of building from the ones used in the past.

They very much serve the needs of school children going forward. In the case of Warwick East State School we did not lose one day of learning. They worked over the weekend. They poured footpaths. They even did enhancement projects. It was amazing. All the landscaping was done for that school to start on Monday. There were new offices, new classrooms. It was all there—even the finishing touches. Thank you to the crews, the contractors, that were used. They did a good job. I know BAS is involved at times as well. We have seen these schools up and running without any major disruption to learning.

Upper Mount Gravatt State School principal Derek Brady said the community was grateful that life was able to return back to normal so quickly after the fire. The goal of all school fire recovery efforts is to ensure that teachers are back teaching and students are back learning as quickly as possible and that was the recent experience of these schools. I say a big thank you to everybody. I spoke to Marina Clarke, the principal at Warwick East State School, on the phone and she was very thankful and proud of the work that the Department of Education did in making sure that her school was supported. They worked over the weekend to make sure that everything was right and when they came to school the next morning everything was ready to go—landscaping, footpaths, everything. I commend the department on its role. When they all work together it is an example of magic happening in our education system every day.

Mr HEALY: Once again, as you would expect, in the Service Delivery Statements there is reference to both Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students. There is no greater reflection of the disparity in our state and the size of our state. Being the member for Cairns, as you would appreciate, it is a significant issue in our part of the world. Could you give us an update on what the department is doing, not only with the provision of education but also what we are doing to continue to ensure that we keep those students in the education system?

Ms GRACE: I have visited schools in your electorate where we have been doing some wonderful work in this space.

Mr HEALY: Terrific work.

Ms GRACE: It is a pleasure to visit those schools with the new facilities we have opened.

Mr HEALY: Cairns West.

Ms GRACE: Using Indigenous artists, having security panels designed by local elders in one of your schools, was absolutely fantastic. I commend the infrastructure branch of the department in the use of Indigenous elders in those schools for artwork that they use as security screens. There is one in Cairns that was absolutely gorgeous.

Mr HEALY: It just looked fantastic, didn't it, Cairns West?

Ms GRACE: It looked fantastic. As I said, we want to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage with school. It is a high priority. We have more than 58,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in our Queensland state schools and in some of the most remote schools in Queensland. I am extremely proud to report that last year 98.1 per cent of Indigenous state school students across Queensland achieved either a Queensland Certificate of Education or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement compared to 98.4 per cent of non-Indigenous

students. We have been able to close that gap. Only about five years or so ago that gap would have been seven per cent. We have now the difference, which is nation leading, of 0.3 per cent between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students completing the certificate levels which is something I think we should as Queenslanders all be very, very proud of. When we look at other states we are leading the nation in this area.

We work hard to give all our students the best start in life. In 2019-20 the government is investing almost \$38 million to continue to lift outcomes of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student. We have developed initiatives focused on improving attendance, engagement, retention and academic achievement. The department also partners with a number of organisations to continue to improve on these outcomes for Indigenous students. We have partnerships with Netball Queensland, the Stars Foundation, Brisbane Broncos, Girls Academy and Clontarf Foundation. I have visited several schools that have these programs and they are doing a great job. We are looking to see the outcomes that are achieved. I know that they engage the students, they assist them in many, many ways with attendance.

I remember talking to a parent at one of these schools who basically said if it was not for Clontarf that was operating in their particular school her son would not have been achieving the 94 per cent attendance rate that he was now achieving. You hear stories about students wanting to walk out from school. These mentors often speak to them. There was one incident where a young fellow said the mentor said to him, 'There's nothing for you outside that gate, but there's a lot for you inside this gate'. It was just those few words that allowed him to remain in school and he is very proud that he is just about to finish year 12 and graduate. He is very proud of the fact that he was well on course to do that. It was those few words at that point in time when he was frustrated and about to walk out, when they said it is all in here, there is not much outside, which was really great.

I recently visited in the Torres Strait, Saibai Island, Horn Island, Thursday Island and Badu Island. I visited Lockhart River with the member for Cook MP, Cynthia Lui, and we saw firsthand the impact of these dedicated, hardworking teachers and some of these programs in place at that school. On Thursday Island we also celebrated the retirement of the Tagai State College, Thursday Island Secondary Campus teacher aide Nancy Sailor who had been making a difference in the lives of her students for 35 years. What an honour it was to be there to wish Nancy all the very best. Local member Cynthia Lui was at the Tagai State College, a proud Torres Strait Islander woman, as was Nancy, a Torres Strait Islander woman, the executive principal Judy Ketchell, an Indigenous woman, and the head of campus Suberia Bowie, a Torres Strait Islander woman as well. They are great role models for their schools.

These are the examples we are rolling out in all of these schools to assist these children to be engaged, to assist these students to embark upon attending school, enjoying school and to find out what we need to do to make sure that we give them the best education that they should be getting. There is a lot of good work happening in these areas, particularly in early education, I have been through that before, but also right throughout these schools. We are very proud of the closing of that gap particularly with the QCE and the QCIA.

Mr HEALY: Thank you. You are right, those statistics do prove we are moving forward very well in that area. Having Clontarf active in my part of the world, they do a fantastic job. In relation to one of the comments you made then, you were talking about the demand for quality teachers, I just wonder if you could give us an update on what the government is doing to ensure that we meet the need in relation to having good teachers in the future for Queensland.

Ms GRACE: That is a very good question, member for Cairns, because having quality teachers, as we know, in our classrooms means a bright future for our students. We know that education is a labour intensive industry. You cannot teach without the appropriately trained and supported people in our classrooms. We have a track record of delivering the teachers our schools need. Since March, this Palaszczuk government has employed more than 4,800 FTE equivalent teachers and over 1,400 teacher aides. We are delivering on our 2017 commitment to employ an additional 3,700 teachers over four years.

We have already seen more than 1,000 teachers employed between 2018 and this year. This is in contrast to the lack of numbers that were employed during the LNP's time in government when we had a big growth in student numbers. There was supposed to be an additional 500-odd teachers that were to cater for that growth and they were never employed during that period of time. We as a government do not ignore the needs of classrooms. We want to make sure that our classrooms meet their targets and we will employ the teachers and the teacher aides necessary. It is fantastic to visit the state, particularly these remote areas, and see wonderful teacher aides and teachers and staff who work in our schools.

It is a rewarding career, but we do know that there have been some pressures not only in Australia but also around the world about getting the necessary teacher numbers and I continually work with the university sector and the department looks at ways we can attract the workforce into this profession. We are looking at a five-year strategy called Teaching Queensland's Future strategy to employ and retain highly capable teachers and school leaders now and into the future. It will have a focus on meeting our increasing demand, building the capability confidence and agility of our teaching workforce, and ensuring the sustainable supply of teachers who will deliver quality learning outcomes.

Over the past 12 months, dedicated workforce planning advisers have visited more than 288 state schools across the state, working with school leaders to gain insights into each school's workforce needs and to identify specific local, regional and statewide strategies to address those challenges. That is also about attracting rural and remote teachers. With the EBA that I spoke about before, some of the bargaining incentives included in the agreement address some of those workforce incentives as well.

Each year I love attending the Teach Rural and Teach Queensland career fairs with the director-general. The fairs promote career and lifestyle opportunities. There is such a buzz in the air. People who are looking at entering teaching or who are graduating from teaching courses attend those fairs and they are snapped up by schools to attend the various areas. They have been absolutely wonderful in attracting them. We have also employed STEM champions in every education region, because we know how important STEM capability is in schools. We have invested more than \$1 million in 72 scholarships to attract new teachers to rural and remote centres: 32 STEM graduate teacher scholarships and 40 general scholarships.

We are doing a lot in this area. We need quality teachers. I commend it as a wonderful profession. When I ask school students what they are going to do when they finish school, if they mention teaching I always encourage them to take it up as they will have a job in the future because of the need. I always speak about the benefits in the wonderful career of teaching.

CHAIR: Minister, we have 30 seconds before we move to non-government questions and I invite the member for Kawana to ask a question. I am very interested in the kindy program at the Queensland Children's Hospital. One of my little boys benefited from that fabulous program. Can you give us a quick 30- or 40-second update on the program for those who are not aware of it?

Ms GRACE: Absolutely. Funding has been given. It is an amazing program. They have a trolley and the kindergarten teachers go face to face with young children in the hospital to deliver the kindy program at their bedside. I was honoured to be welcomed by a family at the Queensland Children's Hospital recently, where I saw that in place. That child was beaming and asking his parents, 'When is the kindy teacher coming?' It was wonderful to see it firsthand. We have made a \$217,000 investment in bedside kindergarten for kiddies in hospital. It is wonderful for anyone who can experience it. I was so grateful to the family and the kindergarten teacher for showing me that fantastic program, which is delivered throughout the hospital.

CHAIR: I will own that I was excited by the program, but my son was less excited by the maths working sheet! It is a wonderful program.

Mr BLEIJIE: I want to continue our discussion about solar panels on school roofs. I represent Kawana on the Sunshine Coast. I think Kawana and Caloundra have the biggest uptake of solar panels on residential roofs in Queensland. I think in South-East Queensland about two-thirds of people have solar panels and have had no incidents, including electrical incidents. Director-General, did the ETU contact the department or you with concerns about the implementation of the Advancing Clean Energy Schools Program?

Mr Cook: Contact me, no.

Mr BLEIJIE: Or the department?

Mr Cook: I am not aware of any contact with the department, no.

Mr BLEIJIE: Could you find out, Director-General?

Mr Cook: Sure. Mr Hunt has indicated to me that he is in charge of the program.

Mr Hunt: I am the senior responsible officer for the ACES Program. I have not been contacted by the ETU.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, you have mentioned concerns that you had about matters raised in an article in the *Australian*. Which particular article was that? Was it the article that talked about the minister's failed solar farm program laws?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, without the imputations, please.

Mr BLEIJIE: The director-general indicated that he read an article expressing concern—

CHAIR: No, the question was clear. I simply said without the imputation tacked on to the end, I am sure accidentally.

Mr BLEIJIE: Indeed.

Mr Cook: I am happy to take the actual date. There has been a series of articles in the *Australian*, I think as a result of the national regulatory body identifying deficiencies in solar panel installations. I think there was even an article on that last week. There was a series of articles. I think there were two in January or December—it may have been December last year. I am happy to refer to the actual article, if that helps. I can bring that information to the committee.

Also from our perspective, one of the things that we considered as part of the government's proposal in relation to best practice principles is looking at best practice principles in terms of safety regulation and looking at issues in relation to the tenderers and also any subcontractors they might appoint around their safety record. We engaged the Electrical Safety Office around that as part of the tender process. If the member wants the exact article, I can probably refer to three articles that I have read that were reports as a result of the national regulatory body making findings in relation to the installation of solar panels.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, you may or may not know that there was an article that appeared in the ABC this morning. I know we have discussed assaults on teachers before, but this morning's ABC article was about assaults on students or compensation paid out to students. One of the alleged incidents was a sexual assault on a student. There were other alleged incidents in the article that I read with respect to children with disability being bullied by teachers. The amount payable was about \$500,000. I am concerned about sexual assault on a student. In a situation such as in that case, what happens when compensation has been paid out? Is the teacher's employment with the Department of Education terminated or is that teacher still teaching somewhere in Queensland?

Mr Cook: Obviously if there are issues in relation to criminal offences, those criminal offences and that legal activity are dealt with by police. The teacher registration board is responsible for the registration of teachers—that is, the Queensland College of Teachers. They would make decisions in relation to any criminal matters, and I am assuming a sexual assault would be a criminal matter. That is my assumption. It is the Queensland College of Teachers that would then remove the registration of that teacher. If a teacher is not registered, they cannot work in Queensland state schools.

Mr BLEIJIE: In the article the ABC said that the Department of Education was reluctant to or did not disclose what happened in the situation and could not even confirm whether that teacher had been terminated. If compensation has been paid, it might not necessarily mean it is a criminal offence. Compensation may have been paid to a student because of something that had occurred. Is it not worth the community knowing that a teacher has had an allegation made and compensation was evidently paid out but that the teacher has gone on teaching? How is that acceptable to the department?

Mr Cook: To be clear, there are potentially some assumptions about what has happened there. As is the case with any issues to do with ethical matters, the department investigates those matters, as the department is required to do. The department will then make decisions in relation to the employment of those staff. That happens on a daily basis.

To be clear in relation to this issue—and I think it is important for the benefit of the committee that we are clear—this particular issue that was running in the ABC media this morning relates to four payouts made by the Queensland Government Insurance Fund dating back to 2011. On the particular incident that I understand you might be referring to, out of the \$500,000 almost \$450,000 related to that particular incident that occurred back in 2011. My understanding is that at that time the appropriate investigations were undertaken, both by the department and by the police. If the police decide to take further action, as you would be aware, people can face time in jail and they certainly are banned from teaching by the Queensland College of Teachers.

In relation to the remaining \$54,000 that made up that \$500,000 reported in the media today, there was a \$4,500 payout in relation to discrimination. That incident happened in 2013.

Ms GRACE: Under the LNP government.

Mr Cook: In 2014 there was an incident in relation to bullying—

Ms GRACE: LNP government.

Mr Cook:—or sexual assault by teachers and the payout was \$40,000. In 2017 it was racial discrimination by a teacher and the payout was \$10,000. I think most of that detail was provided—

Mr BLEIJIE: Racial discrimination: Labor government. Thank you, Director-General. I am satisfied with the answer.

Ms GRACE: It happened across governments is the point.

Mrs WILSON: My question is to the director-general. Earlier today the member for Currumbin discussed parking issues within her electorate. Within my electorate I have the Banksia Beach State School which has had a large parking issue since prior to 2012. I am wanting to know roughly where we are at in delivering the car park for Banksia Beach State School and also the kiss and drop zone?

Mr Cook: My understanding in relation to the new car park for Banksia Beach State School is that \$965,000 has been allocated. It is due for practical completion late this year.

Ms GRACE: We are delivering it for you.

Mr BLEIJIE: But not yet.

Mrs WILSON: That is fantastic. Can you give me an anticipated time regarding when construction will commence?

Mr Cook: Not at the moment, sorry.

Mrs STUCKEY: Will you get to do the media release?

Ms GRACE: She does not have to quote me either if she wants a media release.

Mrs WILSON: I am happy to be there with you, Minister.

Ms GRACE: I am happy for you to do it alone if you like, but I am happy to do it with you too.

Mrs WILSON: I have another question for the director-general in relation to Bribie Island State School. I thank the minister for the classrooms that are currently being built at that school. I am wanting to confirm that those classrooms will be completed and handed over by the end of December 2019—hopefully before December 2019—so teachers are able to go into the classrooms and have them set up ready for school commencing in 2020.

Mr Cook: As indicated, in terms of Bribie Island State High School a touch over 7½ million dollars is being allocated by the government for that school—\$2.4 million in this budget and \$5.2 million has already been expended. My understanding, based on the advice I have just been given, is that they are based on 2020 Ready. They will be ready to be used in the 2020 school year. Mr Hunt might like to add something.

Mr Hunt: As the minister indicated earlier, the 2020 Ready program is on target to deliver the range of projects we have in a number of schools right across the state. We are working very hard, weather permitting of course—I always put that caveat on any building project, as the minister has heard me say before—for that to happen. If it were that the weather impacted on our program we will have other circumstances in place. The minister has already discussed the prefabricated building program. There could be alternative arrangements that we will negotiate with every school. I can assure you that there is no greater priority for us than making sure that those classrooms are ready for the beginning of the 2020 school year.

Mrs WILSON: As the member for Currumbin said earlier, I would like to be kept up to date so that I can work with the school if we need to make alternative arrangements.

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. We will certainly work through the school principals and the staff to make sure that they are comfortable with any actions that we are taking. We have had great investment and involvement from those school principals in the design work for those projects. They are progressing at pace. We look forward to doing that ribbon cutting with you at some point in the future.

Ms GRACE: I understand it is a great building too.

Mrs WILSON: It is.

Mrs STUCKEY: My question is to the director-general. I am referring to page 6 of the SDS in relation to youth engagement. It was revealed in October last year through RTI that a senior advisor in Minister Grace's office was collaborating with the Queensland Council of Unions on how to make the Young Workers Hub program more palatable. I am asking the director-general if he would be kind enough to advise whether the department has received a formal proposal or had any meetings about the Young Workers Hub?

Mr Cook: I think your reference was youth engagement in the SDS, is that correct?

Mrs STUCKEY: Yes.

Mr Cook: I will quickly outline the important aspects of youth engagement that the government is funding, particularly in the 2019-20 budget. In terms of youth engagement, there is an additional \$29.457 million in 2019-20 to provide a number of programs for youth engagement. Regional youth engagement hubs operate in every one of our regions. They result in the department working across other agencies to provide support to those students at risk of disengaging from schooling. Last year 3,037 young people were reengaged back into school as a result of that youth engagement hub. We are continuing the great work that happens in regions by providing additional funding in relation to youth engagement hubs.

Mrs STUCKEY: Point of order, Madam Chair. With respect, I did ask specifically about the Young Workers Hub program.

Mr Cook: The reference to the SDS was about youth engagement funding so I am just giving an outline in relation to—

Mrs STUCKEY: That was not my specific question though.

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, he is still answering. You did mention that part. Director-General, if I understand you correctly, you are referring to the same point of reference in terms of the programs in the department. I also appreciate that he has not gotten to that yet but he was still answering.

Mr BLEIJIE: Point of order, Madam Chair. The reference may be there—it is a budget reference—but the question is the question that gets answered not the whole SDS.

CHAIR: With respect member for Kawana, he is not answering the whole SDS. He is referring specifically to the reference that was provided which provided context for him to answer the question. He is speaking to that.

Mr BLEIJIE: The question is to be answered.

CHAIR: He had not finished answering the question. I think we should allow him to do so and see where he was going. Director-General, were you still answering the question?

Mr Cook: Just to clarify for me, is the reference the \$28 million for youth engagement around youth engagement hubs, the digital engagement strategy, FlexiSpaces? That is where I was starting.

Mr HEALY: I can see how you get confused.

Mrs STUCKEY: The reference was very much about the Queensland Council of Unions and the Young Workers Hub and whether the department had had a proposal or meetings with them. I have a subsequent question depending on the specific answer to that Young Workers Hub question.

Mr Cook: The answer is no. I just do not see the reference in the SDS about that particular aspect. That is why I was confused. I am sorry, I thought you were asking about youth engagement more broadly.

Mrs STUCKEY: Given we are expected to reference the SDS, I was giving a broad link. Are there any state schools in Queensland where the Young Workers Hub program is operating and if so is the department paying for any of it?

Mr Cook: Schools are not required to report to the department the range of programs they operate in their schools so that information would not be available to me. They do not report what programs they operate in youth engagement more broadly or health and wellbeing. The only thing they are required to report in their annual report is in relation to domestic violence and respectful relationships. Schools do report that in their annual reports. There is no requirement to provide information to the department about one particular program that they might be implementing.

Mrs STUCKEY: That means that schools could be running virtually any program they like and you do not know about it.

Mr Cook: Schools principals always have the autonomy to make decisions about what programs are being used in their schools. I would not ask my 1,241 principals to report to me on every single program they are operating in their schools. Those programs could be different day to day. They may decide tomorrow to implement a particular program. I do not expect them to contact me to let me know that they are doing that. It is an important role of the principal to make decisions about the program that is most appropriate for their school community and we trust them to do that.

Ms GRACE: Without any interference at all.

Mrs STUCKEY: We like the independent public schools, do we not.

Mr BLEIJIE: Have there been any budget blow-outs or IT programs in your department that have run over budget?

Mr Cook: In relation to IT, we have 12 projects that are currently listed on the dashboard. I think there might have been one program where the program was identified with an initial budget before the tender was put out. I think it might have been the online collections survey solution, where there might have been a change in terms of what was originally put on the dashboard in relation to the initial allocation. After that initial allocation is made, tenders are put out. Additional information might be made available at that time. The department then reassesses that and then there is a different amount published on the dashboard which is the approved expenditure.

Mr BLEIJIE: What is the specific one? What was it advertised as and what is the budget now?

Mr Cook: The initial allocation was \$41 million. Once the tender process had been undertaken there was reallocated expenditure which was approved of \$45 million. The cost to date is \$39.8 million. Mr Hunt might be able to explain that a little further.

Mr Hunt: I can assure the committee that all of these IT projects are governed by IT project boards and the expenditure is approved by those IT project boards. Those projects are also overseen by the department's budget committee and are monitored on a monthly basis and periodically through the budget committee as well.

If the reference is to the wireless upgrade program, the wireless upgrade program is basically a rolling program and has been a rolling program since its inception. This program is to install additional wireless access points—the things that hang from ceilings around office blocks and classrooms right across the state. As technology emerges, obviously we need to make sure that our classrooms are updated with the latest technology to support that internet access in classrooms.

Mr BLEIJIE: So the figure was \$41 million to \$45 million?

Mr Hunt: I make the point again that it is a rolling program and we would continue to invest in further wireless upgrades as the technology continues to evolve to make sure that classrooms across the state have access to that contemporary technology.

Ms GRACE: The approved expenditure was \$45 million.

Mr Hunt: The approved expenditure by the project board is \$45 million. We had an estimate at the outset. As you would imagine with any budgeting process, the project board made a budget bid. An allocation was made. As the director-general has indicated, we go out to market and we seek the services and support from contractors and providers to allow us to install those wireless access points. We would envisage that that program will go through a number of further phases. I think the committee could expect that the department will continue to invest in that part of our initiative.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, with respect to the great Liberal National Party program of Independent Public Schools, I note that the previous federal funding agreement expired—

Ms GRACE: It was started by Julia Gillard, I might add.

Mr HEALY: Yes.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection. It was supported by the federal Labor government, not the state government.

Ms GRACE: Julia Gillard actually. It was supported by us.

Mr BLEIJIE: I note that the previous federal funding national agreement—

Ms GRACE: We have increased numbers. That is not true.

Mr BLEIJIE:—expired in mid-2017.

Mrs STUCKEY: I raise a point of order, Madam Chair. The minister is interrupting while the member is trying to ask a question.

Ms GRACE: I raise a point of order, Chair. I was correcting the imputation that the Labor government does not support IPS when they have actually grown to 250 schools under the Labor government.

CHAIR: I have heard both points of order. If we could just have the question—

Mr HEALY: We need a schoolteacher in here.

CHAIR:—without the helpful interjections from both sides, that would be great.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Director-General, I note that the previous federal funding national agreement expired in mid-2017 for the Independent Public Schools. When did the department seek and write to the federal government requesting an extension to that agreement that expired in mid-2017?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that it was the minister, not the department, who wrote to the federal minister. I do not think I have the date with me. We should be able to get that before the end of the hearing.

Ms GRACE: I think it was the previous minister at the time.

Mr Cook: Yes, to Mr Birmingham possibly.

Ms GRACE: Yes, it was written to Mr Birmingham.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, I am slightly confused. The agreement expired in mid-2017. Someone would have written, I would have envisaged, to the federal government requiring—because it had an extension in the agreement—

Mr Cook: An extension in the agreement, sorry?

Mr BLEIJIE: It had in the agreement a term for extension, so the parties could extend the agreement past 2017. Was it extended and who extended it? Was it the department? You are saying that the minister wrote to the federal minister.

Mr Cook: My understanding is that the minister did write to the federal minister in relation to funding for Independent Public Schools.

Mr BLEIJIE: No—specifically in relation to requesting the extension of the agreement. Is that what you are saying, Director-General?

Ms GRACE: He was not here at the time.

Mr Cook: If it was 2017, yes, I was not here. I might have actually been in the Commonwealth at the time.

Ms GRACE: I was not the minister at the time. The current federal minister was not the minister at the time.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, would you be able to take that on notice? The agreement expired in 2017. There is funding in this budget for Independent Public Schools, so it is quite relevant to the future of the program. The agreement expired in mid-2017. It had an extension period in the agreement, but it does not appear that that extension was exercised. I am trying to ascertain: if it was exercised, who by and, if not, why not?

Mr Cook: My understanding, based on my past history, was that there was—I would have to look at the agreement. I am sorry. I would have to look at the agreement to actually find—

Ms GRACE: He was not here at the time. It really should be out of order.

CHAIR: Just to clarify, it is relevant insomuch as it relates to this financial year only.

Ms GRACE: No, it does not relate at all. He has ample opportunity to ask a question like this in parliament or on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are running out of time and I want to give you the final couple of minutes in regard to you as education minister to make any final comments. Member for Kawana, can you clarify the relevance to this financial year?

Mr BLEIJIE: Independent Public Schools is a program that started through a national partnership. The minister has complained that the federal government ceased their funding. There was an agreement on the table that could be extended. This government in this budget has put forward—

Ms GRACE: You are talking mid-2017.

Mr BLEIJIE:—money for Independent Public Schools but blamed the federal government and said the reason they had to put the money in this budget was that the federal government did not fund it. If it turns out that the minister never requested the extension to the federal government funding—

Ms GRACE: I was not the minister at the time.

Mr BLEIJIE:—then, Madam Chair, it is highly relevant to this committee that it was the state government that did not continue the extension.

CHAIR: What is relevant to this committee today is the appropriation for the financial year we are looking at, not a decision that may have been made back in 2017.

Mr BLEIJIE: Or may not have been made.

CHAIR: Can I suggest that—

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, the director-general said he is happy to find out, so all we need is the minister to say those magic words that she is happy to take it on notice and we will find out.

Ms GRACE: I am not taking it on notice.

Mr BLEIJIE: You are not taking it on notice?

Ms GRACE: Put a question on notice when parliament sits.

Mr BLEIJIE: Why are you hiding from it?

Ms GRACE: No, I am not hiding it.

CHAIR: No, no. Order!

Ms GRACE: You have had ample opportunity.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr BLEIJIE: Why can't you take it on notice?

CHAIR: Order!

Ms GRACE: No. It is not relevant.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Kawana, thank you for trying to clarify the question, which I did understand the first time, which is not directly relevant to this financial year. I appreciate that you did wish to see whether the minister wanted to take it on notice because the director-general started to comment in that regard. She has indicated no because of relevance?

Ms GRACE: Yes, because of relevance.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is relevant.

Ms GRACE: What is relevant here is that there is \$12.5 million in the budget to fund Independent Public Schools—done by a Labor government under this budget.

Mr BLEIJIE: You did not sign the agreement. The government did not sign the agreement.

Ms GRACE: Other questions in relation to what happened back in mid-2017, when I was not the minister and the director-general was not here—

Mr BLEIJIE: Well, stop blaming the federal government then.

Ms GRACE:—are subject to parliamentary questions on notice in the proper format.

Mr BLEIJIE: Why are you blaming the federal government?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana! Please. Thank you.

Ms GRACE: Because the federal government walked away and did not fund it further.

Mr BLEIJIE: No, because you did not sign the agreement.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, order!

Ms GRACE: You do not know that.

Mr BLEIJIE: You did not extend the agreement.

CHAIR: Order!

Ms GRACE: You do not know that.

CHAIR: Enough! Order!

Ms GRACE: You do not know that. You are speculating.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Order! A question was asked and answered and ruled out on the basis of relevance. The committee is scheduled to conclude its examination of the education portfolio area at 12.45 pm at which time we will break for lunch. After the break the committee will move on to the examination of the industrial relations portfolio area. Minister, very briefly before we break, would you like to make any closing comments in relation to the education portfolio area and the few matters that were mentioned to potentially be taken on notice?

Ms GRACE: Thank you very much, Chair. I just wanted to reiterate that my office received some referral from the local member in relation to the issue that was raised. I just wanted to clarify a date—22 July. Within an hour that was referred to the department for urgent consideration and contact. I understand your ruling and I do not want to say any more than that. Can I also say that when I became aware, immediate action was taken by me, as I said earlier. I think there may have been a date that the director-general would like to give.

Mr Cook: I think I or the minister might have taken a question on notice in relation to the member for Mansfield. The consultation was October 2018. I think there might have been a question from the member for Noosa around additional funding for youth engagement. The additional funding for youth engagement is outlined in Budget Paper No. 4.

Mr BLEIJIE: I raise a point of order, Madam Chair. In answer to the question taken on notice about consultation, the director-general said 'October 2018'.

Mr Cook: It was 26 October.

Mr BLEIJIE: It was on 26 October that you informed the member for Mansfield?

Mr Cook: On 26 October the member for Mansfield was involved in a conversation between the principal and one of my assistant directors-general in relation to a negotiated catchment for Mansfield.

Ms GRACE: Can I clarify, too, that that was a referral that had been from the local member to the Minister for Child Safety, who then emailed that email to us and we acted on it within an hour.

CHAIR: Director-General, you were referring to the member for Noosa's question with regard to funding. Did you finish your comments?

Mr Cook: Budget Paper No. 4 outlines additional funding for youth engagement. She was asking questions around youth engagement specifically. Budget Paper No. 4 outlines on page 47 the additional funding for things like regional youth engagement hubs, youth FlexiSpaces in schools and those sorts of youth engagement programs that are happening in our schools.

CHAIR: Minister, you have a quick last minute. I am sure you want to thank your staff.

Ms GRACE: Yes. Thank you to all of my Department of Education staff who do a wonderful job every single day and thank you to those who helped to prepare for this wonderful questioning in estimates. Thank you very much to all.

CHAIR: For those officers who are leaving, thank you for your time and expertise in coming to the hearing today and for the genuine and fulsome way in which you have answered questions. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 1.15 pm with the examination of the estimates for the portfolio area of industrial relations.

Proceedings suspended from 12.49 pm to 1.17 pm.

 **CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure for the industrial relations portfolio area. The committee will examine the industrial relations portfolios until 2.30 pm and will then commence examination of the estimates for the portfolio area of employment. I ask that ministers, advisers and staff please assist in making the changeover at the witness table as prompt as possible at 2.30 pm. We have not been joined by additional members. Minister, we will provide you with an opportunity to make a brief opening statement of no more than five minutes with regard to your industrial relations portfolio.

Ms GRACE: Every Queensland worker should be able to go to work and return home safely every day. Sadly, we have seen a number of tragic incidents at worksites across the state which resulted in workers not making it home to their loved ones. Just this week at Little Mulgrave, near Cairns, a crane made contact with powerlines while working on a cane rail system, resulting in one fatality and two workers with serious injuries. At an abattoir near Charleville a man became entrapped in an item of plant and has sustained fatal injuries. And let us not forget about the tragic loss of six mining and quarry workers in the last 12 months in Queensland.

There are grounds for a reset in health and safety in the mining industry. This is extremely distressing and concerning. That is why Minister Lynham has announced that Queensland mines and quarries will implement a state-wide safety reset with a targeted completion date by the end of August. This reset has been designed to facilitate discussions between management, operational staff and relevant union representatives on risks and safe practice. I would like to pass on my condolences to the family, friends and co-workers of these individuals. Chair, we must remain ever vigilant to safety in the workplace.

The 2019-20 state budget includes a total budget allocation for the Office of Industrial Relations of \$167 million, an increase of seven per cent on 2018-19. The Office of Industrial Relations' ongoing priorities in the 2019-20 financial year include: continuing to ensure compliance with work health and safety, electrical safety, industrial relations and workers compensation regulatory frameworks and taking enforcement action where necessary; continuing to lead the nation in the response to silica exposure in the engineered stone industry; continuing the great success of our nation-leading labour hire licensing scheme in lifting the standard of the industry and protecting vulnerable workers; regulating

amusement rides and theme parks against world-class, best practice safety standards; bargaining in good faith with public sector workers and their representatives in line with the Government Wages Policy; and implementing the recommendations of the five-yearly review of the workers compensation scheme.

Chair, the government will also continue its work in responding to wage theft. In the past few weeks we have seen another two examples of wage theft perpetrated against workers, with high-profile chefs and businessmen George Calombaris and Neil Perry hitting the headlines because of their underpayment of staff. This kind of activity must stop! This committee is well aware of the impact of wage theft, having undertaken a parliamentary inquiry into wage theft in Queensland. The Palaszczuk government is acting, including looking at criminalising wage theft at a state level in deliberate or reckless instances.

Chair, coinciding with the budget I also announced that WorkCover Queensland will maintain its current premium rate for another 12 months, the sixth straight year that the rate has remained the same. Maintaining the WorkCover premium at the same low rate—\$1.20 per \$100 of wages—for six years provides much needed savings as well as stability for employers in their business planning. WorkCover will also continue to provide discounts for employing apprentices and the early payment of insurance premiums, offering employers further savings. In fact, in the case of apprentices employers pay no premiums. Queensland has Australia's most efficient workers compensation scheme, and that is great news for workers and employers.

In closing, Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Michael Roche, a director on the WorkCover board who passed away on Tuesday night just three weeks after being diagnosed with brain cancer. Michael would be known to many in the room here today and those following the broadcast. Among other things, he was an adviser during the heady days of the Goss government back in the 1990s and was chief executive of the Queensland Resources Council for 11 years. In more recent years he was a strategic adviser at McCullough Robertson and a valued member of the WorkCover board. Michael was always a pleasure to deal with in a professional sense and he was well respected across the spectrum for both his decency and his intellect. It is just so very sad that these things happen and that they can happen so quickly. My deepest sympathies go to his wife, Jenny, and family.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make an opening statement today. I look forward to questions with regard to this estimates hearing.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. It was remiss of me not to note and welcome you, Deputy Director-General Craig. I appreciate there has been a changeover of staff so I welcome all of your team from the industrial relations portfolio. We will move to the member for Kawana to open questions.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have a question to the director-general with respect to the administration of the Industrial Court and Industrial Relations Commission system. Director-General, are candidates for appointment to the Industrial Court and the Industrial Relations Commission required to satisfy a fit and proper person test?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. As you are aware, there are 12 members of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission—a president, a vice-president, two deputy presidents and eight commissioners. All appointments that have been made recently, over the last 12 months or so, have satisfied the eligibility requirements of the Industrial Relations Act and are eminently qualified for the position.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, were the four appointments that were recently announced by the minister on 5 July 2019 to fill vacancies in the commission or were they new appointments?

Mr Cook: My understanding is that three members of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission retired in 2018-19, one member of the Industrial Relations Commission is due to retire in December 2019 and one member is due for retirement in July 2020.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, prior to the four appointments that were recently made, were these positions advertised?

Ms GRACE: The process is a cabinet one. Chair, point of order—

Mr BLEIJIE: I am asking the director-general.

Ms GRACE: The appointments are a cabinet process and they are made by the minister. Asking the director-general for decisions and considerations—

Mr BLEIJIE: I did not. I asked if they were advertised positions.

Ms GRACE:—that were not part of the director-general but were part of the cabinet process is probably not relevant. I am happy to answer any questions in relation to the appointments of the QIRC commissioners.

Mr BLEIJIE: There are plenty of cabinet appointments that are advertised. I am simply asking whether these positions were advertised or not. I have sat around a cabinet table where positions have been advertised and then the successful candidate goes to cabinet for endorsement or otherwise. All I am asking is whether these four positions were advertised. That is the question.

Ms GRACE: No.

Mr BLEIJIE: Well, I asked the director-general.

Mr Cook: No.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Director-General, with respect to the four appointments that were announced by the minister, can you confirm to this committee if the appointee Jacqueline Power is formerly Jacqueline O'Mara, who admitted to committing electoral fraud in the Shepherdson inquiry at the request of the then Labor MP Grant Musgrave?

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, how is this question relevant to this portfolio's appropriation?

Mr BLEIJIE: Because, Madam Chair, the QIRC appointments are directly related to the administration of the Industrial Court and the commission system and the director-general has said that all the appointments satisfied the eligibility criteria. All I am asking is, with respect to the fit and proper person test, if Jacqueline Power who has been appointed is the same Jacqueline O'Mara, which is her maiden name, who committed—

CHAIR: Without going into a statement, you are asking whether, coming back to a fit and proper person element of—

Mr BLEIJIE: Is it the same person?

CHAIR: I am just not sure how the director-general would be able to answer the question.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I seek leave to table a document. It is two pages of the Shepherdson inquiry, which is a public document. I have 10 copies for the committee.

CHAIR: Is this meant to assist the director-general to answer this question? Is that your intention?

Mr BLEIJIE: The seriousness of this issue goes to the heart of the administration of the commission in Queensland. If a person has been appointed to the commission who is in fact that same person who has admitted to committing electoral fraud, that is really concerning and this committee should be entirely interested in that.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, my guidance would be that you could certainly ask the director-general, which you already have, what the requirements are if there is a fit and proper person test. I believe you have put that and the director-general has answered.

Ms GRACE: It is a ministerial appointment. Ask me.

CHAIR: I think if you are talking about the ministerial appointment, perhaps can I guide you to better direct it to the minister.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will rephrase it this way. Director-General, with respect to cabinet or otherwise appointments to the commission, obviously a list of names goes through and the department prepares documentation and conducts due diligence on individual candidates who are put forward by the minister to cabinet. Did the department conduct due diligence with respect to Jacqueline Power prior to her appointment?

Mr Cook: Yes, as we would normally do and that is part of the cabinet process.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Throughout that due diligence that you have just confirmed you conducted, did it come to your attention that Jacqueline Power may have been Jacqueline O'Mara, who was adversely mentioned in the Shepherdson inquiry?

Mr Cook: Thank you for the question in relation to the Shepherdson inquiry. Those issues that came out of the inquiry were put before the Supreme Court. They were fully canvassed when Ms Power was admitted to practise as a legal practitioner in 2004 and by the then Chief Justice, Paul de Jersey. The Chief Justice indicated that Ms Power had fully cooperated with the Shepherdson inquiry. No criminal proceedings were brought against her.

In relation to our due diligence, we undertake the standard process that we would normally undertake in relation to any criminal activity. That information came back clear. That formed part of advice to government as part of the cabinet process, as the minister indicated.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. I think through that answer, if I am correct, Director-General, you have read from a statement as part of the due diligence of this inquiry. I think you have all but now confirmed that it is one and the same person who was mentioned in the Shepherdson inquiry and who now sits on the Industrial Relations Commission. Is that correct?

Mr Cook: My understanding in relation to what I have just read out is that Ms Power is part of the appointments that have been made to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, how does an individual who has admitted to fraud—

Ms GRACE: This is a ministerial appointment.

Mr BLEIJIE:—pass the due diligence test for appointment—

Ms GRACE: You are asking for an opinion.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I would rule the question has been asked and answered.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Chair, I will put it—

CHAIR: Are you asking something new?

Mr BLEIJIE: This is serious. I will put it a different way. Director-General—

Ms GRACE: If it is serious, ask me.

Mr BLEIJIE:—if a candidate has admitted to electoral fraud, does that prevent the person serving on the Industrial Relations Commission through the due diligence processes of the department of industrial relations?

Ms GRACE: No.

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question in relation to the appropriateness of people who are appointed to boards. As this was the case, it was a cabinet process. It was, therefore, undertaken by the department in terms of due diligence. It would also have been undertaken, or certainly examined, by other central agencies including the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, who would have provided advice to the Premier and to the cabinet as part of the normal process. In relation to that, the criteria has been met in relation to due diligence and the appropriateness of the appointments of the QIRC commissioners.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, how can the department be satisfied that individuals or organisations that go before the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to hear matters can be confident that their matters will be heard by the person who should be the best person for the position now knowing that the individual who may be presiding over their individual case is a self-confessed electoral fraudster?

CHAIR: My view, member for Kawana, is that the question is out of order because it has been asked and it has been answered. Director-General, is there anything further you wish to add, or are you of the view that you have already answered and provided information relevant to it? In my view it is out of order.

Mr Cook: I believe it has been answered a number of times. We undertook the processes that the department is required to undertake. Those processes are also checked by other agencies to give advice to cabinet and the process is complete.

Mr BLEIJIE: Chair, with respect to the document that I tabled, I do not think we have finished that process.

CHAIR: It looks to me like it is a publicly available document?

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes, Shepherdson inquiry, yes.

CHAIR: We could table it but it is something that is already publicly available.

Mr BLEIJIE: Yes, it is. I sought leave to table it.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted. I suggest that you pursue a new line of questioning or a new question. If you ask the same question you have asked now three times in a different way I will rule it out again.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, were you aware that the appointment you have just made of one Jacqueline Power to the Industrial Relations Commission was the same Jacqueline O'Mara as contained in the tabled document, self-confessed electoral fraudster, before you made the recommendation to cabinet?

Ms GRACE: Absolutely. I thank the member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to put this once and for all in the clear. It never astounds me the amount of mud throwing that the member for Kawana will embark upon. These issues were put before the Supreme Court and were fully canvassed when Ms Power was admitted to practise as a legal practitioner in 2004—15 years ago—by the then Chief Justice Paul de Jersey. Ms Power, then Miss O'Mara—and I confirm that that was her previous name—made a full disclosure to the court that in 1997 when she was 22 she wrongly completed material in relation to the Shepherdson inquiry. The Chief Justice at the time of her appointment, stated—

She co-operated fully with the Shepherdson Inquiry and no criminal proceedings were brought against her. In my view—

Mr BLEIJIE: Because time ran out; they could not.

Ms GRACE:—this should be regarded as—

Mr BLEIJIE: Time ran out.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, do not interrupt the minister, please, while she is answering the question you asked.

Ms GRACE: This is the Chief Justice that I am quoting. I am being interrupted by the member for Kawana when I am quoting the Chief Justice on a very serious matter. He claims to be very serious and I am being interrupted. It goes on—

In my view this should be regarded as a youthful aberration, not now indicative of unfitness to practise the law.

Mr BLEIJIE: Ha, ha!

Ms GRACE: You may laugh—

Mr BLEIJIE: I do.

Ms GRACE:—at the Chief Justice—

Mr BLEIJIE: No, I do not.

Ms GRACE:—but this is his quote.

Mr BLEIJIE: The Shepherdson inquiry.

Ms GRACE: Had Ms Power not met the rigorous standards, she would not have been admitted. In relation to her appointment, I said—

Each of the appointees bring the life skills, professional experience and expertise required of a commissioner of the QIRC and I congratulate them on their appointment.

The assessment of suitability for appointment was in line with the *Cabinet Handbook* procedures for significant appointments and is no different to the process used by the LNP for the four QIRC appointments. Appointments were well received at the swearing-in ceremony on 10 July. President of the QIRC Justice Glenn Martin stated—

I thank the minister for making these appointments. Her actions in doing so are emblematic of the consultative and cooperative approach which she has demonstrated in all dealings with the commission. It is very interesting to have people appointed who exhibit such a plethora of learning, talent and experience.

Even Mr Jim Murdoch, QC, for the Queensland Bar Association praised the astute selection of the new commissioners and their combination of fresh, legal and industrial skills. Labor is on track to record balanced appointments to the QIRC, appointing members from both worker, employer and legal backgrounds as well as members with legal and government experience and employer experience as well.

Unfortunately, we do not hear the same carping coming from those opposite about the federal jurisdiction, which covers all of the private sector in Queensland, where there have been 20 appointments from the employer side and not one worker representative in the 20 appointments that have been made during the time this current government has been in power. They have tipped the balance so in favour of employers we are seeing—

Mrs STUCKEY: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Ms GRACE:—stagnant wages in this state. That is a complete reflection of that.

CHAIR: What is your point of order, Deputy Chair?

Mrs STUCKEY: What does the federal jurisdiction have to do with the question that was asked?

CHAIR: With respect, I think it is a little give and take. The member for Kawana was quite—

Mr BLEIJIE: I asked about the Queensland jurisdiction.

CHAIR: No, I am trying to think of a diplomatic word. He was clearly attacking an individual, an issue and the minister, and I think the minister has responded but has done so relevantly.

Ms GRACE: Thank you. In comparison to that, we have maintained that balance. We have eminently qualified people represented on the commission and they are very proud Queenslanders, unlike the member for Kawana who, when he was minister for industrial relations, employed a retired deputy president of Fair Work Australia who was living in Victoria. He could not find a Queenslander to replace a commissioner in the Queensland industrial relations system.

Mr BLEIJIE: I would not have appointed an electoral fraudster.

Ms GRACE: He had to find someone from Victoria and pay for the moving costs including for his cats.

Mr BLEIJIE: They would not have been a fraudster, would they? Cats?

Ms GRACE: When it comes to appointing commissioners, everyone at that swearing-in ceremony praised the government for the eminent qualifications of all of those appointed. To bring this up after it was canvassed in the appointment of Ms Power as a solicitor in the Supreme Court and the findings of Justice Paul de Jersey is nothing more than besmirching the character of a very fine Queenslander. She will do an excellent job on the commission. I commend her appointment.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, on the day of the announcement, CFMEU state secretary Michael Ravbar, with whom I note from your diary you have met a few times, said—

What we have here is a decision that commits taxpayers to funding millions in extra salaries over the coming years for a series of appointments that basically reward friends of the government ...

These appointments reflect an appalling lack of judgment on the part of the Palaszczuk government—a government which when it comes to the interests of workers—is looking increasingly remote and intolerant of criticism.

For the first time in years, the QIRC will have scant representation from blue-collar—

CHAIR: Question?

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, I am getting to the question. It goes on—

and trade workers in Queensland—exactly the sort of workers Ms Palaszczuk and her Ministers love to pose with in high-vis and a hard hat at every available photo opportunity.

Minister, do you dispute the concerns of Mr Ravbar?

Ms GRACE: Yes, I do. It is a sad day in Queensland when the member for Kawana and the CFMEU general secretary agree on the appointments to the QIRC.

Mr BLEIJIE: I struggled to ask the question, trust me.

Ms GRACE: I thought you may have had to swallow hard on that one. Quite clearly, when you are on the same page as an organisation that you attack at every given opportunity and you have to scrape that low—

Mr BLEIJIE: And possibly saw the light!

Ms GRACE:—to make a very, very weak point, it is a sad day in Queensland.

Mr BLEIJIE: Weak but true points.

Mrs STUCKEY: He has asked a question.

Ms GRACE: The answer is no, I do not agree with the comments of CFMEU secretary Michael Ravbar.

CHAIR: We will move to the member for Cairns.

Mr HEALY: Minister, on page 11 of the Service Delivery Statements there is reference to overseeing the ongoing delivery of legislative reforms and regulatory improvements to Queensland's industrial relations, workplace health and safety and electrical safety systems. With such large-scale solar farms and the government policy of pursuing renewable energies, can the minister please provide an update on what the government is doing to ensure electrical safety and why it is so important?

Ms GRACE: I think it is important that we take account of the fact that there are no second chances when it comes to electrical safety. That is why the Palaszczuk government has a clear policy position on improving safety standards within the rapidly growing large-scale solar farm industry. Solar panels are live while being mounted and removed, and incorrect installation or earthing during mounting or removal can result in latent electrical safety risk such as electrocution, fire and system faults.

I just want to paint a picture here about the incidents that were happening in this industry over 12 months ago. My department has been conducting compliance and enforcement activity in solar farms over several years. As at 25 July there were a number. This year, 218 solar farm compliance audits have been undertaken by the ESO and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. There were 84 statutory notices, 31 breaches of work health and safety laws and 53 breaches of electrical safety laws.

In June 2018, the ESO was notified of an allegation of unlicensed electrical work performed at the solar farm near Chinchilla. The investigation revealed that high-voltage and low-voltage underground supply cables had been installed on a solar farm by a company that did not hold an electrical contractors licence to perform the work. The company engaged unlicensed workers, including backpackers, to install the cable. The June 2018 incident near Chinchilla prompted my department to discuss with me their growing concerns about solar farm safety, including the Electrical Safety Commissioner. In July we established a steering committee of technical and safety experts, because in July there were also incidents coming my way in relation to the report of the breaches and the number of incidents occurring.

As of 1 July 2018, 22 incidents at solar farms had been reported involving electrical shock, electrical burns, fire or explosion and risk of injury from damage to solar panels from grass fires and severe storms. We had a situation where I had been briefed in June and July 2018 about concerns in the solar farm industry around the type of issues that I bring here today. We have had a number of statutory breaches. It would be a very brave minister that ignored that kind of advice coming through their Electrical Safety Office and the independent Electrical Safety Commissioner.

In October 2016 we had another serious electrical incident where a young worker received an arc burn/flash burn when incorrectly attempting to connect solar panels. There was a pattern in solar farms, similar to the silicosis issue. In the June 2018 incident at Chinchilla they had to do incredible work to rectify the situation, because it had been done by unlicensed electrical contractors without an electrical person in sight.

In July last year we established a steering group of technical and safety experts made up of stakeholders, the Commissioner for Electrical Safety, Powerlink, National Electrical Contractors Association, Master Electricians Australia, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Energy Networks Australia, Energy Queensland, ETU, ESO, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and the CFMMEU.

Following eight months of consultation and advice from the steering group, the government developed the code of practice and new provisions for electrical safety regulation. Broader industry consultation also occurred including the Clean Energy Council and the Australia Industry Group. Crown law advice was provided about making the regulation. The regulation was drafted by the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel, a general process for the introduction of all regulations.

In February 2019, during the time the code and regulation were being finalised, another serious electrical incident occurred. A worker received burns when they contacted live equipment. Based upon this, we acted quickly to bring in this regulation. We know the history and that it was challenged on technical grounds—that the act has not kept pace with modern technology and that the issues of safety were never canvassed other than by the making of a regulation, not an act of parliament. I refer to the sexual offender laws that the member for Kawana brought in when he was a minister that were invalidated. These were regulations.

In light of that Supreme Court action, we needed to defend this and get clarity about the exact issues with the legislation, which has not been looked at for 19 to 20 years and clearly has not kept pace with changes. We needed to appeal this to be sure, because there are other regulations in train that we want to bring in. These relate to the de-energising of ceiling spaces before a worker enters a ceiling space to carry out pest control, lay pink batts and undertake other activities.

We needed to be sure that the act allowed that regulation under general health and safety. Following this Court of Appeal decision, it appears there may be problems with that. It was absolutely essential to get clarity around this issue. That is why this appeal was made—on solid grounds, based

on legal advice. We may have to look at different legislation in the making of future regulations. For example, prohibiting a pest controller from entering a ceiling space unless it is de-energised could be stepping beyond the Electrical Safety Act. These are serious health and safety issues.

If there is anything that the Palaszczuk government and Labor governments do, it is take health and safety seriously. We will leave no stone unturned. That is why we are leading the nation in terms of the silicosis issue in this country. We make no apologies for what we have done. We now have clarity and are moving forward with the Electrical Safety Office and the Electrical Safety Commissioner. There are clear guidelines on where we intend to go. I would like to speak further on this should other questions be asked.

Mr HEALY: Thank you very much, Minister. That was extensive. Bearing in mind it is all part of the legislative reforms and the regulatory improvements to Queensland's industrial relations workplace health and safety, can the minister advise of the government's response to the invalidation of section 73A of the electrical safety regulation?

Ms GRACE: Thank you very much, because there is more to be said in relation to this issue. It is important to note that these improvements to safety standards for the solar farm industry received broad-ranging support at the time. The National Electrical and Communications Association executive director Peter Lamont, whose organisation was represented on the steering committee, said that the changes would make the solar farm industry safer. He said –

The mounting, locating, fixing, earthing and removing of solar panels at solar farms is dangerous work and it should not be undertaken by unlicensed workers.

He also said—

We fully support the new changes.

The safety requirements were not looked at in the appeal process. It was a technicality about whether or not these regulations could be made under current definitions. As I said, we now have clarity about that. They are not keeping pace with modern technologies as they roll out, particularly as panels now not only generate electricity but also supply at the same time. This act was written at a time when generation, transmission and distribution were seen as separate areas and each was regulated. Now, electrical batteries and electrical solar panels generate and supply at the same time. The current legislation is not keeping pace with changes. We have that clear now, and we will go further.

Patrick Lau, the engineering director for eco energy company EIWA Queensland, was quoted in the Bundaberg *NewsMail* as welcoming the changes, despite fears in some quarters. He said—

I don't think there will be a major impact, I think it's provided a bit of clarity as to what is classified as electrical work.

He said that the changes would make things safer on solar farms. We have had the challenge, based on a technicality about whether the act has kept pace, and we now have clarity that that clearly is not the case and the regulation has been declared invalid. Although we are disappointed, we respect the courts. Governments pass acts. New South Wales introduced legislation which the member for Kawana emulated in our IR Act. It was found that certain requirements were unconstitutional, and those were removed. This happens with governments quite often, and these are issues that need to be canvassed for clarity.

Similarly, we rely on advice given to us by Crown law and the department and we move in accordance with that advice and we move quickly. At some stage the member for Kawana was trying to intimate that I may have acted a bit tardy in relation to silicosis—he has not been able to land on that one—but quite clearly any minister who received the information that I received and did not act would be a very brave minister in these circumstances. When we look at the technical responses made by the appeals, after the Supreme Court handed down its decision the Electrical Safety Commissioner and I met straightaway and he has been quoted as saying—

... I remain concerned about the safety risks workers installing solar panels at these large-scale solar electricity generating farms face, such as electrical shock and fire. Contrary to some of the commentary I've seen in the media, these risks are very real and very serious and they need to be addressed.

Mr Greg Skyring, the Electrical Safety Commissioner, is an independent commissioner who comes from an industry background and is well aware of this. On the basis of all of that, it is very necessary that we get a very clear view. The Electrical Safety Commissioner in meetings with me said that he continues to support the government in their efforts to ensure this industry and the jobs it creates can grow but not at the cost of safety. We have now met. We have a course of action where I have asked that he report to me by 31 October in conducting a round table so these issues can be fully canvassed about what needs to be regulated at this point in time, what agreement is done in the current

terms of the legislation and what work can and cannot be done but also to look at the longer view of the Electrical Safety Act in terms of bringing it up to date with technologies that are coming on the market that were not around at the time when the act was drafted.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, in relation to page 2 of the SDS and its reference to creating safe, fair and productive workplaces and communities, can you update the committee, and particularly me—I am very interested in this—of developments under the government about the labour hire licensing scheme?

Ms GRACE: The Palaszczuk government—and I note that you, too, are a proud member of our caucus—is proud to have led the way by introducing Australia's first labour hire licensing scheme with these laws—laws that were not supported by those opposite. We have finally regulated a sector that was left unregulated for far too long. Before the new laws came in, you had to have a licence to sell a car and you had to have a licence to sell a house, but you did not need a licence to sell labour, and this was an untenable situation. The issues encountered by some workers in the labour hire industry have been well documented—cases of wage theft, sexual harassment, substandard housing and serious workplace health and safety risks. These cases had been happening for too long and too often and the Palaszczuk government was determined to take strong action through a rigorous licensing scheme establishing basic minimum obligations on all labour hire providers having to meet these requirements before they could operate in Queensland.

Now more than 12 months on since the new laws started on 16 April 2018, I am glad to report that the new laws have been a great success, lifting the standard of the industry and protecting vulnerable workers from exploitation. In the first 15 months of operation—and these far exceed the numbers we even thought were going to come forward—3,124 licences have been granted to labour hire providers operating in Queensland and there have been great benefits from this in that the licensing compliance unit have taken compliance action against a number of providers and they have linked up with Border Force and Fair Work Commission inspectors. They are working as a team and now in Queensland they can identify those providers in terms of actions and meeting standards that these other agencies need to look at. They have been working cooperatively together in ensuring that their requirements are also being met by these labour hire licensees.

Since it came in, 13 licences have been refused, 13 have been given with conditions, 113 have been withdrawn for failing to provide compliance information, 14 licences have been cancelled and 140 licences have been suspended at some point, with 44 under current supervision. The compliance unit carries out audits, as I said. There are now teams and others have linked on and we have seen great benefits come from this. The compliance unit is doing a great job. They have linked with the ATO, with Border Force, with the Fair Work Ombudsman, with WorkCover, with Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, with emergency services and with local councils to break the business model of unscrupulous providers, particularly in the area where they were also providing substandard accommodation.

There have been great benefits come out of this. We will pursue labour hire providers not doing the right thing, and we have already had one successful prosecution. This has been a success story and I am very proud that the Labor Palaszczuk government has introduced labour hire laws. We will continue to monitor this sector and ensure that vulnerable workers are protected.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. We will move now to the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, once again thank you for acknowledging the hard work that people do in the mining and construction industry and acknowledging the deaths that there have been in the industry over the last two years. I am a fitter boilermaker by trade. I spent a lot of time in the mining and construction industry. From my personal accounts and from reports back from the industry as it is today, worker safety has fallen since the global financial crash. We saw things ramp up with safety from the mid-2000s all the way through when safety was at a height. It has not returned back to where it was and a lot of that is being blamed on the transient workforce created by labour hire companies. Would the minister be able to outline how many deaths in mining and construction occurred on mining and construction sites during the 2018-19 financial year as well as the 2019-20 financial year?

Ms GRACE: Obviously 2019-20 is not over yet as we have just entered it, member for Hinchinbrook. I understand what you are saying, but we are happy to provide those numbers and we hope that there are not any for this financial year coming. In the last financial year I think I quoted that there were six deaths in the mining and quarrying area over the last 12 months. Obviously under our WorkCover scheme—and my condolences to the families—they would then meet all WorkCover benefits and entitlements. If you would like to know more about that, Mr Bruce Watson, the CEO of WorkCover Queensland, is here who can give you information on workers' entitlements.

Mr DAMETTO: If you could take that on notice?

Ms GRACE: We are happy to provide that to you. I will make sure that Mr Bruce Watson provides information about what is available under the WorkCover scheme. However, you are right and this is why we brought in the labour hire licensing laws and wanted a strict criteria. In order to be licensed, labour hire licensing providers have to meet strict workplace health and safety requirements and they could lose their licence if they are not meeting those strict requirements. Another benefit of our labour hire licensing scheme, which often goes unnoticed, is WorkCover. We are finding that WorkCover are now finding these companies that never paid premiums before, but now that they are paying premiums they have increased the premium amount to the WorkCover scheme by about, I think it was, half a million dollars last financial year in additional premiums because of licensing and the need for workers comp. I will get that figure for you. It is \$456,000, so around that half a million dollars in additional funding. If they do not pay their WorkCover premiums, they cannot be licensed.

Mr DAMETTO: When you find out the number of people who have become deceased on construction or mining sites, can we also have a split between the permanent workforce and labour hire? Can you take that on notice?

Ms GRACE: I am sure that some of these figures are available, but we will get those for you, member for Hinchinbrook. We have no problems in providing them and we will get to you exactly what WorkCover Queensland has on their books. There would probably be something in their annual report coming out soon for 2018-19, but if you require them before that we will make sure that we will get that information to you as soon as possible.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you. Can the minister outline what the Palaszczuk government is doing to reduce the excessive use of labour hire workers on mining and construction sites by mining and construction companies?

Ms GRACE: That is a good question. Quite clearly, there is not a lot that we can do to stop employers deciding where they obtain their workforce from. That might be counter to some laws in the country, but what we can ensure is that employers must only engage licensed labour hire providers.

If they engage in a provider that is not licensed they face fines, which are in the legislation, if they are prosecuted and found guilty of doing so. You must be licensed to operate in Queensland and if you are not licensed you cannot operate. We have had one successful prosecution there. At the same time, for employers there is a list on our website of all the companies that are licensed. They can only engage licenced operators so that we can ensure health and safety, WorkCover coverage and all of the wage protection for those workers in the documents that they have provided for us. That is the basis upon which we ensure that vulnerable workers are protected, but employers are free to decide where they obtain their workforce.

There are legitimate times when workplaces need labour hire workers to come in for particular periods. We acknowledge that. Many workplaces have labour hire. These workers are often covered by agreements or awards. There is a legitimate place, but far too often it was an unregulated area where it became the primary source of labour rather than the secondary source. We do what we can to ensure they operate ethically and meet all necessary legislative requirements.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, with respect to workers compensation services, could you please advise how many firms currently undertake work on behalf of WorkCover Queensland on the Legal Services Panel?

Mr Cook: I might call Mr Watson.

Mr Watson: We currently have a total of 11 firms. That is legal firms but that also includes the government legal service, Crown Law.

Mr BLEIJIE: Eleven firms inclusive of Crown Law on the panel?

Mr Watson: Correct.

Mr BLEIJIE: Is that the same figure that was there last year or has that increased or decreased over the past 12 months—the number of firms on the panel?

Mr Watson: It increased commencing from 1 July of last year. It increased from nine to 11. We are under the current contract for a period of three years. That will continue for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 years.

Mr BLEIJIE: What has been the total amount of funding for these firms over the past 12 months?

CHAIR: Director-General, are you happy for that question to be asked?

Mr Cook: I am happy to refer to Mr Watson.

Mr Watson: I do not have that number with me at the moment, but I am most happy to get that to you. I have my CFO here. I may be able to get that number shortly.

Mr BLEIJIE: Whilst we look for that, if the minister may take that on notice?

Ms GRACE: Yes, I am happy to take it on notice. To clarify, the member for Kawana is after what the legal expenses were for the financial year 2018-19?

Mr BLEIJIE: To the lawyers on the panel.

Ms GRACE: To the solicitors on the panel.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. Director-General, can you confirm with the committee if law firm DWF is on the panel?

Mr Cook: I refer that to Mr Watson.

Mr Watson: I can confirm that DWF is one of the panel legal firms.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, could you confirm for the committee the itemised fees that DWF has received in the past 12 months?

Mr Cook: I imagine that we would have to take that on notice. I will refer to the minister as to whether the minister would be willing to take that on notice.

Ms GRACE: I am not sure whether WorkCover Queensland looks at legal fees on a firm-by-firm basis or whether it does this as a collective amount. I am not sure whether that is possible. I am not sure where this is heading. We can give you figures for every single one of the 11 solicitors on the panel, if you like.

Mr BLEIJIE: No, I am after the individual.

Ms GRACE: We would be happy to take on notice that WorkCover Queensland will provide the fees for every legal firm that is on the panel.

Mr BLEIJIE: The question was specifically about the fees paid to DWF, which we have confirmed through this process sits on the WorkCover board panel. I am particularly interested because Deputy Premier Jackie Trad's husband is a partner of the firm DWF.

CHAIR: Member for Kawana, I can save you the time. I am very clear on what your question was and I was writing down that the minister took that on notice and gave an indication of what she was coming back with by the end of the session or after—by 5 pm on Monday. The question was asked and answered.

Mr BLEIJIE: Can I confirm that taken on notice was specifically for that firm?

CHAIR: I think the minister was quite clear that she was providing all of them.

Ms GRACE: No, we will provide for every single firm on the panel.

Mr BLEIJIE: Individual items? That is fine. Thank you.

Ms GRACE: Individualised on the panel.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, what process does WorkCover have in place to ensure that conflict of interest is manageable in terms of legal firms and particularly government ministers or members of parliament to ensure a complete separation between the two?

Mr Cook: I thank the member for the question. I will refer to Mr Watson, but I will make a general comment to start with. As part of any procurement process, including the establishment of panels, obtaining declarations of interests from the people who are applying to be on those panels is standard practice across government. I imagine that would be standard practice no matter what section or what department of the government we are talking about. I will ask Mr Watson to talk about the particular aspects in relation to WorkCover.

Mr Watson: I can confirm that the process is to adhere to the government's procurement process. We go through and ask specifically about conflicts of interest as part of the tender offers and they have been disclosed along the way in the process.

Mr BLEIJIE: Director-General, can you confirm for the committee whether any disclosures have been made by anyone from DWF law firm?

Mr Cook: Certainly, not through any work that I have done or any disclosures that have been made to me. I will refer to Mr Watson in relation to WorkCover.

Mr Watson: I will have to go back and check. It is testing my mind from 18 months ago. I will be able to confirm that. However, I will say that we note this is a related party interest in our annual accounts, our annual report every year.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, were you taking that on notice? Mr Watson said that he would check that—whether a disclosure was made by anyone at the DWF firm? Mr Watson said that he would have to check.

Ms GRACE: I will take that on notice.

Mr BLEIJIE: Lovely. Thank you. I refer to page 9 of the SDS with respect to industrial relations. In the middle of the page under 'Source of revenue', in relation to 'state contribution' it is \$31.864 million. Is that figure correct, Mr Director-General?

Mr Cook: Yes, I can see that reference.

Mr BLEIJIE: Is it also correct that last year's budget figure for the same state contribution was \$32.398 million?

Mr Cook: That is correct.

Mr BLEIJIE: In terms of the state contribution that I have just asked you about, the funding for your department this year is less than it was last year; is that correct?

Mr Cook: In terms of the state funding contribution, as you indicated, in the 2018-19 budget it was \$32.398 million. I think you indicated that. In the 2019-20 budget it is \$31.864 million. Total funding, of course, has increased with other funding that is available.

Mr BLEIJIE: Taking away the other funding that you mentioned in other revenue, the state contribution from this government has decreased this year. Director-General, can you provide the committee with an update with respect to the investigation by O'Connor Marsden & Associates Pty Ltd with respect to the allegations I made of undue influence with the CFMMEU and the department of industrial relations?

Mr Cook: I understand that that was a complaint that was made earlier this year initially to the CCC. The CCC referred that complaint to the department. As you indicated, the department engaged an independent investigation agency, O'Connor Marsden & Associates—we did that on 19 February—to carry out the investigation into those particular allegations. That investigation has recently been completed. However, also recently some further complaint information has been referred by the CCC to the department which requires further investigation in relation to that particular matter.

Mr BLEIJIE: I responded as a witness to O'Connor Marsden & Associates back in March. I have not heard back from anyone. You are now saying that investigation has been completed. If it has been completed, my question is when was it completed and when will that be made public?

Mr Cook: As a result of additional information referred to us by the CCC, that information will be part of the continuation of the work that O'Connor Marsden & Associates are undertaking.

Mr BLEIJIE: When were those additional matters referred to your department by the Crime and Corruption Commission?

Mr Cook: It was last week: Thursday, 25 July.

Mr BLEIJIE: When was the investigation by O'Connor Marsden & Associates completed?

Mr Cook: In terms of completed, it was provided to the department I think a week or so beforehand—on the Monday of that week.

Mr BLEIJIE: The matters the CCC now refer to, which you have now expanded the scope of the investigation on, what do those matters relate to?

Mr Cook: I cannot go into the detail of that. That is a matter for the CCC.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will broaden it then because it is quite public, the issue here. The Crime and Corruption Commission—

Ms GRACE: Only because you have done so. Only because you have made it so.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have spoken about it in parliament as is my right and as is the right of people complaining. We have just been advised that the Crime and Corruption Commission have referred further allegations, which I might add have not been made by me, so more people have expressed concerns about the Department of Industrial Relations.

Ms GRACE: We do not know who has made the complaints.

Mr BLEIJIE: The matter that I referred to was with respect to inspectorate officers feeling that they were under undue influence from director Helen Burgess in the Department of Industrial Relations. Those matters have been made public. Is the matter of Helen Burgess now completed or is that still now under investigation?

Mr Cook: The matter in relation to, as you indicated, the original complaint, that investigation will continue to cover the further referrals that the CCC has made to us in the last week. I am not prepared to go into detail around that as I would not want to do and, in fact, under the CCC Act I do not think I am allowed to.

Mr BLEIJIE: With respect, the Crime and Corruption Commission are not investigating it is an independent investigation.

Mr Cook: They have referred it to us and the letters that they write to me indicate to me quite clearly that the details of that, while they are under investigation, I am not to speak of those matters.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you. What is the role of Helen Burgess in the department at the moment? What is her title?

Ms GRACE: This is a disgraceful attack on public servants.

Mr Cook: Her role is an inspector.

Ms GRACE: When something is under investigation—disgraceful attacks!

Mr Cook: Her role is as it has been. She is an inspector.

Mr BLEIJIE: I understand she was a director.

Mr Cook: I think she has inspector powers as well. I think she has actually got those qualifications. She has maintained the role she has always had. She is a director.

Mr BLEIJIE: There is a difference between an inspector and a director. What is her role?

Mr Cook: I will seek clarification about her actual role in the structure. There has been no change to her role is what I am saying.

Mr BLEIJIE: I understand that the director position was advertised either at the end of last year or early this year.

Ms GRACE: Point of order, Chair. We are asking about a specific person who has been referred to the CCC—

Mr BLEIJIE: I was asking about the job.

Ms GRACE:—who has been referred to the department under delegation powers that are being investigated and we are airing issues that could possibly be part of this investigation.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am asking about a job. That is rubbish!

Ms GRACE: While it is before the CCC I ask for your ruling on the appropriateness of these questions in relation to an officer that is currently part of an independent investigation referred to the director-general by the CCC.

Mr BLEIJIE: The position of a senior public servant is relevant.

Ms GRACE: You are naming people and you are delving into issues that could be looked at.

Mr BLEIJIE: Rubbish!

Ms GRACE: That is what I am saying.

CHAIR: I heard your point of order, Minister. I have also been listening very closely to the director-general's comments and how carefully he is addressing the issue. I would say, member for Kawana, that the questions you are asking now do not appear relevant to the appropriation. If you wish to make out your case as to why they are directly relevant I would appreciate it and you have a minute and a half to do so.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will, Madam Chair. The senior Public Service office is funded through the department internally. It is highly relevant to ask about positions that senior public servants hold within the industrial relations portfolio. I am simply asking: what is her position?

Minister, the director-general has advised that under the SDS the state contribution to Workplace Health and Safety and the Department of Industrial Relations has reduced this year. You talk about the government having such a focus on workplace health and safety. If that is the case, why have you cut funding to your own department?

Ms GRACE: The Workplace Health and Safety budget has increased. That is incorrect. Often when you look at figures some of them are rollovers from previous budgets, there could be a program that extended into another financial year. There are all kinds of reasons the overall budget for my Department of Workplace Health and Safety has increased and we are very proud of that.

Mr SAUNDERS: As a follow-up question to the question in relation to page 2 of the department's SDS and its reference to creating safe, fair and productive workplaces and communities, can you update the committee on how the new licensing scheme has been received and any relevant developments at the national level in labour hire schemes?

Ms GRACE: Thank you. It is nice to get a question about actual issues in industrial relations that are making people's lives better and are actually about helping employers to determine who they engage as labour hire. The feedback that we are getting has been excellent. Questioning from the other side is nothing more than mud throwing, mudslinging, imputation and accusations the whole time and it is refreshing—

Mrs STUCKEY: That is just what you are doing now.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is called government accountability.

CHAIR: Order! The minister is answering a question.

Ms GRACE:—to get a question in relation to issues that affect employers every day.

Mrs STUCKEY: You can throw it but you can't take it. Mud sticks.

Ms GRACE: Despite the lack of support from the opposition who opposed the legislation I can report that the new labour hire laws have been well received right across the spectrum from employers, providers, workers and the wider community. For example, Barry Hockings of Trident Trades and Labour Hire told us they found the online application process to be easy and user friendly, the process was straightforward and particularly self-explanatory with plenty of information available online and it is great to see the Queensland government taking a hard line against providers who are not doing the right thing by workers.

The biggest praise we are getting is from those employers in the labour hire industry who were doing the right thing but were continually being undercut by those who are obviously not doing the right thing. Their biggest complaint was that they would tender for work and continually be undercut by labour hire providers who were not meeting award conditions, health and safety standards, their WorkCover premiums, their superannuation obligations, and who they knew were not doing the right thing by workers and they very much welcome these laws.

Gino Marcon, a grower in Bundaberg, wrote to my office with the following message: 'I must congratulate your government on finally addressing the problems that have plagued our horticultural industry for some time now. The response from my fellow farmers has been overwhelmingly positive.' Joe Moro, the president of the Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and chair of the Far North Queensland Growers Association who appeared at the wage theft inquiry last year—your committee—said they are very happy with the changes the state government has made, we are getting this right because as horticultural employers now know, when they look at the website they find the labour hire companies are now licensed and they can use them and should they stray from that and not provide fair and balanced conditions and meet their licensing obligations there is a hotline where they can be reported and their licence can be looked at more closely.

Michael Sippel, the president of the Lockyer Valley Growers—and the member for Lockyer Valley has spoken to me about this and how it has changed the growers in his area which is a fantastic food bowl in Queensland—told the *Queensland Times* on 15 June 2018 that the new laws were long overdue. It was this Labor government that brought them in with opposition and no support whatsoever from those opposite. We are leading the country when it comes to our labour hire licensing scheme.

We have even had spin-offs. The Gatton Caravan Park is where many labour hire workers often stay. Julie Gordon, who works at the park, told the *Gatton Star*—

The new laws are good for the kids because they feel more secure being signed off.

This is excellent feedback. Better Crop Management managing director Rod Parker told the *Gatton Star* that the new requirements under the scheme did not affect providers that were operating aboveboard, apart from a little extra paperwork that they were happy to do. He said—

It—

the laws—

will get it across the board that workers will get a fair deal and they will get paid the correct amount.

Often the farmers were doing the right thing—they were paying the labour hire provider the money they needed to pay—but it was not being passed on and the entitlements were not paid.

We want to see the benefits of this flow. I continue to call on the federal government to establish a rigorous national labour hire licensing scheme. Unfortunately, in six years the federal government has done nothing, in spite of all of the evidence of wage theft and the underpayment of conditions under awards and agreements. Only in the final months as the election loomed did they commit to a light-touch labour hire registration scheme with limited coverage in just a few sectors. I look forward to discussing this. I will make sure that we ask the government, in whatever they do in this area, to reconsider a light touch and adopt the proven and successful model of labour hire licensing that we have here in Queensland, where not only are Queensland employers and workers benefiting but also you have the ATO, Border Force and the Fair Work Ombudsman linking together with our unit to bring about greater compliance with legislative requirements. It is a great outcome.

CHAIR: Minister, in relation to page 10 of your SDS with reference to the delivery of workers compensation services, can you please outline the WorkCover premiums set for 2019-20 and the money saved by employers in the last financial year in relation to discounts on premiums?

Ms GRACE: This is a good news story as well. For the sixth straight year, WorkCover Queensland is providing Queensland employers with the lowest average premium rate of any Australian state or territory, at \$1.20 per \$100 of wages paid. Maintaining the WorkCover premium at the same low rate for six years has provided much needed savings, stability for employers in their business planning and a competitive edge over their interstate rivals. WorkCover has also delivered over \$75 million in additional savings to Queensland businesses since two new measures were introduced under our government in 2017.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Ms GRACE: A five per cent early premium discount has led to \$39 million in savings. That five per cent is up from three per cent. In 2018-19 alone, 64,700 employees took advantage of that. No, member for Kawana, they were not your initiatives.

Mr BLEIJIE: The lowest premium in the country.

Ms GRACE: Thanks to a Labor government, member for Kawana. I agree: we have the lowest premium in the country—the member for Kawana is so right—thanks to a Palaszczuk Labor government. The premium discount of no payments for employers who employ apprentices, where they do not pay any payments, is a Labor initiative. It never happened under the LNP. I am sorry, member for Kawana, but you cannot claim that one. That has provided more than \$36 million in savings and benefited more than 10,000 employers each year, providing a significant incentive for Queensland businesses to take on apprentices, while maintaining safe workplaces. I am happy that those two measures continue in operation. Obviously they will supplement nicely the government's broader \$885 million payroll tax package benefits to support Queensland businesses, particularly in rural and remote areas.

We have achieved this while also delivering significant benefit reforms for injured workers. The National Injury Insurance Scheme provides no-fault long-time care and support for workers who suffer a catastrophic injury at work. We reinstated the rights of workers in this state to access common law, which was hindered by the LNP by putting in a five per cent threshold for workers to access. That would have meant that in this state not one worker with coal workers' pneumoconiosis would have been able to access common law benefits, because of the threshold put in by the member for Kawana and the Campbell Newman government.

Mr BLEIJIE: Not true.

Ms GRACE: Very true indeed. The scheme's strong performance was independently affirmed by the recent five-year review. Safe Work Australia also reports that, of all centrally funded schemes in the country, the Queensland scheme has the highest proportion of total expenditure paid directly to or for our injured workers and the lowest proportion going to administrative costs. Congratulations to Mr Bruce Watson, the CEO of WorkCover, and to the workers of WorkCover. That means that we are enjoying Australia's most efficient workers compensation scheme, thanks to the efforts of the CEO and his staff.

CHAIR: I refer to the response to silica exposure in the engineered stone industry. Minister, can you please outline the government's response to ensure the health and safety of workers working in the engineered stone industry?

Ms GRACE: That issue is gaining national prominence. We were the first state, once again, to act in this area when it became apparent that these injuries were being sustained in the stone benchtop industry. We took this matter very seriously and implemented bans and alerts straightaway. Once it

was brought to my attention I briefed the Premier, and the Premier and I acted swiftly and with intent. We are leading the country in relation to this. We are making sure that every single workplace has been audited. We have issued relevant notices to ensure safe systems of work. We are ensuring that safe systems and processes, as well as personal protective equipment, are being provided. We are obviously making sure that workers are protected in this industry.

Workers compensation has also come on board. We have ensured that workers receive the screening that they require and that they obtain the workers compensation they deserve. Sadly, to date we have had accepted 164 workers compensation claims for silicosis from stonemasons working within the stone benchtop industry. Sadly, 22 of the 164 relate to progressive massive fibrosis, PMF, which is the worst kind of silicosis that workers can get. Tragically, in March this year we had our first death. Mr White died after battling PMF. His passing was the first confirmed death of a worker suffering from PMF. I want to extend, on the record, my deepest sympathies and condolences to his family and friends. We are continuing to ensure that the nearly 900 workers who have come forward receive free health screens or are in the process of being screened. There are fewer than 100 health screens outstanding. That is incredible, and I commend the work of WorkCover.

In another first in the country, Queensland Health has a notifiable dust lung disease register, which commenced on 1 July 2019. We are calling for a national register. We have teams of experts looking at prognoses and working together to assess the best way forward in relation to this. It is outstanding work that we are doing in the state. We are leading the country. We are making sure that silica is well and truly contained, that injured workers are well and truly catered for and that we continue to make sure that we implement the best possible processes here in the state, leading the nation.

CHAIR: The committee will now conclude its questioning. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio areas of education and industrial relations has almost expired. Minister, I give you these final few minutes to address anything you may wish that you took on notice and, obviously, to make any final comments to your officers and the committee.

Ms GRACE: I will give a closing statement within the time allocated and we will take those matters on notice and provide the answers.

CHAIR: Sure.

Ms GRACE: Chair, I thank you, committee members and the deputy chair. I sincerely thank my director-general, Tony Cook, and all staff within the Department of Education and the Office of Industrial Relations for their assistance in preparing for today. Preparing for parliamentary estimates is not easy. It involves a tremendous amount of work, as we all know from previous experience. My department has risen to the challenge once again. I am truly honoured to lead departments that make a difference to the lives of Queenslanders in the way that my departments do. The education side of the portfolio has some 92,000 employees in total. It is helping to shape our children into the global citizens of tomorrow and is delivering a world-class education. The Office of Industrial Relations is working to ensure every workplace in Queensland is safe and that workers receive fair and just treatment.

I again pay tribute to each and every employee for the contribution they make. I would also like to thank my ministerial staff for their constant and loyal support—my chief of staff Sharon Durham, in particular, and all my officers behind me who do a great job.

I thank the chair, the deputy chair and member for Currumbin, and the members of the committee and the parliamentary staff who do such a great job as well. It is always a privilege to take part in the estimates process. I honestly thank members for their probing questions today and for the respectful manner in which this estimates process was conducted. Thank you all very much. Thank you for all your hard work. Thanks to the committee.

CHAIR: The committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice must be provided to the committee secretariat by 5 pm on Monday, 5 August 2019. The exact wording of any outstanding questions can be checked in the proof transcript of this session of the hearing which will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's website in approximately two hours. Minister, Director-General and all officers, I warmly thank you for your attendance and for your fulsome approach to questions today.

Proceedings suspended from 2.30 pm to 2.34 pm.

ESTIMATES—EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE—EMPLOYMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

In Attendance

Hon. SM Fentiman, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development

Mr S Bevis, Chief of Staff

Ms L Fraser Hardy, Senior Policy Advisor

Ms O Amsden, Policy Advisor

Mr M Cooper, Policy Advisor

Department of Employment Small Business and Training

Ms M Curtis, Director-General

Mr B Lang, Head of Corporate

TAFE Queensland

Ms M Campbell, Chief Executive Officer

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2019 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development. The committee has agreed to first examine the minister's portfolio area of employment until 3.45 pm, the portfolio area of small business from 4 pm to 5 pm and training and skills development, including TAFE Queensland, from 5 pm to 6 pm. The committee will suspend proceedings for a break from 3.45 pm to 4 pm. We have one visiting member this afternoon. I welcome the member for Maroochydore.

I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament also apply in this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, argument or opinion. I intend to guide the proceedings so that relevant issues can be explored fully and to ensure there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members. I ask that all member abide by the intent of these standing orders to ensure that the hearing today is both respectful and productive for all present.

On behalf of the committee, I warmly welcome the minister, director-general, departmental and statutory officers and members of the public to the hearing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental officers to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of employment, small business, training and skills development open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, I now invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Ms FENTIMAN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. The Palaszczuk government's message is very clear. There is nothing more important than giving Queenslanders the opportunity to secure the jobs that they and their families can depend on.

As the Deputy Premier said in her budget speech, this budget is about backing jobs for Queensland and it is unashamedly focused on the regions. The Palaszczuk government has helped create over 200,000 jobs since 2015. Job creation is at the heart of this year's budget. As the Minister for Employment, I am incredibly energised by this. Our government has delivered 33 consecutive months of jobs growth and we are keeping this momentum going with our job-creating programs such as Back to Work and Skilling Queenslanders for Work. So far we have assisted over 42,000 Queenslanders through Skilling Queenslanders for Work, providing work ready skills and training with more than 30,000 participants going on to get a job or further training.

Critical to our job creation agenda is vocational education and training. Investing in VET is key to our state's future economic prosperity. We know that nine out of 10 jobs of the future will require a VET qualification. That is why we are investing \$978 million in training and skilling Queenslanders. A key part of this investment is our Skills Strategy—an innovative and game-changing initiative that will see more young people get jobs. Under this strategy we will be enhancing the quality of our public providers and we will be looking at other ways to support our students with free TAFE.

I recently visited the Southport TAFE campus and met free TAFE student Kendra who was completing a Certificate III in Hospitality. She told me that without free TAFE her family would not have been able to afford to help her enrol in the course. Her life-changing story is common across Queensland. What our free TAFE has done is remove the barrier preventing a young Queenslander from being able to start and build their career.

Our Skills Strategy is also about creating a partnership. We know that government cannot provide all training needs so we need to partner with industry to get Queenslanders skilled up for the right jobs in the right locations. I am looking forward to announcing that strategy very shortly.

I also want to quickly talk about our TAFE assets. We have doubled our investment of more than \$105 million to upgrade TAFE campus such as Gold Coast and Mount Gravatt, while continuing to work on major projects at Pimlico in Townsville and Toowoomba and in campuses like Alexandra Hills.

Our Back to Work program continues to give local businesses the confidence to be able to employ more Queenslanders. Almost 20,000 people now have jobs because of the program. In Cairns I visited with the member for Cairns Lethal Welding and Fabrication and saw firsthand the power of the program where Cole was taken on by Mark as an apprentice and his business is thriving. Small businesses like Mark's are critical to the Queensland economy, and that is why we are delivering the biggest changes to payroll tax in over a decade.

This year's state budget has earmarked \$885 million in payroll tax initiatives to support businesses to create more jobs. There is no doubt about it, Labor is good for business. Since the budget has been handed down I have travelled around Queensland to talk to business owners about what our payroll tax initiatives will mean to them. Mark and Judy Evans of Paronella Park in Cairns have been in business for 25 years and since the payroll taxes initiatives were announced they have employed three new staff.

The Palaszczuk government is delivering jobs for Queensland. We have done much to repair the damage done by the former LNP government and to rebuild the confidence and stability in the Queensland economy. By targeting our investments and strategies to giving Queenslanders the right opportunities through training and skills building, we are not just encouraging business to invest locally but also giving more Queenslanders the opportunity to participate in our economy.

CHAIR: We will now move to questions from non-government members. I invite the member for Maroochydore to start.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the minister. I refer to the minister's sponsored stay in the luxury ski town of Whistler with a major government contractor and former Bligh chief of staff in relation to departmental expenses on page 9 of the SDS. How long did you stay at the house?

Ms FENTIMAN: I stayed with the Scurrahs—with them at their home—for six nights.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, what was the estimated value of the accommodation?

Ms FENTIMAN: I do not have that to hand. I am happy to get that to you. I stayed at their home with them. As I said in my statement this morning, I initially did not consider that the family holiday needed to be disclosed under the standing orders. My partner and I were planning a trip to the US. We were invited by the Scurrahs to stay with them for a short period while we were in the same part of the world. We travelled during school holidays.

Mr HEALY: I raise a point of order. How is this relevant?

Ms FENTIMAN: I am happy to answer this, Chair.

CHAIR: I was going to say the same thing if a third question followed—that there is no relevance—but the minister immediately started answering, so I am assuming that you wish to answer?

Ms FENTIMAN: I am happy to answer this. To be very clear, they are long-term family friends. It was a family holiday. I considered this matter recently and decided that there would be no harm in being overly cautious and declaring it on my register, and that is what I did last week.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, were there any other gratuities, including flights or flight upgrades, provided?

Ms FENTIMAN: No.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, did the Deputy Premier and her husband stay at the same time as you and your partner, Matt Collins?

Ms FENTIMAN: We were on separate family holidays, but there was one night when we were all staying with the Scurrahs.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, did you discuss the Palaszczuk government with the Scurrahs and the Deputy Premier during your ski trip in January?

Ms FENTIMAN: No. It was a family holiday. We are long-term family friends. As I said, we travelled there in the school holidays. They are long-term family friends.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, did you disclose this gift to your director-general, given that PricewaterhouseCoopers have since received nearly a quarter of a million dollars of work from your department?

Ms FENTIMAN: When I made the decision to update the register, I informed the director-general and have asked her to obviously investigate any contracts with PwC. As the minister, I have no role in any government contracts or consultancies. I did update the director-general and she has pulled together some of that information.

Ms SIMPSON: Why did it take over six months to do the right thing and declare the free accommodation?

Ms FENTIMAN: Thank you, member. As I said, initially—

CHAIR: I am sorry to interrupt you, Minister. I appreciate that I have been lenient because you clearly were indicating when you answered the question earlier that you wished to answer but, as the chair of this committee, these questions are not directly relevant to the appropriation and I would bring the member for Maroochydore back to the appropriations. Please make your links clear as to how these questions relate to that.

Ms SIMPSON: Gladly, Madam Chair. I refer to page 9 of the SDS with respect to procurement and probity that relates to expenditure of government. It is entirely appropriate to ask the minister, given that this department has in fact expended funds—nearly a quarter of a million dollars—with respect to PricewaterhouseCoopers. Minister, did you only declare the free accommodation after the Deputy Premier was questioned in estimates last Tuesday?

Ms FENTIMAN: No, but certainly that information did prompt me to consider the matter. As I said, initially, because it was a family holiday with long-term family friends, I did not consider that the matter required to be disclosed under the standing orders, but I did not think there was any harm in being overly cautious and so did declare the family holiday on my register of interests and erred on the side of disclosure last week.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, to clarify, you only declared the free accommodation after the Deputy Premier was questioned in estimates last Tuesday?

Ms FENTIMAN: As I said, I considered the matter and felt that there was no harm in being overly cautious, so I have now declared the family holiday and it is now a matter of the public record.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, do you understand that under the rules of the parliament there are also rules involved with respect to perceived conflicts of interest and the need to declare and that that in fact does mean that you should have declared this?

Ms FENTIMAN: I understand that under the standing orders sponsored accommodation does not include gifts from personal family friends in a personal capacity where there is no conflict of interest. I made the decision that it did not need to be disclosed at that time. However, I have since reconsidered the matter and out of an abundance of caution have now declared the family holiday with long-term friends on my register of interests.

Ms SIMPSON: Only after the Deputy Premier had had this matter raised as well.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, that is the third time that statement, rather than question, has been put. The minister has answered it. Again, I think we are straying into matters that are not directly relevant. Can you please make them relevant to the appropriations.

Ms SIMPSON: Gladly, Madam Chair. This is a matter of probity. This is a firm that does business with government and the minister does have ministerial responsibility. My question is to the director-general. I refer to departmental expenses on page 9 of the SDS. Has the minister ever discussed PricewaterhouseCoopers with you?

Ms Curtis: Can I clarify the question? When you say 'have you spoken to PwC', are you talking about a particular matter or in general?

Ms SIMPSON: I am talking about anything to do with PricewaterhouseCoopers with respect to departmental expenses.

Ms Curtis: The department has a number of engagements with PwC, yes. We have spoken in the last 24 hours about those engagements.

Ms SIMPSON: Has the minister previously raised issues relating to PricewaterhouseCoopers with you?

Ms Curtis: No issues.

Ms SIMPSON: I will ask this question of the minister. Will you appoint an external auditor for the review?

Ms FENTIMAN: For which review?

Ms SIMPSON: I understood that you were saying there was a review into this issue.

Ms FENTIMAN: Apologies, member. I have asked the director-general to review the contracts that we have in place with PwC. The director-general has done that, and I am sure she would be happy to talk you through the nature of those contracts. As the minister, I obviously have nothing to do with the procurement of consultants.

Ms SIMPSON: I ask the director-general: will this review be done by an external body?

Ms Curtis: As the minister indicated, she asked me for some information regarding the contracts. I have looked into the contracts that we have had on foot. Neither the minister nor her office have had any role in relation to the appointment of those contracts, and all contracts have been undertaken in accordance with normal departmental procurement procedures.

Ms SIMPSON: You have completed your review of the matter with respect to contacts with PricewaterhouseCoopers and their contracts?

Ms Curtis: I have reviewed the procurement arrangements for the contracts and they are in accordance with our normal procurement procedures.

Ms SIMPSON: I ask the director-general: will you appoint an external body to review this matter?

CHAIR: You have already asked that, member for Maroochydore.

Mr HEALY: Even I am getting dizzy.

CHAIR: She has answered that she has done a review. Director-General, were you going to answer the question that referred to the details in front of you? A question was asked of the minister before. I am mindful that it is moving very quickly. The minister referred that question to the director-general to provide information. Then you came in with another question.

Ms Curtis: I am happy to talk through the contracts that we have with the department, if that would be of use.

Ms SIMPSON: Yes, I would appreciate that. Also, I ask the director-general: when did you undertake this investigation of PricewaterhouseCoopers? Was it in the last 24 hours?

Ms Curtis: As the minister mentioned earlier, she advised me when she updated her register of interests, and I have since that time gathered the information in relation to the contracts.

Ms SIMPSON: Could I just clarify when you had this discussion with the minister?

Ms Curtis: That was yesterday.

Ms SIMPSON: I would again raise the issue that it is necessary for these matters to not only be free of conflicts of interest but perceived conflicts of interest, and that is why this is viewed with some degree of seriousness—

CHAIR: Is that a question or a statement?

Ms SIMPSON:—and that consideration of external review would be a good idea—

CHAIR: That is not a question.

Ms SIMPSON: My next question is to the director-general. I refer to the department's expenses on SDS page 9. The minister announced the establishment of a Just Transition Group last year. How much has been spent on this group's establishment and how much is budgeted over the forward estimates to support the group's operation?

Ms Curtis: There has been \$4.9 million committed over five years to support the Just Transition Group and ongoing funding of \$1.06 million per annum after that.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general again. I refer to the department's expenses on SDS page 9. How many staff are working within the department to support the Just Transition Group and what is their total salary amount?

Ms Curtis: There are currently five FTEs employed in the department working on that project. The answer to the question on notice that was previously provided outlined the employee expenses associated with the Just Transition Group. That was question on notice No. 973.

Ms SIMPSON: That amount has already been expended to date by 30 June?

Ms Curtis: That was the year to date actual as at 30 June 2019.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. Who will be on the advisory committee and when will they be appointed?

Ms Curtis: The Queensland government is establishing an advisory committee to provide advice to government on policies to ensure a planned and measured approach to skilling workers in communities in Queensland's energy sector. The advisory committee will comprise business and community representatives, academics, unions, Jobs Queensland and other relevant government agencies. In line with the usual practice, the names of the appointees to the advisory committee will occur following the finalisation of government consideration and advice to the nominees.

Ms SIMPSON: If I could just clarify through the chair. What is the time frame for the appointment of the advisory committee?

Ms Curtis: That is currently being finalised by government.

Ms SIMPSON: Is there any indication? Are we talking about a number of weeks or months, six months?

Ms Curtis: It is to occur in the short term, I understand.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. Has the Treasurer or her office had any involvement in the establishment of the Just Transition Group?

Ms Curtis: I would have to take some advice on that. The matter was obviously considered by CBRC at the time the funding allocation was given to the department, and the Deputy Premier is a member of CBRC.

Ms SIMPSON: That process would have been approximately about six months ago?

Ms Curtis: I would have to check the exact date.

Ms SIMPSON: If I could just clarify that?

Ms Curtis: I will see if I can get that information.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, will this group seek to undertake the role of reskilling Queensland thermal coal workers in line with the Treasurer's statement of intention to parliament on 26 February this year?

Ms Curtis: Sorry, just to clarify, was that the group or the committee?

Ms SIMPSON: The Just Transition Group. Will this group seek to undertake the role of reskilling Queensland thermal coal workers in line with the Treasurer's statement of intention to parliament on 26 February this year?

Ms Curtis: The Just Transition Group was established to help skill workers and facilitate the creation of new jobs, drive economic diversification and encourage new investment in our energy sector.

Ms SIMPSON: The answer is yes, that is in line with the Deputy Premier's statement?

CHAIR: No, member for Maroochydore, the answer is the answer that the director-general gave.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a right to clarify. That is following on from the Deputy Premier's statement about reskilling Queensland thermal coal workers?

Ms Curtis: As I said, the Just Transition Group has been established to help skill workers and facilitate the creation of new jobs, drive economic diversification and encourage new investment in our energy sector. The government recognises the complexity of the changes underway in the energy sector as a result of new technologies, shifting demographics and the imperative to reduce emissions. To address these complex issues the Just Transition Group will collaborate with stakeholders to maximise future job and skill opportunities in the energy sector.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, does that include thermal coal workers?

Ms Curtis: As I outlined, it is to look at maximising future jobs and skill opportunities in the energy sector.

Ms SIMPSON: It seems like nobody wants to say the word 'coal'. So it is to include the thermal coal workers in alignment with the Deputy Premier's statement then.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, please ask questions; do not make statements.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. Director-General, this does include thermal coal; correct?

Ms Curtis: That is my understanding, yes.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. The internal government directory states that at least four departmental staff are working to support the group, and you have outlined that it is actually five. Can you advise what the five staff who have already been employed in this role are actually doing if the advisory committee has not been established?

Ms Curtis: The Just Transition Group has consulted with a large number of stakeholders—in fact, over 55—since they have been employed. These stakeholders include business and industry groups, workers and their representatives, energy generators and academics. They are also facilitating the establishment of the energy skills advisory committee. They have also provided valuable input to the development of key government strategies such as the hydrogen strategy and the ongoing work around implementing Queensland's renewable energy target and other initiatives to support growth, job opportunities, new investment and economic diversification. This has included working closely with other agencies, including Jobs Queensland, to consider future developments in the world of work and potential opportunities for economic growth.

This group is also working on a range of discrete projects such as one with Energy Skills Queensland to identify the skills mix required for the future of the energy industry and also investigating the feasibility of an energy generation upskilling pilot program. The group will also continue work on policy development, research and public and stakeholder consultation to promote continued job growth and economic diversification.

Ms SIMPSON: Madam Chair, my question is to the director-general, and I refer to the department's delivery of the Back to Work program on SDS page 2. How much has the department spent on initial payments that were claimed after four weeks of work but had no subsequent payments made after 26 or 52 weeks of continuous employment?

Ms Curtis: I will just have to see whether I have that detail with me. Are you asking post four weeks—

Ms SIMPSON: After four weeks but no subsequent payment after 26 or 52 weeks. Would you like to take that one on notice?

Ms Curtis: Yes, I will have to get that information for you.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that on notice?

Ms FENTIMAN: I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the Back to Work program. In answer to question on notice No. 1055, the minister stated that over the last financial year there were over twice as many fraudulent applicants as the preceding financial year. Why are fraudulent applications rising so quickly within the Back to Work program?

Ms Curtis: I thank the member for the question. The department has a number of systems in place to prevent, detect and respond to fraudulent activity within the Back to Work program and to ensure only eligible businesses receive grant funding. As a result, they work diligently to ensure that only eligible businesses receive grant funding. We make a number of checks to certify that applicant information is true and correct through various data-matching verification with agencies such as the

Department of Transport and Main Roads and the Australian tax office. Any concerning findings are investigated with respect to potential fraud and ineligibility. We work to determine eligibility in line with the Back to Work guidelines for funding.

Ms SIMPSON: I refer to the minister's answer to question on notice No. 6. In December 2016, Minister Grace announced \$5 million for the North Stradbroke Island Workers Assistance Scheme. Now, 2½ years later, why has only 10 per cent of this money gone to workers?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I am very proud of the work we are doing to transition the community on Minjerribah. I can provide an update for the member. As at 30 June 2019, there had been \$516,741.49 paid to assist 144 former and current Sibelco workers and one employer for an employer wage subsidy. Obviously, the majority of workers at Sibelco still have a job. There have been 26 retrenched workers to date. Of those workers, I can inform the committee of the following: six have gone on to start their own business or purchase an existing business, with four of those being based on North Stradbroke Island and two on the mainland; seven retired; one is completing university studies; 10 have gained employment; one is on a career break; and one preferred not to comment. In terms of next steps, we are working very closely with Sibelco on the impact that will be felt by workers in the next six months with a view to tailoring the assistance available to provide outcomes for impacted workers. We are reviewing that and working very closely with Sibelco.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, can I just clarify? Obviously this is a serious issue for the workers involved. \$5 million was announced, yet only 10 per cent has been paid out after 2½ years.

Ms FENTIMAN: That is because the majority of workers are still employed on the island by Sibelco. There will also be significant rehabilitation work undertaken by Sibelco. We have a full-time officer who travels regularly to the island to provide assistance to workers. As I said, we are reviewing the assistance that is available because over the next six months at some point Sibelco will obviously make decisions about the future of those workers and we will be ready to assist them. We have a number—

Ms SIMPSON: Can you guarantee that will happen this financial year?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore!

Ms FENTIMAN: It is a matter for Sibelco to make decisions about its workforce but we stand ready. We have \$5 million in assistance. We are doing a lot of work on training and the future jobs needs on the island. I have also asked the Office of Small Business to play a role—given that six of the retrenched workers so far have gone on to start their own business, which I thought was interesting. There is a really strong small business community on the island, so they are now involved in providing assistance to workers who may have an interest in pursuing a passion in small business. There is a lot of work being undertaken. We are in regular discussions with Sibelco about how to provide assistance to workers as they need it. We cannot go and advise workers about potential career options until they are ready to do so, and at this stage they still have paid employment with Sibelco.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will move now to the member for Cairns to ask a question.

Mr HEALY: Welcome, everybody. Minister, I have had the great pleasure of looking through the Service Delivery Statements and there are some very positive things happening. I recognise that and I also recognise your recent visit to Cairns, as you touched on in your opening statement, which was terrific for those small businesses. One of the key priorities for the department is increasing Queenslanders' participation in the labour force. Can you outline some of the successes being achieved in changes in Queensland's labour force since 2015?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. Queenslanders know that the top priority for the Palaszczuk government is creating jobs now and into the future. Already we have seen more than 200,000 jobs created under this government, since 2015. June marked, as I said, the 33rd consecutive month of jobs growth in Queensland. This astounding run has not happened by accident. We are focused on making sure Queenslanders have the skills they need to succeed in the labour market and that businesses have the confidence to employ and grow. It is all part of our plan—a plan that works and includes some fantastic programs, like Skilling Queenslanders for Work and Back to Work.

We have helped more than 30,000 people into jobs or further training through our \$420 million Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative alone. At the same time, \$383 million in Back to Work has helped almost 20,000 Queenslanders get a job in partnership with over 9,400 employers. That is almost 50,000 Queenslanders assisted into work thanks to these fantastic programs.

A great example of Back to Work delivering for Queensland is Strait Support, a Cairns based business which specialises in increasing Indigenous participation in the workforce. The employer, Shane Lui, expanded his business to employ staff and build a fleet of plant and machinery to complete a variety of construction projects across the Torres Strait. Shane also happens to be one of our 2018 faces of small business. It was really special to be able to catch up with him on his home island, Darnley, or Erub, in the Torres Strait last year to talk about how we can help him take on and train more apprentices. Shane has said the Back to Work funding was integral to his ability to employ more staff for his business. The support payments under the program gave him the confidence to engage more young people, not only into jobs but also in training.

These are great outcomes from fantastic programs. I want to remind members of the committee that these were two programs that the LNP in their election costings document in 2017 slashed funding for. We have not heard one word from either the member for Maroochydore or the member for Nanango about whether or not they will continue these programs. We know that they opposed these programs in government, and we know that they would only cut them again if they ever had the chance.

Mr HEALY: Minister, the disparity in our state is significant. Could you give us some updates on what is happening in regional Queensland? Obviously my learned colleague the member for Maryborough is very interested too, as others would be.

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I know that you are a champion of these programs in Cairns, and I know that the member for Maryborough is a big fan as well. We share a passion for creating jobs in local economies, and we know that that first and foremost is about people. Ensuring that Queenslanders can find dignity in work is what drives our government. It is why boosting employment has been our No. 1 priority in every part of Queensland, and it is great to see some really fantastic outcomes in the region.

Over the course of 2018-19 we have seen significant employment growth in 12 of 19 regions throughout the state. In fact, according to the ABS jobs figures released last week, the gap in the unemployment rate in South-East Queensland and regional Queensland has gone from 1.5 per cent down to now only half a per cent. Of particular note, as the member will be pleased to know, is that Cairns is among Queensland's high achievers in the latest regional jobs figures. With 10,600 new jobs, Cairns now has the state's lowest unemployment rate, at 4.6 per cent, down by 3.3 per cent since the Palaszczuk government came to office, and it is well down from the high of 8.2 per cent reached under the LNP in 2014.

Along with the member for Cairns, I recently visited Lethal Welding, as I said in my opening statement. They are a great small business and are one of thousands of businesses that have benefited from Back to Work. Lee, the owner, said that without the support payment he would be struggling with the workload on his own. He now has an apprentice and he is looking forward to moving to bigger premises. That is what the program is all about. It is about helping businesses take on and train up the next generation of skilled workers.

While Cairns may have the lowest unemployment rate, I note that Wide Bay has also had the largest decrease in unemployment over the last 12 months, with a 2.3 per cent drop. We are working very hard to reduce this figure even further with the support of local businesses and people like Marianne Kresse. Marianne launched *Beacon*, a community magazine for the Fraser Coast. One of its objectives is to provide job opportunities to people who have been unemployed. With the support of Back to Work, her magazine received three employer support payments and one Youth Boost payment. Back to Work has helped Marianne turn her dream into reality and create local jobs. That is another great story.

Mr SAUNDERS: You are correct, Minister. I love the Back to Work program and I would like to congratulate you, your staff and your department. They do a magnificent job on Back to Work. That program is crucial in my electorate of Maryborough. It is very popular with small businesses. As you quite clearly said before, the unemployment rate has dropped across the Fraser Coast, particularly since this program came in. Can you please detail how this program is also encouraging employers to take on apprentices and trainees, which are important to my area?

Ms FENTIMAN: Absolutely. I thank the member for the question. I know he is a big supporter of our programs and encouraging young people to take up an apprenticeship. I want to commend you for the work you have done to promote these programs in Maryborough. I know that you are working hard in your community to make sure that our high school students take full advantage of our VET pathways to land their dream job. In October last year I had the pleasure of receiving a tour from the member

through the Maryborough State High School's Trade Training Centre and VET school program. The school was absolutely delighted with our free TAFE initiative that provides students with a clear and free pathway to job-ready training.

While I was there, I met students Max, Thomas, Kyle, Darcy and Layla who were all completing a Certificate II in Furniture Making Pathways. These students could pursue a number of trade options including a carpentry apprenticeship for free at TAFE. A lot of those courses are taught as an apprenticeship or a traineeship. It is not just training; they actually have a job as part of their training. To support increased opportunities for students we need businesses that are willing to step up and take on these apprentices and trainees, and that is where Back to Work can really help. Across the state Back to Work has helped almost 5,000 Queensland apprentices and trainees get a start in their trade and industry. I am pleased to say this includes almost 700 apprentices and trainees in the Wide Bay-Burnett region.

One of the businesses in the Maryborough electorate who knows the importance of investing in training and has benefitted from the Back to Work program is Olds Engineering. Olds has been manufacturing specialised mechanical engineering solutions here and overseas for many generations. They have been fantastic Back to Work partners with our government. Their most recent apprentice, Declan, started out as a work experience student, and his enthusiasm and willingness to work was recognised. After finishing school, the business was able to offer Declan an apprenticeship with the support of the Back to Work program. Declan is now studying a Certificate III in Engineering—Mechanical Trade and he is excited about his future. That is another great outcome thanks to Back to Work. Again, I would remind the committee that this is a program that the LNP slashed in their election costings at the last election. That would have been devastating for our regional economies.

Mr HEALY: That is absolutely correct, Minister, when you consider that in my electorate about 90 per cent of the businesses are small businesses. These programs are absolutely fundamental. With reference to the Back to Work program, I also note the continued success of Youth Boost and supporting young people into work. I was hoping the minister might be able to outline the importance of this subject for young people who are seeking work in regional communities.

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I know that he is looking forward to seeing many more young people in Cairns get an opportunity because of these programs. In terms of the Youth Boost program, again so far more than 7,400 Queensland employers have assisted 13,000 young people through Youth Boost. That includes 9,500 of them who are living and working in regional Queensland and 2,250 in Far North Queensland. It is having a real impact.

In Far North Queensland, the youth unemployment figures have dropped by 5.9 per cent in Cairns in the last year alone. When the LNP left office in January 2015 the youth unemployment rate was 21½ per cent. Under the Palaszczuk government due to programs like Back to Work it is now down to nine per cent. Contrary to the LNP, who want to cut these programs and leave our young people without a job, we believe in supporting Queenslanders into work. It is absolutely time the LNP got on board with these great programs because the outcomes speak for themselves.

Sliding door moments can happen at any time and two particular young men in Cairns have found their feet thanks to Rick Robinson, owner of Concrete Impressions. After experiencing some difficulties in a previous job, Lachlan came to work with Rick and he signed him up for a traineeship after recognising that he had potential. Lachlan has absolutely flourished in his new workplace. Twelve months later, his traineeship is complete, he now has a full-time job and he could not be happier. After his father passed away a couple of years ago, Broden, another young man, lost direction and was looking for a new start. Meeting with the staff at Concrete Impressions resulted in a work trial where Broden exceeded all expectations, and it has now been confirmed he will be signed up as a trainee.

These are the wonderful stories behind the figures and the millions of dollars in these programs. They are changing lives and they are making such a difference for young people who had struggled to find the right opportunity and gain a foot into the labour market and get that invaluable experience.

Mr HEALY: We are talking about youth here in regional areas, but these programs also help people across the state. Can you give us an indication of what is happening in relation to jobs for mature age workers?

Ms FENTIMAN: Absolutely. All Queenslanders, regardless of their age, should have opportunities to stay active and connected to the labour market. Over the past 12 months my department has been delivering a range of services and initiatives to support the *Queensland: an age-friendly community: Strategic direction statement* and action plan. In October last year we put the call out to Queensland

businesses with older employees to share their story and nominate for the Mature Workers Mean Business Awards. Ten finalists and an overall winner were chosen as mature age worker ambassadors and the stories they have shared, regardless of their industry or location, all have common themes.

Logan based business the Sniffers Group shared their story of employing Mark as a float driver in their business. Managing director Stephen Orchard said the main advantage of having an older workforce is the experience and the knowledge they can bring to the workplace. Another business in Cairns, a Cairns based tourism business, the CaPTA Group, are dedicated to ensuring their workforce reflects the diversity of their community and their clients. More than 35 people employed by the business are aged over 55 years. Similarly, Hervey Bay based business Simple Solutions boasts an impressive 40 per cent of their workforce aged over 55 years. Natalie Sell, owner of Simple Solutions, says—

As an employer, experienced staff with skills plus workplace and life experience ensures we have a team who can bring more to their role than just a qualification. Our mature age employees ... are often natural mentors for our junior staff.

Our Back to Work program continues to support mature age Queenslanders back into employment. In 2018-19 more than 700 mature age workers aged 45 or over were supported into employment. Since the program commenced in 2016 more than 10 per cent of all approved applications have been from mature age workers—people like Leonard, who had previously been unemployed for over a year before finding a job at Ipswich Paint and Panel. Leonard has worked with the business for over 12 months with the support of the Back to Work program. His employer, Matthew, could not be happier with Leonard and is looking forward to training him in more aspects of the business. I am proud that the Palaszczuk government continues to value the experience and skills that mature age workers can bring to the workplace.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, with reference to the Back to Work program—and, as you know, in common with you I think this is one of the greatest programs I have seen from any government in Queensland—can you tell me about the success and support shown by Queensland employers and what alternatives have been put forward to this type of program?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I am really proud of this government's record on our Back to Work program, and you have heard some of the great stories today. Like most members of this committee, I look forward to soon celebrating the 20,000th Back to Work job in Queensland. We are looking forward to this because this year's budget provides an additional \$14 million over two years to ensure we can continue to meet demand in what is a hugely popular and, as the member said, successful program.

The program's true success is built on the more than 9,000 Queensland businesses, most of which are small businesses, willing to partner with us to create jobs. I speak of business owners like Jess Banks. Jess opened her own pet store, Jess's Town and Country Barnyard, more than three years ago and the business has moved ahead in leaps and bounds. Earlier this year, still working as sole trader, Jess made the decision to move to a larger premise, expand the business and take on her first employee, Emma. Emma is one of our almost 20,000 Queenslanders being given a go.

However, as I said, we still have not heard from either the member for Nanango or the member for Maroochydore about their position on the Back to Work program. At the last election the LNP revealed that it would cut more than \$13 million from this program. Just last month the member for Maroochydore opened another attack on this program in Bundaberg, saying that Back to Work had failed to help people in the region.

Over the past 12 months, the Wide Bay region had Queensland's largest percentage point decrease in unemployment, with a fall of 2.3 per cent. This has been driven by huge falls in the youth unemployment rate as well, down 9.2 per cent from a year ago. Undoubtedly, Back to Work has played a huge part in that turnaround.

I am pleased to say that local businesses do not seem to be listening to the member for Maroochydore and are applying in droves to be part of this program. Just one week after the member made those comments, our Back to Work team received 14 new applications from the Wide Bay region—that is two a day—including six from the Bundaberg local government area. This just proves that the program is incredibly popular. Notwithstanding that the opposition continually criticises this job-creating program, businesses are putting up their hand to be part of it and give young Queenslanders a go.

Mr SAUNDERS: Page 3 of the SDS refers to the North Stradbroke Island Workers Assistance Scheme. Minister, can you please outline how the department is contributing to the economic transition strategy on the island?

Ms FENTIMAN: Absolutely. Our government is committed to phasing out sandmining and boosting business to foster a strong, diverse and sustainable economy on North Stradbroke Island. I am pleased to report that the strategy is on track. It is a collaborative effort across government. The strategy also works closely together with the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, QYAC, and the North Stradbroke Chamber of Commerce. We are very proud of what we already have achieved in a short time.

Recently we saw the launch of Australia's first Indigenous owned whale-watching enterprise, the opening of a new walking track and the release of initial design concepts for a whale interpretive centre. That is just the beginning. Over the next three years we will continue to assist the local community to make the most of the transition from sandmining to tourism through a \$25 million suite of more than 23 projects.

Earlier this year it was wonderful to head over to the Minjerribah Quandamooka Festival. The opportunity of sharing the rich arts and culture of the Quandamooka people, the people of the land and sea, with visitors far and wide including international guests demonstrates how important the completion of the \$4½ million Quandamooka Art Museum and Performance Institute will be for Quandamooka people and the whole North Stradbroke community.

To assist in the transition away from sandmining, we have invested \$5 million for the workers assistance scheme to help mineworkers pursue new employment opportunities. Much will be happening in this space over the next six months, but so far it has been great that we have supported the 26 workers who have been retrenched.

We also know that education is a huge part of the economic transition strategy on Minjerribah, and that is why my department has allocated \$300,000 to the education exchange program to provide and promote training opportunities on North Stradbroke Island. My department has also committed \$150,000 over three years to support the business operator training and capacity-building project for local business owners on North Stradbroke Island. One of the great beauties of the Stradbroke island economic transition strategy is that it builds on unique cultural, historical and environmental values. Minjerribah's success story has been millennia in the making, and we are now writing the next exciting chapter.

CHAIR: With two minutes remaining before I move back to non-government questions, I will ask a question that I asked last year and that you will not be surprised I am asking—nor will the minister's office—in regard to social enterprises, which you know I am very passionate about. I have some extraordinary social enterprises in my electorate. Can you please give us a brief overview of what the government is doing in that regard?

Ms FENTIMAN: Absolutely. I thank you for the question and for the work that you do supporting our social enterprises. I know that you do a great job promoting your local social enterprises, but you also do a great job promoting social enterprise throughout Queensland. Without a doubt, Queensland would be a poorer place, financially and socially, without our wonderful social enterprises. Social enterprises work across almost every industry sector and include small, medium and large businesses.

The social enterprise sector in Queensland is small, but it is gaining momentum. This grassroots movement is estimated to be supporting over 4,000 jobs in Queensland so far. Already, through existing programs like Skilling Queenslanders for Work, we are supporting a range of social enterprises—organisations like Career Employment Australia, which was awarded \$23,700 under the Community Work Skills program to assist eight disadvantaged jobseekers in Manly. The Coffee Train Manly project assisted eight participants to gain a Certificate II in Hospitality in 2018 while working at the Coffee Train Cafe, a social enterprise. Of the eight participants, all successfully completed their vocational qualification, with five getting a job after completing the project.

There is opportunity to help grow this wonderful, dynamic sector and achieve more outcomes like this. That is why my department has worked closely with a range of social enterprises on the ministerial round table. I was pleased that I joined you, member for Nudgee, at the opening of this year's Small Business Week at the Vend marketplace in your electorate to announce a \$240,000 two-year partnership with the Queensland Social Enterprise Council. It will help us get a head start on building networks across the state to help the sector take full advantage of the strategy when it is released. Another exciting component of this funding is the support it provides the council to commence a bid for the Social Enterprise World Forum in 2021. I wish Queensland's world forum bid every success later this year.

CHAIR: Thank you for your support of social enterprises in my electorate. Thank you for launching that. It was lovely to have you locally. We will move to non-government questions.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. I refer to the minister's answer to question on notice No. 13. Of the \$288,412 spent on entertainment by the department over the past financial year, what recreational activities were paid for by the department and how much each was?

Ms Curtis: The department's annual expenditure relating to conferences, workshops, catering and other hospitality expenses was, as outlined in the question on notice for 2018-19, \$1,024,358. As outlined in the table with that question on notice, that relates to staff training and development costs, entertainment, refreshments and light meals, venue hire, and training and seminar costs for external participants.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the aspect of recreational activities that were paid for by the department. That had an asterisk as part of the entertainment expense. Could you please advise what recreational activities were paid for by the department and how much each of these were?

Ms Curtis. That reference refers to the whole-of-government's chart of accounts, which defines entertainment as expenses relating to food, drink and other recreational activities. The department's finance system is based on a chart of accounts prescribed by Queensland Treasury that lists available general ledger accounts. All of those things are coded to that ledger, and it is quite a manual process to unpack that.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, if you cannot outline what kinds of recreational activities were part of the entertainment, could you please take that on notice to give us a breakdown of what they were and how much they were?

Ms Curtis: As I said, that would require quite an in-depth, manual investigation of our ledger accounts. I not aware of any recreational activities as such. That is the definition of that ledger code under the whole-of-government chart of accounts.

Ms SIMPSON: Do you have a breakdown of the entertainment for that particular line item?

Ms Curtis: No. As I said, our finance system is based on the chart of accounts prescribed by Treasury that lists available general ledger accounts to record expenses. The department records entertainment costs for official functions, including food and drinks, to entertainment expenses.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, of the \$138,431 the department spent on refreshments over the past financial year, how much of this was spent on alcohol?

Ms Curtis: I thank the member for the question. Costs related to alcohol are only incurred for official functions involving government, business and industry or community representatives, with the objective of promoting and delivering the goals of the department. These costs are coded to entertainment expenditure.

As I said earlier, the department's finance system is based on a chart of accounts prescribed by Queensland Treasury that lists available general ledger accounts used to record expenses. The department records entertainment costs for official functions, including food and drinks, to this ledger code and this means the department's spend on alcohol specifically cannot be easily identified without an in-depth manual investigation of each record supporting transactions coded to the entertainment general ledger accounts.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the department's delivery of Back to Work in the SDS at page 2. Can you provide a regional breakdown of where the 56 identified suspected fraudulent applicants were over the past financial year?

Ms Curtis: I am sorry, but could you repeat the question?

Ms SIMPSON: Can you provide a regional breakdown of where the 56 identified suspected fraudulent applicants were over the past financial year? I would be happy for you to take that on notice.

Ms Curtis: I do not have that information with me. I am not sure if it is captured in that way, but I am happy to see if I can get you some further information during the session.

Ms SIMPSON: If there are 56 identified suspected fraudulent applicants I assume that there would be the ability to identify what regions they are in, so I ask that you take that on notice.

Ms Curtis: I am happy to see if we can get some further information. I am not sure what information, but we will have a look into that.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy for that to be the case?

Ms FENTIMAN: Yes, I am happy to take it on notice.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, across the whole department, what was the total value of all fraudulent activities over the past financial year?

Ms Curtis: Sorry, but was that in relation to Back to Work?

Ms SIMPSON: In relation to Back to Work.

Ms Curtis: Since the scheme began in 2016, there have been 11 referrals to relevant law enforcement agencies. The 11 matters referred to law enforcement agencies account for approximately 0.36 per cent of the total funding provided to the Back to Work program.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. With respect to the whole of department, not only Back to Work, what was the total value of fraudulent activities over the past financial year?

Ms Curtis: I am not aware. I would have to find out if there is any further information regarding fraudulent activities across the department. I am not aware of any additional ones, but I would have to check that information.

Ms SIMPSON: Will you give a commitment to bring that back on notice?

Ms FENTIMAN: We will take that on notice.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you very much. Director-General, I refer to the department's Back to Work program in the SDS at page 2. Is the director-general aware of any instances where the minister or her office have promised funding to businesses under the Back to Work program before the application has been assessed and approved by the department?

Ms Curtis: The Back to Work program has guidelines and eligibility criteria that are clearly published and all payments and all applications are assessed in accordance with those guidelines and eligibility criteria and the minister and her office are not involved in that assessment.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Director-General. My question is to the director-general with respect to the service area highlight for continuing to support employment opportunities for young people in the SDS at page 3. Has the Sticking Together youth employment program been cut from Townsville, Cairns and Logan?

Ms Curtis: I thank the member for the question. The recently completed Sticking Together pilot focused on testing an innovative solution to better support young Queenslanders to gain and retain employment. Over 60 weeks coaches worked on a one-on-one basis with 89 young people and employers in three pilot sites, including Cairns, Townsville and Logan. The coach provided intensive coaching and mentoring to build the young person's skills, confidence and resilience and provided support and advice for employers to address barriers to these young people finding and keeping employment. The pilot has recently been completed and Sticking Together commissioned the Queensland University of Technology to undertake an evaluation to measure the outcomes across the fields of employment, wellbeing and employability and those findings are also going to be compared, I understand, to the pilot that was undertaken in Victoria. The final evaluation report will be considered and used to inform future youth engagement activities.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Director-General. I refer to the minister's answer to question on notice No. 6 in respect of North Stradbroke Island, and I ask: have any applications from workers for funding been refused?

Ms Curtis: As at 30 June 2019, we have assisted 144 former and current Sibelco workers and one employer for an employer wage subsidy. They have been assisted across a range of categories, including job search support, training and skills, employer wage subsidy, housing assistance and commuter ferry. As the minister mentioned earlier, of the 26 workers to date, six have started their own business or purchased an existing business. A number of other retrenched workers have either retired, completed university studies, gained employment or are on a career break. I am not aware that any have been refused.

Ms SIMPSON: Could the director-general advise what expenditure of that \$5 million that was to assist workers in transition is expected to be spent in this financial year?

Ms Curtis: As at 30 June 2019, we have expended \$516,741. The expenditure for the year ahead will obviously be linked to the activities that the minister talked about earlier and the focus for the year ahead will be on supporting workers. As the minister mentioned, a number of them are currently still employed by Sibelco and we will continue to support them through that process, so in a way it is demand driven.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, as a follow-up to that, is there a projection of what you expect to expend on those transitional programs for workers in this financial year?

Ms Curtis: We will respond and work with affected employees as they transition from their current employment into new ventures, so we will support them and work with them as we go.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, with respect to machinery-of-government costs on page 33 of the SDS, what machinery-of-government costs have there been in the last financial year and are there still outstanding machinery-of-government costs that you will have carried over into this financial year?

Ms Curtis: Sorry, but was that on page—

Ms SIMPSON: I am sorry, page 9 of the SDS.

Ms Curtis: As you may be aware, the department was established in December 2017. All establishment activities have occurred within existing resources.

Ms SIMPSON: Can you estimate the cost of the machinery-of-government changes?

Ms Curtis: As I said, all our expenses and any establishment activities were funded within existing resources.

Ms SIMPSON: There is no estimate around the machinery-of-government costs that have been noted?

Ms Curtis: As I said, they were all funded within existing resources.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, with reference to page 9 of the Service Delivery Statements, specifically regarding IT systems, were there costs associated with changing the IT services in the machinery-of-government change?

Ms Curtis: We currently have one ICT project reported on the government's dashboard. This project is called the ministerial correspondence project—or Mincor. It implements a system to manage ministerial and executive correspondence in an efficient and effective manner for the department. This is consistent, as I understand, with the practices of other departments. I think we have disclosed on the dashboard the budget for that particular project.

Ms SIMPSON: Are all three service areas on the same IT system?

Ms Curtis: We are continuing to transition to a common IT platform. We have moved forward on a number of those matters. For example, we have migrated Office 365 across the department. We are managing the establishment of the department in a cost-effective manner to ensure that IT services continue to be provided in a stable manner for all employees.

CHAIR: In the time remaining—we have about four minutes—I understand that the member for Maiwar has sought leave to ask an employment related question.

Mr BERKMAN: I am aware of time, but I want to ask a couple of questions or clarifications about the Just Transition Group. In your answer in the prepared response earlier there were regular references to the energy industry, energy generators, the energy sector, but we heard virtually no reference to the resource sector—thermal coal miners or CSG. I think you said in one of your answers that it was your understanding that the reskilling of Queensland's thermal coal miners was within the remit of the Just Transition Group; is that correct?

Ms Curtis: As I mentioned, it is to maximise our future jobs and skills opportunities in the energy sector. That is correct, yes.

Mr BERKMAN: As distinct from the resource sector or resource export sector?

Ms Curtis: The focus is on helping employees maximise their future jobs and skills opportunities within the energy sector.

Mr BERKMAN: You mentioned that the departmental staff in this area had consulted with 55-plus stakeholders. This may be a question to be taken on notice, but can you advise who those stakeholders are and whether any of those have a particular focus on transitioning workers affected by changing resource exports as opposed to the domestic energy sector?

Ms Curtis: I do not have that detail to hand. As I said, they have engaged with 55 stakeholders, including business and industry groups, workers and their representatives, energy generators and academics. I certainly know there is a broad range of stakeholders they have been engaging with during that time.

Mr BERKMAN: Could you take on notice who those stakeholders are?

Ms FENTIMAN: I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you, Minister. It is much appreciated. Minister, you are well aware that I and many others across Queensland have been calling urgently for a transition plan like this to support workers and communities in the move away from not only coal-fired power generation but also fossil

fuel exports. As a question of policy, would you agree that this transition planning is equally or perhaps even more important for the fossil fuel export sector as opposed to energy generators, given the number of people employed in thermal coal mining and CSG in regional Queensland and their exposure to international markets?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. Clearly, this group was set up because of the government's commitment to renewable energy and our renewable energy target. Modelling from the 2016 final report of the Queensland Renewable Energy Expert Panel predicted that a 50 per cent renewable energy target would lead to a net increase in the employment of Queenslanders of around 6,400 full-time-equivalent positions between 2020 and 2030. As the jobs and training department, obviously we have a role to play working with Jobs Queensland and other skills advice bodies the skills and training that the thousands of new workers in these new renewable energy sectors will need. That is predominantly the work, as the director-general has said, of our Just Transition Group. Obviously, they will work with a range of stakeholders who have an interest in members of the energy sector. As I said, we are working very closely with Jobs Queensland on predicted future jobs growth in the energy sector and how we can best support Queenslanders to take the opportunities to fill those jobs of the future.

Mr BERKMAN: Finally, can you give us—

CHAIR: Member for Maiwar, I am very sorry but it is 3.45 pm and the committee is required to adjourn for a break. It is only for 15 minutes, so we really cannot cut it short. The hearing will resume at 4 pm with the examination of the estimates for the portfolio area of small business.

Proceedings suspended from 3.45 pm to 4.01 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure for the small business portfolio area until 5 pm, followed by examination of the estimates for the portfolio area of training and skills development from 5 pm to 6 pm.

Minister, I refer to the Queensland small business budget statement. I am pleased to see a number of measures to support small business through changes to Queensland's payroll tax. As you know, I have over 4,000 SMEs in my electorate, most of them being small business, and this will make a big difference. What responses have you received from small business about this change?

Ms FENTIMAN: Our government has delivered the biggest change to payroll tax in over a decade: \$885 million in payroll tax relief. Under the package, the Palaszczuk government is delivering lower taxes for an estimated 13,200 small and medium businesses across the state, making it easier for them to grow and create more jobs. If one in five small businesses hired an additional employee, we would create 80,000 jobs.

This news has been incredibly well received, with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland saying they were delighted with the changes and labelled it absolutely crucial in boosting employment. From the start of this month we are raising the payroll tax free threshold from \$1.1 million to \$1.3 million. I have heard from businesses across Queensland who were approaching this threshold and had stopped growing their business and now they are out there advertising for new staff. Bill Gaydon, who runs a fundraising company here in Brisbane, was one of the businesses that reached out following these changes. He had stopped growing his business as he approached the payroll tax threshold but has now said he is going to employ two new staff for his sales team. The Palaszczuk government knows that small businesses are the engine room of our economy which is why we are supporting business owners like Bill to create more jobs.

On top of raising the threshold we are also introducing a one per cent regional discount, introducing a new growth rebate for employers who increase their number of employees and, of course, extending our apprentice and trainee rebate. Kynaston Engineering in Mackay said, 'A one per cent reduction in payroll tax is an absolute benefit to us because payroll tax can be a penalty for putting on people'. They were also supportive that we were extending the apprentice rebate, saying, 'We now have six apprentices, about a quarter of our staff. Extending the rebate on their wages is a big help.'

Needless to say our payroll tax package makes Queensland a lot more competitive. Our payroll tax package threshold is now 50 per cent better than New South Wales and, I am pleased to say, a whopping 93 per cent better than Victoria. Put simply, this means a business in Queensland can employ twice as many people and operate at twice the size of a business in Victoria before paying a single dollar in payroll tax. Queensland is leading the way and we are making Queensland the best place to start and grow a business.

CHAIR: It has been extremely well received so I thank you very much. It was definitely a standout in the budget for my electorate this year. Again in regard to payroll tax, how do these measures compare to previous changes and what other alternatives have been proposed?

Ms FENTIMAN: The Palaszczuk government has delivered, as I said, the biggest change to payroll tax in over a decade. We are raising the exemption threshold for payroll tax from \$1.1 million to \$1.3 million. Businesses are already benefiting from these changes. Noel from Townsville Ten Pin Bowl, who now falls below the threshold, let me know that since we announced the package he is out there looking for two new staff. This is a government backing small business and backing jobs.

Quite frankly, there could not be a starker contrast in the speed and scope of our government's payroll tax changes and what the former government achieved. When in government, the LNP promised to raise the threshold \$100,000 a year over six years and what did they deliver for Queensland small businesses? Another broken promise! After only 12 months the LNP broke their election commitment and shelved any further changes—another broken promise from Campbell Newman and his assistant Treasurer, the member for Nanango. Unlike the former government, the Palaszczuk government knows that small business is the engine room of our economy. We take our promises seriously. We deliver on them. In less than a month we delivered on a budget promise to do more in four weeks than what the LNP promised to do over six years.

During the member for Nanango's budget reply speech she said, 'I am glad that Labor has implemented the payroll tax relief policy that the LNP took to the last election.' Small businesses everywhere are glad we did no such thing. The LNP's policy was to increase the threshold by \$25,000 per year. It would have taken the LNP until 2027 to get to the threshold that we set on 1 July. That is assuming that the LNP did not go back on their word again. Needless to say, the LNP election policy did not include a regional discount, growth rebate or apprentice rebate.

To summarise, the LNP approach is slow, not targeted and likely to end in broken promises. In comparison, the Palaszczuk government's \$885 million payroll tax package is fully funded, delivered on time, when small business need it.

Mr HEALY: Minister, I would have to agree. There are 112 businesses in my electorate that have been overwhelmingly responsive and very positive about that. That is hugely appreciated. I refer to page 7 of the SDS and note the state government's commitment to ensuring a skilled workforce. Can you please outline the effects from recent changes to federal government funding towards skilling Queenslanders, please?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. Skilling Queenslanders and how it applies to small businesses?

Mr HEALY: Correct, yes.

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. Many of our Skilling Queenslanders for Work contracts go to our non-government organisations who are also small businesses and, as I have said, a number of them also have partnered with us to deliver Back to Work. As I have been travelling across Queensland on our small business roadshow, a number of small businesses have been talking to me about the various employment programs and how it makes life easier for them, such as Back to Work and Skilling Queenslanders for Work. These are two great programs that small businesses are signing up to deliver.

In conjunction with our payroll tax package and our small business grants, our Back to Work program and Skilling Queenslanders for Work are really making things easier for small business in the regions. As the small business minister, I will do what I can to make sure that Queensland is the best place to start and grow a small business. As I said, as I travel across Queensland I see that small businesses are not only partnering with us to deliver these great employment programs; they are also benefiting from our grant programs, our mentoring programs and the work we are doing around government procurement.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, I refer to page 5 of the SDS and note the reference to the Small Business Regulatory Reform initiative. Could you tell us about the projects the department will be rolling out as part of that program and any others that will reduce red tape for small businesses across this great state?

Ms FENTIMAN: We are committed to reducing red tape for our small businesses and to making it easier for them to grow and employ Queenslanders. That is why the Advancing Small Business Queensland Strategy has a key focus on improving the regulatory environment. This year's budget provides renewed opportunity through the \$60 million Small Business Regulatory Reform initiative.

Under this program, seven digital projects are being introduced that will reduce red tape and make it easier to do business in Queensland. These digital projects will streamline the compliance process for starting and growing a business and will help businesses to hire and manage apprentices. My department will lead the delivery of two of those red-tape-busting initiatives, the Business Launch Pad and the VET consumer support program.

The Business Launch Pad will make the process of starting and managing a food and beverage business or a residential construction business much easier. We have targeted those two industries as they are significant contributors to Queensland's economy and jobs. Our own Better Regulation Taskforce identified them as likely to gain the most benefit from the launch pad initiative. We will bring together multiple tasks across a range of government agencies that business operators undertake when starting their business. Businesses will also be able to complete many transactions not currently possible, such as receiving email reminders about upcoming renewals that can easily be paid online. The Queensland Business Launch Pad will package up the customer experience so that business owners do not need to supply the same information over and over again. The launch pad will reduce processes down to one single application and one payment.

The VET consumer support program cuts through the regulatory requirements when bringing on a trainee or apprentice. Businesses taking on an apprentice or trainee under 21, or also of course any young person, are available through our Youth Boost program. We know that our free TAFE initiative will help young people to get a job. With all of this in mind, the benefits of this digital marketplace on customers' experience is twofold: it will help future trainees make more informed decisions about which VET course and provider to choose and it will also help government decision-making when making investment decisions to support vocational education and training.

Mr HEALY: Minister, with reference to page 6 of the SDS, can you please detail any recent achievements made by the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council?

Ms FENTIMAN: I love chairing our Queensland Small Business Advisory Council. It is made up of peak bodies and small businesses that provide advice and recommendations to me and the government more broadly on the impacts of government regulation on Queensland small businesses. It allows me to hear firsthand from small businesses and industry stakeholders and work collaboratively on practical solutions. The council has been instrumental in advising government on payroll tax reform and the benefits this will bring for small businesses. This engagement has helped the Palaszczuk government deliver the biggest changes to payroll tax in over a decade: \$885 million in payroll tax relief. But it is not all about big changes.

The Queensland Small Business Advisory Council is also currently working on the development of a guide to assist government agencies to actively engage with small businesses when undertaking capital works. This guide has been designed to assist small businesses and government agencies to work together and think creatively to tailor solutions to minimise disruption. This year the capital program will invest \$12.9 billion in essential infrastructure such as better roads, hospitals and schools. We want to make sure that small businesses, many benefiting from local upgrades, are not partners with us during the construction phase. Currently, we are piloting this new guide with Transport and Main Roads as the agency most in contact with small business during construction, with the guide to be rolled out across all agencies shortly.

This work would not be possible without the continued advocacy of Maree Adshead, our Queensland Small Business Champion, who also sits on the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council. Now in her third year in the role, Maree has undertaken more than 500 engagement activities with small business, industry and key stakeholders. Ms Adshead has also been an invaluable support to the business community of North Queensland that was impacted by flooding earlier this year. Ms Adshead has attended the region on at least five occasions to visit businesses, listen to their stories and coordinate support from relevant regulatory agencies at a local and national level.

Maree is also an important voice for Queensland at the key national forum for small business, the National Small Business Commissioners Network. The Palaszczuk government knows how important it is to have a champion for Queensland small businesses to ensure that we have a seat at the table. It is disappointing that the LNP does not share this view after, of course, they cut the role of the Queensland small business commissioner during their time in government, which meant that for three years Queensland did not have a seat at the national table. For three years Queensland businesses did not have someone to provide assistance in dealing with national regulators. We created the role of the small business champion because our Queensland small businesses deserve a voice and they deserve a champion.

Mr HEALY: Absolutely. I refer to the Queensland small business budget statements in reference to the Mentoring for Growth program. Minister, can you detail how the program is supporting small businesses?

Ms FENTIMAN: The Mentoring for Growth program is a fantastic initiative to give businesses free advice and feedback on how they can grow and reach their goals. Mentoring for Growth can provide a fresh set of eyes to help businesses address challenges or identify new opportunities. Whether they are an established business or have a new business idea, they can be paired with an experienced mentor who is tailored to their needs. This year we held a record number of mentoring sessions, almost 600, across Queensland. Everywhere I go I hear from small businesses that have gone through the program and cannot recommend it highly enough.

R&F Steel Buildings is one business that has taken advantage of the free program and it is one of the best business decisions they have made. Starting as a small business servicing local farmers in the Lockyer Valley, R&F Steel Buildings has expanded across the state, up to Cairns. Manager Josh could not rate the program more highly and expects that, as a result, R&F Steel Buildings will hire an additional four employees. He also reported that their distributors will increase their employees by up to 27—all of that growth from a free mentoring session.

The Mentoring for Growth program could not achieve such fantastic outcomes if it were not for our incredible business mentors, who over the past year have donated more than 1,400 hours of their time to help small businesses across Queensland. Across the state we have a pool of over 580 experienced business owners, including management consultants, business advisers, investors, bankers and specialist accountants. One of those volunteers is Don McKenzie, a seasoned mentor from Adizes Institute Australia, who has helped hundreds of businesses during his career. He says that his role as a mentor is not only to inspire but also to ask the hard questions and prepare the business with the skills and foresight to help solve their challenges.

The Palaszczuk government knows that small businesses are the engine room of our economy, which is why we are supporting business owners. Through programs such as Mentoring for Growth, we are making it easier for all Queensland businesses to have access to expert advice to help their businesses grow and thrive.

CHAIR: Minister, page 5 of the SDS mentions \$4 million to continue the Advancing Queensland Small Business Strategy grants program, which includes the incredibly popular digital grants program that many businesses in my electorate have benefitted from. Can you please explain how those grants are supporting small businesses?

Ms FENTIMAN: The Palaszczuk government's Small Business Digital Grants Program is by far one of the most popular programs. I know the member knows firsthand from meeting recipients the impacts these grants have on local businesses. We have supported 1,100 Queensland small businesses with almost \$6 million in digital grants. That includes nine businesses in the member's electorate of Nudgee. Businesses like PLC global, a fitness gym with a focus nutrition, health and wellbeing. With their digital grant they updated their web portal and are now looking to grow their workforce.

These grants offer up to \$10,000 in matched funding to help business owners access digital technologies and services to enable them to work smarter, engage with the global economy and make the most of online business opportunities. We know how important it is for the survival of small businesses to be competitive online. Over 60 per cent of customers will stop using a business if they cannot find information about the business online.

Websites and technology are always allowing Queensland small businesses to compete globally. Queensland is leading by example in supporting small business to work smarter through our digital grants program. In fact, it is working so well that a recent federal parliamentary inquiry into internet competition recommended that our digital grants should be rolled out across the nation. Once again, Queensland is leading the way.

At the end of last year I met Emma from The Dog Mum who is a successful grant recipient. She was hoping that the grant would help her to expand to two extra staff. Six months later and she recently messaged me to say that with the help of the grant she was almost there, having employed one extra person and about to hire a second team member.

As the small business minister, I want more business owners like Emma to take advantage of these opportunities. That is why we have committed \$4 million to continue to deliver our Small Business Digital Grants Program through the Advancing Small Business Queensland Strategy to continue making Queensland the place for small businesses to start, grow and employ.

CHAIR: Thank you for telling a little bit about the PLC story in my electorate and also sharing the stories of other recipients and not just providing the facts. It is really bringing it to life. I appreciate that. We will move now to the member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the minister. I refer to the department's stated focus to streamline regulation to make it easier to do business which is in the SDS at page 5. Did the minister take any action to stop the introduction of the government's latest tax grab on Queensland craft brewers?

Ms FENTIMAN: As the small business minister, I have worked very hard with our craft brewers as small businesses. In Queensland we currently have about 100 independent breweries supporting more than 1,700 workers. I understand that local councils have conducted audits to ensure the Emergency Management Levy is being applied correctly and that as a result of those audits they found that some independent breweries have been charged the wrong levy. The Emergency Management Levy ensures that businesses, including craft brewers, have an appropriate response from emergency services should there be a fire or emergency.

In relation to this issue, I understand that the advice from the minister is that affected businesses should contact their local council to ensure they have been correctly classified. QFES have assured all businesses that they will work with them on a case-by-case basis in relation to the levy.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, will you give a commitment to repealing this government's regulated beer tax hike? It has been a regulation that your government has put in place. There is nearly a tenfold increase for those craft brewers.

Ms FENTIMAN: I can confirm, as confirmed in estimates last week, that QFES is committed to engaging through the industry. They will also work with the department of state development through the Craft Brewing Strategy.

Ms SIMPSON: It is not the responsibility of councils that your government has increased the Emergency Management Levy nearly tenfold. Will you do more than just pass the buck to councils but give a commitment to restore the levy to the amount previously paid by these businesses because a tenfold increase is gutting for these people?

Ms FENTIMAN: I understand QFES has said that they will work on a case-by-case basis with each of the businesses as is appropriate.

Ms SIMPSON: Are you aware that that means that for the majority of those businesses which maybe have premises of 400 square metres that they have been put into the new category created by your government of up to 15,000 square metres, which is a huge area? It is not good enough that you are expecting to work through this on a case-by-cases. Will you show leadership and strike down this beer tax?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, you are making comments like 'your government'. If you are talking to the minister can you talk to the minister about her portfolio and matters that fall within the purview of her portfolio. My understanding is that that is not one of them.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, Madam Chair. In a previous answer to a government member's question the minister talked about the best place to grow and start a small business and she referenced her department as being part of that. Surely this government and this minister has responsibility as the small business minister for ensuring small businesses do not get whacked with nearly a tenfold increase in the levy.

CHAIR: That does not answer the question, member for Maroochydore, as you know.

Ms SIMPSON: It is under the small business portfolio to ensure that regulations do not burden small business. I ask the minister: will you go into bat for small business rather than pass the buck to council?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, please do not include imputations as well, just the question.

Ms FENTIMAN: As the small business minister, I am happy to talk about the support we are providing our craft brewers. We are working with TAFE Queensland on providing training as a result of the feedback I have received from craft brewers. We are working to develop a course for craft brewers that can maximise training outcomes. Through Trade & Investment Queensland we are also supporting craft brewers to enhance their export skills and access new markets.

My department has been working with craft brewers on grants. To date at least \$25,000 in grant funding has been committed to small businesses in the sector. The Good Beer Co. is one of our 100 faces of small business. We are working with our craft brewers. I am happy, as I said, for the department to continue to work with QFES and manage these levy issues on a case-by-case basis.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, will you not guarantee to repeal this regulation? Will you give a guarantee to see this regulation struck down and a fair levy put in place?

CHAIR: Which regulation and where does that regulation fall from the point of view of responsibility for ministers?

Ms SIMPSON: The minister has responsibility for regulatory reform across the portfolio so surely the small business minister should be advising—

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for Maroochydore. For my clarification, does the regulation fall under your responsibility as minister?

Ms SIMPSON: Regulatory reform is part of—

CHAIR: No, does that regulation you are referring to—

Ms SIMPSON: It is part of the regulatory reform and streamlining of regulation of the state government and that is the small business portfolio.

CHAIR: Member, I have asked the minister a question, please be polite enough to allow her to answer my question.

Ms FENTIMAN: The Emergency Management Levy is regulated by QFES.

CHAIR: Thank you, as I thought. Therefore, we come back to relevance. Ask questions that are in the purview of the minister.

Ms SIMPSON: I ask the small business minister: do you actually go into bat to see these regulations fixed when another area of government has—

CHAIR: It is repetition, member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: The minister has responsibility for regulatory reform and red tape.

CHAIR: I know what the minister has responsibility for.

Ms SIMPSON: Otherwise why bother having a small business minister who does not go into bat to fix the problems of red tape.

CHAIR: I am trying to guide you as to what the minister has responsibility for so you can ask relevant questions.

Ms SIMPSON: It is relevant to the people who have just been whacked with a nearly \$5,000 increase in their taxes.

CHAIR: We are here to ask questions that are relevant to the appropriation as you well know having been in this House for so long. Could you please ask a question the minister can provide a clear and direct answer to with regard to her portfolio?

Mrs STUCKEY: Point of order, Chair. Is this a minister in name only? She is talking about mentoring—

CHAIR: Deputy Chair, I do not need a statement. There is no point of order. We will move on. Everybody here knows this is a regulation—

Mrs STUCKEY: What does she stand for?

CHAIR: that does not fall under this minister so let us get to questions that actually relate to the Appropriation Bill.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister in name only.

CHAIR: I do not need statements like that, please.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. Has the department allocated any money to alleviate the craft brewers from this massive levy hike?

Ms Curtis: No, we have not. As the minister outlined, we provide a range of support to small businesses. This year's budget included \$4 million to continue to support our small business programs.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the minister. I refer to the department's stated focus to streamline regulation to make it easier to do business, page 5 of the SDS. Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast all were not included in the government's regional payroll tax discount. How does the minister define 'regional'?

Ms FENTIMAN: Under our \$885 million payroll tax initiative there is a one per cent discount for regional businesses. That is defined in the budget papers as a business that has 85 per cent of its workforce outside of South-East Queensland. The areas that you mentioned fall within South-East

Queensland and are not eligible for the regional discount, but they are of course benefiting from the increase to the threshold from \$1.1 million to \$1.3 million and are benefiting from our two rebates—the new rebate for any new employees, capped at \$20,000 per annum, and the 50 per cent payroll tax rebate for apprentices and trainees.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, the Department of Education precludes Toowoomba, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast from the metro region. Why does the payroll tax exemption use a different definition?

Ms FENTIMAN: The definition used by Treasury is for those businesses, as I said, that have 85 per cent of their workforce outside of South-East Queensland. South-East Queensland is defined as a statistical area by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It includes the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and Toowoomba. They have all been part of the South East Queensland Regional Plan since the nineties, I am pretty sure.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to the department's stated focus on making it easier to do business, page 5. Did you ever raise concerns with the Treasurer about the definition of 'regional' used by Treasury to preclude Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast from the regional payroll tax discounts?

Ms FENTIMAN: No. It is very clear that the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba are part of South-East Queensland. My own department has the same definition of South-East Queensland for those areas.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, the Treasurer stated that 70 per cent of the government's entire capital spend was in regional Queensland. This definition includes Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. Why does the payroll tax exemption use a different definition?

Ms FENTIMAN: As I said, it uses the definition of South-East Queensland. That is the statistical division that the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses. That is the definition that Queensland Treasury uses. That is the definition that my department uses. We have called it a regional payroll tax discount. The budget papers very clearly go on to say that it is a discount for those businesses with 85 per cent of their workforce based outside of South-East Queensland.

Ms SIMPSON: The Treasurer has a different application of the word 'regional' with respect to the capital budget. I note that there are different definitions that government use.

CHAIR: With respect, that is a not a question for the minister.

Ms FENTIMAN: With respect, there is a consistent definition for South-East Queensland.

Mrs WILSON: Director-General, I refer to the department's service area focus on delivering small business grant programs, on page 5 of the SDS. Round 1 of the small business grants closed on 25 February this year and has remained closed for a review to be undertaken. I note that round 2 of the small business grants program has been reopened today, 1 August, and closes on 1 August 2020. I would like to put on record that this website was updated today, 1 August 2019. Can you advise whether the review has now been completed?

Ms Curtis: You referred to small business grants. We have three grants programs. Can I clarify which particular grant program you are referring to?

Mrs WILSON: Business Growth Fund Program.

Ms Curtis: The Business Growth Fund provides targeted assistance for small and medium businesses that demonstrate high growth and employment aspirations.

Mrs WILSON: Yes, I understand that. Round 1 of that grant closed on 25 February of this year and has remained closed while a review was to be undertaken. My question specifically was: can you advise whether the review has now been completed?

Ms Curtis: As you flagged, the Business Growth Fund is currently open for applications.

Mrs WILSON: That opened today. Can you advise whether the review has been completed?

Ms Curtis: The Business Growth Fund has reopened for applications now. As I outlined earlier, there was \$4 million in funding to continue to support the small business program this year. The Business Growth Fund has reopened. That is the next round of the grant program. It has been a highly successful program. That program commences, as I said, today.

Mrs WILSON: Round 1 closed on 25 February 2019 and will remain closed while a review has been undertaken. My specific question to the director-general is: can you confirm whether a review has been undertaken?

Ms Curtis: Just to clarify, this is the normal process for funding rounds opening and closing. We open the round. People submit their applications. They are assessed in accordance with the criteria. The outcomes are advised.

Mrs WILSON: So you are unable to—

CHAIR: Hang on. Sorry. Member for Pumicestone, I think the director-general was trying to gather her thoughts, but because you have interrupted her five times now she is maybe not able to answer. Can we just give her a moment?

Mrs WILSON: Yes, that is okay.

Ms Curtis: There is no review. The grant rounds open and close in accordance with the normal process for grant funding rounds. When they open, people are able to submit their applications. We consider those against the eligibility criteria and they are assessed, and then people are advised of the outcome in accordance with our programs and guidelines.

Ms FENTIMAN: Chair, if I could just add to that, one of the pieces of feedback the department received while the director-general and I travelled across Queensland with our small business budget roadshow was that small businesses wanted more advance notice of grant rounds opening and closing. Many of them loved the grants but often found out about the grant opening when there was only a week to go to get their applications in. As a result of that, just today in fact we have uploaded a full schedule of when grants will open and close to give businesses advance notice of applying. Again, that is just one of the pieces of feedback that we have had on this extensive engagement with small business that we have acted on. As the director-general said, it is quite normal for rounds to open and close, but we are now providing further notice to enable small businesses to better apply.

Mrs WILSON: Thank you, Minister. My specific question was: has a review been undertaken, because that is what it states?

Ms FENTIMAN: I think it says that the review is in relation to reviewing the applications.

Mrs WILSON: It does not actually state that whatsoever.

Ms FENTIMAN: No, but we review the applications. The round is closed. We review the applications, we announce the winners and then we open again for the next round.

Mrs WILSON: You are now saying that there has never been a review of that?

Ms FENTIMAN: The Advancing Small Business Queensland Strategy is due to be renewed at the end of this year. That is all of our grant programs, the mentoring program and the small business commissioner. We have not reviewed any specific grant, but we of course review the applications as they come in.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, in that first round of the Business Growth Fund Program, how much of the fund was allocated?

Ms Curtis: The amount of \$2.7 million has been allocated under the Business Growth Fund to help 62 businesses purchase and implement specialised equipment or services to enable them to seize growth opportunities.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, can you provide a list of all fund recipients? I would be happy for you to take that on notice.

Ms Curtis: Can I clarify something in relation to that? I would like to confirm whether they are already published.

Ms FENTIMAN: They are published as part of the media statements announcing the winners. It is public information.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, were any recipients linked to a government minister or their staff?

Ms Curtis: As I said earlier, all applications are assessed against eligibility criteria. I am not aware that any are linked to ministerial staff.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, were any fraudulent activities or misappropriation of the fund identified?

Ms Curtis: Was that in relation to the Business Growth Fund in particular?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms Curtis: I can advise that there have been two internal audit processes conducted in the past year on the small business grants program. I understand that no fraud, misappropriation or impropriety was identified as a result of these audits.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the department's Small Business Grant program on SDS page 5. How much has been allocated as part of the Small Business Digital Grants Program for last year and how much do you anticipate will be spent this financial year?

Ms Curtis: In the last 12 months we have allocated \$1 million in small business digital grants, and that has helped 210 businesses access digital technologies and services. I understand that there are a number of applications currently underway at the moment.

Ms SIMPSON: Have there been any applications refused?

Ms Curtis: As I said earlier, all of our grant applications are assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria for each particular grant program. We do assess all applications against those criteria, so if they do not meet the criteria then they would not be successful.

Ms SIMPSON: Has there been any fraudulent activity or misappropriation in relation to this fund that has been identified?

Ms Curtis: I referred earlier to the internal audit processes conducted over the past year. That is across all of our small business grant programs. My understanding is that we look at the program as a whole. The internal audits did look into our grants programs and identified some improvements for the level of guidance, and we are looking to implement those in the future. We have taken on board the learnings from those processes and will implement those for future rounds.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to the implementation of an on-time payment policy on SDS page 2. When will the government's existing late payment policy be implemented?

Ms FENTIMAN: As part of our small business procurement commitment, which was released in Small Business Week, I made a commitment that the government would be moving to 20-day payment terms for all business on 1 July next year, so we are moving from a 30-day payment policy to 20 days. That is in recognition that cash flow is critical for our small businesses. That was a commitment the Premier gave at COAG. There was a COAG commitment to reduce payment terms for small business vendors to 20 calendar days. That was a commitment in relation to invoices valued under \$1 million. I am very proud to say that Queensland has gone much further than that, and we will be implementing 20-day payment terms for all business invoices.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, in the last reporting period the Department of Health and the Department of Local Government both paid over 20 per cent of payments late. How can Queenslanders trust this government will start paying businesses on time under the new policy?

Ms FENTIMAN: We do a lot of work with our agencies on the on-time payment policy. I know the director-general is in regular contact with her colleagues around the on-time payment policy. I am very pleased to say that since 2015 when we came to office the number of late payments across Queensland government has been trending down. We do have a very good record. It is trending down. There is always more to do. We are always working with our departments to make sure they do pay our small businesses on time but, as I said, I am proud that we will be moving to 20-day payment terms for all invoices on 1 July next year.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, with New South Wales adopting a five-day small business payment time frame from December this year, why do small businesses have to wait a whole year until Queensland adopts a 20-day payment policy?

Ms FENTIMAN: As I said, we are going much further by introducing payment terms for all businesses in 20 days, so it will require departments to make sure they have proper processes in place to make those payments within 20 days. It is a significant commitment. We are going to work with all of our agencies to make sure they are ready to implement this incredibly positive policy, which has been well received, by 1 July next year.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the department service area highlighting the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council on SDS page 6. The council has been tasked with responding to requests the minister has identified on small business issues. How many requests has the minister made relating to small business issues over the past financial year?

Ms Curtis: As the minister indicated earlier, she chairs the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council. The council provides strategic advice, recommendations and practical solutions to identify small business issues. That allows the minister and the government to engage with the small business community, hear firsthand issues of concern and also identify opportunities that the government and the small business community can work on together.

One of the issues that has been raised, and some of the feedback that has been provided through the Small Business Advisory Council, was in relation to payroll tax. That is one of the key issues we have spoken about. Another area that has been a particular focus for the Small Business Advisory Council was the Supporting Artisan Producers plan, which was raised by the council and has been discussed quite frequently at recent meetings. As chair of the Small Business Advisory Council, the minister and the council have also requested that the Better Regulation Taskforce undertake some work in relation to better regulation for small business.

Ms SIMPSON: Could the director-general be a little more specific? You said that the minister raised two issues and you mentioned better regulations, but we have just had this discussion about government regulations and who is responsible. Does the director-general accept that the minister has a responsibility to be involved across government with regulations that impact small business?

Ms Curtis: The minister is the chair of that committee, so I would defer to her. She is best placed to answer.

CHAIR: I was going to say, member, that if you are seeking a more fulsome answer it may be best to direct your question to the person who chairs that committee, who is the minister.

Ms FENTIMAN: For the benefit of the member, I can add that one of the recent requests to go to the Better Regulation Taskforce was outlined in our artisan producers strategy, which I released just a month ago, which tasked the Better Regulation Taskforce to look at how we could streamline licensing requirements for our artisan producers in bringing their wonderful products to market, particularly how we could look at streamlining that across different local government areas and different requirements from local councils. They are now tasked with that work. I have been working with them on their work around the entrepreneurial pipeline, which again is about supporting producers being able to get their product to market without having to pay extensive fees and undergo regulation for licensing requirements, so that is a recent request I made of them.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council. The council has been tasked with bringing to the minister's attention any systemic and emerging issues with the potential to affect the ability of Queensland small businesses to operate successfully. How many issues were formally brought to the minister's attention?

Ms Curtis: As I said before, the minister is the chair of that particular committee, so I would defer to her to answer that particular question.

Ms FENTIMAN: In 2018 the task force undertook a review of the future of regulation in an economy digitally disrupted by new technologies with a focus on the impacts for small business and presented its regulatory review project to me in December last year. The government has just finalised its response to the 2018 better regulation response, and that will be published very soon.

Future work for 2019: as I said, the task force is reviewing licensing and process requirements for small artisanal food and beverage producers and we are also implementing the \$1.1 million Business Impact Statement project. That includes our election commitment around introducing small business consultation panels. They have been very busy. In March this year I also tabled in parliament the government's response to their 2017 work.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the \$10 million disaster recovery package, on SDS page 5. How many applications have been received for the business grants?

CHAIR: While the director-general looks for the requisite information, I indicate to the member for Maroochydore that that is the last question and we will move to government questions next.

Ms Curtis: As at 31 July 2019, we have received 50 applications for the small business disaster grants.

CHAIR: We will move now to questions from government members. I am very interested to know more about the government's recently released document Supporting Artisan Producers, which the minister and the director-general briefly mentioned before. I would love to hear more about how that is supporting these small businesses in Queensland. I am sure we all have many of them in our electorates, and I certainly have some very excited small businesses in my electorate that would love to know more.

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. Queensland is home to so many wonderful local producers, and we want to encourage more of them to get their tasty treats to the market and to more Queensland families. We launched our Supporting Artisan Producers plan about a month ago. That includes a new grant, an artisan producer grant, which will provide up to \$5,000 that can be used

for professional advice to take their business to the next level or develop a digital presence. Artisan producers often do not self-identify as a small business. They see themselves as a producer, so I think creating a strategy and targeted grants is a great way to support the sector to grow.

Whilst in Cairns with the member for Cairns I met Rachel Wilson from the Far North Queensland Food Incubator. She was over the moon with the new support available and thought it was a welcome boost to the sector. Emma Greenhatch, from the Food and Agribusiness Network on the Sunshine Coast, was also thrilled with the announcement and was excited to promote the funding with FAN members. Here in Brisbane Angela Hirst, the director of Wandering Cooks in West End and also Australia's largest artisan food and beverage incubator, is another passionate champion for artisan producers. The business provides commercial kitchen space, mentoring and peer support to small food and hospitality start-ups to minimise risk in the process of starting a business. In 2018 we funded Wandering Cooks to deliver a workshop and group mentoring program which helped more than 30 women to develop their food businesses.

As part of the plan, we are mentoring people in the sector who, as producers, may not have all the business knowledge necessary to turn their passion into a viable business. We are working to tailor our fantastic Mentoring for Growth program to cater to the needs of our artisan producers to ensure we are helping businesses reach their full potential.

The Palaszczuk government is also supporting Indigenous artisan producers with our funding for the Meeanjin Markets. The Meeanjin Markets are a fantastic opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business owners, including many artisan producers, to showcase their beautiful products and produce. We have invested \$1.2 million over the next three years to support the markets and work with stallholders to build sustainable businesses. The Palaszczuk government is committed to supporting Queensland's diverse range of artisan food and beverage products. We are so lucky to have some incredible produce coming out of this state.

CHAIR: Minister, I have Nundah markets in my electorate and this has been well received. I think it is wonderful that you are moving in these new directions so I thank you for doing that.

Mr HEALY: I would have to say that is extremely popular up in our part of the world. Minister, I refer to page 5 of the SDS and note the \$10 million for phase 2 of the North Queensland flood recovery. Could you outline what this funding will mean, particularly for the local and small business community?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. The work to rebuild the communities, businesses and economies that were damaged across North and North-West Queensland following the unprecedented flooding at the start of the year is continuing. I have been incredibly inspired by the resilience of the communities in the region. The effects of weeks of rain and flooding were incredibly heartbreaking, and there is still plenty of work to do.

I visited Townsville as part of this year's Queensland Small Business Week and had the opportunity to meet some business owners at a cafe in Fairfield Central Shopping Centre, a key community hub hit by the disaster. Each coffee poured, each transaction and every store reopening has meant more customers for the businesses and a step towards recovery for the owners of these businesses. While I was there I announced an additional \$10 million package of support for the region which included a further \$3 million for a new small business disaster recovery grant. The package is jointly funded under the Queensland-Commonwealth disaster recovery funding arrangements. The grants are for up to \$10,000 so businesses can access expert advice to improve their recovery planning or make their operation more prepared and resilient. The grants are available to businesses outside the five LGAs that were not activated for the initial grants.

During my time in Townsville I met with Tony from Cheapa 4 U Crane Hire who was impacted by the floodwaters but, because his business was located outside of the Townsville local government area, previous grants had not applied to him. Since I announced these additional grants, Tony has now been able to access \$10,000 in much needed funding. As I said to him, clearly the floodwaters do not stop at the boundary of a local government area. We are always willing to work with those members of the community who have been affected.

Other elements of the package will fund counselling, mental health support, a go-local advertising campaign, mentoring for recovery sessions and ongoing support for small businesses in the region for the next two years. This, along with extending the applications window for the small business special disaster recovery assistance grants through to the end of November, demonstrates the ongoing commitment to support the region to listen and respond to the needs of affected business owners.

The Palaszczuk government is continuing to support small business owners seven days a week through the Queensland first Small Business Recovery Centre in Townsville. I want to thank all of the wonderful departmental staff and our partners with the chamber of commerce and other business leaders for their wonderful work in our recovery centre. The centre is a locally-led collaboration, supported by a range of agencies and small business stakeholders. The wonderful people at the centre mean business owners can turn up to one place for information, advice, referrals and some local encouragement. Together, we are turning the recovery effort into long-term economic growth for the region, bringing jobs for locals, customers for businesses and brighter futures in the Sunshine State.

CHAIR: We will go to the member for Maryborough for probably the last question.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, I refer again to the Queensland small business budget statement and the Queensland government's small business procurement commitment. How will this improve the government's spend with small businesses across Queensland?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. Queensland is home to more than 438,000 small businesses. I know that, as a former small business owner, the member for Maryborough is always appreciative of government making it easier to do business with the state government. Each year the Queensland government invests billions of dollars for the purchase of goods and services. Our small business procurement commitment is making it easier for small businesses to do business with us.

As of 1 July 2020, we have committed to reduce invoice payment times, as I have said, from 30 days to 20 days for small businesses. The Palaszczuk government recognises that cash flow is vital for small businesses and is committed to fair payment terms. We have also begun measuring across government our spend with small and medium businesses so that we can set a measurable target. This commitment builds upon the work of my colleague Minister de Brenni, who through our Buy Queensland policy is delivering a range of measures to increase our spend with Queensland businesses, including delivering a visible pipeline of projects and making it easier to break down large contracts into smaller pieces of work so that small businesses can tender for it.

When you go local you grow local, which is why our government has a Buy Queensland policy. It ensures local businesses, jobs and better social outcomes are front and centre when taxpayer dollars are spent. We know that small businesses are the engine room of our economy which is why we are backing them and putting our money behind them. Our small business procurement commitment will deliver real results for small businesses, unlike the LNP. They voted against Queensland businesses when they did not support our Buy Queensland policy. They did not support Queensland businesses when they abolished the small business commissioner. We will continue to work with our small businesses and make it easier for them to do business with us.

CHAIR: We have come to 5 pm and the committee is scheduled to conclude its examination of the small business portfolio now. We will move to estimates for the portfolio area of training and skills development. I welcome Ms Mary Campbell, chief executive officer of TAFE Queensland to the hearing. We will examine the proposed expenditure for the training and skills development portfolio until 6 pm. To open the questioning I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr DAMETTO: Minister, thank you very much for your appearance this afternoon as well as the director-general. Minister, I am very passionate about training and positive training outcomes, just like everyone else in this room. However, it does infuriate me that there are RTOs out there that are defrauding the taxpayer and the department. Some of these are operating brazenly and intentionally and the losers are trainees and apprentices in Queensland along with taxpayers. In answer to question on notice No. 18, Minister, you have stated that since 2016, 304 prequalified supplier registered training organisations have been removed from the system for a range of issues and 12 prequalified suppliers are currently suspended from taking any new enrolments because of their investigation by the department. Referring to the SDS, can the minister please quantify the amount of government funding that has been paid to these RTOs—the 304—while in operation? In addition to that, how much funding has been recouped by the state from these businesses that have been found through investigation to be acting fraudulently and illegally?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I know he is very passionate about making sure that we are getting quality training from all of our registered training organisations. As you have stated, we have a very strong focus on quality. We work very closely with ASQA, the national regulator, but we have our own quality procedures. As you have said, we have been working hard to make sure that we only provide government funds to those RTOs that are doing the right thing.

Since 1 July 2018 we have terminated 28 PQS agreements held by 23 prequalified suppliers; issued directives to 14, as you have said, to cease enrolments pending investigation; and issued 24 notices to remedy breaches to prequalified suppliers who are not meeting the terms of their agreement. We have progressed 88 prequalified supplier compliance audits.

As for the money that those prequalified suppliers would have had while they were registered as a PQS with us, I can get you that information and take that on notice. As for any fraudulent training organisations, I am also happy to provide you with that information, although I am not aware of whether or not we have that information. We can get that for you. I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr DAMETTO: In answer to question on notice No. 19, Minister, you have stated that TAFE Queensland has an extensive regional presence. I must agree; the lights are on in the Ingham TAFE campus, but it is becoming increasingly harder to undertake training courses. The information given to me is that in order for TAFE to run a course in Ingham they need at least 12 people. Referring to the SDS, can the minister please provide the minimum number of students required by TAFE to run a TAFE training course? Also, out of the 6,500 Queensland rural and regional students who received funding to complete a traineeship or apprenticeship in the last 12 months, how many had to actually travel to complete their training course when they already had a local rural or regional TAFE in their town?

Ms FENTIMAN: Certainly making sure that Queenslanders, no matter where they live, have access to quality training is one of my key priorities and one of the key priorities of the government. You are quite right; TAFE does provide training in parts of the state where I do not think any private provider would set up a campus. I have had the pleasure of visiting the TAFE campus on Thursday Island, in Bamaga and in places where it would not be profitable for a private provider to run a campus, and that is why we have a public provider.

In relation to your question about Ingham and the number of persons TAFE requires to run a course, I am happy to get that information from the CEO of TAFE. I know it does depend on where the campus is as to how many students TAFE requires before it runs a course. In relation to your question about how many students would have to travel, I am not sure we would have that information. I know that we certainly do provide travel allowance for apprentices and trainees who have to travel away from their home. We do endeavour to make sure there is a wide range of training opportunities for Queenslanders across the state. I do not know if the CEO wants to add anything to that.

Ms Campbell: The Ingham campus is located in the town's centre and it does offer easy access to nearby cafes, food outlets and facilities. We offer a broad range of courses there from certificate II through to diploma as well as selected skill sets. The study areas offered at Ingham include: community services, counselling, alcohol and mental health, practice management, early childhood, event management, optical dispensing, employment pathways, travel and tourism.

With regard to the question of needing a minimum of 12 students to run a class, in our local metropolitan areas we usually cap our apprenticeship classes at 14 and our theory classes at 28; we have set numbers. We run a lot of smaller classes across Queensland in our rural and remote areas to ensure that we encompass working with a wide, diverse student population as well as those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. If there is a specific example of a course in Ingham, I am happy to take that and investigate that for you. Generally, in our rural and remote areas we run with much smaller class sizes because we have larger class sizes in our metropolitan areas.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for that. If there are any specific cases, I would be quite happy to pass them on to the minister.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to the departmental budget summary on SDS page 8. How much did the state government spend on the Training Management System project?

Ms Curtis: Are you referring to the TAFE Queensland system?

Ms SIMPSON: This was listed under the Training Management System of the department, last updated on 18 July 2018. I understand that it covered training and that apprentices information was on that published web page.

CHAIR: Are you referring to the SDS or is that a web page?

Ms SIMPSON: Page 8 of the SDS is in respect of not only the estimates for this year but also the actuals for last year. This project was published and, one would assume, would have been included within the actuals of the last 12 months.

Ms Curtis: Are you referring to being published on the dashboard?

Ms SIMPSON: I believe it may be. I am more than happy to table a copy of this page for the assistance of the director-general.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

Ms Curtis: I thank the member for providing that information. As outlined in the statement, that project has come to a logical point and the parties have jointly agreed for it to come to an end. The details of that agreement are commercial-in-confidence.

Ms SIMPSON: Did this project end up costing taxpayers in the vicinity of \$50 million?

Ms Curtis: As I have already outlined, the agreement was commercial-in-confidence.

Ms SIMPSON: What was the originally budgeted cost for this project?

Ms Curtis: The details of that agreement are commercial-in-confidence.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, you still have to have line items reported. In terms of the accountability of that process, there would have been a budget allocation to enable a project to proceed. Did the project cost \$50 million, \$100 million or \$5 million? What are we talking about? Potentially, this is a project that has been undertaken. There must be some accountability of reporting this estimates matter?

CHAIR: The same question has been repeated.

Ms Curtis: Throughout the life of this project, I understand there has not been any budget information published on the dashboard, and this is due to the commercial-in-confidence nature of the project and the agreement.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I refer to page 8 of the SDS. Has the Training Management System project been scrapped?

Ms Curtis: As outlined in the statement that the member has tabled and provided me with a copy of, the project has come to a logical point and the parties have agreed for it to come to an end. That was in July 2018.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, what benefit have taxpayers received from what appears to be a multimillion dollar investment into this now defunct program?

Ms Curtis: The work performed during this project will assist in taking advantage of synergies with the new department and also refining its business systems.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, who will review that there has been value for money—however many millions this is—or if money has been wasted if there is no accountability to this parliament?

Ms Curtis: As I said, it has been jointly agreed that the project would come to an end. It was closely monitored and updated on the IT dashboard and, as I said, the agreement for that project is commercial-in-confidence.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the CEO of TAFE Queensland. Good afternoon. I refer to TAFE Queensland's income statement on page 19 of the SDS. How much has TAFE Queensland spent on external consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers over the past financial year?

Ms Campbell: TAFE Queensland has a legislative requirement to establish and maintain appropriate systems of internal control and risk management. PricewaterhouseCoopers provide audit and assurance services to TAFE Queensland. PwC were originally appointed to provide services to TAFE Queensland in 2014 as the statutory body was being formed. Appointment of PwC followed an appropriate procurement process that selected PwC under a Department of the Premier and Cabinet standing offer arrangement. This initial contract was for a three-year duration and was extended a further three-year term, commencing in July 2017. In 2018-19 TAFE Queensland expended \$228,000 on audit and assurance services from PwC. That amount in line with the expenditure from 2017-18.

Ms SIMPSON: When dealing with contractual arrangements with PricewaterhouseCoopers, were you aware of the minister's sponsored stay in luxury ski town Whistler from PricewaterhouseCoopers consultant Nicole Scurrah?

CHAIR: I do not see how that is relevant. Can you please explain how that is relevant to the appropriation of TAFE Queensland?

Ms SIMPSON: On SDS page 19 we have an income statement and this is to do with the integrity of the procurement process.

CHAIR: Giving me an SDS reference does not necessarily make the nexus of relevance.

Ms SIMPSON: Well, expenditure is a matter that must have probity and integrity in that process. That is why I am asking the CEO—

CHAIR: About a contract that was extended in 2017?

Ms SIMPSON: And when TAFE spent nearly a quarter of a million dollars with PwC. When dealing with contractual arrangements, it is appropriate that we are able to ask about the probity of the process. Was the CEO aware of the minister's sponsored stay in luxury ski town Whistler from PricewaterhouseCoopers consultant Nicole Scurrah?

CHAIR: In 2017 when the contract was awarded? Again, I am trying to clarify the relevance.

Ms SIMPSON: Currently, because these are ongoing contractual arrangements. I want to establish whether the CEO was aware of these matters.

Ms Campbell: The initial contract for TAFE Queensland as a statutory body was required by the Financial Accountability Act 2009 and the Financial Performance Management Standard 2009 to establish and maintain appropriate systems of internal control and risk. As I said earlier, in September 2013, for 2014 the TAFE board resolved that an internal audit function for TAFE Queensland be established. In 2017 the board, by way of contract extension, extended PwC for a further three-year term, commencing in July 2017. That has been accessed by TAFE Queensland accessing the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's internal audit standing offer arrangement to conduct a competitive procurement process, which resulted in the engagement of PwC to provide audit and assurance services.

Ms SIMPSON: So no contractual amendments or changes have occurred in this financial year?

Ms Campbell: No.

Ms SIMPSON: I refer to the government's stated priority to deliver world-class training facilities for TAFE students, on SDS page 2. How much has been allocated towards capital investments to refurbish the Cairns TAFE site?

Ms Campbell: The owner of the assets of TAFE Queensland is the department. I would need to refer this question to the department for answer.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, how much has been allocated towards capital investment to refurbish the Cairns TAFE site?

Ms Curtis: I might need to grab some detail in relation to the Cairns site. I do not think I have it to hand. In order to support growth in Far North Queensland, \$15 million has been allocated for significant revitalisation works for this campus as part of the government's Advancing Our Training Infrastructure election commitment. Master planning to determine the options for investment at that site has been underway. In addition to that particular funding, \$4.6 million is budgeted over the next two years for general maintenance, furniture, fit-out and equipment and capital projects to complement the planned Advancing Our Training Infrastructure revitalisation works that I referred to earlier. In the 2019-20 budget, \$600,000 is provided to replace some air-conditioning equipment and chiller plant and \$1.433 million is budgeted for building upgrades.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, we will come back to you, but we will move to some government questions. My question is to the minister and relates to the continuation of the free TAFE initiative. Minister, can you please detail the success of this initiative and any recent changes?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. It is fantastic to see that since introducing this initiative last year close to 90 students have taken up free TAFE in the Nudgee area. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring pathways for young Queenslanders to get the skills and training they need to get a job and build a career. It was fantastic that in this year's state budget the highly successful free TAFE initiative will be continued.

Since we kicked off our free TAFE campaign, we have supported almost 7,000 young Queenslanders with their qualifications and today I announced that it would be expanded to include 12 additional courses in industries where we know there will be jobs. Free TAFE will now offer 172 courses in high-priority demand industries, with the additional courses focused on health care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care. With the rollout of the NDIS and an ageing population, we know we will need more skilled workers for the healthcare industry, and that is what free TAFE will provide.

This year I have travelled around the state seeing firsthand how free TAFE is changing people's lives. At Nambour TAFE I met Suncoast Christian College graduate Ben, who is well on his way to a successful career in our growing horticulture industry. Ben described free TAFE as too good of an opportunity to pass up and said that it would be something that would boost his career now and into the

future. I visited the TAFE Queensland Southport hospitality hub with the member for Gaven and met Moana, who graduated from Beenleigh State High School last year. She is looking forward to a bright future in hospitality when she finishes her Certificate III in Hospitality and hopes to work in a five-star establishment. This is something Moana said that she could not do if she could not get this for free from TAFE. I was also able to meet Moana's parents at the TAFE campus and they were very appreciative that the government was offering these courses for free. We know that one of the biggest barriers to training is the cost, and that is why we will pay the up-front cost for year 12 graduates to study at TAFE. This again is in stark contrast to the previous government, which cut \$82 million from the state's training budget. This has been turned around by the Palaszczuk government and we are very proud of our record on free TAFE.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. While we have the CEO of TAFE here, I want to say that I am a very big supporter and talk very proudly about the quality of your programs and just the fact that they do change people's lives, particularly young people, when they get that opportunity. Thank you very much for all that you do and the people who work within your industry.

Mr SAUNDERS: I also agree with those words. It is a game changer in people's lives, and that is what the Palaszczuk government is doing. Minister, I refer to the training and skills section of the SDS and note a highlight includes increasing engagement of young people in vocational education and training. Can you tell me and the rest of Queensland how the Palaszczuk government is increasing its engagement with young people into training through VET in Schools and how Queensland compares to other states in this nation?

Ms FENTIMAN: Last year, as I said, we visited Maryborough State High School and the Maryborough Trade Training Centre and the students there are doing some amazing work. They even—I think you will probably remember this, member for Maryborough—constructed a replica iron throne from the *Game of Thrones* TV series and were all very keen to get me to sit in the iron throne.

I am proud to say that Queensland is leading the nation with more than half of all secondary school students undertaking a vocational education and training qualification. Data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research shows Queensland with the largest share of school based apprentices and trainees, with more than 50 per cent of the nation's school based apprentices and trainees here in Queensland. Nationally, VET participation for school students has remained consistently around 30 per cent since 2008, but we are leading the way with 52.8 per cent participation rate in our secondary schools. We set the benchmark on how to engage with kids in schools. We are the envy of every other jurisdiction.

Our Gateway to Industry Schools Program has shown huge success, funding key industries to go into schools across the state and promote the need for a highly skilled workforce in these industries. There are more than 200 Queensland schools across the Catholic, independent and state schooling sectors that participate in the program—students like Carlo Davies from Kelvin Grove State College who, through the engineering gateway hub, joined a tour of a manufacturing plant. Carlo went on to accept an industry placement with the company and now works there as an apprentice. We continue to support young people once they leave school through our free TAFE program. I am incredibly proud of the more than 7,000 students we are supporting with free TAFE and, as I have just said, now they have even more options in relation to the 172 courses available.

Mr HEALY: Minister, once again I refer to the state government's commitment to ensuring a skilled workforce. I know that is a strong commitment that you have given. Can you please outline the effects from recent changes to federal government funding towards training Queenslanders?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I know that he is very passionate about ensuring that students in Cairns have access to quality training. It is of the utmost importance that a Queensland vocational education and training student is offered the same support that a university student gets, and this comes down to an equitable student loan system. We cannot continue to expect students to afford to pay high up-front, out-of-pocket expenses to study a VET course while a university student will pay nothing up-front, as they can defer costs through Australian government administered loans. The Morrison government's own Joyce review has highlighted this issue and has proposed a new state-Commonwealth agreement expanding funding for VET in the longer term so that student tuition subsidies are at an equivalent level to those applying to higher education.

At the moment the Commonwealth government is absolutely overseeing a system which favours university students at the expense of VET students. It has to be changed. It is very clear that the current system is failing Queensland VET students and it is time for the Australian government to make TAFE just as affordable and attractive as a university course. Despite repeated attempts to secure an

arrangement that was in the best interests of Queenslanders, the federal government also refused to offer a fair deal or funding certainty for Queensland. We refused to sign a deal reliant on the now failed skilling Australia fund because it did not deliver any guaranteed funding. It was based on a skills levy where you could not predict year on year how much funding we would receive. An apprenticeship takes four years. An apprentice needs funding certainty over the life of their apprenticeship.

Scott Morrison's federal budget saw the skilling Australia fund decreased by \$649 million. That is a reduction of more than 50 per cent. While the budget delivered \$525 million with one hand, it snatched away \$649 million with the other. It was actually a \$120 million funding cut. I have previously written to Senator Cash seeking a meeting to further discuss these issues and I would like the committee to note that, despite my repeated attempts to lobby Canberra for an equitable student loan scheme and a fair funding deal for Queensland, the member for Maroochydore has been silent on this issue. She has not bothered to pick up the phone or talk to her Canberra colleagues. It is absolutely time that the LNP did the right thing and started lobbying for a fair deal for Queensland.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to the delivery of Queensland's VET Quality Framework. Can you outline the reasons for improving VET quality?

Ms FENTIMAN: The member for Hinchinbrook also talked about the importance of quality with our registered training organisations. We are absolutely determined to grow and support quality training for jobs in order to grow a strong economy. In 2019-20 we are committing \$958.3 million to training and skills throughout the state and we are continuing to build on the partnership between industry and government and the partnership between our public providers, industry and government—a strong partnership that will benefit all of Queensland.

We are a state that seeks to be a genuine partner with our national training regulator, the Australian government, in providing quality vocational education and training. Across the state we currently have 524 active prequalified suppliers who have contracts with my department. Their contracts are providing quality in programs such as user choice, certificate III guarantee and higher level skills. Every registered training organisation wishing to deliver training under a Queensland government funded VET program must meet my department's eligibility requirements, and quality of training is a priority no matter whether it is from TAFE or another RTO.

Our standards are high. As I have said, over the past 12 months 25 organisations have had their PQS contracts cancelled. From 12 December 2017 to June 2019, my department has identified 148 breaches of contractual arrangements and has sought the recovery of a total of \$3 million in funding related to these breaches. I have instructed my department to raise the bar for quality training standards for our PQS providers to ensure that government subsidised training drives enhanced outcomes for students and employers. This will mean that VET students, parents and employers can rely on a government subsidised training qualification being a quality one.

The Queensland Training Ombudsman also works to identify systemic issues about training delivery and makes recommendations to positively impact the provision of quality VET in Queensland. In addition, TAFE Queensland is there to provide support to students as the state's leading provider of vocational education and training. We are committed to jobs growth and ensuring that Queenslanders are equipped with the skills and training they need to participate and succeed in our diverse and expanding economy.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Having spent three years with ASQA, I cannot speak strongly enough about how important it is to have those high standards and ensure integrity in the sector. Thank you for taking that approach.

Mr HEALY: Minister, I refer to page 8 of the Service Delivery Statements and note Queensland government support for public providers to deliver training services in our communities. Can the minister advise how this support will assist TAFE campuses in remote and Torres Strait Islander communities like, for example, Thursday Island?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. TAFE Queensland delivers important high-quality training services for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland. As I have already mentioned, campuses include Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and Bamaga in the northern peninsula area.

As the ministerial champion for the Torres Strait, I have visited the Thursday Island campus a number of times and talked to staff and students about how we can build on the success of the campus. In this budget we will invest more than \$800,000 to upgrade the campus on Thursday Island. Students

will see a revitalisation of this campus. The refurbishments will include the creation of a cultural hub that the whole Torres community can benefit from. Students on Thursday Island have also benefited from recently upgraded 4G internet and 20 new laptops.

The Palaszczuk government wants all Queenslanders to be able to access quality training no matter where they live. My department has been working closely with TAFE Queensland, opening up a range of new courses. This includes a certificate II in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care, a certificate II in Indigenous housing and maintenance construction, and a certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts. These additional courses will be offered to Torres Strait Islander students from semester 1 next year.

The government also wants to see more local teachers in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. That is why we have committed \$225,000 for funding for skilled locals to undertake a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. This means that we will be training 10 students in the Torres Strait and 12 in Bamaga. Once completed, they will have a job waiting for them at their local TAFE campus. This means we will not be having teachers having to fly in and out of places like Cairns. Locals will be trained to deliver the training. It is incredibly exciting and cost saving. That is a wonderful outcome.

In May this year, for the first time, Construction Skills Queensland held a Try'a Trade day at the Thursday Island TAFE campus. Forty-five high school students from the local Tagai State College in the northern peninsula area visited the TAFE campus to get their hands dirty trying out popular trades such as plumbing, plastering, tiling, painting and decorating. From learning to connect up a water source to having a go at plastering, learning wall and floor tiling and techniques for painting and decorating, the year 10 students received hands-on experience to help them decide if a career in construction is right for them.

The Thursday Island TAFE campus is a wonderful example of the government listening to the local community. We are providing the right qualifications where they are needed, investing in the future growth of the community. We hope in the coming months to replicate this successful model to other TAFE campuses in remote communities.

Mr HEALY: That is an outstanding response. I refer to page 7 of the SDS and note the state government's efforts to increase the engagement of young people in vocational education and training. Can the minister give an example of how the government is working to increase the engagement of young people in vocational education in Far North Queensland?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. I know how passionate he is about ensuring that young people in Cairns get the right skills they need. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring that young people have access to vocational education where they live. In Cairns, young people have access to a highly successfully free TAFE initiative, support through Skilling Queenslanders for Work and, of course, opportunities through Back to Work. The Cairns TAFE campus is a hub of activity, with close to 30 free TAFE courses offered in both trades and non-trades. We are currently progressing plans as part of our \$15 million commitment to revitalising the campus.

Earlier this year I visited the AFL Cape York House for girls in Cairns, where I announced \$100,000 in funding to employ a coordinator who will work with students one on one and provide wraparound support and help guide students through high school and on to employment. Cape York House helps shape the lives of Indigenous young people in Cairns every day. This additional support will make a real difference to their lives.

When I visited, it was great to spend time with Margie, Hilda, Alma and Ashlee, who showed me around AFL Cape York House and shared with me their experiences. Creating opportunities and fostering a supportive learning environment for our young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who might be so far from their homes, is so important. Developing a strong network to support these students is an exciting opportunity, and a transition-to-work coordinator is currently being recruited. This vital support will mean that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students will be on a path to a better future.

This not-for-profit organisation works with around 65 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from years 7 to 12. AFL Cape York House general manager Rick Hanlon said that this was a great opportunity because having this type of support and role locked into the program will ensure each student is case managed in their pathway to further study and career goals. Linking with AFL Cape York House is an opportunity to work with young people and ensure they stay engaged with their education, plan for their futures and attract support from employers and industry. This is a new opportunity and the Queensland government will work with AFL Cape York House to ensure that the coordinator's work assists students. The pilot will be reviewed after 12 months.

Mr HEALY: Terrific program.

Mr SAUNDERS: Minister, I refer to page 7 of the SDS and the \$105 million investment in Queensland's training infrastructure. Can you please detail where this investment will be targeted?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thank the member for the question. He has been a very strong advocate for TAFE. Unlike the former government, which closed the TAFE campus in Maryborough, this government opened the new campus in Maryborough in the centre of town. TAFE Queensland delivers important high-quality training for communities across more than 50 government owned or leased locations from as far away as Thursday Island to Coolangatta on the New South Wales border and as far west as Mount Isa. Strengthened by its online and international access, no other provider can match TAFE Queensland for scale and training options. Our priority is to ensure that Queenslanders have access to world-class training facilities. That is why, in this year's state budget, we have doubled our investment in TAFE campuses, with more than \$105 million to rebuild and renew campuses across Queensland.

Key projects include \$15 million to revitalise the Mount Gravatt campus to become Queensland's first vocational education design and technology precinct and \$10 million to boost trade and health training at Alexandra Hills TAFE in the Redlands, which will allow more students to undertake their apprenticeship locally while upgrading health facilities for nursing and aged-care students. On the Gold Coast we are investing in a new trades centre, building to cater for future growth in students studying construction, electrotechnology and engineering. We are continuing construction work in Townsville, investing \$31 million at the Pimlico TAFE, and investing more than \$7 million in Toowoomba on nursing and a new rural centre for excellence. Both projects are due for completion later this year.

This is in stark contrast to the previous LNP government. Of course, who can forget that, rather than investing in our TAFE campuses, they closed them, established QTAMA ready to sell them off and charged TAFE rent to use its own assets? They commissioned reports recommending the closure of TAFE campuses across Queensland. They wanted to sell the Alexandra Hills campus, resulting in plummeting student numbers. In contrast, we are investing \$10 million, owing to a boom in student numbers. The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Nanango at the time even had to lobby her own government to save her own local Kingaroy TAFE. I am proud to say that this year we are investing more than \$530,000 at the Kingaroy TAFE to make sure that locals have access to the best training facilities.

I am proud to be a member of a government investing in TAFE campuses and rebuilding the damage done by the former government. I look forward to touring the state as projects commence providing jobs to local communities across Queensland.

CHAIR: A final question from me before we move back to non-government questions. Skilling Queenslanders for Work is a six-year commitment of \$420 million. I know there is a target of 54,000 Queenslanders who will be helped through that program over six years. What is the progress with that number?

Ms FENTIMAN: The member will be pleased to hear since Skilling Queenslanders for Work was reintroduced in 2015 more than \$7 million has been invested in the Nudgee electorate helping more than 900 people; more than 560 of them securing a job as a direct result of the program. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring Queenslanders have the opportunity to gain the skills and training they need to get a job and build a career. This year's state budget is all about creating more jobs for Queenslanders and that is why we have invested \$80 million as part of our \$420 million investment in the initiative.

Since we reintroduced the program, more than 42,000 people have been assisted across Queensland, with more than 30,000 going on to get a further job or training, each person with their own amazing success story, boosting their confidence and skills to get a job. We smashed our previous target of assisting 32,000 nearly 10 months ahead of schedule and we are on track to hit 54,000 well ahead of time.

Last month I announced 211 projects were successful through the \$43 million funding in the latest round. This will change the lives of around 6,700 Queenslanders. From as far north as the Torres Strait and Cape York through Western Queensland and along the coast, this program is giving Queenslanders the work-ready skills and training they need to get a job and build a career. Last month I met Kalia. She commenced her business administration traineeship at the Brisbane Broncos in June of this year within the events and community development department. She has been a valued employee, an integral support in the lead-up to the club's annual fundraising event, Champions for Charity—what a great opportunity!

When I travel across the state community groups tell me what it was like when Skilling Queenslanders for Work was cut under the previous LNP government. They had to lay off staff and turn vulnerable people away. We know from experience that the LNP simply do not like this program, despite an independent audit by Deloitte saying that for every dollar invested in Skilling Queenslanders for Work \$8 was returned to the community. I urge all members to attend a Skilling Queenslanders for Work graduation and hear these amazing stories firsthand. It is a program really changing lives and it deserves the support of every member in this House.

CHAIR: The graduations are some of my favourite events as the local member. Thank you very much.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, I ask a follow-up question in regard to Cairns TAFE: will the \$15 million that has been announced for Cairns TAFE be spent in this term of government?

Ms Curtis: As I referred to earlier, \$15 million has been allocated as part of the election commitment for the Advancing our Training Infrastructure. I have outlined the budget and the amounts that are for this financial year and the budgets for the next two years and all of that work will be commenced this year is my understanding.

Ms SIMPSON: Sorry, I missed that last part.

Ms Curtis: My understanding is that that work will be commenced this year.

Ms SIMPSON: But when will it be finished?

Ms Curtis: The master planning, as I said, has been completed. The next phase of that is then to undertake some more detailed business case work and we will commence the work then. Once the construction work is clearly commenced we will have a better picture on the time frame for that particular work.

Ms SIMPSON: When will the construction work actually start?

Ms FENTIMAN: I can answer that. It is due to commence early 2020.

Ms SIMPSON: Can I ask when will it be finished?

Ms FENTIMAN: As the director-general said, it is still in the planning stages but work will commence early 2020.

Ms SIMPSON: You do not know when it is going to finish then?

Ms FENTIMAN: We can get you that information.

Ms SIMPSON: I think that needs to be stated because otherwise, Minister, is this a broken promise if you are not going to complete the works you have promised within the term of government that you announced it for? We will take that on notice as to when it is going to be finished.

My question is for the CEO of TAFE. I refer to TAFE Queensland's income statement in the SDS on page 19. In TAFE's annual report published towards the end of last year it was revealed that even though the previous CEO had 'resigned' she received \$390,000 worth of termination benefits. Why was this payment made if, in fact, Ms Schmidt had resigned?

Ms Campbell: Following the resignation of the former CEO in late 2017 I was appointed by the TAFE Queensland board to the role of interim chief executive officer for TAFE Queensland and was appointed formally to the role in July 2018. Termination benefits of our key management personnel are disclosed in TAFE Queensland's annual reports. While the amount of the termination benefit is disclosed, the details of any payment contained within a contract are generally subject to confidentiality restrictions. As the current CEO of TAFE Queensland I do not have access to information contained within any agreement between the board and the previous CEO.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. My follow-up question is: are you aware of how the termination payment value was determined?

Ms Campbell: I was appointed to the role of CEO in July 2018 and, as I have already stated, I do not have access to any information at all that was contained within that agreement between the board and the previous CEO.

Ms SIMPSON: Are you aware whether Ms Schmidt resigned or was her contract terminated?

CHAIR: Can I check that the payment that you are talking about—

Ms SIMPSON: \$390,000?

CHAIR: Does this precede July last year?

Ms SIMPSON: No.

CHAIR: We need to clarify that.

Ms SIMPSON: It was reported in the financial year that has just closed in the annual report. Your annual report was actually published towards the end of last year.

CHAIR: What relevance does it have to the appropriation here and the CEO who is sitting before us?

Ms SIMPSON: Because your annual report was actually published in the last financial year.

CHAIR: So the appropriation that we are currently considering here, the relevance to that?

Ms SIMPSON: The annual report that was published within the last 12 months.

CHAIR: About the time period of the payment before the financial year?

Ms SIMPSON: About nearly \$400,000 worth of funds that were paid to the previous CEO that was reported.

CHAIR: It is a really long stretch. I know you are trying to make that stretch, but I do not think it is made.

Ms SIMPSON: Not really when that was not reported previously and it was reported in the last 12 months. My question is does Ms Campbell know whether the previous CEO resigned or her contract was terminated.

CHAIR: Again I do not see the relevance to the CEO sitting before us now talking about what is in the budget papers.

Ms SIMPSON: Can I put this to the CEO and to yourself: are you saying that you cannot scrutinise the government's annual report that is published after the estimates process?

CHAIR: No.

Ms SIMPSON: That appears to be what you are saying.

CHAIR: I am saying that we are sitting here looking at a particular period of appropriation.

Ms SIMPSON: So we cannot talk about the annual report in the last 12 months?

CHAIR: I am saying this for the fifth time, and I think you have heard me and you have decided you wish to make a point, but if it was relevant to the appropriation I have absolutely no issue with it being put to the CEO, but if I am correct, and please correct me if I am wrong, it is not relevant to the appropriation, it is something that occurred before last financial year and you do not have the information to answer it.

Ms SIMPSON: Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Sorry, member for Maroochydore, I have just sought clarification.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, what you are saying is you cannot ask the government about the annual report that came down in the last 12 months.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I have asked for clarification. With respect, if you could be respectful back and stop putting words in my mouth, I have asked for clarification from the CEO of TAFE and I will receive that clarification without interruption please. Is it relevant to the appropriation? Am I missing a link and a nexus? If so, I will allow the question, but I do not believe that is the case.

Ms Campbell: It is the appropriation in the 2017-18 year, not the current year or the next year.

CHAIR: Do you have another question?

Ms SIMPSON: I note that we cannot ask questions about the annual report.

CHAIR: No, member for Maroochydore, we do not need your statements. Your questions are irrelevant; that is the problem.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the CEO of TAFE. I refer to TAFE Queensland's alleged focus of providing access to quality training, under the service summary on page 16 of the SDS. When was TAFE Queensland first alerted to the mould infestation at Nambour TAFE?

Ms Campbell: TAFE Queensland is a safety-first organisation, and the health and safety of our staff and students is always our first priority. That is why we take every precaution we can to ensure that people feel safe where they work and study.

I am aware that staff raised concerns about the air quality in D block at the Nambour campus in 2015. Immediate action was taken. The block was assessed by Opira Pty Ltd environmental risk management. Results of that assessment showed indoor quality was good and advised a range of preventive recommendations. That has continued since that time.

In May 2019, in preparation for scheduled renovations, the building was again tested. The presence of surface mould was identified. A further review and testing by an independent environmental consultant identified the types of mould in D block as common indoor and outdoor moulds. Staff were kept informed during this process through a range of communication channels, including email, team meetings and multiple face-to-face consultations with TAFE representatives and independent industry experts. The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, as the asset owner, can provide more information for you on this question.

Ms SIMPSON: I appreciate that. You mentioned that independent assessments were taken. Were the 2015 assessments independent? Was that an independent assessment of the mould that was complained about at that point?

Ms Campbell: What I can tell you is the information today that is here, which says that the block was assessed by Opira Pty Ltd environmental risk management.

Ms SIMPSON: How many complaints were there about the mould issue back in 2015 and since then?

Ms Campbell: I have a chronology or time line of events. As the asset owner, I am sure that the department can provide you with that chronology.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. I will direct that question to the director-general. Director-General, the CEO has said that, as the asset owner, you would be able provide further information. How many complaints were received about the mould infestation at Nambour, initially in 2015 and since then?

Ms Curtis: You are asking about the time period 2015-16; is that correct?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms Curtis: That was before the formation of my department, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training. I can tell you that we have taken appropriate measures in relation to the recent issues to make sure that the campus remains a safe workplace for TAFE staff, students and visitors.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, in respect to the property you stayed at in Canada, could you advise where that property is? What is the address?

CHAIR: That is not relevant.

Ms FENTIMAN: I am not required to disclose that under the standing orders. I have disclosed the nature of the family holiday with family friends.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, how much is the remediation work going to cost at Nambour, to address the mould issue?

Ms FENTIMAN: As we have said, the Queensland government Department of Employment, Small Business and Training is the owner of TAFE assets. That question should be directed to the director-general or me.

Ms SIMPSON: I thought I did. Did I misstate and say 'the CEO'?

Ms FENTIMAN: I thought you said 'the CEO'.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, how much will the remediation works cost?

Ms Curtis: I understand that the estimated cost for the remediation of D block is just over \$3 million.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, can you undertake to find out how many people have complained about the mould at Nambour TAFE?

CHAIR: The director-general can provide a response to the current financial year and the previous one as it relates to the appropriation, but if anything is to be taken on notice could you please ask the minister?

Ms SIMPSON: Can I put it in context, to the director-general. If the department is undertaking \$3 million worth of work to address the mould problem at Nambour, I imagine there would also be issues of workplace health and safety for the staff and that there is a tail of responsibility to those who used to

work there in previous financial years. Director-General, can you undertake to find out how many complaints have come forward and whether that is part of the consideration of the works that you are undertaking and funding in this financial year?

CHAIR: That is the last question. Over to you, Director-General.

Ms Curtis: I am not aware that the department itself has received any complaints this financial year in relation to that particular site. I am aware that—

Ms SIMPSON: There would be a tail of liability with people who have previously complained and that would carry on regardless of the financial year.

CHAIR: Member, the director-general is trying to answer the question. Do not interrupt.

Ms Curtis: I understand that TAFE Queensland has been working with a former employee in relation to some issues that were raised by that former employee. I understand that it relates to an ongoing tribunal process and it relates to a medical condition. It is appropriate that we respect that individual's privacy.

CHAIR: Thank you. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of training and skills development has almost expired. Minister, before we conclude, do you have any comments or additional information that you would like to provide in regard to anything taken on notice?

Ms FENTIMAN: Yes, we have some things that we wanted to come back on. In relation to the Cairns TAFE campus, as I said, I can advise that construction will start in the first half of next year. We are still finalising the scoping of the project, so a completion date is not available at this stage. In relation to the other matters taken on notice, the director-general has some answers to provide.

Ms Curtis: There was a question in relation to the number of Back to Work payments: four weeks, but not receiving the 26-week payments. I have been advised that, as at 30 June 2019, 6,703 applicants who received the four-week payment have not claimed the 26- or 52-week payment, and that is since the program commenced.

The member for Maiwar asked a question around a date in relation to the Just Transition Group. I point back to a joint statement and media release that Minister Fentiman did with other members of the cabinet on 30 August 2018 which referred to the establishment of the Just Transition Group.

A question was also asked about the Back to Work cases of suspected fraud and the regional breakdown. This information is based on the addresses of the applications that we have received. Because the applications that I am referring to are suspected fraud and often it is identity theft, we can only go on the addresses that are received with the application. I can advise the breakdown by LGA. There were two in Banana, one in Brisbane, four in Bundaberg, six in Cairns—another seven for Cairns—two in Cassowary Coast, two in Central Highlands, one in Cook, two on the Fraser Coast, five in Gladstone, two in Livingstone, one in the Lockyer Valley, three in Logan, five for Mackay, two in Mareeba, Moreton Bay two, Mount Isa one, Redlands one, Rockhampton three—I have Rockhampton listed twice for three—South Burnett one, Southern Downs one, Sunshine Coast two, Tablelands one, four for Townsville and two for Whitsundays. That refers to individual businesses that have submitted applications.

A question was also asked around the stakeholders that the Just Transition Group has consulted with. I have a list of those stakeholders if the minister is happy for that to be tabled.

Ms FENTIMAN: Indeed.

Ms Curtis: That is the list of stakeholders.

CHAIR: Leave is granted for that to be tabled.

Ms FENTIMAN: I would just add in terms of the Back to Works payments that there are obviously a lot of reasons employees do not stay for a full six months. We have a number of case studies in relation to employees who, as a result of getting experience in the labour market, went on to get promotions at other companies or returned to study or work. Overwhelmingly, most of the employees have decided to leave to undertake other opportunities.

CHAIR: Director-General, did you have anything else?

Ms Curtis: That was everything, I understand.

CHAIR: If there is anything outstanding that comes to your attention or to the attention of the committee secretariat they will contact you. They would be due by Monday at 5 pm. Minister, did you have any final comments you wish to make before we close?

Ms FENTIMAN: I would like to thank all the committee members, particularly the committee chair. Thank for your interest in the portfolio. Thank you also to the parliamentary support staff for all they do to make estimates run smoothly. You can take a deep breath now—last session on the last day.

I would like to thank my director-general, Mary-Anne Curtis, and her team of deputies—Steven, Irene and Peter. I would also like to thank Jamie Merrick, the Director-General of the Department of Environment and Science, and his team. I thank all of the support staff from the department, including Matt, Narelle, Jenni, Emily and Brad Lang, the head of corporate service, who have put in a huge effort. I thank the CEO of TAFE Queensland, Mary Campbell; the chair of Jobs Queensland, Professor Coaldrake; and the Queensland Training Ombudsman, Geoff Favell, who all made themselves available today. Thank you to my ministerial staff—my chief of staff, Shane Bevis, and my team of advisors, Laura Fraser Hardy, Oliva Amsden and Mat Cooper.

CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you, Minister, your director-general and all of your officers who were present today for their diligent answering of questions. I thank my fellow committee members for their time today and the work that they put into these portfolio areas during the parliament and during estimates. I also thank the members who attended and participated in the hearing who are not on the committee. Thank you also to Hansard and all the parliamentary staff who assisted here today, particularly our secretariat who work so hard behind the scenes to support us. I declare the committee's hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 6.01 pm.