



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Jeremy Rockliff MP

Thursday 26 November 2020

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC
Hon Ivan Dean MLC
Hon Jo Palmer MLC
Hon Tania Rattray MLC (Chair)
Hon Jo Siejka MLC
Hon Josh Willie MLC

WITNESSES IN ATTENDANCE

Hon. Jeremy Rockliff MP, Deputy Premier; Minister for Education and Training; Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing; Minister for Disability Services and Community Development; Minister for Trade; Minister for Advanced Manufacturing and Defence Industries

Mr Tim Bullard, Secretary, Department of Education

Ms Trudy Pearce, Deputy Secretary – Learning, Department of Education

Ms Jenny Burgess, Deputy Secretary – Strategy and Performance, Department of Education

Ms Katharine O'Donnell, Registrar Education

Mr Kane Salter, Director -Finance and Budget Services, Department of Education

Mr Bob Rutherford, Deputy Secretary Industry and Business Development, Department of State Growth

Ms Angela Conway, General Manager, Workforce Development and Training, Skills Tasmania

Ms Liz Jack, Executive Director Libraries Tasmania

Ms Jenny Dodd, Chief Executive Officer, TasTAFE

Mr Scott Adams, Chief Financial Officer, TasTAFE

Mr Craig Jeffery, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Health

Ms Kathrine Morgan-Wicks, Secretary, Department of Health

Mr Dale Webster, Deputy Secretary, Community, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Department of Health

Ms Ingrid Ganley, Director, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania

Mr Michael Pervan, Secretary, Department of Communities Tasmania

Ms Courtney Hurworth, Acting Manager of Community Development, Department of Communities Tasmania

Ms Kate Kent, Deputy Secretary, Disability Services and Community Development, Department of Communities Tasmania

Ms Lara Hendriks, Executive Director, Business and Trade, Department of State Growth

Rear Admiral Steve Gilmore (Retired), Defence Advocate, Advanced Manufacturing and Defence Industries

Mr Brett Stewart, A/General Manager, Business and Trade Tasmania, Department of State Growth

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

DIVISION 3

(Department of Education)

CHAIR - Good morning, everyone. The time being 9 o'clock, I'll invite Lynne to be ready to broadcast. Thank you very much. Minister, welcome to day 4 for Committee B Estimates Process. I will introduce our team at the table and then invite you to introduce your team, provide what we consider is a brief overview if that's possible, because we do have quite a bit to get through and we've already made some commitments around that.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I understand.

CHAIR - On my left, I have the honourable Josh Willie, the honourable Ivan Dean, myself, Tania Rattray, the honourable Rosemary Armitage and the honourable Jo Palmer who's managing to work through her first Estimates process and doing very well. Thank you. We also have an apology from the honourable Jo Siejka who has not been so well. We've invited her to stay at home and she's probably watching online; perhaps not. We have with us our secretary, Natasha Exel and Allison Waddington; they are invaluable with their assistance. We have Lynne from Hansard, who's been with us for the last three days.

Minister, one of the most important areas of the budget is Education. You have a couple of other hats as well: the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Disability Services and Community Development, Trade, and Advanced Manufacturing and Defence. So many portfolio areas. Let's get started. Thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you, Chair. To my right is Tim Bullard, the Secretary for the Department of Education. To his right is the Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Performance, Jenny Burgess, and to my left is Kane Salter, the Director of Finance. I have an opening statement.

CHAIR - Thank you. Welcome, Kane, Tim and Jenny. When you come to the table, anybody in support, clean chairs are at one end, so put your clean chair in and remove any that have been used over to that side. Thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Chair, our Government has prioritised lifting education achievement in Tasmania with a significant investment in students, teacher support staff, schools, resource and infrastructure. We're all passionate about ensuring every Tasmanian student, no matter where they live or what their background, has the best possible opportunities in life and a good quality education is key to that. We continue to build on our plan to improve outcomes for learners that is based on research and data, is tailored to the needs of particular schools and communities and is focused on providing support and the time necessary for our valued school leaders to succeed, and it is working.

Too many times in the history of education the right policy has been produced but not given the time it deserves to make a difference. This is a budget that recognises the importance of building on what we have already achieved to ensure that every child and young person is extraordinary. We are investing a record \$7.5 billion over the next four years into education in Tasmania to provide more opportunities for learners to remain engaged in their learning, to feel safe and secure and to complete year 12 in a way that is meaningful for them.

As Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, as well as Education minister, I also take the wellbeing of our students in our schools very seriously. Evidence demonstrates that students who have greater health and wellbeing are more likely to have better educational outcomes, more likely to have positive wellbeing throughout their lives, and be more productive. I'm very proud of how our department has prioritised mental health and wellbeing in our schools since we came to government. In fact, we have committed an unprecedented \$81 million to support mental health and wellbeing in our schools since 2014, which includes across the forward Estimates, record numbers of professional support staff, including social workers and psychologists; the reintroduction of school nurses, health nurses; \$1 million over four years to deliver SPEAK UP! Stay ChatTY schools program in Tasmanian Government schools; \$14 million over four years to build capacity in schools to support children and young people with the emotional and behavioural challenges impacted by trauma; and wellbeing teams implemented in every school.

We know there is no one single solution to dealing with mental health issues, which is why we have taken a holistic, multi-faceted approach to supporting our students. Every student is different and so are their needs. We recognise that listening to students and understanding their needs is key to improving student wellbeing. The annual student wellbeing survey introduced last year provides schools and the department with critical data on the wellbeing of our students which will further guide our approach.

We're also supporting more families to have the financial resources necessary to provide for their children by expanding the students distance scheme which waives the cost of school levies for eligible students. Improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes of students continues to be a priority. NAPLAN data shows us that when the education levels of parents are taken into account our results are clearly on par with the rest of Australia. Our challenge is to overcome the long-standing barriers to achieving in Tasmania that are clearly linked to socioeconomic status. Continuing to build on the schools and the capacity of our teachers is key to this. That's why we've committed \$12.8 million over four years, for 35 additional quality teaching coaches to support our dedicated and talented staff.

COVID-19 has provided us with an important reminder that every one of our learners is unique. Individuals who have their own hopes and aspirations, ways of learning and sometimes barriers to engaging. This year, we introduced the educational adjustments funding model for students with disability which includes funding of \$34 million over four years. I'm very proud to say that this budget increases the funding even more to help build on improving, accessing engagement for students with disability. We also recognise that what a student needs to succeed is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We've already taken action to keep our young people engaged in education until they complete year 12 by raising the leaving age to 18.

Years 11 and 12 extension school program has been embraced by school communities, students and their families since its introduction in 2015. There are now 47 extension schools across the state. Many are working collaboratively and effectively with our colleges to give our students more choices and options to be able to complete year 12. I'm also excited by the work being undertaken by three education sectors in partnership with industry and the community to deliver the years 9 to 12 project, providing a new curriculum and a strong vision for vocational learning and VET in Tasmanian schools. The capacity of our schools to provide better opportunities across the state is being prioritised as more schools extend to years 11 and 12 and a focus is based on labour market requirements of a school's region.

In 2020, there are 53 different full VET qualifications delivered to schools and colleges across the state. In addition, the profile of Australian school based apprenticeships and traineeships has been elevated. In 2020, there were 418 in Tasmanian government schools.

Chair, we're allocating \$6.6 billion over the four years to engage and empower our learners through years 9 to 12 by accelerating the packages of learning program designed for years 9 and 10 students and the back-on-track pilot at Hellyer and Claremont Colleges. This work complements the extensive scope of vocational education and work-based learning outcomes. In Tasmanian government schools, work-based learning includes vocational placements and work placements as well as work experience, mentoring, observing work place practice skill development in the work place, volunteering and community involvement.

An example of a work exposure activity is the aged care career discovery days, showcasing the aged care sector, including roles within the sector. To date, they've had over 170 students across 32 schools and colleges participate in these events. In fact, it is important to note that now all students are supported to start considering their future and careers as early as kindergarten through the My Education initiative. This provides students with the tools to develop the knowledge, the skills, the attributes to plan and make informed choices for their future, which is great.

In the face of a difficult and uncertain year, I am very proud of the budget we have been able to deliver in education for Tasmanians, and I am looking forward to continuing support, more of our learners to learn, or every single day. I look forward to your questions and scrutiny. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The committee very much appreciates the brief overview that you have provided. It's probably not going to be any surprise to you, but the first question in 1.1, which is in school education, will be from Mr Josh Willie.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, you'd be aware of this document from your party, Building Your Future. In that document, you state that by 2020 your goal is to be at or above the national standard in every single NAPLAN measurement and meet national benchmarks in reading, writing, maths and science. Minister, obviously NAPLAN didn't take place this year. Why have you abandoned that target?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I can speak at length with respect to NAPLAN. In fact, I touched it on my opening statement, and when the context Tasmania has taken into account, Tasmania students are performing very well. There are areas where we need to improve, Mr Willie. I'm actually a believer in NAPLAN. I know there's been some discussion nationally about these matters, but a way to measure and benchmark or progress over a number of years is very important. So we can be held accountable, and so we can tail it, if you like, in terms of our literacy and numeracy specialists in our schools, and some of the areas that I have outlined in my opening statement are very crucial to this.

What is also important is that NAPLAN does not become the be-all and end-all. It's one day in the year on which our students are measured. It's important to recognise the fact that, in many respects, the key to the way that we are implementing our education investment on equity and based on equity is the importance of growth of individual students throughout the 12 months. That comes from NAPLAN results. They provide an important yearly snapshot of how Tasmanian students have performed in key aspects of literacy and numeracy.

As you alluded to, it wasn't able to take place this year. On March 20 this year, the education council agreed to cancel NAPLAN 2020. The decision to not proceed with NAPLAN in 2020 was taken to assist school leaders, teachers and support staff to focus on the wellbeing of students and the continuing of education in the face of COVID-19. When it comes to the NAPLAN data story, and I'm more than happy to provide you with some information on this -

Mr WILLIE - Chair, if I may help the minister to redirect him to my question, which was why have you abandoned that target that you set for this Government to be at or above the national standard in every single NAPLAN measurement by 2020?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We're not abandoning our students at -

Mr WILLIE - We saw yesterday that the Health minister has abandoned our target in health. It's all very well to be ambitious around targets, but I'm interested in why you've abandoned it.

Mr ROCKLIFF - What we're not doing is abandoning any of our students. Chair, if I would like, we could hand out some of this information on NAPLAN, which shows very clearly - the NAPLAN data published on the My School format shows that more Tasmanian government schools were above than below similar schools across Australia in reading, writing and numeracy at every year level - 3, 5, 7 and 9. While NAPLAN data indicates Tasmania is performing well, given the circumstances of our students' backgrounds, investment education is critical if Tasmania is to improve those circumstances.

This is consistent with the Grattan Institute report released in October 2019, which indicates that after adjusting the index of community socio-educational advantage, Tasmanian student progress is generally similar to the national average. A report suggests that Tasmanian schools on average are punching above their weight. They are not doing a bad job. Rather, they are doing a tough job very well, the report suggests. I'm very proud of the team. When we look at our students and their socioeconomic circumstances, we are doing pretty well. But we need to build the capacity of our teachers to counter the negative impacts of the effects on disadvantage on performance.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, my question was very specific: why is that target no longer applicable in the Budget?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We don't abandon any of our students when it comes to supporting our students into literacy and numeracy. We have demonstrated our investment in this particular area. I'm never going to abandon an aspiration to be at or above the national average on every NAPLAN measure. I would never abandon that aspiration.

Mr WILLIE - Your Budget doesn't reflect that.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The Budget does reflect that because the dollars suggest that the effort is going into teacher quality, into literacy and numeracy, investment in our schools. You'd be aware of our literacy framework, the implementation of that plan, and our literacy coaches, Mr Willie. Over 2018 to 2021, the Department of Education's strategic plan identifies improved outcomes for literacy and numeracy as one of the four goals to support all learners to succeed in learning, life, and work. In the 2019 to 2022, Department of Education literacy

framework and association with literacy plan for action implementation plan guide the department's efforts towards achieving literacy goals for our learners. Three key priorities of literacy framework provide system-wide guidance on what is required to improve learning and to achieve our aspirational goal of 100 per cent functional literacy for all Tasmanians.

I launched a few days ago the adult literacy and adult learning plan for the community. That has over \$4 million attached to it. Unfortunately, Tasmania's set of circumstances, and if you go by measures previously, Mr Willie, half our population is functionally illiterate. We've got to address that. Our target, if you want to talk about targets, is 100 per cent functional literacy. That has to be our target. Yes, it's an aspiration, but we can get there if we invest particularly in our early years, but right through our years of compulsory education. We will never abandon any single student. In fact, we're doing more now to identify barriers to learning to support our students at every year level possible. Investment in the early years, as you would certainly appreciate as an educator, is most critical.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you can say what you like, but in Tasmania over the past decade in 20 areas of assessment across grades 3, 5, 7 and 9, there were small gains in nine areas, one with no improvement, and 10 areas of decline. So the rhetoric doesn't match the outcomes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's no rhetoric, Mr Willie. In fact, if we had your policy, we wouldn't have any measure because you don't support NAPLAN.

Mr WILLIE - That's not true.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is true. You tried to - yes, you and your colleagues -

Mr WILLIE - No. I support a fit for purpose test.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Can I tell you something? Launching into Learning, which has been around for a long time - in fact, there was -

Mr WILLIE - A good Labor policy.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's good policy, absolutely, and we support it. \$6.3 million allocated across schools, plus \$600 000 to support implementation, Learning in Families Together. That's an initiative that builds on the Launching into Learning. We've had that since around 2016. \$4 million allocated across schools, plus \$400 000 to support implementation. The middle years literacy project, \$1.9 million, and in school literacy coaches, plus six lead coaches and the investment of \$10.4 million. So there's a lot of effort going in this area.

I am more than happy, and one of the reasons why I don't support your policy of abandoning NAPLAN -

Mr WILLIE - Which is not true, minister. That is not true.

Mr ROCKLIFF - which surprises me given Julia Gillard was the prime minister when it came in, was the fact that we need to be held accountable. I want to be held accountable. I mentioned evidence and data, it's important that we're driven by that. Look, we might not have achieved our targets in 2014, but we'll never abandon the 100 per cent literacy goal or the aspiration of getting to at or above the national average in terms of every NAPLAN measure.

Mr WILLIE - Chair, if I could correct the minister. I've never said that I don't support testing. I've encouraged the minister in the past to be part of that national conversation that other states are leading, and he squibbed it. He did so at the table.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I was sitting at a great table, Mr Willie.

CHAIR - We need questions.

Mr ROCKLIFF - When we all discussed this, and education ministers around the country, and that review was very insightful in fact.

Mr WILLIE - Chair, if I could go to some of the inputs that might improve some of this data? Around phonics testing, speech pathology, that sort of thing.

CHAIR - If you can hold that thought.

Mr WILLIE - Sure.

CHAIR - I'll just ask Mr Dean who has a question on this, and then we'll come back to that, Mr Willie.

Mr DEAN - Thank you. A number of teachers have spoken to me about this, and I have a family member in teaching - I need to identify of that as well just for the record.

CHAIR - You've had to make a lot declarations this week.

Mr DEAN - Yes, I do. I needed to put that on the record. But the teachers that I have spoken to give support to that plan, and I haven't spoken to any that have not supported it. My question is, have we ever done any surveys with the Education department, with the teachers, with parents, as to the values of NAPLAN? The feedback I get is positive so I'm asking if there's any survey, any work done in that area at all?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The feedback is positive, but the feedback that I get is that sometimes NAPLAN can appear to be a too high a stakes test. It's a snapshot at a point in time. Last year we demonstrated when we had our student achievement awards across that state that we supported our students and recognised our students who performed well in NAPLAN, but we also changed the model, the format, if you like, of our awards where we recognise the growth of students and the achievements that they had made throughout the last 12 months. That's even more important because not every person can be top of the class. I certainly wasn't.

CHAIR - And I certainly wasn't.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There you go. But it's important to measure the growth and encourage our students irrespective of their ability at a particular time, and we've changed our focus around that. We're committed to NAPLAN as a department, but we're also committed to improving. I've never said that it needs to be the same every single year and, in fact - I stand to be corrected - but we're the only state with 100 per cent online NAPLAN.

Ms BURGESS - Not the only state, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Aren't we?

Ms BURGESS - The ACT is also online.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The ACT, my apologies - which is a territory. There you go, we're both right.

Ms BURGESS - Yes, true.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That is, in fact, better to support our students in measuring that growth as well, is my understanding. The review into NAPLAN which Mr Willie and I have had some discussion about so far is that it was reviewed. New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT to undertake an independent review of the NAPLAN including the NAPLAN Online project, and I thank the commissioning ministers from those jurisdictions for that body of work.

Consideration of any national response to the reviews' findings is ongoing, but in terms of our future participation in NAPLAN because of the impact of COVID-19 on NAPLAN in 2020, the education minister has agreed to extend the time line for a full transition of schools in all states and territories participating in NAPLAN Online and we're well placed with respect to that. When it comes to the strength of NAPLAN Online, it makes it easier for us to get more use, if you like, it's a more useful set of data to support our students, the way that it works in terms of the questions and it moderates through, yes.

Mr BULLARD - This has been a summative test, which is seeing how a student is going nationally. When we move it to online it can become a formative test. There's a number of things that the test does. It supports through branching students, so students who might not be getting things right get easier questions, students who are getting things right get harder questions. The feedback that we got from young people was that it was more enjoyable as far as testing can be experienced. The data then that comes out of it provides a greater level of information. Once it's national we'll get that information sooner - I think it's three weeks. So you won't do it in May and then September you'll get some results about how you went. You'll get it in May and they'll be generated into results for teachers. That allows them to use that information for the rest of the year rather than it being a point in time piece of data that comes out and reports. That's really useful and the other thing too is -

Mr DEAN - Sorry to interrupt. That answers one of the complaints that I did receive, the fact that they were doing the tests and then the results were coming back many months later.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, online means you can get the test back a lot quicker. So again, we're 100 per cent online. Other states, such as Victoria, I don't think are at 50 yet, are they?

Mr DEAN - Sorry about that.

Mr BULLARD - No, no, that's all I was going to say. Then the other point too is that, nationally, the importance of formative assessment has been recognised and is part of the bilateral agreement all states and territories are working on, formative assessment systems. So how can we give teachers just in time information about how their students are tracking and also then on the back of that, how can we support them with strategies that are going to assist students to go to the next level.

Mr ROCKLIFF - And drilling down on some of the results - have you had a briefing on NAPLAN from the department yet?

CHAIR - No.

Mr WILLIE - The LegCo did last year when I had a motion in the House.

CHAIR - That was last year.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, it's worth having one and drilling down on some of these matters.

CHAIR - Feels like a lifetime ago last year.

Mr ROCKLIFF - In 2019, we had approximately 25 000 students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 successfully completed the online tests, focusing on reading, writing, language, conventions and numeracy. Now, nationally year 3 students sat a paper-based writing test, but for years 3, 5 and 9 writing, there were statistically significant improvements from the previous year 2018, and all other assessments, Tasmania's results are statistically comparable to 2018.

We continue as a state to perform strongly in the domains of reading and writing with results comparable to Australia, and once socio-demographic factors are taken into account, for example, parents' education levels, differences to Australia effectively disappear in reading and writing and are markedly reduced in other NAPLAN domains. We should be mindful of that but always never rest on our laurels because of that.

Mr DEAN - If we're to have a briefing, I suggest that we hear from a couple of the principals - I'd suggest in primary and also a high - to see how they feel about it. That would be a useful session.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We could bring some educators.

CHAIR - Something for next year, I'd think.

Mr DEAN - Yes, sure.

CHAIR - We'll run out of time this year, would be my assessment.

Mr DEAN - We will.

CHAIR - Something like that, but I know Mr Willie will make sure we get as much information as we possibly can. I'd like now to go to the other end of the table and invite Ms Palmer.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, can I ask you to update the committee on how the state government will ensure all Tasmanian public primary schools will have access to the Year 1 Phonics Check, and what support will be provided to teachers and students to assist with the implementation on actions resulting from this program?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure, thank you for that, Ms Palmer. As we've discussed, we recognise as a government that literacy is an area of utmost importance for the reasons that Mr Willie has raised as well. We have set that aspirational target of 100 per cent functional literacy for all Tasmanians, and, again, it's 50 per cent now. We've a long way to go.

Earlier this year we announced that a year 1 phonics check pilot would run in over 30 Tasmanian government schools to support improved educational outcomes across the state and give students the best possible start at learning. Of course, phonics is an essential skill for learning to read and write, and is a key part of the early years literacy program, as detailed in the Australian Curriculum: English. The teaching of phonics is responsive to student learning and intentionally makes connections to the learner's writing and reading experiences. Teaching phonics is especially important for students in prep and year 1, and is best taught explicitly as part of a balanced approach to literacy learning.

It is my pleasure to announce in response to your question that the phonics check that captures evidence to track progress and helps inform teacher practice and identify areas for improvement is going to be available to all Tasmanian government primary and district schools in 2021. From 2021, year 1 teachers in all Tasmanian government primary and district schools will have access to and be supported to use the online Year 1 Phonics Check. The Australian Government Literacy Hub, launched in August 2020, includes the Year 1 Phonics Check tool as part of a suite of resources.

The literacy hub is available to school leaders, teachers and families to support young students with developing their reading skills. This year, the schools that participated in the pilot provided valuable feedback, including teachers reporting that the phonics check could be used to identify students who may need additional support, and that the check complements other strategies and assessments already in use in the classroom. Information gathered from the pilot schools has informed planning for future professional learning support that will assist teachers with phonics instruction, monitoring student progress and intervention.

In 2021 school-based quality teaching coaches and professional support staff will collaborate with classroom teachers to use the information from the check to inform next steps in instruction and learning. Our Government recognises - and I'm sure we all do - that literacy is an area of utmost importance for all Tasmanians, which is why we are continuing to build the knowledge and practices of our educators through targeted and aligned resources, supports and other initiatives. Thank you for the question.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll go back up to the other end of the table.

Mr WILLIE - Just with that announcement, minister, you said that schools will have access. Will it be mandated or would it be opt in if schools decide to do it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am sure all schools will take up the opportunity and have access. Just like other policies we've implemented for years 11 and 12, we don't walk around the state and schools with a big stick - we provide the resource, we encourage the resource, and we encourage the professional learning and opportunity there. The pilot has been excellent; it's been in over 30 schools.

Mr WILLIE - I think 35.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Schools will all have access to it, but why wouldn't they want to have access to it? It'll be strongly recommended that they do because it's such an important part of the literacy strategy.

Mr WILLIE - Well, if the Government believes in it, why wouldn't you make every school do it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - It'll be strongly recommended, Mr Willie. The resource and the availability is there, and given the success of the pilot to date and the feedback we're getting, we're making it accessible to all schools. If it weren't a success, we wouldn't.

Mr BULLARD - The important thing here is not the test; it's building the capacity of our workforce to understand the data and what they need to do with it. We don't want to end up in a situation where we mandate something, and, as you'd know from your time, the highly competent pick it up and use it well; the middle, we can build capacity; and then the end, it's like, 'Here's another test we need to do in year 1.'.

We want to roll it out by providing access for all schools, but also by supporting teachers to understand the data they're getting in year 1 and then make decisions through the end of year 1 and year 2 about how they're going to use that data to support students to take the next step. As the minister says, the view of the department is that it will be strongly recommended, but we'll need to build the workforce capacity to do that across our system.

Mr WILLIE - How were the 35 schools selected for the trial, minister?

Mr ROCKLIFF - An expression of interest process.

Mr WILLIE - So you got a broad range of schools?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - Just on the secretary's comments, building capacity is important and a key part of doing that would be speech and language pathologists in schools.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure. Yes.

Mr WILLIE - This year's annual report says there are only 49.65 FTE speech pathologists across the whole system. Minister, how many children have had a learning plan developed for them by or in conjunction with a speech pathologist?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Regarding the important role that speech and language pathologists play, our Government is committed to improving literacy outcomes for all our learners, and we acknowledge in that that speech and language pathologists provide that vital guidance and resource to support teachers with identifying young learners at risk and monitoring learner progress towards becoming functionally literate. As at March 2020, there were 48.4 full-time equivalent speech and language pathologists in our schools. In recent years we have increased the number of pathologists by almost six-and-a-half full-time equivalents.

Only this week, the department advertised positions for speech pathologists which, I have to say, are very hard to fill as unfortunately there is a national shortage of speech and language pathologists which makes recruitment difficult. For this reason we have been in discussions for some time with the University of Tasmania to look at if speech pathology qualifications can be offered locally, which is an important conversation to have, and yesterday Professor Black confirmed that the University of Tasmania is progressing work on the new speech pathology qualification. The course is currently under development through a co-design process with a comprehensive input from a range of stakeholders across the Tasmanian health, education and disability developmental delay sectors and Speech Pathology Australia. Speech Pathology Australia - SPA - is the crediting body for university programs that offer speech pathology education and UTAS is engaging with them to seek qualifying accreditation of the new course through 2021.

The new UTAS course will have a focus on producing graduates well equipped to work with other allied health professionals in regional and rural settings. Our Government highly values the role of speech and language pathologists - we all do - in supporting our schools and learners. We are committed to building on that collaborative culture between educators and speech and language pathologists as outlined in the 2019-2022 Literacy Framework. I've spoken to that -

CHAIR - What sort of time frame is that? If that's only in development, are we looking at five or six years before we actually have any graduates from that course?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, we're still working through that with the University of Tasmania, but as soon as possible. The important thing is that this work is underway, and I've had discussions with Vice-Chancellor Rufus Black from the University of Tasmania for some time regarding the University of Tasmania's capacity. You know, as soon as -

CHAIR - Was a time frame discussed?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, as soon as possible and practicable, given the processes the University of Tasmania has to go through. Now, some information here -

CHAIR - I appreciate these things don't happen overnight, but I just thought there would be some sort of time frame attached to those discussions, given there's such a shortage of speech pathologists.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Look, I'm with you 100 per cent.

Now, to learning plans, they are co-constructed with input from teachers, parents, specialists, and the students themselves. Not just one person, such as the speech pathologist, but a team of people, if I can put it that way. The learning plans are contributed to by speech pathologists as that team approach to supporting learners with additional needs and -

CHAIR - Do we have a number? Do we have a quantum? That was the question.

Mr WILLIE - So it's not formally recorded whether a speech pathologist has been involved in a learning plan?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Not to my knowledge, no.

Mr WILLIE - Can I keep asking a few questions on this? Just one last one.

CHAIR - We've got - okay.

Mr WILLIE - It's around the referral process, minister. Is there a formal referral process for, say, a student who is identified as needing an intervention, and is it transparent? If there is a formal process, can we have the number of students who have been referred to speech pathologists?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure.

Mr WILLIE - While you're getting that, I understand that, due to shortages of speech pathologists, the Education department has a policy to prioritise services for children younger than grade 3. This means that any child with speech, language or literacy issues who does not meet the national minimum standard for reading in grade 3 or older will not receive an intervention from a speech and language pathologist. It's also been put to me that the department has a policy not to prioritise those on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, claiming it's a duplication, despite the NDIS being very clear it does not fund literacy intervention, but specialist speech and language pathology services.

CHAIR - A range of questions there. I hope somebody's making a note of all those. We do have a seat at the table.

Mr BULLARD - I can speak to that.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Bullard.

Mr BULLARD - Yes, there is a formal referral process, and I'm told it is transparent in terms of how those referrals are made. There is an emphasis on early childhood in prioritising speech and language pathologists, so certainly the practice - I don't know that it's a policy - but the practice is that they will certainly work in the lower years.

What was your third question, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - The NDIS.

Mr BULLARD - There is no delineation of our service provided to children who do or don't have an NDIS plan.

Mr WILLIE - Can we get the numbers on the referrals to speech pathologists? It's on the way.

Mr BULLARD - We also have special language pathologists who specifically work in our child and family centres. As to the numbers of referrals, we're getting that information. Can we come back to it?

CHAIR - We can come back to it.

Mr WILLIE - One last question, while they get that information. What's the ratio of FTE speech pathologists to students?

Mr ROCKLIFF - In terms of -

CHAIR - Forty-eight, wasn't it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - On average, speech and language pathologists will provide services to between four and eight schools, or approximately 130 to 150 students. It's a bit simplistic, to be frank, to prescribe a ratio of speech and language pathologists to schools.

Mr WILLIE - It gives you an idea of the resource across the system.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It lacks consideration, for two very important reasons. One of those is that the vast majority of our students fortunately do not need the expertise of these specialists. Fortunately, they do not need it.

Mr WILLIE - But a lot do, and they're not getting it.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Second, interactions between the speech and language pathologists and students varies with consideration to need and the context of the school level.

CHAIR - I think we have a number.

Mr ROCKLIFF - While we're getting that number, it is important that the collaboration between the university - the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment - with specialists and the sharing of teaching strategies and resources is reinforced. The Peter Underwood Centre report was recently released through the Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools, a comprehensive work for the Peter Underwood Centre. That was commissioned by the Education department, and has been critical in shaping its literacy framework implementation plan and plan for action.

CHAIR - Thank you. And a number?

Mr BULLARD - We're still getting the numbers.

CHAIR - That's fine. We can come back to that.

Mr BULLARD - Just a point of clarification so we're clear on the ratio of speech pathologists to students, which the minister referred to. In a number of circumstances, that will be speech pathologists supervising teacher aides to deliver a program, so it's not a speech pathologist seeing every single one of those children, or providing support themselves. There are teacher aides who, through the teacher aide speech program, will take responsibility for the delivery of a program designed by a speech pathologist for particular cohorts of students.

Mr WILLIE - Before they go on, you're taking that on notice, the referrals, and also the ratio of FTE speech pathologists to students?

CHAIR - He gave that, 130 to 150, wasn't it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I did. Yes, I gave that.

Mr WILLIE - Okay.

Mr BULLARD - Yes, 130 to 150, with the qualification that it isn't the speech pathologists running the program for every individual.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Chair, I said before, as soon as possible in terms of that speech pathologist qualification. My understanding is 2022 is the goal for introduction from the University of Tasmania, so not too far away.

CHAIR - Sooner than I thought. Well done.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, we had discussions last year.

CHAIR - The member for Launceston, Ms Armitage.

Ms ARMITAGE - Just a follow-on, minister. The speech pathologists sometimes do see students in more severe cases, I imagine, rather than just the teacher setting out programs for them. What's the waiting list for a speech pathologist to see a student? I'm assuming there's a waiting list.

Mr ROCKLIFF - A waiting list, as such?

Ms ARMITAGE - A waiting list. Students actually identified as needing a speech pathologist in the schools - how long before they actually get to see them?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Get to see them?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - All schools have access to professional support staff, which of course includes our school psychologists, social workers, and speech and language pathologists as well. We're working hard to recruit more. We've allocated an extra 72.5 FTEs to professional support staff since 2014, including school nurses and specialist staff dedicating their time to support vulnerable children through the Safe Homes, Safe Families and Strong Families, Safe Kids Government initiatives, bringing the combined total as of 31 March this year to 209 full-time equivalents.

Professional support staff work with schools to respond to requests and proactively support students in a range of areas, including mental health, behaviour and learning. Staff provide assistance based on a variety of factors, including the nature of support required and how to maximise efficacy and efficiency of those services.

Ms ARMITAGE - Is there a waiting time for the students to see these specialists?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The number of students requiring support means that waiting lists are sometimes necessary. However, prioritisation guidelines ensure that urgent cases - and I think the more critical ones you're referring to - and incidents are responded to very promptly. Factors that impact on waiting times include the level of need; type of support required, for example, assessment versus therapy; departmental processes; assessment for disability funding; student self-referrals; timing of other professionals' assessment; frequency of visits to

the school; mobility of the student and the family; and the availability of other services in and around the community.

The work of the professional support staff also aligns to the recently released Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy, and the Principal Wellbeing Action Plan 2019-2021, and the 2019-2022 Literacy Framework, as I said before.

Ms ARMITAGE - Say you've got a student who may be medium, and needs to see a speech pathologist. What would be the average time they would wait before seeing them? Would it be a month? Would it be two months? Would it be a week? Do we have any indication on an actual time?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Well, as we say, we prioritise the urgent cases and the critical needs.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, I understand that, but we haven't got a time. When we say prioritise, is that prioritise from six months out to one month, or is that from one month out to one week?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We might have some information for you on that.

Ms ARMITAGE - It looks like it might be coming.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The priority for the department is - are these the waiting lists?

Mr BULLARD - The files will need to be paper-based.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The files on each particular student?

Mr BULLARD - Yes, so it's hard for us to track that information around waiting times. The priority for the department around student support systems is looking at ways we can bring in IT systems that will provide the granularity of data you're referring to, and allow us to track things like case loads, workloads and waiting times, and therefore know where we need to put additional support.

At the moment, our student support staff largely hold their files. Some of that information is in digital systems, but it is captured in Word, in free text.

Ms ARMITAGE - Very easy for children to slip through the cracks if you're just applying on paper.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, and the department is working to digitise all those processes, as Mr Bullard referred to. Then questions such as yours might be able to have information more readily available.

Ms ARMITAGE - I think it's important to know whether children are waiting a long time or whether they are actually being seen in a timely manner. It makes all the difference to their studies and how they progress at school.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, it does and. as I say, urgent cases and the students who require that more critical care and support.

Ms ARMITAGE - Did Mr Bullard say we had a time frame to do with the digitalisation?

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's a priority for the department to digitise the paper-based system.

Ms ARMITAGE - What is the time frame is for priority?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, the priority is now.

Ms ARMITAGE - All right. So, by 2021 we'll be digitised?.

Mr BULLARD - We're working on the business need at the moment - understanding what is required by student support staff - and then we'll need to go through a budget process. As you'd appreciate, these systems get fairly expensive.

Ms ARMITAGE - I do. But I also appreciate our children are our priority and if they can't learn, if they can't hear or have other problems.

Mr BULLARD - Certainly. The one thing we need to be mindful of is that every student is connected to a teacher in a class, and certainly they are great ambassadors for the learning needs of their students. So in the absence of a digital system that really would provide, at a whole-of-department level, information to allow us to make whole-of-department decisions about where we needed to prioritise resources, teachers are advocating for the needs of their students every day.

Ms ARMITAGE - The School Nurse Program, minister. I know that's something that, as you've mentioned previously, is very good in our schools. I'm wondering how often does the school nurse actually attend schools? Is it a monthly basis? Six monthly? Do they do regular visits to the schools? How does the actual School Nurse Program work? It's a long time since my children were at school.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We've only reintroduced school nurses back into our Education system, since in around - EDI's that program, yes, is that right? Are we talking about EDI?

CHAIR - I was trying to recall the name of the system and I had help from my colleagues.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The successful contemporary model of school nursing that we introduced in 2015 - it was a commitment of ours in 2014 prior to coming to government - recognises the link between good health and positive education outcomes and has resolved in over 18 411 students, being seen by a school health nurse for one-on-one sessions from July 2015 to March 2020.

In the 2019-20 Budget, funding of \$2.7 million over four years was committed to provide a nurse in every government senior secondary college by 2021, and this includes \$665 000 in the 2020-21 Budget. In 2020, four full-time equivalent college nurses commenced and enabling each college to have 0.5 FTE allocation. This allocation will increase to eight full-time equivalents by 2021 when each college will have access to one full-time equivalent nurse. This is in addition to the Tasmanian Government's election commitment and subsequent commitments to expand the nurse program across all schools following the value of the program. This is increasing the Government's total investment for school nurses to \$5.1 million

in 2020-21 and a total of \$21.8 million over the forward Estimates. By delivering 42.7 full-time equivalent nurses by 2021 - next year - we'll be servicing a total of 110 schools and eight senior secondary colleges as our commitment to reintroducing a contemporary model of school nursing back into selected Tasmanian government schools.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you for that. While we're talking in that area of support staff, I assume with that school psychologists and social workers, you wouldn't be able to give me a waiting list to see those either. Would they still be paper-based and no waiting lists available for students?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We've some more information.

Ms ARMITAGE - I just think it's interesting to see if there is a long wait.

CHAIR - Welcome, Trudy Pearce.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Trudy Pearce is the Deputy Secretary, Learning. Welcome to the table, Trudy.

Ms PEARCE - In relation to a speech and language pathologist in the first instance, very broadly, as identified, there is a range of factors, including a severity level, staffing levels et cetera, at the time. It might be one to six months, but it would be no longer. That would be the absolute maximum length of time, and that would be in relation to a lower level matter that can't be dealt with through working with a teacher or with a teacher aide, or with a group. Individually, it wouldn't be any longer than that. There would be certainly other supports in place during that time, as I indicated before. The speech and language pathologists work extensively in building the capacity of a teacher. So they do a lot of professional learning and a lot of at-the-shoulder with teachers.

Ms ARMITAGE - And that's not for a severe case, you were saying?

Ms PEARCE - No, that's not for a severe case, but they would be providing information and instruction to the teacher around how the best practice teaching should be occurring for that student in the classroom. That would be part of their learning plan. They build the capacity of teachers and teacher aides prior to seeing the student. If there's going to be a time to wait for that individual assessment, urgent students are seen ASAP. Where they are prioritised in triage, they would be seen, even if it means moving our speech and language pathologists around.

Ms ARMITAGE - And that would be the same for school psychologists and social workers?

Ms PEARCE - Absolutely, yes. It's the same structure and system - we have a wellbeing team in each school now, so we're able to use that wellbeing team to provide the lower level non-clinical assistance. A psychologist might be required - we're now able to address mental health needs, a number of range of wellbeing needs through that wellbeing team.

Ms ARMITAGE - All right. Thank you. And through you, minister, Trudy may be able to answer it.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Has there been an increase of students requiring the school psychologist or social workers in the last financial year, particularly with more difficult times?

Mr ROCKLIFF - As I said in my opening statement, we're certainly putting a lot of emphasis on and a dedicated unit to the wellbeing of our Tasmanian students, including surveys and the like. In terms of access to the services and increase?

Ms PEARCE - Certainly, post-COVID-19, which was an unusual time with a high level of need. There were times when students weren't necessarily able to access the ongoing support they had been accustomed to. We did have a spike where there was a greater need for assistance for our students, and it continues because some of the effect in relation to COVID-19 is ongoing. We are working to address those needs, especially in association with Communities Tasmania.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There's a wellbeing check-in tool for our students as well that we've developed through that time.

Ms ARMITAGE - Is the wellbeing check-in tool online - it's for students working at home?

Ms PEARCE - Yes. So we utilised it when children were at home so that a teacher was able to get a really quick temperature check or pulse check around how a student's wellbeing was, as well as making contact with the child and their parent. Our teachers have continued to use it since coming to school, because it's a really quick assessment of the wellbeing of children. Once again, our professional support staff have been working at-the-shoulder with our teachers so our teachers are more empowered to be able to support students through the range of needs around mental health and other areas of wellbeing.

Ms ARMITAGE -. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - Yes, thank you. I might go onto a different area?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr DEAN - I want to get the numbers of students who are in years 11 and 12 at all the high schools who are now online with years 11 and 12. If I can have the numbers in each school.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, we can provide that for you. Of course, it fluctuates from year to year.

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Depending on COVID.

CHAIR - Are you happy to have that tabled, Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - Whether those in attendance at the beginning of the year, whether or not they're in attendance at the end of the year. I want the numbers. I ask this question because I'm told in some there was only one student, and in another school, I think there was about three students.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, and that's the case. That's my understanding, but it varies again.

Mr DEAN - Yes. I think Devonport High and Reece High are good examples. They are only a few hundred metres apart from one another and about kilometre-and-a-half away, or two kilometres away from Don College. I'd like some facts and details and the cost incurred.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, we can do that, and it's not just about the numbers, per se, it's about the individual student and their needs, and being flexible enough in our education provision based on a system of equity, to provide for our students in what is a setting that suits them.

Mr DEAN - Yes, and while that number is coming - Chair, can I move on?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I have a long list here, Mr Dean. Yes, we've quite a lot of information here, Mr Dean, which might take some time.

Mr DEAN - I think Devonport High only has one or two students, by my information.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Devonport High School, my information, two students.

Mr DEAN - Right.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Huonville High School, 67.5. Not far from Devonport, there is Ulverstone Second College, which has 85.4.

CHAIR - Eight-five?

Mr DEAN - That's great. That's great in some of the high schools. If we look at Devonport High School, what extra work is required in that school to accommodate those two students or whatever it is that are in year 11 and 12, and what is the cost of providing that education in year 11 and 12 for Devonport High School?

Mr ROCKLIFF - More broadly, of course, remembering that a number of the schools are members of collectives. We've got the Rosny - well, the teganna Collective around the Rosny College, supporting that. We've got the Hellyer collective around Hellyer College in Burnie and the schools there. There was resource to support the capital improvement for schools to extend. There is ongoing resource that remains with the school to support the school and its continuation of years 11 and 12. As the student numbers increase, of course, so does the figure in terms of the level of investment.

So regardless of the size of the schools' enrolment in terms of their numbers, the schools are funded appropriately so they can develop and offer programs that suit their students' needs and individual learnings and pathways. As I've said, the per capita funding allocation for years 11 and 12 extension schools for 2020, including the capital funding is \$23 377 per student,

full-time equivalent. This is based on a per enrolment variable cost using the Fairer Funding Model for both cash and staffing.

However, this figure is inflated by the capital funding allocation as the capital allocation will benefit the year 11 and 12 cohorts, not just that the capital is expended but throughout future years. So in that sense, it's not really appropriate to apportion these costs to students in 2020. The more appropriate figure without the capital component is \$20 089 per student.

Mr DEAN - So my question coming out of this is that with Devonport High and Reece, probably the best example in the state - probably one of the best examples. Would it not have been a better position there to have brought those two areas together? Because they're only a dropkick away from one another, one school looks at the other school. So wouldn't that have been a better, more economical position to have adopted in relation to those two school in particular?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Not necessarily, because in part of that region as well we've got Latrobe High School, Reece High School, and we've got Don College and Devonport High, as you've said. I understand the face value of your question.

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - If we're tailoring our learning and pathways to individual student need, the high school needs to cater for that student's need right through to year 12, which is now law - you have to attend year 12 or turn 18. But the schools work together very closely. Now, I've mentioned the teganna Collective a lot in recent years, which is probably the first example of it in terms of that really good collaboration, and that's continued. The Hellyer collective is very similar; they've got Smithton there, you've got Parklands and Burnie high schools which are close together and Hellyer as well. It's all about working together and supporting that student's pathway irrespective of the setting. The student's circumstance is taken into account as well.

Mr DEAN - Yes, minister, I support the concept. I've never said I don't, but I just heard some issues with these schools when they're closely associated and so on. So maybe while that's happening I can go into other questions, Chair?

CHAIR - Why, what's happened? We've a supplementary on years 11 and 12 while we're here.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I guess what I was referring to in terms of the pathways and the high schools and catering for every student's need is that they've their connection with their peers and with their teachers and all those sorts of things. So it's important to have that resource made available in each individual setting. It's not hard and fast - you're going to do years 11 and 12 at Devonport High with a few other students, whatever it might be. It's the collaboration and the opportunity to do subjects outside that infrastructure as well. You mentioned how close in proximity Don College is, for example.

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It could be a combination of both, thereby reducing a barrier to learning as well. For some of our kids attending a college is a barrier, and to be able to get the

confidence in your local school on a couple of subjects, and then more confidence to go down the road to another setting, which is a different setting, is what we're trying to achieve here.

Mr DEAN - They are both good public schools and they've got a pretty good reputation both of them, Devonport High and Reece. I'm not challenging that in any way. Are those figures available online, minister?

CHAIR - They've been tabled.

Mr DEAN - They're all tabled, yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - How about if you would like to be specific about the question and we can take it on notice and talk to that?

Mr DEAN - Okay. Fine.

CHAIR - He's asked for the number of every extension school at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year to see who completed.

Mr BULLARD - Yes. Okay. Census 1 and census 2 in every school.

Mr DEAN - Yes, thank you.

Mr BULLARD - The minister doesn't have that information in front of him.

CHAIR - It will take some time to go through every one of those, so Mr Dean understands that?

Mr DEAN - Yes, I do.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have a follow-up.

CHAIR - And a supplementary.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Just on Devonport High School very quickly, we're currently sourcing a trainer for Devonport High to offer engineering next year, and that's good and they have confirmed enrolments in those areas.

CHAIR - If you find a trainer, they'll turn up, if you don't, they possibly won't.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Right. There's a shortage of trainers in the North West.

CHAIR - There appears to be a shortage of everything, yet there's people without a job. But they are obviously not the right job for the right person.

Ms ARMITAGE - They may need to train.

CHAIR - They need to train. Thank you, member for Launceston, supplementary.

Ms ARMITAGE - My question is very easy. No, it is. I certainly agree it's great that everyone goes through years 11 and 12. The only concern I had was with regard to specialist teachers for years 11 and 12.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have asked this question many times of a minister, and I thought I'd take the opportunity to see if I can get a reason behind the 'no' that I generally get.

CHAIR - Ask the question first.

Ms ARMITAGE - So with regard to our colleges - our years 11 and 12 colleges in Launceston - Newstead College and now Launceston College - the suggestion has been made to me on many occasions by teachers that, as well that, Launceston College is oversubscribed with students, often packed to the rafters. We have - please wait until I'm finished, I can see you're anxious to answer - Newstead College, which has much lower numbers. What is the reason behind that- they're both state colleges. It's not like one is private and one isn't, and the state would have to take one over. They are both state colleges.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - What is the reason - particularly with the extension to 47 schools across the state now and obviously fewer students needing to go to college - with having one college with two campuses? Would it not level out the numbers to have a Launceston or city campus and a Newstead campus of one college, rather than having two colleges in very close proximity competing against each other when they're both state colleges? What is the reason, with the Government not even considering having one college with two campuses?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Again, they have different histories and cultures and offerings as well.

Ms ARMITAGE - You could have some offerings at one campus, another - sorry, I have been told to stop -

CHAIR - We might let the minister finish that answer.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, but it might make the minister's answer something I'm going to go to. Teachers have told me that particularly at one college, there might be 30 students in a class in a particular course. At the other college, there might be six students. Now, the teachers are actually being paid the same amount, doing the same amount of work, but one is coping with a lot more difficulty than the other.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I remember we have had this conversation a few times.

Ms ARMITAGE - We've had it lots of times.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Last year, I think you had some concern about the drop in enrolments in Newstead?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - And the increase in enrolments in Launceston College?

Ms ARMITAGE - Launceston city campus was bursting at the seams. The member for Windermere might remember we were told that a lot of that was the difficulty getting to Newstead on the buses. Some children have to catch two or three buses, particularly in grade 11, because they didn't drive.

Has the Government considered it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - No, we haven't.

Ms ARMITAGE - Will the Government consider it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - No.

Ms ARMITAGE - And why?

Mr ROCKLIFF - But I have some good news for you. Newstead College has actually increased its enrolments quite significantly over the last 12 months, from 479.5 students to 533.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's very good news.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Which is good news. You mentioned that Launceston College has been bursting at the seams. As I have said in the last -

Ms ARMITAGE - Very well subscribed, at least.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I have 2014 data and 2018-19 data. Last year, Launceston College was 1502.6 students FTE, and now it's 1358.8 students.

Ms ARMITAGE - They've lost a few.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's a reduction of 150 FTE students, but, of course, more students have -

Ms ARMITAGE - Stayed at their schools. You've got 47 extension schools.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Not necessarily. That's also to do with grade 10 cohorts. Some year 10 numbers are lower than others and all those sorts of things.

Ms ARMITAGE - But there has to be a shortage if some are staying at the high schools. You would think that obviously some are there, and they're not going on to the colleges.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. We have over 900 students in all our extension schools, as I understand, right across the state.

Ms ARMITAGE - Can I get more than a no?

Mr ROCKLIFF - They're no real threat to colleges. I've never seen this as a worry or a threat. It's about offering alternatives in each individual location as well. But, of course, our

colleges also meet regularly together. Launceston College and Newstead are working together to design their offerings. They are responding to their school needs as well. They don't work in isolation. They're not in bubbles. I've met reasonably regularly - once every six months, I was hoping to - with all our college staff to discuss their needs. Principals, I mean, and their eight colleges. But they're all working together. Colleges are still enrolling 90 per cent of all our year 11 and 12 students.

Ms ARMITAGE - Would there be a cost saving for the Education department with one college and two campuses?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well -

CHAIR - Probably have to ask the finance guru.

Ms ARMITAGE - I would have thought there would, that's all, and the money can go back to the students.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's a very economic rationalist view. Tim wants to respond to that, but we don't sort of look at that aspect of it. We look at where we can invest in our kids for the -

Ms ARMITAGE - I understand that. No, I thought that investment could go back into them.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I know you understand. But the Education Act has essentially lifted the leaving age from what was the regional Guaranteeing Futures legislation of 17 years. We found that a lot of our kids turned 17 in October - year 11 - and left. At least now they're turning 18 in year 12, and you've got to go through.

Ms ARMITAGE - Or they're staying there at the very least.

Mr ROCKLIFF - They are staying and learning and engaging. This is about getting more of our students in an education setting to year 12, irrespective of the setting. But it's important to realise that 90 per cent of our year 11 and 12 students attend colleges, and we're investing in our colleges.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Do you want an answer to the question around saving money?

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. It would be interesting, because you would have one principal and vice principal.

Mr BULLARD - A saving would be a principal, but we would still need a senior leader on that site, so it would be basically the difference between a principal and an assistant principal, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's the only difference. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'm trying to move the questions on and the answers more succinct as well. Thank you, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sorry, yes.

CHAIR - I know it's difficult.

Mr WILLIE - This question follows on from the member for Launceston's questions around school psychologists, social workers and nurses.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - The annual report says there's only 70 FTE school psychologists, 79.42 social workers, and 36.5 nurses. I'm just wondering whether there's a formal referral process for those specialist staff, too, just like speech pathologists, whether that's recorded and whether we can have the data for that, too.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Student referrals?

Mr WILLIE - Yes. And, minister, while that's coming, it's not uncommon for me to write to you about bullying in schools or violence, sometimes drug use. It's a huge problem, I would suggest, and I'll start with an example. I've de-identified it, but they've given me permission to use it -

My concern is there is the insufficient nature of the current system to deal with physical assaults, which are a criminal offence, bar suspending a student. We have several assaults at this school, the one visited upon my daughter and her friend having been reported to the police. My daughter called the police just after the incident. We, the other parent and our daughters, took out restraining orders and currently have a long-term good behaviour bond on the attacker.

She went on to say -

To experience firsthand the type of violence visited upon my daughter while at school is something I never, ever thought I or my daughter would have to face. I've seen a very short video of my daughter on the floor, huddled, possibly unconscious, while another student stands over her, grasping her hair and thumping her head into the floor of the school hall. No parent should ever have to witness that.

Minister, I'm hoping for an update in a right to information request of mine earlier in the year, I believe, or even late last year.

I'm happy for these questions to be taken on notice.

The first question is: can I have any figures held by the department relating to the level of bullying in Tasmanian schools between 2016 and, say, 2020, and information around bullying and harassment of a student, and the number of suspensions for students and a percentage?

I also would like some data on the number of student-on-student assaults or other incidences of physical violence that occurred in Tasmanian schools from 2016 to 2020 that was physical abuse of another student, and it was around suspensions, how that was captured.

I would also like the number of student-on-teacher assaults or other incidents of physical violence that occurred in Tasmanian schools from 2016 to 2020, that was physical abuse of a teacher or other staff member, and that was captured in suspensions and percentage.

The number of suspensions for bullying and harassment of another student from 2016 to 2020 that was captured in bullying and harassment of students, or harassment or stalking of another student, and that was captured in suspensions and percentage.

The number of suspensions for bullying, harassment of a teacher or other staff member from 2016 to 2020, and that was harassment or stalking of a teacher or another staff member, and that was around suspensions and the proportion. I'm also after the total number of student suspensions from 2016 to 2020 with a breakdown by grade, which has been provided to me by the department previously.

To add to that, I'm not sure whether this data is captured, but if possible, the number of incidents in schools reported to police for 2016 to 2020, any reports of sexual assaults - which I think might be captured by the first question from 2016 to 2020 - family violence notifications made by schools from 2016 to 2020, and notifications to child safety from 2016 to 2020 if that data is captured as well. We can't help what walks through the school gate, but I'm concerned about these sorts of issues in our schools, and if you could provide that information, that would be useful.

Mr ROCKLIFF - If that's possible for you to put that on notice, we will endeavour to extract that information for you. I know I do get some correspondence from you, Mr Willie, from time to time, and we take all that very seriously and investigate that very thoroughly. The example that you provided me is personally very upsetting. Some of us have children in school and none of us would like to see that happen to our kids that we love, dearly. I understand why parents get very emotional and upset around some of these incidents which you have referred to and I'll take that at face value.

This is a whole of community responsibility which I think the last part of your question highlighted, where it is incumbent upon all our society, our communities across all departments with respect to this matter. Our schools and the Department of Education are our responsibility. We're responsible - and Tim is responsible - for more than 62 000 students and young people going through the school gate every single day of the school day and that's a huge responsibility. That's why we are very committed to ensuring right across all our public schools that we do have those respectful relationships. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of all our children who go through the school gate.

We know that a strong sense of wellbeing enables our children to feel safe and supported and able to engage in learning as well. Respect is one of the department's key and fundamental core values and we have four. Respectful relationships are integral to empowering and engaging our students and our staff and our school communities in all aspects of school life. There's an enormous amount of work being done in this area. You've mentioned bullying. There's the physical aspect of that which I take your example at face value. Like all that correspondence you present for me - and I hope we respond in a timely manner to that. The

Department of Education has been very proactive for a number of years, particularly the years I've been minister, to ensure that our learners do feel safe, are safe and feel supported to flourish at school.

Now, we have a combating bullying initiative. School leaders and staff are provided with a range of programs and resources to address bullying, including cyberbullying. The Combating Bullying Initiative is in its fourth year of implementation. The full commitment of resources and supports are on track to be delivered in 2020. This work is part of a broader effort to ensure that our learners are respectful in their relationships and have the courage also to stand up to - and challenge bullying behaviour as well. I've some more detail here of what we're investing in our combating bullying program. About \$631 000 or thereabouts in 2020-21 has been allocated to this area. Our expectation is that all schools will develop a whole school approach to support student behaviour, build respectful environments where everyone feels safe, is safe and feels supported. School communities can access research, evidence and experience-based resources most appropriate for their local context. Supports include professional learning resources for teachers, school leaders, parents and the community; funding for community organisation partnerships and school grants; and a dedicated Bullying Stops Here website. The Combating Bullying Initiative has supported schools to address the growing challenges associated with cyberbullying, particularly, by providing all kindergarten to Grade 10 Tasmanian government schools access to the Alannah and Madeline Foundation. It's an organisation we all know. It has a very important Tasmanian connection and we're investing there and it's a really good partnership with our schools, from where I sit. That's part of that cyberbullying approach as well.

Regarding the figures you've asked for, I'm not sure. In an answer I've provided you, and it was a question on notice, was it?

Mr WILLIE - No, it was the right to information.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Right to information. When that ended, or when that update was?

Mr WILLIE - It ended in 2019 but -

Mr ROCKLIFF - We don't have our 2020 figures yet.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It might take perhaps until the school year finishes, before we can - I don't know.

Ms BURGESS - Minister, we'll have to do data cleansing processes and those sorts of things, so it probably won't be ready until at least the end, and we like to validate our data at the end of March, so it wouldn't be available before then.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Perhaps if we could commit to you, and all the processes and the validation absolutely has to be done as well for all the data. If it saves you the trouble of RTI-ing it, Mr Willie, when it becomes available, we can provide some of that data, but if you could write it down and put it on notice, that would be great.

The important thing to remember also is that the student voice is so important in this, in that we listen to our students about their school environment, which is why we have undertaken the wellbeing survey of our students. We had that when some 28 600 students completed that survey in August-September last year. We've done a survey this year where up to 30 000 students in years 4 to 12 undertook a survey with a range of questions specific to their school environment. That information supports the school and the broader Department of Education team as well.

The key findings of the report we released probably five or six weeks ago now was that 96 per cent of students reported they had good relationships and support from their teachers. Now that actually increased in the year before and we spoke about data before about NAPLAN. This data we're hoping and expecting to get every single year, so we can track that. That's been an increase of -

Mr WILLIE - You can pick those sorts of things out, though, but there's also some concerning data in that survey too, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The survey showed 91 per cent of students felt connected to adults in their home; 86 per cent of students feel safe at school and 76 per cent of students felt that teachers and students care about each other and treat each other with respect. And you're right. We have drilled down a little further in the public information that we released this year and I won't go into all that now, but I'm not just cherrypicking data here. Although, 86 per cent of students feeling safe at school is a good number, we want 100 per cent. There are some other areas of data - and I'm sure you've read it quite extensively - where we need really key information of some student cohorts.

Mr WILLIE - Emotional wellbeing.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - Some of the older cohorts, girls.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Years 8, 9 and 10, for example, dip off in some of those areas from grade 7, and picks up in years 11 and 12 again. There are some areas where we have some great learnings - good information and good data for us and our schools as well in that sense. That's why we do it.

Mr WILLIE - Don't get me wrong, minister, I think it's a good thing that you're doing it. It's a great to measure that.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm not taking it that you're critical of it at all. I'm just providing some context to your question.

Mr WILLIE - Can I move to another subject?

CHAIR - As long as you're not going to truancy because Mr Dean's got that ready to go.

Mr WILLIE - When he does that, I'll chime in too. But can I just go to a different topic?

CHAIR - All right. And again, we've got to start moving things along otherwise we'll be still here at 7.30.

Mr WILLIE - It's a big output line item.

CHAIR - I know.

Mr WILLIE - Most of the things are captured in it.

Mr DEAN - It is.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, it's been established this week that the secretary of Communities Tasmania requested some information from the department regarding James Griffin and a report to Child Safety Services in 2018. I believe it was November. The department searched the records, couldn't find anything for the high school concerned, and then subsequently found some records at another high school. I'm assuming that was the same student that may have moved schools. No? Okay, well that's interesting.

It's been said before that the student data system of the Education department is student-centric. There's been information I've requested in the past and been told that it's not possible to access that because you'd have to go into every student file. I'm interested in how forensic the Education department's search has been? It is quite possible there could be references to James Griffin in student files that you wouldn't know about yet without doing that work. Is that true?

Mr ROCKLIFF - An inquiry into Griffin was announced by the Health minister, and the Premier's since announced a commission of inquiry, which will be broad-ranging. I'd expect that any allegations around Griffin to be fully investigated as part of that commission of inquiry.

Mr WILLIE - So that work hasn't started yet. I know you've got your own inquiry that's leading into the commission of inquiry.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have our own inquiry, which we announced on August 24 this year, which is an important historical inquiry going back many decades.

Mr WILLIE - That statement I made, you can just say whether it's correct or not, that it's very possible that there could be references to James Griffin in student files. The department would not know about that without checking each student file.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. In relation to Griffin, to my knowledge Griffin has never been employed by the Education department, and no allegations have been raised about Griffin offending in a school environment.

Mr WILLIE - No, but he did work at the university accommodation facility, and the department used that facility.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The University of Tasmania is doing its own investigation.

Mr WILLIE - But that statement I just made about whether there could be references in student files, could you please address that?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you, Tim.

Mr BULLARD - Mr Willie, when we became aware of the request to undertake a search of our systems, we went through and did a keyword search. So as I said, it's free text a lot of the information, but we actually had the people at the backend do a keyword search of our electronic student support files around things such as his name, the ward, children's ward et cetera. We also went to all senior social workers in the north of the state and requested any information they may have pertaining to discussions around the alleged perpetrator, and no-one recalled any discussions, although there was a thought that families would have pursued their recourse through hospital or police, and not necessarily come through us.

We've also since undertaken a search in regard to anything held in archives around, for example, visits to the Newnham Campus. We can't find any records there. Obviously principals in the north of the state are aware of the allegations, and have been requested to provide any information that they may have.

Mr WILLIE - So it's quite possible that schools would have potentially information at a school level too that would be paper-based that would be historical?

Mr BULLARD - Certainly the senior social workers should be aware of that, so they are the people who have oversight of that. So we have been - you know, we've done a data search, and we've also been out to people who are responsible for the wellbeing of students to see whether there is a record or not.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks. Minister, I'm not sure whether you know or not - I don't - whether Cabinet documents can be subpoenaed by royal commission? Obviously there's some definitions around that. I would assume that Cabinet deliberations probably can't be, but there may be a possibility that advice or information provided to Cabinet could be. When did you first find out about James Griffin and the allegations surrounding him?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I stated that on record two days ago, and that was when it was first raised publically.

Mr WILLIE - So there's been no discussion at Cabinet prior to that?

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's when I first found out about the allegations of James Griffin, so I can't comment on Cabinet processes, but I've certainly had no discussion. As I said, again, I answered that question the other day.

Mr WILLIE - Okay.

Mr ROCKLIFF - And I can't - I'd have to take advice in terms of subpoenaing information. I don't have that with me now, but the Premier's committed, of course, to a very broad-ranging inquiry.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - Yes, thank you. My question is about truancy, minister. I just need to make a couple of statements in asking the questions. I've been given information, and this information came to me at the end of last year, so I need to make that clear. End of last year, 2019. It was in relation to truancy, and I was given the information that where truancy is occurring, phone calls are required to be made to the home after the absence of three days. Attendance letters then at day 5, 10, 15 and 20. From day 15, a copy of attendance is sent and a request to have a parent meeting. A meeting occurs, and if things are not adhered to in that meeting, they start the process again with all these processes.

Between grades 7 and 12 on the information I have, there are lots of students whose attendance is 15 per cent or less. Then I am told personally - and a quote here that I have been given -

Personally I think there needs to be an interagency approach.

And an example is given, but I won't refer to that -

I believe that Children's Services or Safe Families should be leading many of these cases throughout the state. A school's core business is teaching and learning. We seem to be spending a considerable amount of our time on phone calls, letters home, meetings with parent, sometimes advocates where we hear about how hard life is. Nothing ever seems to change. The overriding issue for us is time, continually following up 17 per cent of our school population not being here takes us away from spending time with the ones that do turn up. Bring back the truant officer of a dedicated attendance team that follows up with some home visits, liaises with families, and goes between schools and a home'.

I then referred to the headlines in *The Examiner* of 20 November. Minister, you'd probably be aware of that, which reads, 'Teen's truancy unchecked'. That relates to a grandmother who has grave concerns about her grandchild, who is not attending school regularly, who is now in - I think out of home residence, and the attendance is poor, and I think it's abysmally poor. She says that she contacted Child Safety Services, and they said, 'If he doesn't want to go to school, we can't make him'.

So my question is around what are we really doing with truancy? What is the level of truancy in the state with our school students? I'm told it's 17 per cent in some areas, some schools, probably across the board. My question also goes to - well, it was another question on suspension, so perhaps I'll leave that there for that question. What are we doing on truancy? When the Education bill through our place several years ago, if you get to *Hansard*, I was very critical of the processes it provided for in relation to truancy because I could see it was a toothless tiger. What are we doing - how are we addressing this issue? It's a big drag on a lot of these schools to follow up the truancy cases, with the processes they've got to go through, and they're really saying they can't do anything.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You're talking about the 2016 act?

Mr DEAN - This is the act we passed. We passed the act, didn't we?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, that's when we set up the compulsory conciliation conferences -

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - And those processes there.

Mr DEAN - I was just critical of the legislation or the clauses around truancy, and if I could get my *Hansard*, I -

Mr ROCKLIFF - We chose deliberately not to change the act, as we weren't going to a prosecution pathway. When it comes to students not attending school, part of the process before you get right down to prosecution - we wanted to avoid that - is working with the important people in the student's life. The student themselves, if appropriate, can be part of the compulsory conciliation conference, with the parent or the carer, the schoolteachers et cetera to drill down a little deeper as to why a student would not be attending school. When you take that pathway rather than straight to prosecution, as what happened prior to the 2016 act, you're able to put supports in place hopefully to re-engage students within a school setting, and that is across all Education sectors - that compulsory conciliation conferencing. I'll have to take those questions on notice perhaps and get some more information in terms of the success of those. I understand they are working well.

Mr DEAN - Can I be given the truancy numbers around the state? My other question was: shouldn't the department now consider bringing back truancy officers? It was a good comment made on the information given to me about truancy officers. What they say is that their position is about teaching and educating; it's not about spending a big part of their time on the students who don't attend school.

CHAIR - Couldn't that be --

Mr DEAN - It ought to be the responsibility of some other person.

CHAIR - Couldn't that be something that someone in Learning Services could undertake rather than leaving it to teachers? Perhaps they already do.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Consistent school attendance is essential for learning and developing the skills and knowledge needed for success now and later in life. To support student attendance, authorised persons can be appointed under the Education Act 2016 to investigate unauthorised absences or suspected unauthorised absences of any school-aged child or youth. Authorised persons will focus on identifying non-attendance issues in a respectful and collaborative way and facilitate support for parents who need some help for their child to attend school.

The use of authorised persons by schools is option as an additional mechanism to help support and manage student attendance. Staff who are appointed as an authorised person are likely to be known by students and will be appointed because they have specific skills that help them undertake the role. Department of Education social workers regularly work with the students and families to help resolve the reasons why a school-aged child or youth isn't at school, and a process is in place to train all social workers in the role of an authorised person.

They can have specific powers to help schools identify students who are not in attendance at school during school hours and work cooperatively to obtain information from parents about the reasons a student is absent. Authorised persons must always clearly identify themselves to parents and students by showing their photo identification card. The identification cards contain Tasmanian government holographs as a security feature and are professionally produced by the same card manufacturer that produces Tasmanian driver licences and Working with Vulnerable People cards.

In addition to authorised persons, other school staff can continue to contact parents by telephone or in writing, advising of a student's absence and seeking an explanation and any required evidence. Each school's attendance policy includes how the school uses authorised persons. The policy is developed in consultation with the school association to ensure parents have input into the practices at their child's school and are aware of any school staff who are authorised persons.

Training and appointment for all social workers is in place, and as at September 2020, 80 social workers have been appointed as authorised persons, and my understanding is the Education Registrar will be able to talk to the conciliation of the process that we spoke about before, Mr Dean, in terms of the numbers of students and -

CHAIR - Grab a fresh chair from the end there. The questions are around truancy and authorised persons and we need a number of truancies - thank you - for the year.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. Katharine O'Donnell, the -

CHAIR - Thank you, Katharine.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes. I can talk to you about the conciliation conferencing process which my office runs across all schools, not just government schools. This year we had 232 referrals from schools for conferences. Obviously the year was a bit disrupted because of COVID-19.

We conducted those conferences as best we can determine because there was some difference among schools about how attendance was recorded for the year because of the time working at home. Our best estimate is that about 58 per cent of referrals resulted in an increase in attendance, and those statistics are up to the beginning of September, and 56 per cent of that increase was greater than 20 per cent. So, the student was not necessarily back full-time but was back attending and engaging with school again by the beginning of September.

We often will hold more than one conference and work with the family and the school to try to find out what's blocking the attendance and resolve those issues. Sometimes it's housing; sometimes it's transport; sometimes it's mental health; sometimes it's just assisting the parent with strategies on how to get particularly young children into school and giving them support with that.

Mr DEAN - And the time - sorry, chair.

CHAIR - Through the minister.

Mr DEAN - Sorry, the minister. The time that this process takes is an issue that was raised with me.

Ms O'DONNELL - When we receive the referral, we try to hold the conference within usually about three weeks. Sometimes that depends on the availability of staff at the schools. It depends if it was a particularly busy time of the year and obviously not during school holidays. But we will usually hold a conference within two to three weeks of receiving the referral, and then requirements I issue will come back out within about one to two weeks of that conference to the school and the parents.

Mr DEAN - Thank you. My other question relates to multiple suspensions, minister. What numbers of multiple suspensions would we have in the state?

CHAIR - Thanks, Katharine. Mr Willie, did you have a question on truancy?

Mr WILLIE - Just on the conciliation conferences, yes.

CHAIR - Okay. We might just - if you would stay in that chair -

Ms O'DONNELL - Sure.

CHAIR - and then we'll go to that. So your supplementary, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - Yes. I'm not sure whether this number was provided, but the number of conciliation conferences in the past 12 months? I don't know whether you've got this data, but I'm interested in it: the percentage of students with a disability who were required to attend a compulsory conciliation conference.

Ms O'DONNELL - What I can give you right now is the number of referrals between 30 March 2019 and 30 September 2020. That's all I have available, which was 232.

Mr WILLIE - It's increasing each year.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Ms O'DONNELL - I'm happy, through the minister, to take a more specific date period on notice if you'd like.

Mr WILLIE - Yes. And the number of students with a disability. Are you able to -

Ms O'DONNELL - Give me one moment to check on that.

CHAIR - We're happy to have -

Ms O'DONNELL - No, I can't give you that directly.

CHAIR - Is it available if we put it on notice?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes, we can find it for you.

Mr WILLIE - I'll put it on notice, but just a comment that it is increasing is probably a good thing because schools are becoming more aware of it and referring.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes, and increasing across the state.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Dean, back to you.

Mr DEAN - My question is around multiple suspensions, minister. How many multiple suspensions have we had around the state, and when does it come a time with multiple suspensions where a school can take a positive action in relation to the student. How often does this happen? I've been given information of four and five suspensions occurring in a year, in any one year, relative to students. What is the position? Do they need to wait for some extremely serious event to occur before they can actually have some real, positive action taken?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We'll get some information for you, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - Yes, sure.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I just want to ask Mr Willie a question about the RTI. Did you indicate that we didn't respond?

Mr WILLIE - No, no. I said that the department had provided that information.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I thought that was the case.

Mr WILLIE - I just wanted the current year added to those questions, and I had some subsequent questions.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I just wanted to clarify.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have some data here for you. That is the suspension measures by student characteristics. Overall, the number of students suspended in 2019 was 3222. The number of students suspended. The number of suspensions, 7425, and the average numbers of suspensions per suspended student is 2.3. That's the average, so there might be other students who are suspended more times than that, but the average is 2.3.

Mr DEAN - Do we have the number in relation to those who have been suspended multiple times? The number of times that some of the students have been suspended? The top suspendees, sadly.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That would be suspensions by individual students, and we don't have that information here.

CHAIR - Is that available?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The average duration of suspension days is 2.9 days.

Mr DEAN - I'd like to know the maximum number of suspensions for students, if I can. Happy to put that on notice, minister.

CHAIR - It doesn't sound like the department gathers that information.

Mr DEAN - I would think they would do because I know that the schools do.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's recorded at school level.

CHAIR - It is recorded?

Mr DEAN - Yes, I think it's recorded at school level.

Mr ROCKLIFF - But not centrally.

Mr DEAN - Right.

CHAIR - So you'd have to contact each school, ask for that, and then come back. So it won't be back by next week.

Mr DEAN - It is an important matter.

CHAIR - The member might like to put that on the Notice Paper, because that's not going to get back in time for this committee to report, and that means that we end up leaving that line item open.

Mr DEAN - And the suspensions - and I guess we were given this last Estimates, perhaps. I'm not sure. The suspensions for 2018-19 would be helpful as well to see whether it's going up or down. You might have that evidence perhaps. The information might be there, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure. The number of students suspended overall in 2017 was 3053. In 2018, it was 3164. And the figure I've provided already for 2019 is 3222.

Mr DEAN - Sadly, it's going up.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's the number of students suspended. The proportion of students suspended from 2017 is 5 per cent of students - that's proportion of students - and in 2018, it was 5.1 per cent, and in 2019, it is 5.2 per cent.

Mr DEAN - Thank you, I appreciate that.

CHAIR - Thank you. Supplementary, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - Not a supplementary. It is a new topic.

CHAIR - It's a not a supplementary.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, new topic.

CHAIR - Okay. New topic, Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, you committed to 87.3 specialist teachers in primary schools - which I certainly support - to reduce instructional load for primary school teachers. Through some questioning in the Legislative Council, you said that that funding had been provided across the system. Are you confident that each school has implemented that government policy?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I just need some answers for you on that. I probably can find it here. The 2019 teachers' agreement provides for what is a nation-leading reduction in instructional load for primary teachers in Tasmania from 22 to 21 hours per week. The Tasmanian Government reached agreement in late 2019 on this important reform to provide primary students with access to specialist instruction and provide additional preparation time for primary teachers. School principals have been working with primary teachers to implement the new provision. The length of school days may vary from school to school, and this is mostly due to local context, such as student transport requirements. The department will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to better understand variances in student instructional hours and the reasons for these to ensure we have a transparent, consistent approach where possible, taking into account the local context and need.

Schools will be provided with information regarding indicative full-time equivalent allocations for staffing profiles in December 2019 to reflect the reduction in instructional load from 22 to 21 hours per week for primary teachers from the beginning of term 3, 2020, and final FTE allocations were confirmed following the census process. The final additional FTE allocated across primary and district schools was 87.4 FTE from February. The department has worked to ensure that any specific recruitment needs identified by schools have been met.

In March 2020, schools were contacted directly to ask how they intended to staff the one hour per week. In April 2020, the advice from schools was that there was no requirement for the additional recruitment of teachers, and schools have made appropriate staff arrangements through the normal staffing arrangement and processes in place. The department advised principals in June 2020 that they should work with teachers to implement the new instructional load, and that support was available. It was agreed between the department and the Australian Education Union that the parties will work together to conduct an audit of implementation in term 4. It has also been agreed that the instructional load clause in the teacher's award should be reviewed jointly by the department and the AEU, and these discussions have commenced.

Mr WILLIE - So in relation to my question, establishing an audit, does that mean you're not confident that each school has implemented the policy?

Mr ROCKLIFF - An audit's an audit, so we need to have a greater understanding of that implementation. Yes, Tim?

Mr BULLARD - When the agreement was struck, as you know, it was very much about the instructional load, so more planning time for teachers, but also about ensuring that our

children have access to specialist instruction. That was front and centre of the agreement. The AEU has agreed to work with us over the course of term 4 so that we can understand exactly how that is rolling out across school sites. If we need to make adjustments to that, we can do so. We saw terms 3 and 4 as the implementation phase. When we knew the agreement was coming in, we agreed we would come back and look at it in term 4 to see how it was working so that we could make adjustments for 2021.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, the crux of the problem is that when you went to implement this policy, it became very apparent that schools have different contact hours. Somewhere like Penguin District School would have 4 hours 30 in a day, but somewhere like Illawarra Primary School might have 5 hours 12 in a day, or West Ulverstone might have 5 hours 15. So it doesn't seem like much over the course of a day, 45 minutes. But over the course of the year, it's about five weeks. Over the course of a student's journey through primary school, it's almost a year. Are you going to address that issue?

Just before you respond, you mentioned school buses and travelling and local context being an issue. They're not necessarily Education-based decisions, are they?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The Department of State Growth manages the school bus contract, if that's what you're talking about. But we do talk to other departments about such matters. The implementation of the new instructional load for teachers has highlighted has some variations from school to school regarding classroom learning time for students. Factors that contribute to this include historical school structures and transport requirements, such as buses, based on local need and context.

Of course, our department will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to better understand any variances and the reasons for these to ensure we have a transparent and consistent approach where possible, taking into account the local context and need.

Student instructional hours is one factor that impacts on student outcomes, but there are a number of other relevant factors, including quality of teaching.

Mr WILLIE - Sure.

Mr ROCKLIFF - As part of the term 4 audit, clarification and consistency of what constitutes student instruction time will be formalised. The department continues to support quality teaching for learning through pedagogy, curriculum and assessment practices.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - I certainly understand the quality versus quantity debate, but it is a government system and you would think that students would have similar access and opportunity in that system.

Just interested, before we move off this, whether you're looking at the break times of school, too, knowing what we know about play-based interaction with kids in the break times? You only have to read people like Pasi Sahlberg, an internationally respected academic on the erosion of play in developed education systems.

I guess my question is: Does it concern you that there are discrepancies in break times in primary school in our system as well? Some schools have very short break times, so could you comment on that?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I think I mentioned in my previous answer that a lot of these factors have happened over the history of the school and the school environment. That's why we're doing the audit. I've mentioned before publicly that a consistent approach as possible to these matters is warranted. Mr Bullard, any further information?

CHAIR - Will the outcome of the review be available before the beginning of term 1 in 2021?

Mr BULLARD - Of the audit, yes.

Mr WILLIE - Publicly available?

Mr BULLARD - It will inform discussions between the AEU and ourselves around what needs to happen next. I think the point Mr Willie makes is a really good one. This provides a unique opportunity for us to understand how a school day could be structured. It's very easy just to jump to what are your starting and finishing times and make an assessment about learning. But as you well know -

Mr WILLIE - I'm not suggesting that.

Mr BULLARD - I know you're not suggesting that. But as you well know, the evidence shows that extending school days doesn't necessarily lead to improved learning outcomes for students. We see this as a great opportunity to work with the AEU around the structure of a school day and to understand how our school days are structured, and also to look at the evidence from writers such as Sahlberg to understand what is the best practice in terms of that, and then look at ways to ensure there is a level of integrity in the way that delivery has occurred.

As it stands at the moment, people would have in their heads different ideas about what constitutes instructional time. One thing we've agreed with the AEU is let's reach an agreed definition at least of that component, when you're on class or not, does it involve eating time or not, or is it duty or not.

But absolutely, we need to look at the whole span of a school day in terms of how we can support the learning and wellbeing of learners through that as another mechanism.

Mr WILLIE - Hopefully we can make decisions that are education-based, not just when a bus is available.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'm getting a feeling that the minister and Mr Willie probably need to sit down and have a coffee and a good old talk about something. You might organise that at the morning tea break, minister and Mr Willie. They're both on the same page, looking for the best outcome for students.

I have some questions to ask. All important, but we also have some other areas. We always ask this. Employee numbers across the department.

CHAIR - I'm comfortable taking the breakdown on notice, but if we can just have some basic numbers, that's useful.

Mr DEAN - And knowing those numbers who are on the floor teaching, as opposed to others in the administration and back office positions.

CHAIR - Yes. So, administration, teaching staff, and then I'd like a breakdown of principals, and we also would like to know how many acting we have. We know it's a significant number within the Education department; it always has been.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. So, for 2020 teaching in schools - FTE, 4470.98; teaching out of schools, 282.22 FTE; there are 1036.89 FTE teacher assistants; school administrative staff, 531.21; and all other staff, 2029.58. That brings the total FTE across the Department of Education, according to its workforce statistics for 2020, to FTE 8350.88.

CHAIR - Thank you, and the number of acting positions, is that available?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Acting positions of principals?

CHAIR - Yes. How many acting principals do we have?

Mr BULLARD - Ms Rattray, are you asking as of today, how many there are today?

CHAIR - The closest figure you've got.

Mr BULLARD - We can take that on notice.

CHAIR - If we can have a comparison to the previous year, that would be also useful to see how that is rolling over, because we know it takes some time to get an acting to become a substantive.

Also, minister, we obviously are well aware of the impact of the pandemic. I'm just interested in whether the COVID-19 pandemic had any impact on the leave liability? Thank you, Kane. Through the minister, or does the minister have them?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Our director of finance is Kane Salter.

Mr SALTER - In terms of annual leave between 2019 and 2020, that liability increased by \$1.89 million, from \$14.383 million to \$16.274 million, so that's an increase of 13.14 per cent. In the number of leave days, there was an increase of around 6.75 per cent between the two years. In terms of long service leave between 2019 and 2020, that increased by \$13.7 million, or 9.9 per cent. The actual days for long service increased by 12.81 per cent between the years.

CHAIR - Was that because employees decided to postpone leave because they couldn't go anywhere? Is that pretty much what happened?

Mr SALTER - Certainly that would've been a component of the impact, for sure. Yes.

CHAIR - Okay. In that case, would that have reduced the teacher relief liability for schools? If teachers weren't taking proposed leave, and were hanging around and accruing leave, wouldn't that be a relief on the school's relief budget?

I mean, 101 economics here. We had Mr Rutherford here yesterday.

Mr SALTER - You would have been well-informed then.

CHAIR - We were. Was that too simplistic?

Mr SALTER - No, there's probably two impacts countering each other. Regarding relief to cover normal leave, certainly a reduction for that, but that was more than countered by the leave to cover COVID-19 special leave where people were taking leave at home and couldn't do their duties at home. That outweighed the saving from the normal relief.

Mr DEAN - I wonder how many parents suspended their kids at home?

CHAIR - They probably would have liked to have done. Possibly not. Ms Palmer? And then I'm going back to Mr Willie, who has another area he would like to provide some scrutiny on. So, thank you, Ms Palmer.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, we know the important role families play in supporting their children's education. Can you tell us the ways this relationship is being enhanced in government schools?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. We have, as a government, committed to working more closely with families who are the most important influence and support for their learners, as I'm sure you'd appreciate. This year has been a year like no other, with families making incredible adjustments from supporting their children to learning at home, to ensuring our students are supported to return to on-site learning. The respect we already had for our teachers has been enhanced through that COVID-19 period of learning at home.

We have seen a high level of involvement from parents and student learning during the pandemic and this has provided us all with a great opportunity to grow and learn from this experience. I would like to thank all our parents for their commitment and efforts to ensuring our young people have been able to continue learning through this most unusual and challenging year.

Family engagement and family involvement plays an important role in students achieving positive learning outcomes and in supporting student developments and wellbeing. In 2019, the Department of Education undertook a review of family engagement and in 2020 has been implementing their recommendations from this review. The department continues to work closely with our key stakeholders including families and the Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations, otherwise known as TASSO, to promote family engagement.

In 2019-20 the Tasmanian Government committed \$803 000 over four years to implement the recommendations of the 2019 Family Engagement Review. Three recommendations were to: collaboratively develop a framework that sets out clear expectations and provides a coherent guidance on engaging with families at the department, the school and the child and family centre level; expand and strengthen supports to build the capacity of

families to engage with their child's education at a department or school or CFC level; and specifically embed family engagement as a critical element in the department strategies and practices for school improvement.

The department has worked collaboratively with stakeholders to develop the 'Together with Families' approach, and that approach includes clear expectations to staff to build strong and trusting relationships with families; be guided by our engagement principles; to be caring, purposeful, inclusive, genuine, responsive and effective; to be deliberate about how we engage with families in decision-making; a family engagement officer has been employed to facilitate improved family engagement practice; and resources, tools and information are available to staff to build their skills and knowledge in engaging with families.

A pilot project will provide intensive and targeted support to up to 10 schools, libraries, Child and Family Centres or business units between now and June 2022. These sites will be supported to implement the evidence-based parent engagement guidelines developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Over the next 18 months, we'll be continually reviewing the progress of schools and sites involved in that pilot to inform future practices and decision-making and the department of education continues of course to work very closely with TASSO, and their new president Jared Dickason in promoting family engagement through our school associations as well.

CHAIR - Does that answer your question, member?

Ms PALMER - It's a very comprehensive answer. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. I thought that might.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, it's good to see an increase in funding in the adjustments model, the disability model -

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - I've supported it the whole time, but I am aware of some -

CHAIR - I've already mentioned, you're both on the same page here.

Mr WILLIE - I am aware of some schools that have struggled with the implementation in terms of their capacity of demonstrating adjustments and being able to support their students. My questions are: What is the funding level in the dollar amount for each student at each level of the new model? Has this been adjusted to reflect the additional funding? I've a series of questions here. Do you want me to ask those?

CHAIR - Maybe do two at a time because otherwise it gets a bit messy.

Mr WILLIE - How much federal funding was allocated to the state as part of the national partnerships funding agreement of the \$490 million for students with disability and trauma over the next 10 years? Could I have the current year and next year, specifically?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. Well, we may have to take some of that on notice.

Mr WILLIE - That's all right.

Mr ROCKLIFF - But we'll see or try -

Mr WILLIE - If we're doing that, what's the state's obligation around that funding?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay.

Mr WILLIE - How has this money been -

Mr ROCKLIFF - First, in a broader context, the reason we have this nation-leading model is to support all our students and to ensure that no matter what a student's circumstance or their background, they have that fundamental right to a quality education. We're committed to providing high-quality inclusive education for students with disability, and to achieve this we have implemented the new educational adjustments funding model to better meet the needs of the students.

In a broader sense, the Budget provides increased funding for the Educational Adjustments funding model, with 2020-21 funding increasing by \$3 million to \$11 million and subsequent years increasing from \$11 million to \$14 million. We've invested \$115.2 million to provide targeted funding for students across schools, including those with disability, and this investment includes \$83.8 million for direct targeted support for students with disability as well as \$31.4 million for targeted support services that also meet the needs of students with disability as well as other students with special needs.

I commend all those involved across the department for what is outstanding work. We're leading the nation in this and all those who contributed to the ministerial disability taskforce when we set that up in around 2014, we're implementing those recommendations of which this is one. Cheryl Larkin [TBC] heads the Inclusion Advisory Panel to ensure the implementation to those recommendations go as well as possible.

We've made progress across all three sectors of education - the Catholic, and independent and government school systems - to implement inclusive education initiatives and system-wide supports for schools to support all learners in that sense. I have drilled down on some figures as well for you, Mr Willie, and the 2020-21 Educational Adjustments funding rates, as at 21 September 2020, if I look at the funding per student FTE, the base funding is \$1056. Substantial low, above the base, funding, is \$8488; then we go to substantial high, \$15 080 per FTE student; extensive low, \$25 100; extensive mid, \$34 761; and extensive high is \$56 701.

Mr WILLIE - Will that remain the same for next year, or will it be increased to reflect the increase of funding?

Mr SALTER - The amount will be indexed, but then the overall pool increased based on the additional numbers for 2021.

Mr WILLIE - So the numbers will increase, but there will be more students coming into the system as well?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Possibly, yes.

Mr WILLIE - Could I have the current number of students supported at each level, a total; and also the expected numbers for next year?

Mr ROCKLIFF - In 2020, schools have accessed funding to support the Educational Adjustments of 4145 student FTE with disability requiring adjustments from supplementary to extensive levels of adjustment.

Mr WILLIE - Is it broken down at each level? Can I have the numbers of students at each level? I'm happy for you to take it on notice, whether I can have the - yes, with the student numbers at each level.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The levels I just read out from base to extensive high, you want the student numbers?

Mr WILLIE - The student number attached to each level for this year and the expected numbers for next year.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, if we can access that for you now, we will. But -

CHAIR - We won't wait for it because it takes up too much time. No, it's arrived.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We've got the level for this year, but it's between extensive and substantial and supplementary. No subcategories though. For the 2020 year, but these are figures from March 31 this year. Extensive is 588.52 FTE students, and substantial is 1734.5 FTE. That's the NCCD level of adjustment category.

CHAIR - Are you comfortable with that, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - Wasn't the total number 4500?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Then we have supplementary, 1821.85.

Mr WILLIE - That's getting closer to the total.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Then we have a quality differentiated teaching practice FTE figure, which is 1666.9, so that brings the total NCCD to 5811.77.

Mr WILLIE - And the numbers for next year? I'm assuming that work's being done about adjustments needed.

CHAIR - Projections for next year.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm advised an additional 815 students, full-time equivalents, across all those categories.

Mr WILLIE - That's a big jump, minister. Is that because schools are understanding the model and their capacity to demonstrate the adjustments is improving?

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's correct.

CHAIR - I saw seven nods to that.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Which highlights the benefit of the model.

Mr WILLIE - I'm going to lose the call again, I think.

CHAIR - Thank you, Ms Armitage, and I'm looking to have a tea break at 11.30, so thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'll be quick, and I'm sure the minister has the answers to my questions. It's just regarding -

CHAIR - Somebody will.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm sure he will. Just regarding levies and fees, I note a lot of them have been waived for this year.

Mr ROCKLIFF - All were waived from 2019.

Ms ARMITAGE - Right. From 2019 and 2020?

Mr ROCKLIFF - No, 2019 levies were waived.

Ms ARMITAGE - Right.

Mr ROCKLIFF - And we also waived the debt.

Mr SALTER - 2020 was waived.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sorry, 2020.

CHAIR - Yes, I was going to say.

Ms ARMITAGE - I was wondering why you were waiving 2019.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I don't know why I'm thinking 2019. It was 2020.

CHAIR - Because we lost a year, that's why.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Probably COVID-19 was in my brain, and I thought 2019.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's okay.

Mr ROCKLIFF - My apologies, the fees were waived in 2020.

Ms ARMITAGE - And that resulted in an amount of?

Mr ROCKLIFF - About \$14 million to waive all those fees. A number of families had some liability and old debt.

Ms ARMITAGE - Historical and old debt.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We waived those debt levels as well, and that figure came to about -

Mr SALTER - It was \$2.8 million.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, \$2.8 million. I was going to say \$3 million, but \$2.8 million.

Ms ARMITAGE - Okay. I have -

CHAIR - Something else?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, I was going to ask, so the -

Mr ROCKLIFF - Next year we'll bring in additional support for our families as we work through the levy model, and we'll be supporting an additional 9000 students.

Ms ARMITAGE - And schools, will they be compensated for any lack of funding that they may be suffering?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - To around about those amounts?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Is that right?

Mr SALTER - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. The school levy relief for 2020 - yes.

CHAIR - Yes. You've already given us the numbers.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Given that. That's right. I did mention the Student Assistance Scheme eligibility, and using the healthcare card or equivalent as the assessment mechanism for replacing previous income thresholds that applied. It's pleasing that we can confirm this will be introduced from 2021. As I've said, this 2021 school year, and as a result upwards of 9000 additional students are becoming eligible for the Student Assistance Scheme, which means that one in two students will no longer pay any school levies at all. For a family with three school-aged students this could provide a saving of up to \$1000 a year. Significant for many families.

Ms ARMITAGE - So with the \$2.8 million, the historical or old debt, how far did that date back?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Kane, how far did that -

Ms ARMITAGE - We're wiping it off for difficulty, but it doesn't all - or none of it would relate to COVID. Some of the families might relate to people in difficulty. But how far does that actually go back, that debt?

Mr SALTER - A fair component of it would be 2019.

Ms ARMITAGE - So it's fairly recent?

Mr SALTER - But there's certainly amounts, you know, over several years. I'd have to go and get the specific breakdown.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, there's not -

Mr DEAN - Those who paid up would be pretty upset.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, it's an interesting one. With things that are owing, a lot of government departments go to MPES, so you obviously don't put any of your outstanding debts to the Monetary Penalties Enforcement Scheme. Is it that it's more costly to keep it there sometimes than to try to recover it than it is to write it off? Is that part of the reason that you actually -

Mr SALTER - Sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Ms ARMITAGE - Well, it was \$2.8 million. A lot of it's been outstanding for quite a period of time. I don't necessarily need a cut-off. But I'm just looking at the recovery you actually get. Is the cost of recovery, is it sometimes more cost-effective to write it off than to try to recover it?

Mr SALTER - So in terms of -

Ms ARMITAGE - Because you're obviously writing of 2019, which -

CHAIR - You're very soft, Kane.

Ms ARMITAGE - And 2019 had no relevance, really, to COVID. It wasn't paid then.

Mr SALTER - We undertake follow-up processes or the schools undertake follow-up processes, and there are also central follow-up processes. But as has been advised, we don't send any of the -

Ms ARMITAGE - You don't put them in the collectors.

Mr SALTER - We don't put them in collectors.

Ms ARMITAGE - And you're not going to stop the children coming to school and accessing education, obviously.

Mr SALTER - And in terms of the \$2.8 million then, that was a government policy decision to support families through COVID. Notwithstanding the debt was prior to COVID, they're still experiencing financial difficulties during the COVID period.

Ms ARMITAGE - So when we don't have COVID, I'm just wondering what we normally do though with the debt if there's no COVID. Is there a period of time that realises it's not going to be recoverable and it's costing more to try to recover than it actually is written off?

Mr SALTER - There are write-off processes once we've followed the reasonable processes by the school centrally.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm just wondering what your processes are, because you don't put it with the collectors. You're not going to stop students coming. So what is your process? If someone simply doesn't pay, what is the process?

Mr SALTER - Again there's follow-up processes at the school level.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr SALTER - Importantly, trying to have discussions with the parents and families about the payment plans rather than having to pay it as a lump sum. So that's probably the first bit of the conversation is: can it be paid over the course of the year? Then there's follow-ups by schools during the course of the year, and then there would be a point where if they consider they can't take any further action, they would refer it centrally and we would undertake two follow-ups.

Ms ARMITAGE - I know you follow up, and it goes centrally, and it is followed up. My question, minister, is if they simply refuse to pay. If someone says 'I'm not going to pay', you're not going to stop the child's education. It's not going to go to MPES. That's what I'm saying. Is it simply someone knows, if I don't pay, at the end of the day, it will never really go anywhere? I guess it's my question.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Most people do pay and they value -

Ms ARMITAGE - Well, most do, but I'm just thinking \$2.8 million from last year, or from previous -

Mr ROCKLIFF - This year, in recognition of broadening the net, if you like, healthcare card or equivalent, we're supporting another 9000 students.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes. It's just that it's a considerable amount of money, \$2.8 million into the Education department for students. I was just trying to ascertain whether eventually it gets written off. Sometimes there's follow-up, follow-up and follow-up, and there's a cost to that as well.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There's work done, as Mr Salter said, at the school level to work with the families, payment plans and the like, to -

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm sure the majority want to pay, but there would be some who realise that there's not really anything that's going to happen to them.

MR ROCKLIFF - No student is turned away from our schools.

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - On the strength of that we will stop the broadcast and suspend for a cup of tea and be back here ready to go by 11.45 a.m. We'll have 15 minutes, then we will go to Skills, as I indicated, and then we'll see where we go after that.

The Committee suspended from 11.31 a.m. to 11.45 a.m.

CHAIR - Welcome back everyone. Minister, if you could turn your mind to Budget Paper Number 2, Volume 1. On page 92, the note says-

The decrease in Cash and deposits reflects the impacts of the Department's School Finance Project ... on schools reducing their bank balances.

Can I just have some indication if that's across the board, or are there just a number of schools that have been more frugal than others?

Mr SALTER - The School Finance Project has involved working collaboratively with schools in terms of targeting their use of resources, generally following the principle that the majority of the funding is provided for the students, in that -

CHAIR - Don't hoard it, in other words.

Mr SALTER - Yes. Or are they perhaps being overly risk averse, because like all of us, they do have to manage those funds within a year. Over a couple of years, between learning services and corporate services, working with those schools to align their resources to their school improvement plans to reduce those balances to more reasonable levels, but at the same time make sure those funds are being used for value-added purposes for their school improvement plan.

Mr ROCKLIFF - So when it comes to the project more broadly, in December 2019 the school bank account balance, compared to December 2018, on a like-by-like basis, showed a reduction in school bank balances of 15.3 per cent, or \$7.8 million, across all schools. That's from \$51.36 million to \$43.52 million.

For 2020, the school budget cycle has been changed to February-to-February, to better align the budget cycle with school operations. This means that the end of January balance will be the composition going forward with respect to that.

In terms of examples of supports and building capacity that was being progressed as part of that project - and Kane referred to some of this.

During 2020, the Business Operations Team in learning services has been providing intensive support to 97 focus schools, with higher carry-forward balances to ensure there are clear plans in place for targeted expenditure in line with school improvement priorities.

A significant positive has been the 2020 school business manager learning plan, covering topics related to facilities, finance, administration, human resource and leadership and

management. A number of online sessions have been held during 2019 and into 2020, which have been very well attended by school business manager staff.

Work has been progressing on the development of an online platform designed to provide easy access to information on all aspects of school business operations. The first platform will be launched by December this year.

Work will continue to develop or refine the resources and guidelines for schools in the areas of administration, budgeting, financial management, human resource management and facility management.

Forward work includes continuing to build on and improve in deduction processes, and aspiring school leader programs in relation to business operations management.

CHAIR - In other words, use the finances you've got, before you come cap in hand to the department?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, no. Spend money when the money is allocated to the schools -

CHAIR - Yes. Use it.

Mr ROCKLIFF - and the students at the school need to have the benefit of that funding.

Output Group 1 Education

1.2 School Support Services -

CHAIR - I'll ask the first question. In regard to learning services, we know there are three regional areas of learning services, so can we have some numbers for those areas?

Mr ROCKLIFF - In terms of the numbers of -

CHAIR - Yes, in each area.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Dollar numbers?

CHAIR - No, no, people numbers.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Right.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There's two leading service areas too, by the way. There's Learning Services North and Learning Services South.

CHAIR - Okay. There's not a north-west?

Mr ROCKLIFF - There's not a north-west.

CHAIR - Okay. That's fine. That'll be fine then, I'll have two lots of numbers.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Just get those for you, Chair.

CHAIR - It's just a statewide number. That's fine, we can take that on notice.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. So learning services statewide, full-time equivalent as of March 2020 is 72.94.

CHAIR - Right. That's split between the north and the south. Okay.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Also, minister, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I think the number of deputy secretaries has increased as well in the department. Have we always had four?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

CHAIR - We've always had four? Apologies.

Mr BULLARD - Since 2016.

CHAIR - Since your government came in.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We came in 2014.

CHAIR - But the time you got it organised.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There was a restructure.

Mr BULLARD - When Ms Gale took over, there was a restructure.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

CHAIR - All right. That's fine. Any other questions there, members? We already talked about the digital systems in that area. So we'll now move to early learning. Ms Palmer, have you got a question on early learning?

Output Group 1 Education

1.3 Early Learning -

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I understand the Working Together program is generating some excellent outcomes for a diverse range of children around Tasmania. Can you provide an update on this program? I'm particularly interested in how it provides wraparound care for families.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you, Ms Palmer, and that wraparound service and care is the key to that. There is compelling evidence that investing in early learning years sets children up for the brightest possible future. 'Working Together', which your question centres on, is focused on creating opportunities for eligible three-year-old children to participate in free quality preschool. This initiative announced in 2017 is generating really great outcomes for a diverse range of children and families in the year before kindergarten and supports successful transitions into school. The total investment in this targeted preschool initiative that offers eligible children the opportunity to access 400 hours of free early learning in the year before kindergarten at a cost of \$22.5 million over four years.

Following the successful pilot in 2019, the Department of Education is funding 19 early children education and care service partners to deliver Working Together over 2020-21. This year, Working Together is offering 120 fully-funded places and this will continue with another 120 places to be offered in 2021; that's 240 children in Tasmania who will access free quality early learning over two years. Our staged rollout of Working Together has been guided by the independent review by Clear Horizons, and the review of the pilot program in 2019 specifically recommended that the Department of Education needed to focus on 'avoiding trying to do too much too fast, keep focused, and ensure time frames are realistic'. That's page 42 of that report I'm quoting from.

Interviews this year with participating families undertaken by TasCOSS have found that despite interruptions due to the pandemic, families have had a positive experience, with an overall satisfaction rating of 4.9 out of 5. Families interviewed reported that they were extremely pleased with the way that Working Together had assisted them to prepare for the transition to kinder, and all families commented on how they valued the growth and development that they've seen in their children. Parents and carers were also appreciative of the holistic support that existed through educators, engagement workers and other service professionals, and we're seeing significant outcomes for children in their social and emotional development and learning and school readiness.

So in addition to free early learning, early childhood educators are working in partnership with families and children to access any additional support that might be needed. For example, support to access mental health services, further study, housing and food. This additional help is being achieved through a really great collaborative effort with the private sector, government and community services, and together the organisations are providing valuable assistance to families to address complex barriers that in the past may have prevented their children from participating in rich early learning experiences.

Working Together is creating successful transitions from home into an education and care setting and then with the transition to kindergarten. I've been heartened to hear how life-changing participating in Working Together can be for children and families, with one participant claiming -

I didn't have much hope for my child before, I thought he would be straight to the too-hard basket. But after this and all the help, I've got so much hope for him. I've never been so excited for his future.

So this nation-leading initiative is an important part of our plan for education, and I thank all those involved with the project that is clearly supporting families and young children.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr WILLIE - I can ask a question on Child and Family Centres here, can't I?

CHAIR - Yes, early learning.

Mr WILLIE - Yes. Minister, you've got a commitment to build six new child and family centres. I'm interested in what service mapping is happening around those sites? I've had some interactions with other services in the vicinity; there is some concern that there may be duplication of services whether that's long-day care centres or things like that. Can you dispel some of those concerns in the community hopefully through that work that's taking place?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Our Child and Family Learning Centres here - CFLCs - providing that wraparound education and support services for families with very young children, are key to setting up children for a bright future. One of the major investments pertaining to your question and the early years of a child's life includes delivering six new Child and Family Learning Centres in partnership with local communities across Tasmania.

These CFLCs will provide families with improved access to vital services and supports in their local community. The Government is fast-tracking these projects with additional capital funding of \$7 million, taking the total budget to \$28 million to ensure we deliver high-quality facilities and services that meet the specific needs of their local communities.

Community consultation has now been undertaken for each of the six child and family learning centres, and local enabling groups are meeting monthly. The East Tamar and Waratah Wynyard CFLCs will be built on the East Tamar and Table Cape primary school sites, and are currently in early design and on track to be delivered in 2022. The new Sorell Child and Family Learning Centre will begin construction in 2023 in line with our \$25.75 million major redevelopment of the Sorell school. The sites for the other three new Child and Family Learning Centres are at Glenorchy Primary School, Kingston Primary School and West Ulverstone Primary School.

Community consultation was undertaken with these communities in August and September this year, and local enabling groups for these CFLCs have been established. So the learning centres in Glenorchy, Kingborough and West Ulverstone are on track to be delivered and operational by early 2023, which is six months earlier than originally scheduled. To date, consultants have been appointed to work with Waratah-Wynyard and East Tamar, as I've said, in terms of the design, and the types of services to be provided at each centre will be determined through each local enabling group, based on the specific needs of their communities. Building on the learnings over the years from our 12 existing Child and Family Centres here, for example, is a good example of that.

Early childhood education and care subgroups have been established in each area or each leg to work with the child and family learning centres regarding education and care services. All CFLCs will be built with flexible spaces that can be utilised depending on the needs of the community. They'll be integrated, responsive place-based services and promote greater collaboration across government agencies and community-based services and will help us deliver on that vision about Tasmania's strategy for children, pregnancy to eight years, from 2018-21 titled Children Thriving in Strong Connected Communities. That is probably your question, is it? Each local enabling group has taken into consideration the projected need and

the current and expected availability of early child education and care services in the community. The East Tamar, the Waratah-Wynyard and the Sorell local enabling groups have decided that there is not a need for education and care within the CFLC footprint. However, each CFLC will have a flexible early learning space to futureproof the CFLC should needs change over time.

Mr WILLIE - What were those three, sorry? Can you repeat that?

Mr DEAN - East Tamar, my one.

Mr ROCKLIFF - East Tamar, Waratah-Wynyard and Sorell.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Just a couple more questions?

CHAIR - Yes. Well, I made a commitment around 12, so if we can make them brief. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, is it government policy to build the new ones on school sites? I'm aware under the former government there were local enabling groups set up in a similar way, but they decided where the sites were.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Tim, please.

Mr BULLARD - Yes, it is the Government's policy to build them on school sites. There's a strong alignment between the communities that were identified through this work done around the location of the Child and Family Learning Centres, and previous work that was done with the original CFCs. If you look at what was originally proposed in, I think that time, the announcement and the work that was underway, you can map back against the location of the CFLCs.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, I'm interested in this question because part of the theory around that was that the community would have ownership of it, that it would breakdown some of those barriers around government institutions. I'm not saying it is a problem. I'm just interested in whether the department's had a look at it, whether locating them on school sites does put some of those things in place for some families that may have had a bad experience of the school system.

Mr ROCKLIFF - So we're bringing our community with us on this because if we look at what each local enabling group comprises, it's a mix of local parents, carers, families, services, local council, local education and care providers, committee members and other interest groups. And the purpose of the LEGs, as we call them, is to have input into the setup and implementation of the CFLC, and to ensure local views and ideas are an integral part of the design phase.

Mr BULLARD - I think too, Mr Willie, that there's been a shift. As you know, I was involved in the original Child and Family Centres. We had to go and sell a concept - people were like, 'Well, what is that?' It was really important that community were brought along in helping to design the service, delivery and the location so that they didn't see it as 'school', and

communities now understand they can go and visit one. Local enabling groups can go and see what one is, or they understand that one is because they've had interaction with it. There's a slight shift in how they're perceived. They don't need to make the case that they're not 'school'.

Mr WILLIE - Just a comment, I understand you want -

CHAIR - We only have questions.

Mr WILLIE - I understand you want to have some ownership of it, but I'm pleased you dropped the Early Learning Hubs name because I think that would have been confusing for many people involved.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, and that as through consultation with our Child and Family Centres in actual fact, and I think that's a good thing.

Mr DEAN - Just one quick question -

CHAIR - Comments noted. The member for Windermere, just a quick one.

Mr DEAN - In relation to the East Tamar centre, the position as I understand it, minister, is to build it as a part of the East Tamar school or on that same site. Was the Northern Suburbs Community Centre site looked at for this development? To me it seems like a better fit for it, particularly in as much as the education side is not needed, and you made comment on that, the early learning part of that. So, was it? It seems to me there's a suitable area there for it. It's a large area. Was it considered?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Mr Bullard?

Mr BULLARD - The services of both have been looked at, Mr Dean, and there will be a delineation between the service provision of the Northern Hub and the Child and Family Learning Centre on the East Tamar site. One observation I would make around East Tamar Primary School is that its level of community engagement is enormous.

Mr DEAN - Yes, it's great. It's a great school.

Mr BULLARD - Providing that early start on that site makes sense in terms of helping early learners transition well into school, and also being able to provide a high level of support to children in the early years.

Mr DEAN - It's a great school. Doing well.

CHAIR - Being five minutes past my commitment time, I will now pop to 1.3, Skills and Workforce Development. Take your chair with you, Tim, if you're leaving, but please don't leave us permanently because we will be going back to where we finished - where we paused at. So, whoever needs to come forward, please come forward. As I said, rather than have to clean your chair, take it with you if you're just going to be here for not so long.

DIVISION 11

(Department of State Growth)

Output group 1

Industry, skills development and business growth

1.3 Skills and workforce development -

Mr ROCKLIFF - I've a very short opening statement, as I know you like.

CHAIR - Thank you. We'd appreciate short. Thank you, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - At the table we have Bob Rutherford, Deputy Secretary of Industry and Business Development, and Angela Conway, General Manager of Workforce Development and Training.

Skills and training makes a significant contribution to Tasmania's economy, and in 2019 we supported more than 25 000 Tasmanians across 6.2 million hours of training. I'm very pleased to note that prior to the pandemic, our VET system was outperforming the Australian average across most key apprentice and training indicators.

In March this year, we saw a small increase of 0.4 per cent in apprentice commencements across the previous 12 months. Nationally, apprentice commencements declined by 7.7 per cent, so across the same period, March 2019-20, Tasmania's non-trade commencements increased by 8.5 per cent nationally, that figure dropped by 6.5 per cent.

Tasmania still has the highest completion rates in the country. This means apprentices and trainees are more likely to complete their training in Tasmania than anywhere else in the country. And whilst this is recognised, the national training system has seen significant declines across many years. Our VET system is one of the strongest in the nation. That strong foundation has helped us through COVID-19, with data starting to return to pre-pandemic levels. For example, the number of training contracts commenced in September 2020 was 363, which is 23 more than 2019. Of the 342 apprentice and trainee contracts suspended across March to June 2020, 203 were back in training, 30 have been completed, 43 are still suspended, and 66 have been cancelled. More generally across the whole of 2020, our cancellations are on par with 2019.

We've still got some way to go, but it does highlight our COVID-19 skills initiatives have softened the declines. Those initiatives include \$21 million for JobTrainer, which will deliver free training places specifically for youth and the unemployed; \$11 million for extension of the payroll tax rebates; \$11 million for extension of the small business grants program; and we also extend our Rapid Response Skills Initiative for the further \$6.3 million to help unemployed workers retrain and match them to jobs.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister, a really important area. Can you give me some indication of the support provided to RTOs? Does Skills Tasmania have these really important relationships with RTOs to deliver the right training for those who want to head into a specific area? I'm interested in the support services to RTOs under this output group?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Certainly. Ang, do you have -?

Ms CONWAY - Thank you. We have quite a stable training system. We're quite lucky in Tasmania. Our public provider plays a very important role, but we also have an average of around 100 private RTOs that support the market in Tasmania. That number varies a little bit, but not that much. We run a number of programs.

To be eligible to access Tasmanian Government vocational education and training subsidies, you need to be endorsed by Skills Tasmania and that's a little - I suppose a check and balance that we put in, an extra check, on top of being registered with ASQA, which is the national regulator for quality in the VET system. We also make sure that RTOs have a real connection with the Tasmanian workforce and Tasmanian employers. They have to demonstrate they've got that commitment before they can be endorsed by us to then access our training subsidy programs. We have a number of programs every year that we provide to the market and RTOs apply for places under those programs.

We also provide guidance to RTOs through our ministerial priority statement for the Vocational Education and Training System which guides RTOs as to which areas are a priority for the Tasmanian economy. Through our funding programs, we will actually prioritise allocation of subsidies to those areas because it's really important that we use our investment to support economic growth. Specifically, through the pandemic period, a lot of our registered training organisations, often always small businesses as well, so we were quite concerned to make sure that they were able to continue to operate.

Through the pandemic, we found they were a very resilient group and they adapted their training delivery. We provided additional funding support through a once-off ex gratia payment to RTOs to help them with any additional costs they'd incurred over the pandemic period by perhaps moving their training to more online delivery. We allocated a budget of \$800 000 to support RTOs and we've expended just under half a million of that to date.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Some of those priorities are advanced manufacturing, aged and disability services, agriculture, aquaculture, building and construction, information and communications technology and tourism and hospitality and transport and logistics. So it covers a broad field.

CHAIR - A lot of those areas would need face-to-face training, wouldn't they? You would not necessarily be able to do it online, so that would have posed an issue through COVID. Am I correct in that assumption?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, in terms of practical completion and TasTAFE has been up for some discussion this afternoon as well. Managing and navigating through some of the practical aspects of vocational education and training were challenging, albeit TasTAFE and other RTOs, I'm sure, have done their best through that difficult time.

CHAIR - It was indicated there was around 100 RTOs and only \$500 000 has been subscribed at this point in time. Does that mean a lot of them didn't even bother applying? That's interesting, isn't it? Money there, and they don't want it.

Ms CONWAY - We made it available at least, so -

CHAIR - Yes. So you can't do any more than offer, so I'm quite surprised about that. Minister, I will take you to the Table 11.3 on page 313 of Budget Paper No. 2. I note that the

target for 2021 compared to the actual of 2019 in regard to apprentice/trainee in training. Does the actual and then the target - you're not expecting or targeting higher numbers for the 2021 area? I'm just interested in why there isn't even an aspirational increase?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, well, of course, Ang, do you want to -

Ms CONWAY - We have a number of performance measures. We've the commencements - you're referring to in training, Ms Rattray?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms CONWAY - So I think the 2019-20 target in training, I think we're actually performing better than that at the moment. From memory at the moment, we have, I think, about 9100 or just over in training at the moment. That number varies a little from year to year. It's a point in time measure. It's one we feel confident we will reach - 8400. In fact, I think we are above that now, but it can vary quite a lot just around the different points in time, because at any one time, you could have an apprentice in the system at any different stage of their learning. Year 1, year 4. Yes.

CHAIR - All right. Minister, we heard yesterday about the Marinus Link project and upskilling, and \$17 million is being allocated for that. The minister advised me to ask a question to you today.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Around school, that's the Energising Tasmania project. Yes.

CHAIR - Yes. I'm interested in when - given that the project is still in its infancy - I think is probably the right word - when do you expect to be starting the take-up? Because some of that area of upskilling will be quite specialised, I expect.

Mr ROCKLIFF - In December last year, our Government signed a project agreement with the Australian Government for our \$16.1 million Energising Tasmania initiative. The project agreement for Energising Tasmania will facilitate funding for training and workforce development activities to support the energy and related industries. Now, specifically, the project agreement supports an industry advisory group dedicated to building the skills needed to support the Battery of the Nation initiative. More broadly, the renewable energy and related sectors training fund to deliver up to 2500 fully subsidised training places in areas of identified skills need and provide up to \$1000 per learner to assist with a non-tuition fee costs, such as training materials and a training market development fund to support capacity building of training providers as well as developing courses and delivery methods that meet the needs of industry.

A new workforce development fund to deliver an industry-led workforce development plan to inform and drive priority training and undertake activities identified in the plan that support necessary workforce development. An industry advisory committee known as the Tasmanian Energy and Infrastructure Workforce Advisory committee is chaired by Mr Ray Mostogl. That's been established and -

CHAIR - We heard that yesterday.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You heard that yesterday from Mr Barnett. The Energising Tasmania Training Fund grants program was launched on 7 March 2020 and allocated funding of \$1.45 million available to fund free accredited training for existing employees. The Energy and Infrastructure Training Market Development Fund was launched on 16 October 2020 with \$850 000 available for registered training organisations to increase training capacity, and the Energy and Infrastructure Workforce Development Fund was also launched on 16 October 2020 with \$434 000 available for the project to improve pathways into the career development opportunities for the energy and infrastructure workforce, which I launched in Devonport, from memory.

CHAIR - So it appears to me, minister, and I hope you'll agree, that there's a lot of potential for upskilling and specific skills in the area of energy in this state?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. We've addressed Marinus and all the projects around Battery of the Nation, there'll need to be a lot of work thought through in workforce development capability. We've got a lot of opportunity for new skills and new people, and it's a wonderful opportunity.

CHAIR - Is that message of that opportunity being sold to schools at this point? Is there someone like Bob Rutherford heading around the school saying 'Look, there's some exciting opportunities in the future, have a think about what's available?'. You've got to sell it early.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, yes, and we touched very briefly on in our other areas of education. This year I mentioned My Education, which is a kindergarten to grade 12 initiative. Engagement with industry is a very important part of our career development in -

CHAIR - A new role for Mr Rutherford.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, he's got plenty to do - but engaging all industry sectors with our schools, where appropriate, is important.

CHAIR - Minister, help me out here. Under this output group we've got a COVID Rapid Response Skills Initiative targeting small business. Are Mr Rutherford and Angela the people to stay for these areas?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Let's get those underway.

Output Group 90 COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.2 Rapid Response Skills Initiative -

CHAIR - Mr Dean, you had a question in regard to the rapid response.

Mr DEAN - I have two questions in relation to 90.2. Minister, if we could be updated on the state of the training system, pre- and post-COVID-19. I think you've touched on it already, but I'd appreciate some detail around that, thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure. Employers have obviously had to make difficult decisions on their livelihoods and staffing and how they manage apprentices and trainees as a result of COVID-19.

Tasmania's pre-COVID training system was performing very well, and the foundation will support us as we work through recovery. Our Vocational Education and Training - VET - system was for some time outperforming the Australian average across most key apprentice and trainee indicators, and I've mentioned some of those figures already today.

Our plan for VET was working, and will continue to support the positive green shoots of recovery we're experiencing. I'm pleased to note the most recent training data release continues to show Tasmania has the highest completion rates in the country. This means that apprentices and trainees are more likely to complete their training in Tasmania, as I've said before, than anywhere else in the country.

Our other data has also returned to pre-COVID levels. For example, the number of training contracts commenced in September 2020 was 363, which is 23 more than in 2019.

While there was an unsurprising increase in training contract suspension from March to June 2020, the bounce back has been healthy. As of 12 November, of those 342 suspensions of training, 203 are back in training, 30 have been completed, 43 are still suspended and 66 cancelled.

We've got some way to go, of course, but it does highlight that the COVID schools initiatives have softened declines. During the peak of the pandemic, Skills Tasmania ensured apprentices and trainees on suspension continued training with the RTO, and were ready to return to work when restrictions were lifted. Skills Tasmania also provided flexible funding arrangements for training providers, and additional support for innovative delivery methods.

Nationally, the increased incentives for those employing apprentices and trainees provided significant support for businesses.

Another sign of resilience in our training system is that the apprentice and trainee cancellations in 2020 are similar to previous years, and that's encouraging.

The impact of COVID-19, as we appreciate, will be felt for many years in the training system, as was the case with the global financial crisis, but here in Tasmania we have greatly reduced that exposure, and we're doing all we can to protect students and ensure that we can recover as soon as possible.

Mr DEAN - That's a good result. My next question does cross over on TasTAFE, but it fits under this matter as well. I'd like an update on how TasTAFE is helping to meet the demand for training in Tasmania's vital agriculture sector. Yesterday we were given quite a bit on the agricultural sector and its value to this state, so I'm not sure if this should be answered here or in TasTAFE.

CHAIR - We can hold it over if we need to.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We've got investment, clearly, in TasTAFE. We've got a \$5 million investment in our Centre of Excellence, and TasTAFE as we redevelop the Freer Farm site in

Burnie. It's relevant to this area as well, because in terms of workforce development it's important that we have the right training to grow the sector.

Skills Tasmania and TasTAFE have been proactive in this space. There are several key initiatives to boost training as part of Tasmania's COVID-19 recovery plan. A public training provider has recently developed a training program to help build Tasmania's fruit-growing, vegetable, livestock and dairy workforces - the Agriskills Entry Program. This is an exciting initiative developed in conjunction with Fruit Growers Tasmania, and consists of short, sharp skill sets.

The program enables new and existing workers to get job-ready skills required by industry. It includes three groups of skill sets, with the price for each skill set considerably discounted to be attractive to allow new entrants into the industry.

Skill sets cover entry-level units such as first aid, manual handling, operating quad bikes, operating and maintaining chainsaws. There's a follow-up by skill set in forklift tractor operation, transportation and storage of chemicals, and how to apply and prepare chemicals to control our pests and weeds and diseases, for example.

The first skill sets began on 1 September this year; 63 people took up that opportunity. I'm advised that the second round of enrolments was also pretty heavily subscribed, as I understand, and it appears to be on track to support 120 Tasmanians by the end of July next year. That's really good.

I commend Fruit Growers Tasmania, working with Skills Tasmania and others to support that - our TasTAFE public training provider, our agricultural training centre of excellence.

That's ensuring we've got the right training for both new and existing workers to support that growth in the sector that'll provide for equipment upgrades, increasing training product development, design, incorporate regional delivery models in conjunction with stakeholders in the industry.

There's been a steering committee set-up to that, so we get that expertise on the ground, if you like. They're working hard and made some key decisions around those areas. The key focus of course will be areas of irrigation, livestock management, contemporary learning facilities, biosecurity, effluent management infrastructure and the like.

Various UTAS representatives are involved with developments for both centres of excellence - Agriculture and Energy, and Trades and Water. That's all exciting as well.

So, there's a bit happening in that space across Skills Tasmania, and our public training provider TasTAFE.

Mr DEAN - Can I ask a question that the Chair did ask a while ago? The agricultural sector is a vital part of Tasmania, and I think it's going to be like \$10 billion -

CHAIR - In 2050.

Mr DEAN - In 2050.

CHAIR - I think it's somewhat aspirational, but I'm happy to go with it.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We're on track, well and truly. Absolutely.

Mr DEAN - Yes. So, is this being sold to our students going through the high school stages?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes.

Mr DEAN - The fact that there is a big demand in this area, and they're just about assured of employment if they became skilled in some of these areas?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure. In fact, part of our \$15 million investment in revitalising our school farms is part of this, and we're investing in our school farms across the state. There are large investments in Sheffield School Farm, for example. We're about to embark on the Brighton school farm redevelopment as well.

So, a lot of connections, particularly in the year 11 and 12 space. I was at Sorell the other day and met a number of students participating in animal studies, I believe - I stand to be corrected - as part of their program there.

And, of course, we have the Wool Harvesting Training Program, delivered by Primary Employers Tasmania. There's \$400 000 to increase the number of shearers and wool handlers in Tasmania, and develop skills via continued professional development.

Next-generation foresters, with the Arbore Forestry Hub - there's \$37 500 to develop a VET program for forestry career pathways.

You talk about agriculture, and I guess I'll raise this in our TasTAFE time as well, but -

CHAIR - We mightn't need TasTAFE the way we're going.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Right. Last Friday I attended the national training awards - albeit the virtual training awards - there was an hour-and-a-half virtual training award. We normally have our training awards - last year was in Brisbane and a lot of people go - but this year is different because of COVID-19. But it was great to be with all our finalists for those national awards. The last award of the night - sometimes seen as the most significant, perhaps - is the apprentice of the year, and that was won by Caitlin Radford who lives not far from me, as the crow flies, in Moriarty, and Caitlin won apprentice of the year in her agriculture field of endeavour, which is fantastic, and great for TasTAFE being our public training provider.

CHAIR - Okay. Thank you. Mr Dean, have you anything?

Mr DEAN - I had one under 90.4, but -

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr DEAN - - do you want me to ask that now?

Output Group 90
COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.4 Targeted Small Business Grants Program for Apprentices and Trainees

Mr DEAN - I welcome and encourage small businesses to take on apprentices. What is being done to encourage young people to consider vocational education and training as a career pathway? I think you made a media release in relation to this, minister, at one stage.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I often talk about our need to promote vocational education and training more, and promote the trades, and we've got \$15 billion-worth of public and private expenditure on our 10-year forward plan when it comes to our infrastructure pipeline, so we're going to need more tradies and we're going to need to support our vocational education and training system. We're always promoting it where we can, but we need targeted and good quality campaigns, particularly around vocational education and training.

In June last year, work on the VET promotion project commenced, having been identified as a key priority under then Ministerial Priorities for Training and Workforce Development Plan, and we know that vocational education training graduates have, on average, more job opportunities and higher starting salaries than their university counterparts. With 500 different VET training qualifications and shorter programs on offer through 100 training organisations who deliver government-funded training in Tasmania, VET offers high-level flexibility and teaches real-life skills.

Whether it is traditional trades, disability, aged and child care sectors, high tech industries or roles that are in high demand for skilled staff, VET covers a huge diversity of jobs and careers. It is great to be able to support and promote vocational education and training. In fact, today I'll be launching the VET media campaign called The Right Track, which is a strong focus of this two-year campaign. The focus is to raise the profile and overall perception of VET in Tasmania, assist learners to make well-informed choices for their future and to ensure VET is no longer seen as that poor cousin to a so-called traditional university education. All are great. All pathways are great, but we need to promote VET whenever we can.

Critical to the campaign is a focus on the rich diversity of course and career options within VET, including a range of industries, jobs, roles available through VET, and the flexibility of learning through both TasTAFE and the private RTOs, training providers. The campaign speaks to all Tasmanians; it targets key audiences statewide, including young learners who are encouraged to explore VET during the post-school adults in various work stages, including those adversely affected by the impacts of COVID-19, employers and industry who are critical to the successful growth of our workforce, and to parents and teachers who play an important role as influencers of young people.

The campaign launches today. It's intended to grow and evolve over time. The campaign will appear in various media spots, including statewide newspapers, radio, online and social media and select TV sponsorship spots as well, which is great. So keep an eye on it as it grows and reaches more parts of Tasmania. I welcome your support to share and promote this tremendous initiative. The website goes live today: vet.tas.gov.au. I commend that to you.

Output Group 90
COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.25 Priority Industry Skills Funding - More Teachers at TasTAFE

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Willie, 90.25, Priority industry skills funding.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, chair. Last year's Budget identified \$2.9 million to address current and predicted workforce shortages and deliver a pipeline of skilled workers: 950 in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to fund roles in building and construction and allied trades and \$1 million for nursing.

How many staff are employed under this initiative and how does it differ from this year's \$2 million over two years for staffing? Is it a re-announcement?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. So, I'm happy to answer that. That is definitely a TasTAFE output, chair.

CHAIR - It's not necessarily that easy to follow these output groups.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, we might see if we can make that easier next time, make a note for that.

CHAIR - We'll make a note of that for next year.

Mr ROCKLIFF - But I can answer the question when we have our TasTAFE people here and -

CHAIR - Okay. Will you hold that one?

Mr WILLIE - Sure, yes.

Output Group 90
COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.26 Expansion of the Apprentices and Trainees Small Business Grant

CHAIR - Well, what about the expansion of apprentices and trainees small business grant? Same thing?

Mr ROCKLIFF - No, that's Skills.

CHAIR - See, it's all over the shop, if you don't mind. Are there any questions in regard to that?

I have a question in how is that program being made aware of in the community? I recently had someone come to my office wanting to put on an apprentice, and the runaround was almost more than he could possibly manage, and he said he was going to pursue it, but if it's that difficult - how's it being sold to those potential employers?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The pilot small business grant to support apprentices and trainees was fully subscribed and supported over 1600 Tasmanians into new apprenticeships and traineeships for small businesses. This program ended in May 2018 and the final payments were made during 2019.

Following the success of the program, we introduced the targeted apprentice and trainee grant for small business, which provides a grant up to \$5000 for each new full-time apprentice or trainee, and \$2500 per new part-time apprentice or trainee employed from 23 May 2018. The program complements the Payroll Tax Rebate Apprentices and Trainees and Youth Employee Scheme administered by the state revenue office which is aimed at larger employers in the targeted industries.

In March 2020 the Targeted Apprentice and Trainee Grant for small business was allocated an additional \$2.1 million as part of the Tasmanian Support and Stimulus Package to ensure the program could continue through the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery period. This includes apprentices and trainees employed via a group training organisation, by a small business in one of the identified industries.

Following the success of these grants to employers and the expansion of the payroll tax rebate to all industries, it has been decided to also expand the Targeted Apprentice and Trainee Grant for small business to all industries from 1 January 2021, and this will see a further \$5.4 million provided in 2021-22 and 2022-23 to support small businesses employing a new apprentice and/or trainee. I'm hearing, though, from you, Chair, that there's been some difficulty navigating matters there?

CHAIR - That's right. Do small businesses directly contact Skills Tasmania?

Ms CONWAY - Yes, they can, but also the apprenticeship network providers system that is administered and managed by the Australian Government - we give them information as well, so when someone approaches them about whether they're going to put on an apprentice or trainee, they'll be told all the various subsidies and supports that might be available, because there's a lot from the Australian Government at the moment as well, in that space. They would be made aware of our grant as well, at the state level, and the payroll tax rebate if they're a large business.

So, it might depend on what sector that person is operating in because right now, it's only a targeted program limited to three sectors, but from 1 January, it will expand to all industries.

CHAIR - Well, this was in cabinet-making.

Ms CONWAY - They should be covered.

CHAIR - Well, it sounds like you contact Skills Tasmania and then they step you where you need to go as a -

Mr ROCKLIFF - If you have any concerns, please bring them forward at a constituent level. Either write to me and/or however you'd like to do it, but we'll follow those up immediately if someone's finding it hard to navigate the system.

CHAIR - We certainly will, but its good news that from 1 January, it'll be open to all sectors. I wasn't aware that it was limited to only three, so that in itself may well have been an issue, but I'll follow it up.

Minister, we have exhausted that area and so we hope that's facilitated because we now go into TAFE and that's not until later so we'll need to go back to Education. Because we follow a specific -

Ms PALMER - Could I just check on 90.27, please? I do have a question for the minister.

CHAIR - Does that come under here or does that come under TasTAFE?

Ms PALMER - Funding of Key VET. I'll be guided by you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's probably here.

CHAIR - It's here? Okay. Thank you.

Output Group 90

COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.27 Funding of Key VET Courses (JobTrainer) -

Ms PALMER - Minister, can you update the committee on efforts to ensure Tasmanians of all ages have access to learning?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Good question. We've talked about how critical it is to invest in this area, and training will play an increasingly important role into the future. We've discussed all that today and we all agree with that. This year's Budget includes a wide range of targeted and evidence-based skills measures which reflect what industry need. We're overseeing \$43 million to support more trainees and more apprentices and more opportunities for youth and the unemployed; \$22 million will drive job creation for apprentices and trainees by extending the current payroll tax rebate for all youth employees for a further 18 months; extending the current payroll tax rebate for apprentices and trainees for a further 12 months; and extending rebates to all industry sectors.

A targeted apprentice and trainee grant for small business has also been extended to include any small business with employees and apprentice or trainee until 30 June 2022. Combined, these programs are expected to support a further 4000 new full-time jobs for apprentices and trainees of any age. Our \$6 million for the rapid response skills initiative enables any eligible job seekers to immediately access up to \$3000 towards the cost of training and up to \$500 for employment advice and. Of critical importance is our job training program, with matched funding from the Commonwealth, which will deliver \$21 million of free training to youth and the unemployed right across Tasmania.

The program is currently being finalised and places will shortly be announced; however, it does not restrict training options to just TAFE. We want as many opportunities as possible for our youth and unemployed, even more so when we are recovering from one of the biggest

social and economic challenges we've ever faced. These initiatives are open to all Tasmanians of any age, and have strong industry endorsement including the Master Plumbers of Tasmania, Hansen Yuncken, Housing Industry Association, Master Builders Association, the Tasmanian Minerals Manufacturing Energy Council and Fruitgrowers Tasmania. So we're working hard to get Tasmania back on its feet and I'm proud of the opportunities and the skills opportunities we're offering to all members of our community, and great collaboration also between state and federal governments, because that \$21 million initiative is significant and it's a 50:50 contribution between the state and the federal government.

CHAIR - Just before we let Mr Rutherford go, I see he's writing, was there something that you needed to share with the committee, just in regard to this very important area?

Mr RUTHERFORD - No, not really.

CHAIR - No? Okay. Thank you very much and we certainly, you know, do our best to facilitate the minister's advisors at all times. So, thank you.

Mr RUTHERFORD - Yes. Good. Thank you.

CHAIR - We wish you the best for the next part of your day. Thank you, minister. We're going to head back to 1.4, Statutory Offices.

DIVISION 3

(Department of Education)

Output Group 1

Education

1.4 Statutory Offices -

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. A couple of questions there. I think the number of students undertaking homeschooling is covered by this area. They keep an oversight on that. Can we have that number and the previous year for comparison, if that's possible.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. We can do that. Katharine O'Donnell, our Education Registrar, is of course -

CHAIR - Somewhere else.

Mr WILLIE - A supplementary question while she's coming to you on that topic is whether the minister's got any information how COVID-19 has affected homeschooling, whether we've seen an increase or a decrease?

CHAIR - Yes, yes. Welcome back, Katharine.

Ms O'DONNELL - I've just got the tail end of homeschooling.

CHAIR - Yes. So, under Statutory Offices, the question's just been asked - in addition to what numbers we have for this current year and the previous year for comparison - about the impact of COVID-19, minister, which is a very relevant question.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is. Katharine, would you like to detail some numbers around homeschooling?

CHAIR - Possibly not much change for those who were homeschooling.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, that's the thing, I guess, but -

CHAIR - They do have gatherings of homeschool people in various communities, don't they? They get together as a homeschool community, and they wouldn't have been able to do that.

Mr ROCKLIFF - No, they wouldn't have been able to.

Ms O'DONNELL - That's right. We saw a jump as - a small jump - from March to September this year. We received 218 new applications in that period for home education. We have 1200 students registered in Tasmania. So on 31 March this year, we had 1123. In October, we had 1210. To give you a comparison, on 31 March last year, we had 1094.

CHAIR - A slight increase.

Ms O'DONNELL - A slight increase in March, and then another jump through - up until October. And the increase happens in two parts, one when the virus really first hit around March, and then again once schools returned at the end of term 2, beginning of term 3. There was a little bit of a jump then and that seems to have now slowed down and evened out over the year.

CHAIR - Some parents felt that they were capable of overseeing their child's education, and decided to continue them on with the home education.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes. I think the biggest difference was that when they were conducting school at home, the resources were provided by the school, and they were essentially supervising their children. We did quite a bit of work in explaining to parents that home education is very different and they're entirely responsible for the creation and delivery of the program themselves. We had a number of inquiries that did not continue through to an application because the parent expected to continue to receive the papers and things themselves, so it was really those parents who were keen to take it on themselves who continued.

CHAIR - So effectively the parents thought that the school would just be delivering it each week, and they'd just oversee it and it would be a lot -

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes.

CHAIR - It would be a lot less pressure on the family unit.

Ms O'DONNELL - Anecdotally, we heard that there were people who'd always wanted to consider home education, but hadn't - there were parents who were now no longer working and thought this was the ideal opportunity to give it ago.

CHAIR - Okay. It would be interesting to see what happens in 2021. Mr Willie, was there anything else that you wanted to follow up given that you and I shared that question?

Mr WILLIE - Not on the Office of Education Register, but maybe TASC if we can ask questions about TASC.

CHAIR - Yes. I was going to go there as well, so I'll ask my question, and yours might be different. Last year was the launch of TASC's reporting assessment certificate system of TRACS, as it was known, and it talked about TASC currently being the only Australian jurisdiction rolling out a completely new system for managing senior and secondary assessment and certification. It went on to say TRACS is the best practice system. Is that fully operational now? It said rolling out, so back in 2019. Is it completed?

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's been in operation for more than a year now, and I'm advised it's running smoothly. It's a modern student information system used by TASC to manage student assessment and certification data, and support the reporting of Tasmanian senior secondary results. It is built with best practice technology and ensures the office can continue to provide qualifications and support Tasmanian senior secondary students into the future.

TRACS successfully delivered end-of-year assessment results and certification for the first time in 2019. In 2020, TASC used TRACS to manage school registration for the first time, and to cut over from one calendar year to another at the end of March, and these processes ran smoothly. Further enhancements have been developed to enable TASC to be responsive to anticipated changes in work requirements as a result of COVID-19. If we're going to talk a little bit about TASC, I can bring back Jenny Burgess to the table.

CHAIR - Who is holding her chair. Well done, Jenny.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Our executive officer of TASC is engaged a lot in exams and all those sorts of things at this present time.

CHAIR - We had a bit of a failure the year before when some test results had to be reissued. We certainly haven't had any of those malfunctions since.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You're talking about the Asian Studies area, is that -

CHAIR - There was a malfunction in the area of issuing -

Mr WILLIE - There was last year, that was VET results.

CHAIR - That's it. Yes, we haven't had any of -

Mr WILLIE - And TCE.

CHAIR - Although the results wouldn't have necessarily been issued yet, would they?

Mr WILLIE - Not for this year, no.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is 17 December.

CHAIR - So we won't know -

Mr ROCKLIFF - So exams have been completed. Marking is underway now, and -

CHAIR - We hope it's all going smoothly. Mr Willie, another one in that area?

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. There were issues last year with the VET results, and it's my understanding it was the TTA website overriding the VET results. I'm assuming that's been resolved for this year.

Ms BURGESS - Minister, I can answer that as chair of the ministerial advisory committee that's been overseeing the VET process and how the VET resulting was handled last year. That is correct, it was an override issue of the direct feed from the national data system, and TASC and the department have been working through a process to ensure that feed will not now impact this year's results for students.

Mr WILLIE - The other issue that came up last year was the uploading of portfolios in some subjects for ATAR results and receipts not being issued to teachers. Nobody was made aware of that issue until the results came out and a number of students were impacted by that. I was contacted by a parent and a student at that time, and through some follow-up questions in the Legislative Council; I think about 55 ATARs were reissued.

Ms BURGESS - I can answer again as part of the ministerial advisory committee. This year there will be additional checks and balances in place before those results go out. The time frame that's been developed allows for greater opportunities for those checks and balances to make sure that all evidence, information and data has been compiled and is accurate before those results are released.

Mr WILLIE - Let's hope this year there aren't any problems like the previous years. The parents and students that I spoke to were distraught at the time.

CHAIR - Well, your future often depends on that result.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Everyone's working very hard, as they always do.

CHAIR - Follow-up questions, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - No.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr WILLIE - I think that's covered it.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - I've been given some assurances.

CHAIR - Any other questions in this area? If not, I'd like to move to 2.1, Information services and community learning.

Output Group 2
Libraries Tasmania

2.2 Information Services and Community Learning -

CHAIR - Ms Armitage, thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair. Looking at 2.1, I note the performance measures in Table 3.4 indicate that a very high percentage of people are satisfied with Libraries Tasmania. It's being called Libraries Tasmania now and not LINC. So for the few who aren't, what's the general nature of the most common reasons for dissatisfaction?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you, great question.

Ms ARMITAGE - Sorry, minister, through you. Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I welcome Liz Jack to the table.

CHAIR - Are you asking Ms Jack to answer that question on your behalf, minister?

Mr ROCKLIFF - What was the reason for the dissatisfaction?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes. There aren't that many. It's got a very high level of satisfaction, which is very good.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, a very high level.

CHAIR - Do you think that's to do with the name change, minister?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I don't reckon because that was 110 per cent supported. Liz, can you answer that?

Ms JACK - I'd have to take that on notice for the specific responses. It's pretty ad hoc, and it's usually something very small.

Ms ARMITAGE - Like they can't find the book they want?

Ms JACK - There's no consistent level of dissatisfaction. We do actually have another measure in there for - it's about people being able to easily find what they want because we didn't think that something like the number of people accessing material was as valid or as valuable as being able to find what they were looking for. It's easy to find a book on a shelf, but it might not be the specific book you're looking for, so we went to that measure. Again, that's relatively high. We set the targets ourselves and yes, we'd like 100 per cent of people to be happy, but we always know that we're never going to please everyone.

For instance, one comment that did come in was that in one of the smaller libraries, someone thought it was too noisy, whereas everybody else was really happy we were running Rock and Rhyme and Storytime. But it's not a consistent complaint all the time; it's just that different people have different needs.

Ms ARMITAGE - Has COVID-19 had an effect on the number of people seeking assistance with community learning and adult learning programs, such as the digital literacy programs, or engagement with 26Ten Did the demand increase, or did it decrease?

Ms JACK - We did find there was an increase demand in some cases. One of the interesting facts when COVID-19 hit was that we had a number of people contact us, and I believe also the minister's office, saying they thought we should be open for people who didn't have access to the internet. It wasn't the people themselves who didn't have the access; it was others who felt that was important.

When we did open after COVID-19, what dropped the were people wanting to come in and use our PCs. Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, we shut down every second computer on our computer banks. Where they would normally be full of people using them, they weren't even being half-filled, and it was half the number.

So that demand decreased, but what we did find was that we set up a new statewide phone service for people who didn't have access to the library, had questions about how to get their books back, or might've wanted some help with a computer at home that didn't work, the phone service -

Ms ARMITAGE - And that was subscribed well?

Ms JACK - That was subscribed to very well, and we are looking at ways to keep that going, because it's so much easier to have one number that you can call, whether you're in Bridport, Smithton or Geeveston, and know that you'll get someone that can answer your query - whether it be about a family history-related matter, or I can't get back to return my book, what do I do?

Ms ARMITAGE - Minister, I use the online myself, now that my car doesn't have a CD player. I now have to download books from the library, whereas I used to borrow the audio books -

Mr ROCKLIFF - So, eBooks.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes. So, when I went on, I was instructed to get the app BorrowBox - in the past I think I've had OverDrive. Obviously, there's a cost to the library for BorrowBox and OverDrive? What's the situation with those? Do you use several different platforms? The cost for those platforms? Is it a tender, or how does it work?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Just an overarching thing before we get to some detail on that. With respect to COVID-19, our physical spaces closed to the public on Wednesday 25 March 2020.

However, Libraries Tasmania continued to deliver its full range of online services, and continued a full range of digital services, purchasing around 8000 eBooks and eAudiobooks to meet the expected increase demand for e-resources, using social and traditional media and video conferencing platforms to reach and engage clients, with a range of virtual events and programs being delivered.

These included story time and adult literacy support, introducing a new statewide telephone service, and expanding an online chat service.

Partnering with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the University of Tasmania to deliver The COVID-19 Stories Project, collecting stories of the pandemic for future generations, which will be of great interest.

The Library statewide progressively reopened with a click-and-collect lending service from 18 May 2020, with all libraries and archives reopening to offer modified services from 18 June 2020.

I want to commend the Library Tasmania team for that continued engagement with our public. Having visited the library on Tuesday afternoon - not that I borrowed a book, but we launched our adult literacy -

CHAIR - I'm impressed you have time to read anything other than Budget Papers and Budget briefs, but well done.

Ms ARMITAGE - Well I can recommend the eBooks, particularly when you're driving.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There you go. But in terms of the cost of platforms?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, I just wondered about the app. They have to obviously make their money in some way.

Ms JACK - We have a budget for the purchase of what we call contemporary library resources, as well as our standard books et cetera. We spend approximately \$2.8 million every year on those resources. The choices are made in our collection development area, by librarians and qualified people who know what is the most relevant and contemporary. We also listen to what our clients tell us and what members are saying.

Within that \$2.8 million at the moment, we've been allocated by the state Government \$750 000 a year for four years to purchase these contemporary library resources. So that might include eBooks, the Libby app, OverDrive, BorrowBox.

E-learning has become very popular, whether you want to learn a language or you want to go to Haynes online to understand how to fix your car. There are lots of those manuals online. That's all part of those contemporary library resources.

As well as something as simple as putting in after-hour return chutes to our libraries, which were extremely welcomed over the COVID-19 period, when people - even though they were not being fined any more - were so keen to get their books back, even though we kept saying stay away from the library, stay home. Those who could access the after-hours return chutes really appreciated it.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm assuming volunteer engagement would've dropped off because you weren't open. When you reopened, did you find you had as many volunteers returning? Or had that dropped off?

Ms JACK - We maintained contact with our volunteers. We asked them to postpone coming back until it was safe. Many of our volunteers are in that older age bracket where some were vulnerable. We've had the majority of them come back; however, there are some who have chosen to just put it on hold. Some might be in that vulnerable category, but we still have a good engagement from our volunteers.

All of our programs, including the home library service and face-to-face literacy support, are now running again.

What's happened, though, is that with COVID-19, we've had the opportunity to change some of our services. For instance, with literacy services, where it was always one-on-one and face-to-face, our literacy coordinators and volunteers got quite creative during COVID-19, and they ran those things via Zoom and other online platforms.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The number of active volunteers in Libraries Tasmania 2019-20 was 926, with 43 227 hours contributed by volunteers. That doesn't include online volunteers or board and committee members, I might say.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms ARMITAGE - I also note in the Department of Education annual report that more than 1700 new members joined Libraries Tasmania in the four weeks following the COVID-19-mandated library closures. Were there any issues that arose as a result of the sharp increase in online activity? Was it difficult to manage?

Mr ROCKLIFF - You're right, 1700 new members joined online in the four weeks after closure. Was that -

Ms JACK - Yes, it was very smooth. I can't think of one issue that we had with it. We're really fortunate we are so well supported with the Department of Education with our information technology services - and libraries already being very focused on online delivery of services prior to COVID-19 meant that much of what we did was already there.

We've always used digital volunteers for transcribing some of our family history records. We already had the OneDrive/Libby app and BorrowBox, some of those things were there; they were in place already. So it wasn't that we had to scramble to put them in place, it was just a matter of buying more eBooks, buying more eAudiobooks. Over that period, we purchased an additional 8000 eBooks and eAudiobooks, just to meet the demand.

Ms ARMITAGE - I always think it's interesting when it's online and you have a book that you download, you can download more than once, one would think. Then it has to be returned. So it's still an interesting way that it doesn't get borrowed several times, even though I would assume it could.

Ms JACK - It depends how many can be downloaded within that licence, and that's why it will either have to be returned or you will no longer have access to it if you go over the period that you have it for.

Ms ARMITAGE - Interesting. Go to Mr Willie and come back.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Willie and then Mr Dean, and I'm not sure we're going to get to capital investment before lunch, so let's keep moving.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have a couple more when they finish.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you. Minister, last year the library stopped fining people for late returns. I'm interested in what impact that's having on the return rate and whether there's been a requirement for more of a resource to go into libraries to replace any resources that aren't coming back.

Mr DEAN - It's quite a substantial amount really.

Mr ROCKLIFF - In December 2018, Libraries Tasmania removed the threat of financial penalties to encourage more people to use their local library and for borrowed items to be returned. Instead, if borrowed items are not returned in a timely manner, members losing their lending privileges. If items are lost or are not returned at all, members will be asked to pay a fair replacement cost based on the item's age and condition. The new model has not negatively impacted on the borrowing habits of library members. For example, the number of items people borrow at any one time remains at around 4.6 items, with items being returned on average more than five days before their due date.

There have been a number of positive changes since the fee changes, along with the name change to Libraries Tasmania and additional government investment in contemporary library resources. The number of members who owe money to Libraries Tasmania has decreased from 24 916 at the start of November 2018, to 6179 at the end of December 2019. The money still owed is for misplaced, lost or stolen books. There's been a spike in library memberships, which overall had been in decline over the last decade. Between 1 November 2018 and 1 January 2020, there's been an increase of 11 525 members.

Significantly, this compares to a decrease of 4079 members for the same period in the previous year. These increases have been across all age groups, with the greatest number of new members, that's 3120 people or memberships, being aged between 30 and 39 years, a group which had traditionally been harder to engage. So there's some positivity there. Anything further to add to that, Liz?

Ms JACK - I don't think so, minister. Because of the COVID closure it's very difficult to say what the full impact has been, but we've not seen any increase in books staying out just because people aren't being fined. As I mentioned before, it was quite - almost amusing that over the COVID-19 period when we didn't want people coming in, the libraries were closed, we had so many of them wanting to get their books back.

Mr WILLIE - That's good. One last question on this. The Hobart Library is an ageing building. I'm interested in the lifespan of that building and when an investment will need to be made there.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is an ageing infrastructure, and Ms Jack and I have discussed that on numerous occasions because I'm very keen to see investment in our State Library, and we're working through that now. We've also had engagement with the University of Tasmania and Mr Bullard has met with the VC Rufus Black on what a contemporary library might look like.

Mr WILLIE - Like a co-located one with a uni, is it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Met with the representative, Ms Pearce. So there are various options.

Mr WILLIE - Are you talking about a potential co-located one?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I wouldn't rule that out.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I think that's an option, but we have to bring our community with us on that, in terms of our library community and others. It's an option that we're considering but by no means made a decision on yet. We need to consider it, I think, in the mix. There are other examples of that elsewhere. I'll be working closely and be guided by the library community but definitely in terms of the infrastructure, I've had a good look around, and think there is a need for investment.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr DEAN - I don't want to start a parochial argument; we have a good library in Launceston.

CHAIR - No, no, no.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The Burnie Library has been upgraded in recent times.

CHAIR - Don't be drawn in, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's a wonderful building of brutalist architecture. In fact, I'm open to the redevelopment of the library in Launceston.

Mr DEAN - That's good.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The Devonport Library is brand new and fantastic.

CHAIR - I'm sure the minister spends plenty of time in Launceston.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I do. Launceston, Devonport.

CHAIR - Moving on, thank you.

Mr DEAN - Just on that point, the coffee shop in Launceston Library is a great concept. It lets itself open to a lot of people getting more involved in a library, and the outdoor facility for serving as well.

CHAIR - Right. The question is: does the minister agree that it's been useful? Thank you.

Mr DEAN - Yes. I take it that all volunteers working within the libraries have to have Working with Vulnerable People cards? Have there been any security issues or security breaches? There was one issue that was given some publicity in Launceston. I think it was an older case involving a female, a male, something within the library, is that right? Have there been any breaches that we're aware of in relation to any incidents or any issues within the libraries at all?

Ms JACK - I can answer if you want.

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Ms JACK - To my knowledge, absolutely none. I do recall seeing something in *The Examiner* newspaper about something that had occurred but it wasn't with one of our volunteers, I think it was a -

Mr DEAN - No, no, it wasn't. It was persons coming into the library, yes.

Ms JACK - I would have to go back and search through the records.

Mr DEAN - Right.

Ms JACK - But it was certainly nothing that we've had that I'm aware of in the time I've been there.

Mr DEAN - Right. Minister, are we happy with the security and protection of people coming in and out of libraries? I suppose, that's the question.

Ms JACK - The short answer is, yes. All our staff are trained; all our volunteers must have Working with Vulnerable People registrations.

Mr DEAN - Okay. Right.

Ms JACK - And if you're worried about our computers, they are under the department's security. It's a whole-of-government approach. We have certain allowances for people to access information, because libraries globally are about freedom of access to information, but it's information that would be normally available. It's not pornographic material or anything like that whatsoever.

Mr DEAN - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Any final question in this area?

Ms ARMITAGE - Just a quick one. The \$224 500 Australian Government grants or the statewide Digital Inclusion project, can you give me an overview or a summary of the outcomes or where that was actually spent?

Ms JACK - The minister might like to answer that one.

Ms ARMITAGE - What was achieved?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, we can do that. I'll just find the area. Liz, would you like to answer that? How is that going, please?

Ms JACK - It's been a very successful program. It's been run statewide. It's given us the ability to expand what we normally do. One of the priorities for Libraries Tasmania over the last couple of years has been enhancing the digital skills of our staff so they can also then enhance the digital skills of the Tasmanian community because we know that in the Digital Inclusion Index, Tasmania is ranked the lowest of all states.

The program itself meant we could train a large number of digital mentors who then help others to build their digital skills. Whether that be how to use a mobile phone properly or how to Google things on the internet, there were a range of programs that provided support to people, and particularly older people, to build their skills and help them to be able to do their internet banking online, communicate with family who are interstate or overseas, and particularly through the COVID-19 period when they couldn't see people face-to-face, they were using that service.

Ms ARMITAGE - How do people access that? They come into the library?

Ms JACK - They come into the library to access it, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - My last question following on from that, chair, is there now a good supply of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy tutors? Do they currently meet the demand for the people you actually need coming in for these areas? Through you, minister. Do you have enough?

Ms JACK - It would fair to say that it would be very difficult for us to have enough. We know that digital literacy, and literacy and numeracy in Tasmania is a big problem.

Ms ARMITAGE - There's a high demand.

Ms JACK - But 26Ten, which we know has been successful over the last five years, which was established as a tripartisan-supported statewide program, has made a massive difference, and that's focused on adult literacy and numeracy. Within the broader adult learning strategy that was announced by the minister earlier this week, there is additional funding for 26Ten to go out into communities to expand its reach. Within that, there's also further support for Libraries Tasmania to help adults with their learning. That learning can incorporate literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. I think we could double the number of people providing that support, and would still be really challenged. It is a massive problem, and it's not just a problem for Tasmania. It's a problem globally. I think we're doing very well, and 26Ten itself is well regarded in Australia. There is nothing like it anywhere else in Australia, so I think we're doing as well as we can.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, and also online access centres are promoted through the Tasmanian Government's Digital Ready for Daily Life portal. That online portal supports a more digitally literate Tasmania and provides information on statewide digital learning program, and as Liz has alluded to, improving digital inclusion is a key process.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. A question that I'm happy for you to take on notice is the full cost of the implementation of the new name from LINC to Libraries Tasmania. I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. I'll take that on notice.

CHAIR - I want to get finished with 2.2, Tasmanian Archives before lunch. So, however long this takes cuts into our lunch hour.

Output Group 2

Libraries Australia

2.2 Tasmanian Archives -

CHAIR - Mr Dean, 2.2 - quick questions and quick answers.

Mr WILLIE - Sounds like a school teacher.

Mr DEAN - What work has been done, minister, to help preserve Tasmania's history and heritage through the Tasmanian Archives? What work, and what are we doing there?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm pleased you've raised that question because we're a very enthusiastic supporter of our Tasmanian Archives, which is Tasmania's pre-eminent collection of documentaries and heritage.

Mr DEAN - A very important office.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is. We recognise the importance of collecting, preserving, and maintaining historic records for the benefit of future generations of Tasmanians, and indeed the world. And part of that, of course, is the COVID-19 activity we've undertaken this year for future generations to look back at. Through the Tasmanian Archives, Libraries Tasmania collects valuable documentary heritage that ordinary Tasmanians produce each day of their lives intentionally or unintentionally, and then stewards and safeguards it for the long term.

Government records of enduring value are also added to the Tasmanian Archives collection, and where appropriate made visible, accessible and known. This important material is in print and digital format. It requires fit-for-purpose, climate-controlled, contemporary storage facilities to ensure its long-term preservation and accessibility, and that is why we have funded the establishment of a new specialised storage facility currently being built at Geilston Bay. The existing Berriedale Repository is at full capacity, and can no longer house the state's iconic and growing archives collection. The new Geilston Bay facility will be operational in mid-2021, and provides a significant increase in storage capacity.

An important feature of the Tasmanian Archives is our valuable state audiovisual archives. Over time, because of the outdated formats on which this history has been recorded, the material is degrading to the point of being unusable. While some material has already been digitised, thousands of items are yet to be done; # if it is not digitised now, this collection will be lost forever. To address this, the state Government has allocated funding of \$600 000 in 2020-21, with ongoing funding of \$150 000 in subsequent years, to guarantee the long-term preservation of the historic and cultural value of this iconic collection. This commitment and the establishment of the new, specialised storage facility will guarantee the long-term preservation and accessibility of the Tasmanian Archives for current and future generations to celebrate who we are as Tasmanians.

CHAIR - Second question, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - It virtually answers my second one as well, but the increase - I think there's an increase of about \$700 000 in this line for one-up preservation of the state's Audiovisual

Collection Initiative, and you've just referred to that, minister. Is there any more to explain about that, the audiovisual side of it?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Except that it's degrading over time, and if we don't act now, we'll lose it in that sense. You know, old footage and -

Mr DEAN - There's a lot of material in that, is there? A lot of -

Mr ROCKLIFF - The thylacine footage is an example of historic footage that should not ever be lost for future generations, for example.

CHAIR - And the fox video will probably be there as well.

Mr DEAN - No, I don't think there would be too much there on the fox -

Ms JACK - There are thousands or reels of footage, and because it's acetate-based tape, it's degrading. When you go to look at it through a projector, for instance, it's completely white. Whatever footage is there is gone forever, and it's being recognised globally by experts in the audiovisual field that if we don't have our digitisation completed by 2025, we are at risk of losing a lot of it.

Mr DEAN - One other quick question -

CHAIR - Well, it's very quick.

Mr DEAN - It is very quick.

CHAIR - Because we are finishing at 1.30.

Mr DEAN - The number of visits to the Archives and Heritages pages - I don't think member for Launceston knows this - on the library websites has grown in excess of 300 000. I guess it is due to COVID-19 and more people accessing during the COVID-19 period. Is that the explanation for that?

Ms JACK - Not completely. During COVID-19, we did see increased access. We gave our members free access to Ancestry Online from their homes - normally they have to be in the building - and Findmypast is another one where it's an ancestry search. So that certainly helped, but we are recognised globally here for the records we hold.

Our Tasmanian Names Index has more than a million names entered. We have a lot of work being done by our digital volunteers, our 'digi vols', to increase our capacity with what we can offer. So, it's a combination, yes, a lot of people at home through COVID-19, but we have - through Trove, which is a national collaboration between all the national and state, territory libraries but also our own site -

Mr DEAN - So, there's a lot of international contact in this area and around the country, that's what we're saying?

Ms JACK - That's correct, and people who come on the cruise ships to do their research in person as well.

Mr DEAN - All right, interesting.

CHAIR - Thank you. On the strength of that, thank you, Mr Dean, for those questions. We will stop the broadcast, suspend the Estimates process until 2.30 and then we will come back and straight into capital investment. Mr Willie is ready to go. Thank you, enjoy your lunch everyone.

The Committee suspended from 1.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

CHAIR - Welcome everyone. We are going to head straight into Capital Investment. I would like to invite Mr Willie to kick off in that area, thank you.

Capital Investment

Mr WILLIE - Minister, when this Budget was handed down, I had a look at the 2018 Budget and this year's, and made some comparisons around some of your commitments. I am just after an explanation.

East Launceston Primary - which I think is finished, because I was invited to that opening - was scheduled to be finished 2019. It is now in the Budget for 2021. I am talking about the Budget profiling, for clarification -

- Legana Primary - 2023 in 2018, now it's 2024.
- Montagu Primary - 2019 to 2020.
- Brighton High School - 2024 to 2025.

I have spoken to people in that community and I think they expected it at 2024.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Which one, Brighton?

Mr WILLIE - Yes -

- Penguin K-12 School - 2021 to 2022.
- Sorell K-12 - 2021 out to 2023.
- Cosgrove High School - 2023 out to 2024.
- Brighton school farm redevelopment - 2019-2021; the Sheffield one, 2020 to 2021.
- Sorell School -

which I assume might be the primary school -

- ... 2019 to 2022.
- Southern Support School - 2019, out to 2021.

- Tarooma High School - 2019, out to 2021.

Of the 22 existing school projects, more than half are delayed, if the Budget is anything to go by. Do you have an explanation for that? Why has the profiling changed from 2018 to this Budget?

Mr ROCKLIFF - In many respects, what you've highlighted is how much is happening in terms of the investment we're making when it comes to our capital across the forward Estimates. It is over \$203 million across the forward Estimates - \$204.1 million, to be pretty much exact, which is great. That's great for our schools that can be upgraded to modern, contemporary twenty-first century learning environments.

Mr WILLIE - I don't think anyone would disagree with that. I am just asking about the profiling, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sure. There are various reasons around the profiling and why project time frames move from time to time. There are valid reasons for that. The market impacts - for example, Tarooma going back to a tender was an example of that in many respects. Allowing more time for consultation as well. I would prefer to get the consultation right, and there's a lot of work that's been done in communities such as Sorell, Brighton, Penguin, across the state. Consultation is extremely important in that sense.

There would be valid reasons for all those areas you have listed. A number of projects - Boat Harbour Primary School, Devonport High School, East Devonport Primary School - were completed within the original time frames. In fact, Devonport High commenced earlier than the original time frame.

If you look at other areas such as Hobart College, which I think you were at the opening of, that was completed within the original time frame, as was Illawarra Primary School. We're on track with Lansdowne Crescent. We're on track with Legana and Molesworth Primary School. Parklands High School has been completed within the original time frame.

Queechy High School - I know Mr Dean will probably have some questions as well around amenity blocks et cetera - completed within the original time frame.

Riverside High School - project completed. That was a big project, in the \$11 million to 12 million range.

Mr WILLIE - So, with the schools I've highlighted, is it consultation that's holding them up, or -

Mr ROCKLIFF - You mentioned Brighton farm, didn't you?

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay, so that was pushed out by two years due to the land use and environmental planning processes, but that's an enormously exciting opportunity for that community.

The school farm redevelopment at Sheffield, which we spoke briefly about before, has been pushed out by a year.

Snug Primary School, that's been completed, although I think the completion was a year later. I stand to be corrected on that.

Which other areas did you mention? East Launceston Primary School?

Mr WILLIE - Yes, and Legana Primary, Montague Bay Primary, Brighton High School.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Legana is on track with the original time frames, and is accepted as still being in that 2023-24 financial year, if I'm reading this correctly.

East Launceston Primary School, completion pushed out by two years due to statutory planning requirements, as there was a bit of activity around the school. Kindergarten complete, and landscape works ongoing.

Montague Bay was completed within the original time frame. Part of the cashflow moved out to the 2020-21 year. That's why it's in my list - it still has an amber colour.

Mr WILLIE - Perhaps, Chair, if you're able to provide the explanations to the committee, around the profiling and delivery.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We can put it in a format that might be easily absorbable. I will take it on notice. I'm sure we could draw up a table where it says where everything is at and why, and all those sorts of things as well.

I think you've mentioned Brighton High School at times. That is on track which is good and that aligns with our original commitment to Brighton High School.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr ROCKLIFF - If you would like me to do that, I can.

Mr WILLIE - Yes. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. That would be appreciated.

Mr WILLIE - And all those schools that I raised - we can provide that on notice. Cosgrove High School - devastating for that school community this week. I would like to acknowledge the principal, Mr Woodham, and the great work he has been doing the past couple of years. You notice a real difference walking into that school, the learning taking place, the students being respectful, they're wearing their uniforms. He's doing some good work there and to have that happen, I think, is devastating for that community.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, it is.

Mr WILLIE - Given that works will have to take place anyway to rebuild that block, is this an opportunity to look at bringing forward that redevelopment?

Mr ROCKLIFF - First, I agree with you 100 per cent on Mr Woodham and his leadership of the school. I visited the school this year, I can't think of the exact time when it was, but I was very impressed with the students. We met the student leaders and walked throughout the school and saw why we need to revitalise Cosgrove as a school. As you know, \$20 million has been allocated to that major redevelopment.

What's important here again is the extensive public consultation. They told us that Glenorchy community wants to see a revitalisation of Cosgrove High School and this will be delivered absolutely 100 per cent. A high-level education brief has been developed for Cosgrove High School based on feedback received from the community, demographic research, census data, input from Cosgrove staff and students and an interdepartmental working group. It's very pleasing to hear about that strong involvement of the school's senior leadership throughout the process and you've highlighted that.

An architectural consultant is expected to be appointed by the end of this year to commence development of a concept master plan and construction is expected - and I know you'll hold me to account on this - to commence in 2022 and be completed late in 2023 and, therefore, be ready for term 1, 2024.

Mr WILLIE - A question about the block that has been destroyed, how is that going to be incorporated in that redevelopment?

Mr ROCKLIFF - My expectation is that there will be an insurance claim on that block. Of the \$20 million of funds allocated to the redevelopment, as I understand it, none of those funds will have to be drawn down to fund the rebuilding of the 9/10 block and there's some staff amenities in there as well, I think, from memory. That will be funded by the insurance claim, as I understand it, and expect it, actually.

Mr WILLIE - To clarify my mind, you're going to replace that block and then do the redevelopment or are you going to hold off?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The master plan will inform where everything will be placed, where everything should fit and how the school should be redeveloped. Again, that's going through that consultation phase. We need to bring the community along with us so in that sense, fast-tracking a development and all those sorts of things, we need to be mindful of that and the school is going through a really tough time at the moment.

The commitment of \$20 million is there. That's secure. Given the block has been destroyed, we would need to include the redevelopment of that particular block in our overall master plan. That would make sense rather than it looking a bit higgledy-piggledy, if I can put it that way. It needs to be well thought through.

Mr WILLIE - I've an infrastructure priority list here. It's fairly recent - June.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Is that the one on notice?

Mr WILLIE - Yes. You provided it to me in the Legislative Council. I'm hoping for an update on some of the priority 1 projects. I will stick to the ones in my electorate to give other members a chance. Ogilvie High School priority 1 status, was that the big picture learning block? Has that been completed? Is that what that was about, the old hostel?

Mr DEAN - I might add, that was my wife's school, and she is upset it is going to go co-ed.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, 99 per cent of the community disagrees with her.

Mr Dean's comment dovetails into your question because as part of the announcement we made on Tuesday about commencing co-ed in 2022, Elizabeth College is in this mix as well. With regard to the partnership provision to years 11 and 12 as well, \$150 000 that has been allocated to support that planning exercise around what needs to be put where and what the school might look like - whether there will be cohorts on different campuses and those sorts of things.

Given the strong community consultation to date, which has resulted in an overwhelming co-educational favoured response to move forward, we need to continue that engagement and that is why the \$150 000 was brought forward to support that. How it looks following commencement of co-education in 2022 and it is important to say commencement, because it will probably transition over a few years.

Any infrastructure needs will need to be taken into account. In more recent times, New Town has been invested in, but there are some needs in Ogilvie.

Mr WILLIE - The priority 1 project that I asked about at Ogilvie: Is it part of that old hostel? It is not funded?

Mr BULLARD - Mr Willie, to put that list in context, that reflects our existing asset management prioritisation process which is to go to schools and say, 'What are the issues or concerns you have around maintenance and upgrade of your facilities?'. The minister may actually want to talk to the new asset management system we have recently implemented.

Mr WILLIE - I am aware of this process and the old process because some of these schools like Montello have sat here for some time.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I am very well aware of Montello and there are other areas in my patch that have some pressing needs, but we are getting there. This is why we need to think through these things very strategically and a long-term strategic approach to that as well, to implement a strategic asset management system to manage the department's large and diverse asset portfolio. Developing that strategic asset management system is an important step in understanding the long-term infrastructure requirements for the Department of Education.

To be honest with you, had we done this 20 years ago, we would not have such a backlog of need. You were not in and around at that time so I will not play politics with all that but there was a severe underinvestment and we are catching up

Mr WILLIE - It was a big investment in people around that time, though, minister, for people and professional learning.

Mr ROCKLIFF - And we are still investing in people. The Tasmanian Government is committed to providing the best possible facilities for our learners, now and into the future. This asset management system was installed during 2020 and the data is currently being entered

into the system to allow for predictive modelling and analysis, and then the development of that long-term capital plan.

The department will be able to model the future capital and maintenance requirements, ensuring schools, our libraries and our Child and Family Learning Centres are managed to achieve the best outcomes for the community. It is a long-term and strategic approach so that we do not have that long backlog of works.

Montello, and Ms Dow has also raised these issues.

CHAIR - Probably not as much as the member for Murchison, I doubt.

Mr ROCKLIFF - No.

Mr WILLIE - I think they've both been having a go.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, they're local representatives, as am I, so we've established a process to provide all government schools with the opportunity to lodge capital submissions on an annual basis. These are important processes, as all submissions are assessed using established criteria and prioritised based on the outcome of that assessment.

Montello Primary School, which is on your list, is ranked as a high priority site for capital works. The department has worked closely with Montello Primary School very recently. We've completed a \$100 000 project that included grades 5 and 6 general learning area alterations and homemaker centre.

I'm aware of other needs in that particular school and closer to where I live, the Devonport campus of the North West Support School is also in need of work, which will also be on your priority one list, Mr Willie. We're getting there. We've got a way to go but with a proper strategic long-term approach, we won't have that need, I hope, in a decade's time to have this almighty rush, with schools and classrooms falling down around our ears, which I saw as I travelled the state commencing in 2014 as minister for Education.

Mr WILLIE - You've also had other priorities too in terms of extension schools and other commitments.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's right but in comparison the extension school capital, it is important first, and that includes our school farm infrastructure as well. Every school is a priority in that sense and every school community would point to a need. They do when I go to visit and I welcome that.

Regarding Ogilvie, \$600 000 has been spent on H-Block as part of the years 11 and 12 extension in 2019-20.

Mr WILLIE - The last question, Chair, is on Rosetta Primary - is it the Early Learning space? I think I saw a slab being poured. It probably isn't funded. It's fine to take it on notice.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There's been \$16.5 million allocated through the COVID Stimulus Funding for Maintenance and those sorts of things, but was it Rosetta Primary School I saw the other day that had that fantastic ABC article on their literacy?

Mr WILLIE - Deb Button, a great teacher.

Mr ROCKLIFF - She's a great teacher. I'm sure you know her very well.

Mr WILLIE - I do; I taught her kids.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm sure you're a great teacher as well, but she's done a wonderful job and it's just great to see that kind of exposure, publicity, on the ABC, an example of one government school in Tasmania that's doing fantastic work, and there are many.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Mr Dean, I'm going to be out of this area by 3 o'clock.

Mr DEAN - I'll be fairly quick.

I keep raising the Queechy High School. It has to be one of the bigger high schools in the state now, or close to it. I think there are 750 students, which will peak in a year or two's time at 800. I'm not quite sure of the capacity of that school.

It is appreciated that the toilet block was extended at a cost of \$50 000 but that still doesn't open up the toilet block. Work is programmed to start there early next year; that's on the move; but there is not enough there to do the showers. So the showers will still not be able to be used. It will at least make the toilets themselves able to be used and the basins at least.

There is work being done for years 11 and 12 to start in the new year so that is a great move forward.

The concern now, minister, is E-Block in that school. I'm not sure when the school was built, back in the 1950s, around about then, E-Block has not been touched since then. When I was last there, it had the old steel-type windows, some were rusted shut and you could not open them. I do not know whether they have tried to get them fixed and repaired, but that is the condition of that block. When I asked questions during the year, I was told it was a priority 2 or a priority 3, it might have been. When can we expect that, that will become a priority 1 move?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I recognise your very strong advocacy for Queechy for a very long time, Mr Dean. In recent years, \$5.2 million has been invested in Queechy High School with a further \$1.1 million committed for further improvements in 2021-22. First, the Queechy toilets, gym toilets - work is commencing or has been done on these toilets these holidays, which is good. The school benefited this year from approximately \$220 000 to undertake fire, mains and switchboard upgrades through the Government's \$10 million Schools Revitalisation and Maintenance Package, announced in March. In 2021, \$300 000 will be spent undertaking major refurbishment of stormwater infrastructure as well as the \$50 000 for the gym toilets, as you have said.

The rollout of the years 11 and 12 extension program is progressing well and a further \$750 000 is being committed for upgrades at Queechy High School to ensure the school can accommodate years 11 and 12 students from 2022. In my thinking - and I am sure in the department's thinking as well - we will take on board your examples of the pressing need elsewhere. That would also form part of that systems management approach.

Mr Willie mentioned Rosetta. This is a new kindergarten, and that is coming from Education Act funds; it was about \$15 million for that in total in kindergartens and early childhood premises around the state.

Mr DEAN - What is the capacity of Queechy High, minister, capacity numbers?. It is expected to reach 800-plus, I think within the next couple of years - at least, that is the expectation. Do we have that? Mr Rob Fleming is a great principal; they are very lucky to have a man of that calibre at that school and it is appreciated by students and staff and everybody wanting it to be a great school.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The capacity of the school?

CHAIR - That can be taken on notice. Any other questions on capital investment, we could all advocate for schools in our electorate. We will continue to do so, but we will not be able to check on how they are going this year because we are not allowed to attend any presentations.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, we do not want to take the spots of our parents, families and carers, do we?

Mr DEAN - Some schools have opened them up; the preparatory school has invited me along there, which is great. It is a private school.

CHAIR - No public schools have any room for elected representatives right across the board. And we can only hope that in 2021 they will be open for us to reconnect with their schools.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We do not want another year like we had last year.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, we will now move to TasTAFE. I am not expecting this will be a long output line of questioning because we have covered some of this earlier this morning so whoever you would like. Thank you, Kane; are you leaving us? We very much appreciated having you here and the same with you, Tim - are you leaving us? Have a safe and enjoyable break.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have Jenny Dodd, Chief Executive Officer, TasTAFE, and Scott Adams, Chief Financial Officer, TasTAFE here with us.

I am very proud of what TasTAFE has achieved over the past 12 months. The reality, when it comes to TAFE, is that it is the strongest it has been for many years. Last week, TAFE was just one of three training providers shortlisted for the large training provider of the year, for the 2020 Australian Training Awards. Three TasTAFE students were shortlisted as national finalists, and two won their category.

I earlier mentioned Caitlin Radford, from the north-west, Australia's Apprentice of the Year, and Heetham Hekmat, from Hobart, who is Australia's best Vocational Student of the Year. We are very proud of all three individuals who were nominated as finalists. This is a sign of an organisation competing with the nation's best. The student satisfaction rates at TasTAFE are some of the highest across Australia, and businesses are equally happy with the training.

Despite COVID-19, TasTAFE has seen steady demand in training, with 4898 active apprentices at 30 September compared to 4995 at the same time last year. I am also pleased we have been able to invest in TAFE's Facilities Master Plan with major developments and facility upgrades right across Tasmania. A clear highlight, of course, has been TAFE's seven years re-registration from the Australian Skills Quality Authority - ASQA - and the maximum available renewal period, so well done to Jenny and her team.

Finally, I thank our outgoing CEO, Jenny Dodd, who is leaving us shortly after three years at the helm. You would well remember, Jenny came in at quite a challenging time for TasTAFE and has shown remarkable leadership. The reaccreditation for the maximum period available for seven years is one of the many legacies Jenny can leave behind; TasTAFE is a much stronger public training provider as a result of Ms Dodd's leadership, and I wish her very well for future endeavours.

CHAIR - We endorse those thanks. We were on this side of the table prior to you coming to the helm and certainly raised some of those issues at the time. Remember it well.

Mr WILLIE - I will ask the question I asked before, which I thought was priority industry skills funding at that stage.

Last year's Budget identified \$2.9 million to address current and predicted workforce shortages and deliver a pipeline of skilled workers; \$950 000 in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to fund roles in building and construction and allied trades; and \$1 million in 2020-21 for nursing.

How many staff were employed under this initiative, and how does it differ from this year's \$2 million over two years for staffing. Is it a reannouncement?

Ms DODD - So, 8.3 full-time equivalent teachers were employed. We would have employed more but COVID-19 put a little bit of a stop on that and so it was 8.3.

The newly announced \$1 million is additional and we're expecting to appoint - depending on what level they come in - somewhere between eight and 10 full-time equivalent teachers. They will be in our priority areas, which continue to be electrotech, plumbing, the broad construction industries, metals, and also the health industry. Although with nursing, we are really quite well serviced now. They are really going to be in the trades areas.

Mr WILLIE - Chair, I've looked through the annual reports at enrolments and activity hours over time. Is there some explanation why student numbers have fallen 7 per cent since 2018 and 27 per cent since 2014?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, there is an explanation.

Ms DODD - There's a number of factors and I will present a few, and then I will defer to Scott if I don't cover the whole suite.

We've had growth in apprenticeships. Growth in apprenticeships generally means fewer activity hours, that's a key function, whereas in Certificate IIs, we deliver more activity hours. One of the areas, though, that's most important here is the way foundation students were recorded as studying. There was a degree of double-counting in the way their units of competency were recorded.

Additionally, and most importantly, our short-course program including firearms, which is a very big short course for us, is in the other category, which is a lot of short courses. We haven't run as many due to a range of reasons. A range of reasons have contributed to our activity shift. On top of that, training packages -

Mr WILLIE - There was an incident with that course, wasn't there? Someone hurt themselves?

Ms DODD - Some years ago, before my time. On top of that, the construct of some training packages, the national training standards for the national competencies we deliver, has also changed, which caused a change in the mandatory components of some of those qualifications, especially as students moved through a pathway program. There is a range of reasons some of those activity numbers have shifted. If it's okay, I'll refer to Scott.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You mentioned the 7 per cent decline?

Mr WILLIE - Yes, 7 per cent since 2018 and 27 per cent since 2014.

Mr ROCKLIFF - While there has been a decline in overall numbers in line with what is clearly a national trend, the Tasmanian decline is less severe than suggested, due to the reasons that Jenny has outlined, including the methodology and other matters. We're doing better than the national trend in that sense.

Mr WILLIE - Activity hours have dropped 700 000 hours since 2017. You said growth in apprenticeships would be a contributor to that. Do you have numbers around the growth in apprenticeships?

Ms DODD - We're talking about since 2017. We may have to take that on notice. We have the last comparisons but not -

Mr ROCKLIFF - The overall training hours have reduced due to the increase in apprentices as a percentage of total students and apprenticeships generally resolved in lower trading hours delivered due to the high volume of workplace training and assessment that is involved.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, I understand that. I'm after the growth in apprenticeship numbers. Take that on notice?

CHAIR - We'll take that one on notice, thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm looking at the free short courses in generic skill areas that were delivering transferable skills. I'm wondering what the uptake on that was? Do you have a number?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The uptake on the short courses?

Ms DODD - In the middle of the year we launched our SKILL UP for your future campaign and that was geared at people retraining. That's the program I think you're referring to?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, it is.

Ms DODD - We had more than 300 enrolments in the first tranche, then we ran a second group and had over 200 enrolments. We were very pleased with that take-up.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Across the SKILL UP courses, a total of 504 enrolments have been received, I am advised.

CHAIR - Is that going to continue?

Ms DODD - That was a particular campaign in the middle year to address what we were seeing with COVID-19. Some other initiatives are flowing through, and the JobTrainer environment will direct us for the semester next year. Our offerings for first semester next year are back to full qualifications. We have focused on some of those generic short courses in the middle of year because of COVID-19. We may well introduce them again in the middle of next year, but for the beginning of the calendar year, we will be focusing on full qualifications, which is appropriate, because we have demand there.

Ms PALMER - How is TasTAFE helping to increase engagement in education and training at Risdon Prison?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am very proud of our achievements in this area, and it's an area I feel very passionate about. I commend TasTAFE for what they have done in recent times, because it goes back to late 2018. TasTAFE and the Department of Justice have been developing a new educational delivery model, and a service level agreement for training at Risdon Prison. The new model was signed off in September 2020, and creates a TasTAFE training facility. The site will be staffed by a prison educator coordinator, three training officers, and teachers from education teams across TasTAFE, including construction, horticulture, hospitality and foundations.

Work is also underway to refurbish existing education spaces, to improve classroom space and better reflect a TasTAFE training facility. I am very pleased to note the implementation of the new education delivery model will start in semester 1, 2021. That model will provide higher rates of engagement and retention in education, clear learning pathways for all prisoners, a clearly defined language, literacy and numeracy program relevant to prisoners' needs, and a targeted pre-release program that will foster post-release support service connections and training in industry areas.

Prisoners will be referred to as students on enrolment. Their learning progress will be recorded in TasTAFE's student management system and TasTAFE learning management system. The educational strategy will improve Risdon student outcomes by building a strong, strategic relationship with key stakeholders such as the Department of Justice, Libraries Tasmania, JobActive providers, industry bodies, labour hire companies and community support organisations. A coordinated approach to a student's life in Risdon Prison and on release, and it captures previous work and education, and discusses possibilities and support program available.

There will be a strong articulation between a prisoner's sentence plan and education plan pathway.

It takes into account educational options in prison work and a pathway to continuing training, and work options on release from prison.

Also, vocational education training program design. This will include literacy and numeracy assessment, increased emphasis on soft skills and transferable skills, and the life skills to build self-esteem and confidence, which are so important.

A range of courses to cater for a variety of sentence lengths, including short courses and industry-focused qualification and skill sets, and the development of programs in conjunction with industry and Risdon Prison jobs.

As stated by the Attorney-General and Minister for Corrections, Elise Archer, prison education programs reduce the risk of prisoners reoffending, and enable them to make a positive contribution to the community upon their release, which I wholeheartedly agree with and commend.

I think it is a tremendous investment in this area. Our hard work in this area will pay dividends for many years to come. It is a great initiative, and thank you, TasTAFE and the Department of Justice, for working in close collaboration to make sure those opportunities are available. Thank you for the question.

CHAIR - My question is around the loan to TasTAFE for the Alanvale Campus. What specifically is that loan for, and what is the term of that \$5 million loan?

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's largely to do with the upgrade of the Alanvale Campus, and the interim arrangements were as a result of the sale of the assets in the CBD. That interim loan was from the Department of Education. Once we realise the assets, liquidate those assets - is that the terminology? - that loan will be paid off, and any funds above the loan from the property sale will be reinvested back into TAFE infrastructure.

Scott, is there anything further to add?

Mr ADAMS - That's correct, minister. The properties are on the market now. They're expected to be sold within the next few months, and then the proceeds will repay the loan from the Department of Education.

Mr DEAN - There's interest in the sale, obviously?

Mr ROCKLIFF - My understanding is there is interest, yes.

Mr ADAMS - Last count, I believe we had 15 parties tour the properties through the sale period.

CHAIR - Any other questions? Apologies for stealing your question. I didn't realise it was related to that.

Mr DEAN - As long as it was asked. The changes at Alanvale, the extensions and whatever else, are obviously to take those people out of the CBD?

Mr ADAMS - We have space at Alanvale to house all the staff. What we lacked was some of the specialist facilities, such as nursing and the computer labs. They've now been developed and are ready to go at Alanvale.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I commend you to visit the new facilities, you will be very impressed. It's like walking through a normal hospital ward, if I can put it that way. It is amazing, real life, infrastructure, it's just incredible. We have similar ones - we opened up Clarence as well a few months prior to that. We've got reasonably new facilities in terms of nursing in Devonport, the Valley Road Campus, the Alanvale Campus, brand new. And brand-new nursing and allied health and aged care at Clarence as well, which is great. Much needed.

Ms DODD - That's allowed us to have growth. Very importantly, we will now be able to take 90 more students across the state in enrolled nursing, given that it's one of the chief employers, and in great demand from both industry and students.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, that concludes the TasTAFE line, because we did cross over into that area this morning. We are officially 47 minutes behind our time schedule, so let's try to make some up.

Mr DEAN - All the best in moving.

CHAIR - Thank you, Jenny.

Ms DODD - It was a three-year appointment. That three years have flown and it's been wonderful.

DIVISION 5

(Department of Health)

Output Group1

System Management

1.2 System Management - Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mr ROCKLIFF - To my right is Craig Jeffery, Chief Financial Officer; to my immediate left is Dale Webster, Deputy Secretary of Community Health and Wellbeing; on to Dale's left is Kathrine Morgan-Wicks, Secretary of the Department of Health. We will have others as required come up.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Chair, I acknowledge your good work in fact and the great article on Wednesday I saw it there published in *The Examiner* which was aimed at discouraging people from taking up e-cigarettes or vaping and I thought it was an excellent and well-written piece.

CHAIR - I can let you know that I have already had some feedback saying that they absolutely disagree with everything I said.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You always get feedback when you state a clear position and I commend you for that and I agree. There is no comprehensive evidence to support e-cigarettes or that it is an effective cessation device and it is not supported by the World Health Organisation. Because of this we do not support it.

CHAIR - I had done my homework minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Indeed.

Mr DEAN - Dr Sukhwinder Sohal has a great article in the paper today as well.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I will look at that as well, thank you ,Mr Dean.

Having a dedicated Mental Health and Wellbeing portfolio for the first time demonstrates the Tasmanian Government has increased its focus on these important issues. We are taking a best-practice approach to building a contemporary integrated model of mental health and alcohol and other drugs care, so people can get more holistic support at the right place and at the right time.

I would like to acknowledge this has been a very challenging year for everyone in the Tasmanian community. The difficulties COVID-19 has presented have tested us all. Some more than others. More than ever it is important we are all aware of and take care of our mental health and wellbeing. The Government has invested an additional \$4 million to support people experiencing mental health and alcohol and drug difficulties as a result of the challenges associated with COVID-19.

A key part of this investment is the Tasmanian Lifeline hotline service which has provided a point of contact for information and resources to support those in the community who continue to be impacted by the effects of the pandemic such as social isolation and the loss of employment. This new service has received more than 870 calls since it was established in May and this Budget includes further funding to extend the service to the end of the financial year.

In the 2020-21 Budget we are investing a total of \$595 million for statewide Mental Health Services over the forward Estimates. This includes additional investment of a further \$4.1 million over two years to implement the recommendations of the Mental Health Integration Taskforce; \$4 million to commence implementing the recommendations in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services review, all of which have been accepted; \$4.9 million over two years to commence the implementation of the recommended actions of our reform agenda for the alcohol and other drugs sector; \$1.2 million for community mental health, including alcohol and other drugs support initiatives; and \$2.1 million to community organisations to support individuals experiencing mental health difficulties as a result of issues associated with the coronavirus pandemic.

We are also strengthening the focus on prevention and early intervention and this year's Budget continues investment in our Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan. We have made significant inroads across our four key priority areas - smoking; healthy eating and physical activity; community connections; and chronic conditions screening and management - and we will continue to build on them.

Our Health Tasmania Community Fund grants have been a great success and for the first time we have expanded the scope to specifically include mental health and wellbeing. On Tuesday I announced that work is already underway to develop the next iteration of our Health Tasmania plan which will be launched in 2021. We are strengthening the focus on prevention and early intervention and I will continue working to encourage and enable our communities to understand and value their mental health and wellbeing as much as their physical health, and we all need to do that. I welcome the opportunity for some questions.

Ms ARMITAGE - As you raised cigarette smoking - I will ask you a question on the status of the Healthy Tasmania Strategic Plan and can you give me an update on where it is up to? I have noticed that it was aiming to have Tasmania's smoking rate down to 10 per cent by 2020?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I will try to find some information for you there. You may or may not be aware I signed a Tasmanian statement alongside Mr Graeme Lynch, AM, Chair of the Premier's Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council, and the former premier, Will Hodgman, in August 2019 and that statement - the next five years of Health Tasmania - is currently being signed by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, and will be sent to myself to be re-signed alongside Mr Lynch and the minister, Ms Courtney, as well. That statement is a commitment by the Government to work together for the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians. It commits the Government to involving Tasmanians in its decisions, working together across government and with communities on shared priorities, making decisions that benefit Tasmanians now and into the future and measuring whether we are making a difference.

The council brought together key stakeholders at a Health in All Policies Forum. The forum discussed how to improve collaboration and governance arrangements for health and wellbeing in Tasmania and the forum participants broadly identified seven key areas for government action and I will quickly run through those.

- Establish shared whole-of-government health and wellbeing priorities.
- Implement policies that have benefits for health, as well as the environment.
- Make health and wellbeing a key consideration in the planning scheme.
- Create healthy food environments, in other words paddock-to-plate.
- Improve the accessibility of data.
- Legislate for health and wellbeing.
- Enable community place-based initiatives for health and wellbeing.

I also have to say that taking effective action to prevent ill-health is a key part of the Government's health reform agenda and the Government's goal for Tasmania to have the healthiest population in Australia by 2025. There was some discussion today in the media about the Government dropping our aspirational target to be the healthiest state in the nation by 2025. That is not true. I want to be clear that the Government sticks to its aspirational target to be the healthiest state in the nation by 2025.

Our Government's Our Healthcare Future, released by the Health minister, is focused on primary and acute health care settings and while our Healthy Tasmania five-year strategic plan is our preventative and wellbeing health plan, on Tuesday we highlighted our plan to update and release a new Healthy Tasmania Plan next year in 2021. We recognise there is a lot more to do and that is why the next Healthy Tasmania Plan will build on all we can and have achieved and we will strive to make even greater inroads in improving the health of all Tasmanians and this demonstrates our commitment to working to improve the health and wellbeing of the state.

Ms ARMITAGE - Did you have an answer to what the smoking rate was because it was aimed to be down to 10 per cent in 2020? I am wondering if you have a figure?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm advised the surveys are done every three to four years. If I look at the indicator of daily smokers 18 years and over age standardised, if we look at the trend figures in 2011-12, we had 21.9 per cent of those in that 18 and over category, that trended down to 19.3 per cent in the 2014-15 year and then in the 2017-18 year, 17.4 per cent. We will have figures for 2020-21 soon, but we hope they are continuing that trend down. It's still too high. I know this is a subject that Mr Dean is very passionate about.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm going to ask a question about Mr Dean in a moment.

Mr ROCKLIFF - When I mention those figures trending down from 21.9 per cent to 17.4 per cent in 2017-18, the national average as recorded in 2017-18 was 14 per cent. So we're still above the national average in not a good way. That's why we need to be proactive in this area still. Comments publicly, such as those I recognise Ms Rattray for, are helpful in that.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. Has the department done any work on modelling or measuring the impacts of Mr Dean's T21 legislation?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Mr Dean has offered a briefing to the Premier and me and the Menzies Institute.

Mr DEAN - Menzies are involved in that and an economist as well, Mr Wells.

Ms ARMITAGE - No modelling or measuring at this stage from the Department of Health?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We've talked about the importance of working to reduce our tobacco consumption. Tobacco smoking kills more than 500 Tasmanians each year. That's why as part of our Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan, we've made addressing the rates of smoking one of our four key priorities. Since we launched the plan in 2016, we've made good inroads and some of those figures would suggest the downward trend. We accept there is more to do and we will look closely at measures that could further assist in decreasing smoking rates. As minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing and Education, I'll continue to push a strong anti-smoking message and education campaign against this addiction, both publicly and in our schools.

I've been briefed by the Menzies Institute for Medical Research report on T21.

Ms ARMITAGE - Sorry, you've been briefed already?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I've been briefed already on that. I have, and my team will be. Not all members of the Government have been briefed by the Menzies Institute for Medical Research on the Wells Economics Analysis, but it will be soon, next week.

Mr DEAN - On Monday.

Ms ARMITAGE - Have you had any discussions with the Minderoo Foundation about the T21 legislation?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I've met with -

Mr DEAN - Bruce Mansfield.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Bruce, yes.

Mr DEAN - Tess Howard, perhaps.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I have. We've been engaged with that and my office has been engaged with the Minderoo Foundation. If we look at the expenditure on the Healthy Tasmania Tobacco Control Plan initiatives and if we look at the issues - this is all on alcohol - sorry, this is tobacco, my apologies -

Ms ARMITAGE - I can get to alcohol.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I meant tobacco. We have a total expenditure in the 2019-20 year of \$820 000 through various activities, the Smoke Free Generation Campaign, compliance education, online licensing, responsible service of tobacco, smoke-free environments. This goes into the \$820 000 and there are other additional campaigns as well so there is investment in the area.

Ms ARMITAGE - So, the Government doesn't have a position on the T21 legislation at the moment?

Mr ROCKLIFF - No, but when all my members have been briefed and we have to involve our members and make sure they are availed of all the facts.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have other questions, but Mr Dean might want to follow-up or will I go onto other questions? I thought there might be supplementaries that was all.

CHAIR - No, it doesn't look like it so you can have another two, and then I will go up the table.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. Something different. What outcomes have been achieved through the implementation of the Tasmanian Suicide Prevention strategy? Do you have anything to advise there?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, I do and I have a lot to talk about in that particular area.

Ms ARMITAGE - Oh good.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is a very sensitive discussion to have so we all need to be very mindful of our language and the words we use when it comes to this area because it is complex and a challenging issue. The grief that comes with suicide loss is overwhelming and profound for families, for workmates, for friends and for entire communities.

It is a whole-of-government, whole-of-community issue, and it is up to all of us to do what we can to support each other, to reach out to others in times of disruption and distress and to build hope for the future.

The preliminary data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics annual causes of death report indicates that 108 people died by suicide in Tasmania in the calendar year of 2019 and that is a tragedy for all people affected. All states and territories, except Queensland, recorded an increase in the number of suicide deaths from 2018-19 and the 108 figure is particularly concerning because it is a 40 per cent jump on the five-year trend figure.

We are working. There has been a lot of discussion around this through the impact of the pandemic on this issue and mental health and wellbeing more broadly. The indication now for the 2020 year is that we are getting back to that five-year trend level, which is positive in that sense. Of course, we should always be aiming for no deaths by suicide in any year.

As part of the Government's response to the Mental Health Integration Taskforce Report, we are developing an integrated suicide response that connects existing aftercare support functions with a community-based crisis response. The intention of the integrated suicide response is to provide continuity of care outside the current ED arrangements. This will operate alongside the proposed Hospital Avoidance Program.

We will continue to work with the community to understand the challenges and to work together to identify solutions, including the continued rollout of connecting with people suicide mitigation approach. While the pandemic has substantially limited the face-to-face training opportunities, 904 modules have been delivered and demand is increasing across Tasmania's healthcare system. I encourage everyone within the community to seek out a program that suits their particular needs because there are a number of evidence-based programs that support a compassionate response and safety planning for those in emotional distress.

In 2020-21, funding of \$641 418 has been allocated for Anglicare Tasmania to provide intensive one-on-one support to individuals following a suicide attempt. The Attempted Suicide Aftercare Program - ASAP - is available statewide and is available for up to six months for Tasmanians aged 15 to 65 years plus, and referrals can be made by GPs, emergency departments and other Health services.

The funding of \$764 000 for the next financial year is allocated to Rural Alive and Well, to deliver support for the north-west and west coasts for rural counselling services.

Relationships Australia is funded to deliver the Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Community Network, the Annual Prevention Suicide Forum and the Tasmanian LiFE Awards Community Action Plans. I attended the Tasmanian LiFE Awards last Thursday evening in Hobart, where individuals and organisations were recognised for the wonderful work that they have done in this very challenging space.

It is important to recognise individuals and community organisations, because all Tasmanians can play a role in suicide prevention, giving people a sense of belonging or feeling of connectedness, reducing stigma, listening without judgment, showing compassion, instilling hope and, importantly, developing their skills to support someone in crisis, including to encourage the seeking of professional help if required. Each of us can make a difference by regularly checking in with people around us and encouraging discussion, especially if there is something going on in their life, if they are having a tough time, experiencing major changes in their circumstances, or if we notice any changes in the way they are behaving. It is important to get help early.

I do want to mention, as there was some public discussion about this, that we recently released our Tasmanian Suicide Register. That is a really in-depth look at the 359 people who died by suicide between 2012 and 2016. That document is not accessible online, but is available upon request, given the nature of the information within it, and from now on, we will have the updated register every 12 months. It is important, because it is a more in-depth look at each and every one of the individuals and their circumstances and the background surrounding their death by suicide. Some of the areas are of great interest to me in terms of what we can do across the whole of government in a policy sense, in an investment sense, to really drill down and see how we can support individuals within our community better.

As I mentioned on Tuesday, 50 per cent of the people who died by suicide between 2012 and 2016 had some connection with the police or justice system, or of that nature. So, what can we learn from that? I believe it is something that perhaps even the Chief Psychiatrist would, in a sensitive way, be able to brief your team on, Chair, should you wish that.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - Minister, what is the Government doing to ensure that government agencies, especially frontline organisations that work directly with the public, are adequately trained and resourced in areas like mental health, first aid and dealing with people who may perhaps have mental health conditions?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I have touched on that a little bit - the Suicide Prevention Workforce Development and Training Plan, and the Connecting with People program.

Ms ARMITAGE - The government agencies, especially your frontline, working directly with the public - are they trained and resourced?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Perhaps Mr Webster has a more of an operational knowledge of this.

Mr WEBSTER - Under the workplace health and safety banner, and the mental health and wellbeing across government, there is a program called Mental Health First Aid. The Government is committed to having mental health first aiders in workplaces alongside generalist first aiders, and that's certainly a program that has been rolled out in this department as well.

CHAIR - Minister, you've obviously touched on the human cost of suicide. The Productivity Commission report recently described the extent of cost - human and financial - of mental ill health in Australia, and you talked a bit about what your Government is doing.

Minister, do you take wellbeing into account, and ensure a mental health impact assessment is applied to all policy decisions by your Government?

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's a good question. I'll come to the Productivity Commission report first. That final report, from its inquiry into mental health, was released on 16 November this year, and it presents a very long-term reform agenda.

The commission has emphasised that it is not a health inquiry, but focused more broadly on the social and economic benefits associated with addressing mental health issues. There is no doubting the impact that mental illness and mental ill health has on the lives of those affected, including your loved ones.

Consequently, the commission's priority reforms fall into five broad areas that cut across sectors and portfolios -

- prevention and early help for people
- improve people's experiences with mental healthcare
- improve people's experiences with services beyond the health system
- equip workplaces to be mentally healthy
- instil incentives and accountability for improved outcomes.

The Tasmanian Government provided a response to the commission's 2019 draft report, and we welcome the final report. I note the report recognises the importance of a whole-of-community consumer- and carer-focused response to mental health and suicide prevention and the benefits this has, not just with people's health, but also for society and the economy overall. This is consistent with the Government's Rethink Mental Health plan and associated suicide prevention strategies.

I note in particular the report's acknowledgment that the provision of alternatives to emergency departments should be a key priority. This is consistent with the work undertaken through the Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program on initiatives such as Mental Health Hospital in the Home, and the Hospital Avoidance Program. Integration hubs are under development to provide more supports in the community.

Equally, the report's focus on student wellbeing within schools - and we've touched on that today as well - as a key area of early intervention is consistent with recent initiatives such as the Tasmanian Student Wellbeing Survey.

The report recommends that Tasmanian schools should implement social and emotional learning programs, measure student wellbeing over time, using specific targets, and report against these, so I guess we're talking broadly in your area of questioning.

I am pleased to say Tasmania is a leader on this front. I won't repeat what I've said in my Education scrutiny, but I commend the DoE team for the work they've done there.

We recently released our response to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Review, which commits to expanding the perinatal and infant mental health services to provide

a coverage in the north and north-west. I was pleased to see the Productivity Commission's report also acknowledges this important area of service delivery.

The report also provides further guidance on how the Government should focus our COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. It's great to see the report prioritises making mental health and safety just as important as physical health and safety in the workplace. This is a mindset that should extend to everyone in the community.

The Tasmanian Government, of course, will continue to work hard with our Health service, our community partners, and all levels of government to ensure Tasmanians know where to go to receive the support that they need.

We are pleased that the first meeting of the National Federation Reform Council in December will focus on this report.

The commission has estimated that, conservatively, the cost to the Australian economy of mental ill-health and suicide is in the order of \$43 billion to \$70 billion per year.

CHAIR - Minister, you consider that you are applying the mental health impact assessment to the policy decisions you are making. Is that pretty much what you're telling me there?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Perhaps Mr Webster can comment shortly, but we're doing a lot better at it. I'm not saying we are doing everything and I am sure we can work on exactly what you've just said in a more thorough way.

CHAIR - If there's more work to be done, a commitment that your Government will continue to do that work and ensure there is reporting on possible or likely mental health impacts associated with government policy decisions -

Mr ROCKLIFF - Across government there are areas where we are working on it. The Department of Education, of course, is focused on student wellbeing and the like, but it is certainly something you've raised today we would like to pay greater attention to, and we will. I can give you that commitments today.

We need to do all we can in this particular area and we focus a lot on the physical workplace environment. If I look at when I had the Primary Industries hat on for four years, we did a lot of work in farm safety and all those sorts of things, as I am sure Mr Barnett spoke about yesterday, but the mental health in the workplace and those sorts of things, I think we can also focus on a lot.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Willie, and then I am back to Mr Dean and then I am going back up to Ms Palmer; again, I know it is very important information, but we need to tighten it up. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. I can ask preventative health questions here, can't I?

CHAIR - Yes. System management, Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you're aware of the school lunch trial happening in a few schools around Tasmania? I believe that is funded by Health. I am interested in whether preventative health is looking at the opportunity to potentially improve the health of the population through feeding the kids at lunch time at school. There is also PESRAC recommendation No. 62 which relates to food security being delivered in schools. Do you have some comment on that?.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, a lot of work is being done in this area, and the Tasmanian School Canteen Association is involved as well. We are working on a number of areas within education. Julie Dunbabin, you will be aware, pre-COVID-19 toured a number of areas internationally to take some learnings regarding how we could develop policy and improve health and wellbeing through healthy eating and all those sorts of things. A fair bit is happening in that space.

We are investing in supporting our School Canteen Association. They have made great inroads in the last three or four years in particular and a number of schools have implemented changes to their offerings as well in terms of the food they provide.

Making sure our students have food in their tummies at the beginning of a school day is also very important. That is where our breakfast clubs come in, but in terms of ill-health prevention, the early prevention opportunity through our schools is an area we are increasingly focusing on.

Mr DEAN - I am careful where I put my questions here because I don't want to revisit the T21 stuff at all and I shouldn't here under the circumstances. Going back about three or four years ago now, an undertaking was given in parliament some effort would be put into researching smoking near hospitals and smoking around and close to schools. That commitment was given in parliament. I have asked some questions in the parliament over the years about whether that is progressing. Has it progressed?

Mr ROCKLIFF - You are talking about smoke-free environments around hospitals and schools?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Under the Tobacco Control Plan, some actions have not been progressed because of reduced staff capacity within Public Health Services due to COVID-19 pandemic response and the disrupted decision-making within the department. That is where we are at with that particular matter.

In regard to smoke-free environments, this project was established in response to amendments you sought during a parliamentary debate in 2017. A project officer was appointed in 2019 to develop options to increase smoke-free areas in and around areas where health and education services are provided.

To support the planned smoke-free hospitals, free nicotine replacement therapy for hospital staff was made available and continues to be provided. A legal instrument was provided to the Health minister in October 2019 to designate the Royal Hobart and Launceston General hospital sites as smoke-free under the Public Health Act 1997, but to date has not been approved. Is that right?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - Through the minister, our understanding is that the minister for Health is continuing to seek advice from the department in relation to that instrument. Certainly, throughout COVID-19 and with some of the complications around the screening in and out of hospitals and our reconfiguration for COVID-19 safety, that consideration has been delayed as we have worked through the pandemic environment and free movement of people in and out of our hospitals.

Mr DEAN - The important thing is that some action is being taken, and that is good. That is acceptable and was what I was trying to determine.

Ms PALMER - Minister, the Budget provides funding for \$4.1 million over two years to address priority areas in the mental health reform agenda. Can you please provide some further details on what those areas are?

CHAIR - Other than what we have already heard.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, very good. The Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program commenced in August last year with the key task of implementing recommendations from the report of the Mental Health Integration Taskforce and government response. Despite the impacts of the pandemic this year, we are making good progress and remain focused on building the best-practice contemporary integrated model of mental health care so that people can get more holistic support at the right place and at the right time.

This budget acknowledges the vital importance of connected and integrated mental health services and delivers a range of initiatives to ensure Tasmanians have the supports they need. The \$4.1 million over two years to address priority areas of the Mental Health Integration Reform Program includes increasing north and north-west community mental health teams and their full-time equivalents because decreasing the reliance on acute inpatient services and emergency departments by providing treatment of the community is a key priority.

Funding permanent lived-experience positions because establishing a peer workforce in Tasmanian's Public Mental Health Services is a key feature of revised models of care that are currently being developed and implemented. This creates more senior roles across the state to help provide the structure for the lived-experience workforce within Statewide Mental Health Services and boosting the Royal Hobart Hospital consultation liaison psychiatry service to meet their needs, the Emergency Department is assessing, diagnosing and managing mental health presentations including provision of expert advice on critical issues such as patients' decision-making capacity. I also note that improving access to mental health services for our children and young people is another key priority for the Mental Health Reform Program. This year's Budget provides \$4 million to commence phase 1.

I will be implementing the comprehensive recommendations made in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services - CAMHS - review, which is available for all to see, all of which have been accepted by the Government to ensure that young Tasmanians can receive the best possible mental health care.

Phase 1 of the CAMHS reform includes a new senior management team to facilitate a single, unified child and adolescent mental health service, a dedicated service for children in out-of-home care, a new youth early intervention service and increasing the capacity of the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Service to provide coverage in the north and north-west,

which I have mentioned before but I quickly mention again because it was the end of my contribution and it's important.

CHAIR - Minister, I think this is going to cross into 2.5 with my question. You've just talked about those new strategies and I go to table 5.4, Performance Information, page 141, Budget Paper No. 2. I note that those whose needs are being met by the Tasmanian Mental Health Service come to 71.5 per cent - and that tells me that 28.5 per cent is not being met. Can I have the actual numbers of that percentage?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The percentage of people?

CHAIR - Whose needs are not being met by the -

Mr ROCKLIFF - Those actual numbers, I'm not sure that includes - it's included in the footnotes of the paper, but I will see if we can access that for you as a question on notice, if you don't mind. We've got the percentage.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - But you need the numbers translated. We will take that on notice.

CHAIR - Thank you. Recently, I had an incident or a representation to my office about a parent who was waiting up to two months for their young person with a mental health issue to see somebody. That had led to two attempted suicides. I put it into the parliament in my Budget speech but I'm interested in accessing those services, because this is around Statewide Mental Health Services.

Do we have enough staff for people to access some of those very good initiatives that you talked about when the member for Rosevears asked that question. That's the concern that I have, and I know that that concern is shared elsewhere.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's right and I'll need probably some greater understanding and perhaps in another forum around which -

CHAIR - I just use that as an example of the wait time.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's right and I would be interested to know if that was the wait time related to, say, Headspace.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It was?

CHAIR - Two months.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Right. There you go. There has been some federal investment into Headspace. I think Devonport has recently had some investment - I stand to be corrected. I saw some public discussion about that more recently and I understand from my own feedback around Headspace, there is some waiting time there when it comes to our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, which is why I asked the question on where the person presented -

CHAIR - Which provider.

Mr ROCKLIFF - because the report that we commissioned, if I can use those words, was provided and all the seven key recommendations in that CAMHs review. That's a report I commend you to read and read thoroughly. It's a report that explains in great detail how we can improve our service delivery with our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, pretty much warts and all.

We've got three key phases of implementing those reforms over a longer period of time and phase 1 I have spoken about already today, and phase 2 and 3 will kick in a bit later on. Maybe your question really is resource and -

CHAIR - Those qualified personnel we need, are they out in our communities and available?

Mr ROCKLIFF - That is right, yes, and the next two years we will see significant reform arising from the Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program and Alcohol and Other Drugs Reform Agenda. The Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program will have an additional budgeted investment across the reform programs, which means that the required growth equates to the following approximate FTE increase over the next two years, 2021-22. So, 26 FTE for the Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program.

We have mentioned Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, 21 FTE positions, and the Alcohol and Other Drugs Reform Agenda will have 25 FTEs in the additional investment. The reform activity will result in a growth in the Statewide Mental Health Service workforce across the majority of the services. We have some challenges here because this required workforce growth is on a background of what is an ageing workforce, I am advised. So a demographic analysis in August 2020 of the Statewide Mental Health Service nursing workforce - which is the largest single professional group - indicates that 24 per cent of this work force is aged -

CHAIR - Wait for it, quite young in my view.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sorry, we had a little thing pop up on the screen and it covered up the thing - is aged 60 years or over.

CHAIR - Quite young.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay, correct, 60 years and over, with the largest exit rate seen in the age group of that 64 to 67 space. The Statewide Mental Health Service has approval to expand. The dedicated workforce unit established as part of that reform program is to form a workforce planning and development unit, so we are aware of all these issues and the additional resource that would be required.

CHAIR - My other question is about your target for meeting the needs of Tasmanians. The target for 2020-21 is 63 per cent and that does not even equate to the previous year of 68.2 per cent, let alone the 71.5 per cent, which is the most recent figure. I am interested in why such a low target?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Perhaps I will get Mr Webster to talk about that in greater detail in a moment. I might be able to touch on it myself. Also, in answer to Ms Palmer's question as I outlined in her earlier answer in people on the ground, or FTEs in this important area. The \$4.1 million in the Budget includes more FTEs in adult community mental health teams in the north and north-west as well.

Mr WEBSTER - Just to add to that, the service targets are set on the Tasmanian Health Service Plan. This is a legislated plan that is developed each year. It is important to note that in the mental health space is that Statewide Mental Health Services are not the sole provider of mental health services across the state. There are provisions through the Primary Health Network and those sorts of things. So Statewide Mental Health Services will never deliver 100 per cent of mental health services in the state.

The Tasmanian Health Service Plan for 2020-21 reflected some downward trends due to COVID-19, also our problems with recruitment because of COVID-19. Whilst it's set than lower than last financial year, it reflects the reality of the financial year.

CHAIR - Thank you. I thought that might well have been the case. Any other questions in 2.5?

Mr WILLIE - Minister, can you please provide a breakdown of psychiatric emergency nurses - PENs - at the RHH and the LGH funded positions, and whether they are filled?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, thank you. I understand I have been asked this question or similar questions a few days ago in the lower House Estimates to the Health minister.

Thank you very much for that.

Mr WILLIE - I have been asked to follow up.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Very good. I thought you might.

CHAIR - So, we just need numbers.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Right. We know there has been an increase in mental health presentations to the emergency departments in recent years and particularly at the Royal Hobart Hospital. In response to this increase a number of initiatives have been implemented to improve patient flow, including employing a consultant psychiatrist and career medical officer to work within the Royal Hobart Hospital Emergency Department, and the establishment of a mental health Hospital in the Home service.

The psychiatric emergency nurse service at the Royal Hobart Hospital has an established 5.79 FTE, with 5.21 FTE permanently filled. Where possible, agency and casual staff are utilised to fill vacancies to support the service to be fully operational. This is limited at times due to a shortage of experienced psychiatric emergency nurses.

To improve patient flow and to help address the increase in mental health professionals to the Emergency Department at the Royal Hobart Hospital, the Government has implemented initiatives, including the creation of a six-bed mental health short-stay unit and recruitment to the mental health short-stay unit is currently under way and is anticipated the short-stay unit will

open in February 2021 and the new service will alleviate some of the challenges currently faced by the psychiatric emergency nurses and other staff within the emergency department.

Mr WILLIE - And the LGH?

Mr ROCKLIFF - A 12-month trial was undertaken at the Launceston General Hospital with the PENs, as we call, them rostered on a late shift. The purpose of the trial was to determine if a PEN resource would provide additional psychiatric support in the emergency department. The review of data from the trial has indicated that there was not the demand to support the continuation of a standalone psychiatric emergency nurse at the LGH. Mental Health Services has looked at other options to respond to mental health presentations in the ED during peak times, and an additional shift was established within the CAT team.

The CAT team has rostered a C-shift, Monday to Friday 12 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. The staff member allocated to this shift prioritises clients presenting to the ED who require psychiatric assessment and this supports a collaborative team approach between ED and Mental Health Services aiming for early intervention and assessment. The staff member allocated to the C-shift works with mental health clients in the community where there is low demand in the ED and when the C-shift concludes, CAT takes over the response in the ED, and on weekdays an on-call service commences at 10.30 p.m. If the client is okay to remain in the ED overnight, the career medical officer will review the client first thing each morning on weekdays and on-call at weekends.

On weekends and public holidays, the CAT team provides coverage in the ED from 8 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. and after that the on-call doctors attend the ED as required.

Output Group 90

COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.4 COVID-19 Mental Health Program -

CHAIR - When I go to the Budget Papers and look at the allocation for this, it is related to COVID-19 Response and Recovery - \$3.262 million is allocated under Mental Health Program and community mental health support, minister, and there is no forward funding at this point in time.

Will the allocation under health services for Statewide Mental Health Service adequately cover the shortfall, or will you perhaps as a government look at extending that COVID-19 response and recovery support?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We will look at the need and keep that under review.

CHAIR - Because some of those needs may well go well past next year's budget, which I know will be around August 2021. It is certainly something I have noted and I am sure other will be keeping a watching brief.

Minister, that concludes our Mental Health and Wellbeing area and we would like now to move to Disability Services and Community Development.

The Committee suspended from 4.16 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

DIVISION 2

(Department of Communities Tasmania)

Output Group 4

Disability Services and Community Development

4.2 Disability Services -

CHAIR -. Minister, we're on the home straight. This item is in your capacity as the Minister for Disability Services and the very important Community Development.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you. To my left I have Ingrid Ganley, Manager of Disability Services, and Michael Pervan, Secretary of the Department of Communities; to my right, I have Courtney Hurworth, Acting Manager of Community Development.

Having carriage of these portfolios provides me with opportunity to work even more closely with Disability Services and the Community Development sectors to support our state's vibrant and diverse community, and to provide opportunities for all Tasmanians to participate in our wonderful way of life.

The Community Development portfolio includes initiatives to support Tasmanians to fully participate and be included in our community, and to ensure that those most in need have access to the material basics. Not long after I took on the responsibility of these portfolios, the pandemic started to impact on all people from all walks of life across the state, creating unprecedented challenges for many people.

Indeed, COVID-19 reaffirmed the importance of volunteers, who are often, as we say, the glue that holds together our local communities, contributing over \$1 billion to our economy annually. Many volunteers are older Tasmanians who were unable to participate in responding to COVID-19 in the usual ways, due to restrictions, so in response to the PESRAC recommendations, this Budget includes additional funding of \$351 000 over three years to Volunteering Tasmania, to support the re-engagement of volunteers across the state, and to ensure that community programs, services and activities are viable.

From 2020-21 to 2022-23, Volunteering Tasmania will receive this funding to reconnect past volunteers, as well as encouraging Tasmanians to take up volunteering opportunities. Volunteering Tasmania estimates that more than 140 000 volunteers in Tasmania were stood down during the height of the pandemic.

Earlier in the year, in response to COVID-19, the Tasmanian Government allocated an additional \$130 000 in the 2019-20 year to Volunteering Tas to assist in mobilising volunteers in those areas that need them most. This funding includes \$80 000 to rapidly recruit and deploy the volunteers through EV CREW.

The funding also includes \$50 000 to re-scope the Safeguarding Volunteering in Tasmania project, to co-design a community volunteer response to COVID-19 in partnership with the Devonport City Council, Clarence City Council, and the Huon Valley Council. This

funding is on top of our current three-year grant agreement with Volunteering Tasmania to undertake its role as the peak body for volunteering in its place until 30 June 2021.

I acknowledge the extensive work of the disability service sector in working through the challenges of, preparing for, and transitioning to the NDIS, now at full rollout. It is positive to note that people with disability have continued to enter the NDIS, even during the height of the pandemic. During the 2019-20 financial year, 2595 people entered the scheme in Tasmania, with a further 532 people entering in the first quarter of 2020-21, which shows access to the scheme continued throughout the pandemic. There are now 9602 active participants in the scheme in Tasmania.

What I am most pleased about is that 5059 participants have received funding for the first time. That is over 50 per cent of all participants receiving reasonable and necessary supports for the first time.

In closing, Chair, I look forward to continuing to engage across these important portfolio areas, working with the people and organisations who help to underpin the wellbeing of our entire community.

CHAIR - Thank you minister, the committee certainly appreciates that overview and the fact that you focused on the key areas of your responsibility.

I invite Mr Willie to start, thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. JobsABILITY is a successful pilot program that worked to increase employment outcomes for people -

Mr ROCKLIFF - JobsABILITY?

Mr WILLIE - Yes. I think it's a brokerage, isn't it?

Increased employment outcomes for people living with a disability. There is considerable demand for programs to assist people living with a disability to find work, especially given the NDIS stated aims, and the impact of COVID-19.

Why hasn't the Liberal Government committed to funding this program on an ongoing basis?

Mr ROCKLIFF - My understanding is that it's not technically under this output, because it's Commonwealth-funded.

CHAIR - Where do we find an answer for something like that? Do we contact a federal member?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, or I can contact a federal member to resolve Mr Willie's question.

Mr WILLIE - Perhaps the minister might like to have a look at the Labor policy to introduce a quota on supply and consumables, which would inject significant funding into the Disability Enterprises sector. I offer that not in a political way, just as a suggestion, because I am interested in better outcomes for people getting into work.

CHAIR - I didn't take it as a political slight, and I'm sure the minister didn't either, so thank you.

Mr WILLIE - It works very well in New South Wales, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Very good. I will take great interest.

Mr WILLIE - In Tasmania, just over 10 000 people qualify for the NDIS, but there are many more who never will. These people rely on state-funded disability support organisations - many of which have had their funding substantially cut.

What is the minister doing to ensure these people living with a disability are having their needs met?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We had some discussion around this. There are many other service providers across Tasmania that support people who do not fall within the NDIS. We have some just over 9600 people who participate in the NDIS.

CHAIR - It has come both ways now, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm not sure I necessarily agree with the premise of your question, because there have been no cuts in disability service organisations, I am advised. Rather, the rollout of the NDIS is changing the way that people with disability are supported, so providers that have been traditionally block-funded by the Tasmanian Government have been assisted to prepare for the change to a commissioning approach, including through the provision of readiness grants to assist with the transition.

The implantation of information, linkages and capacity building, known as the ILC, is bringing substantial change to the Tasmanian disability sector, but also innovation and new opportunities for people with disability to engage with the communities they live in. So far, over \$14 million of ILC funding has been invested in Tasmanian-based organisations.

The Tasmanian Government has worked with the National Disability Insurance Agency, and of course we will continue to work with the Department of Social Services to ensure Tasmanian priorities are considered within the national ILC grant process. We have a number of organisations that were previously block-funded by the Tasmanian Government:

- Autism Tasmania Incorporated, for example. As of November 2020, it received ILC funding and is a registered NDIS provider.
- New Horizon Club Incorporated has undertaken an environmental scan.
- The Department of Communities Tasmania is awaiting a report regarding outcomes from New Horizons, and they are a registered NDIS provider.
- Wellways Australia Ltd, a registered NDIS provider.
- UCA Crossroads Tasmania, continuing primarily through the Uniting Care Church.
- Independent Living Centre of Tasmania is a registered NDIS provider.
- Paraquod Association of Tasmania is a registered NDIS provider.

- Epilepsy Association of Tasmania is identified as outside the scope of an ILC and has continued to provide services.
- The TADTAS Inc. funds bike program and other equipment solutions through NDIS plans.
- The Brain Injury Association of Tasmania has secured ILC funding.
- The Victorian Deaf Society and Tasmanian Deaf Society, I think collectively known as Expression Australia, is a registered NDIS provider.
- Tasmanian Amputee Society is receiving ILC funding.
- Lifestyle Solutions Australia Ltd is a registered NDIS provider.
- Multiple Sclerosis Ltd is a registered NDIS provider.
- Royal Guide Dogs for the Blind Association of Tasmania is a registered NDIS provider.
- Spina Bifida Association of Tasmania ceased providing services prior to the state funding ceasing.
- Tasmanian Acquired Brain Injury Services, Li-Ve Tasmania, is a registered NDIS provider.
- Aqua Victoria Ltd is a registered NDIS provider; and
- RPH Print Radio Tasmania is continuing to develop alternate business models.

I've mentioned the ILC funding of \$14 million. I thank the department for its contributions to people with disability in Tasmania, for its services before the ILC funding model was established, and to acknowledge the completion of the transition and finalisation of the bridging funding.

I've mentioned a number of organisations but the Department of Communities Tasmania through Disability and Community Services continues to support providers through transition and met with all ILC type providers in February 2020. Two providers indicated they are still finding their place and are to provide their final report. I mentioned these - New Horizons and Brain Injury Association of Tasmania were granted approximately \$20 000 each to investigate and finalise new business models moving forward.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you've highlighted the transition to the NDIS and ILC funding. In reality, some of these organisations are finding themselves with funding shortfalls to provide the support to people with a disability. You mentioned a few organisations, and I would like to focus on those.

Brain Injury Association of Tasmania - could you give us the figures that the state government provided prior to the ILC funding taking over, and now? Autism Tasmania you mentioned - same thing. Epilepsy Tasmania and New Horizons?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have our best guesstimate of what they used to receive, but it's probably best to put that on notice.

Mr WILLIE - Sure.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Then we get that accurate figure. Tasmanian providers that were successful in individual capacity building ILC grants announced on 13 December 2019 - the Tasmanian Amputee Society received \$95 700 for the Tasmanian Amputee Society Peer Support Development program; Autism Tasmania received \$2.145 million for the Autism Connections; and Brain Injury Association of Tasmania, I am advised, received \$2 143 577.70 for the Recognise, Respect, Responds and Reform program.

Disability Voices Tasmania, auspiced by a Fairer World, received \$909 700 to support the development of skills and opportunities for Tasmanians with disability to have their voices heard and contribute to the development of inclusive communities.

Women with Disabilities Australia received \$2 139 280 for building the capacity of women and girls with disability in Australia. The Migrant Resource Centre, Northern Tasmania, received \$970 548.70 for Beyond Limits and two mainstream capacity building grants were awarded to Tasmanian organisations in February 2020, with Tasmania to benefit from an additional four of the successful projects.

In total, \$35.1 million was awarded to 28 grants across Australia in this round. The two successful grants through the mainstream capacity building grants went to Li-Ve for their healthy dying for people with disability project, and the North and North West Tasmanian Sexual Assault Support Services for Recognise and Respond through trauma-informed care, assisting Tasmanian Health Services to support survivors of sexual abuse who have a disability.

A second round of individual capacity building grant allocations were announced in September and \$1.648 million was awarded across five Tasmanian-based organisations - Autism Tasmania Incorporated, \$60 000; Mental Health Carers Tasmania, \$327 700; the Migrant Resource Centre - Southern Tasmania, \$290 285; ParaQuad Association of Tasmania, \$153 300; and the Association for Children with a Disability, Tasmania Incorporated, has been awarded \$817 333 to further develop, supply and also evaluate in-demand peer activities under the ACD Tasmania umbrella.

The Junction, the Tasmanian family peer-led network: a further 24 grants were awarded in this grant round to interstate providers that will provide funded supports in Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you will take those four organisations on notice on what the state Government provided for you to put the federal money next to it now, not what they are receiving through the ILC grants and others, but what they were receiving and what they are receiving now from the state Government?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay, we can manage that. We will do our best to get that figure.

Mr DEAN - Minister, I raised this issue in my Budget reply and I have been fairly passionate about this now for a long time, as have the members for Launceston and McIntyre as well.

It relates to New Horizons. New Horizons is an absolutely incredible organisation, working with people with disabilities, with challenges. Currently, they are working with more than 300 people in Hobart and Launceston, in the main, and providing wonderful services.

Their funding is a real issue. The state has provided them with some gap funding. Unfortunately, they are not able to get within the NDIS scheme for funding and they have worked on that for a long time and they are continuing to work on that. Currently, they cannot access funding under that scheme.

They have been thwarted in raising their funds this year through COVID-19, with the funding that they normally raise through a number of activities. They are in a desperate position. They have some funding that will keep them going for the short term and after that, it could well be the end.

There are photographs in the media frequently of the people that New Horizons cares for and looks after and their faces light up when they are involved in sport, when they travel about the state. It is amazing. Nationally as well. To see them makes you feel good.

What can we do to ensure there is recurrent funding for New Horizons? We cannot allow them to close. We just can't do it. The services they provide are critical to these people. Minister, we are appealing to you for some support.

CHAIR - Before I head to the minister for a response to that impassioned plea by the member, I know that the member for Rosevears, in her previous life, used to compere for some of those events, so she has an interest as well. We are all here supporting them.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I see a lot of strong advocacy across the table, and our representatives from the Tasmanian Government met with New Horizons in February and March this year. In March, it was agreed that New Horizons would be provided with time-limited specific funding to undertake an environmental scan, to see what further opportunities exist within the NDIS and the wider community, to continue to receive funding.

This funding has been provided, and New Horizons have been, as I understand it, positive regarding what the scan may find for them. I would be interested to know more about that. Have we had any further contact with them?

Ms GANLEY - We are waiting for their final reports. They have been talking with us regularly about developing what has come from their consultancy. We will then work with them to look at what their options are. We are very conscious of the need to support the organisation through the outcomes of their final report. There is a new ILC round open at the moment, and they are intending to apply for that. They have been encouraged to do that, as well.

Mr DEAN - This group, minister, too is predominantly run by volunteers. It is not a big organisation that is receiving salaries galore and so on. That is not the case. They are committed to working with these people.

If we can give some undertaking that we are not going to leave this organisation, I guess, in the lurch, for want of a better word, if they cannot access this NDIS funding. We are trying to get that for them?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am aware of the very good work they do. I think, through Ingrid's response, we are working very closely with them to support them through the process as much as possible. I hear what you are saying, absolutely. If that organisation is doing good work

out there in the community, we need to find a way of supporting - the NDIS may be a way, the ILC could be an opportunity, but we will see. We will give you that commitment.

Ms ARMITAGE - Just a supplementary and I will try to find a way of making it a question. We have had meetings in the past with Jacqui Petrusma, I think it was.

As I said, they have tried everything with NDIS, but on 15 November 2020, it was in the media, in *The Examiner* - 'New Horizons are desperate for core funding as the COVID-19 pandemic wiped out their fundraising efforts'. It does say that they were relying on the community to come up with money.

It says -

As of March, it will no longer get core funding from the government, and will therefore be entirely reliant on community goodwill to stay afloat.

I guess what we are asking is a commitment from the Government for some type of underwriting, if, for some reason or some way that they actually don't qualify, for the other means you have actually mentioned, because I don't believe they do.

The member for Windermere will remember when we have met with them, along with the previous member for Rosevears, Kerry Finch. They filled out application after application, all to be turned down.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Okay. So perhaps if Kate Kent - welcome to Kate.

Ms ARMITAGE - Remember they have staff members as well who they need to keep employed to actually keep the activities for the young people.

It is really a matter of having some certainty, and for the young and old who are clients of all ages and they do a wonderful job out there with many activities.

Mr DEAN - Their funding is not huge not when you look at it.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is minor compared to many other things

Ms KENT - Thank you and my apologies for being late because I was in the Sport and Recreation hearing. From that perspective, through our division, through Community Sport and Recreation, New Horizons do get funded through the State Grants program for \$60 000 per annum for disability sport and recreation. We work really closely with them. I know last year in 2019 we worked with them, as well as Ingrid's area, on their strategic plan, looking for ways to ensure they could become a sustainable organisation. They do a lot of great things in inclusive sports.

CHAIR - It is fair to say they do get out there and fundraise but, as I have mentioned, they just haven't been able to because of COVID-19. We know it is not lost on you, minister

Mr ROCKLIFF - It's not lost on me. Thank you for your advocacy. Between now and the next 10 months, there will be a fair bit of water that would have gone under the bridge. As soon as we get the report, there is a fair bit that can happen as I understand it.

Output Group 4

Disability Services and Community Development

4.3 Community Development - Policy Advice and Ongoing Community Development -

Ms PALMER - Minister, Tasmanians with disability need to know what support and services are available to them, certainly particularly during the time of a pandemic. What is the Government doing to ensure people with disabilities, their families and, in particular, their service providers continue to receive information and essential disability support that they might need?

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is a very important question. We are committed to the principle that people with disability have the same right of access to services as all Australians do. The challenges, as you mentioned, the pandemic has impacted the state earlier in the year and we are still feeling the effects of that now. My office worked alongside the NDS, the Department of Communities Tasmania, the Department of Health and the NDIA to ensure providers and health services were linked up and informed. This included funding the NDS to coordinate regular interface meetings - Zoom meetings - with a number of stakeholders so we could be aware of what supports were needed and where, and to respond accordingly.

This also helps to ensure the NDIA was across the relevant issues being raised by providers and stakeholders in Tasmania, providing real-time feedback on services and supports. I want to thank these service providers for their ongoing feedback, particularly Ingrid and the Disability Services Team that also ensured the department website was updated in line with the changing advice as well as their important work in developing the Tasmanian Coronavirus Disability Service Providers Preparedness and Response Plan.

The plan provides guidance to Tasmanian disability service providers to ensure they are prepared for and can manage the impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses, people with disability being supported, and the workforce. It provides links to key information sources and further guidance materials for disability service providers. This is in addition to the supports being provided by the Commonwealth, such as supply of PPE and infection control training, a disability specific helpline, and extension of the NDIS supports.

A recent example of how the NDIS self-responds is the temporary measures in place to assist participants in South Australia, which includes eligible NDIS participants able to use plan funding to purchase low-cost assisted technology, including smart devices up to \$1500, greater planned flexibility to ensure access to supports and deep-cleaning of residences in the event a support worker returns positive to a COVID-19 test.

Here in Tasmania, as part of our ongoing COVID-19 outbreak preparedness work, and similar to what has been provided to residential aged care providers, the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre and the Emergency Coordination Centre - in partnership with Communities Tasmania and the NDIA, the NDIS Commission, and Tasmanian Health

Services - are currently planning outbreak scenario workshops for providers of disability supported independent living in Tasmania. Supported independent living sites have been identified as a COVID-19 priority setting.

Although some of the outbreak scenarios might apply to other types of disability service provision, supported independent living will be the focus.

The workshops will be held virtually. The week prior to these workshops, a virtual training session will offer supported independent living - SIL - providers a refresher on the Tasmanian outbreak management framework, infection prevention and control, and preparation of the outbreak scenario workshops. Thank you for the question.

Ms PALMER - Thank you. One further question on this. I would like your thoughts on carers, with regard to the significant contribution they make to the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians. What is the Government doing to understand what additional supports for carers might be needed, both before and during the pandemic?

CHAIR - I have a supplementary to that, and I thank the member for her question. The Carer Issues Reference Group - can you identify some matters that have come out of that particular reference group as well, in answering the member's question?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I have met with the Carers Tasmania, and Young Carers Tasmania recently as well. I get the sense very strongly that we all value our carers, who make a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians in need of support and assistance.

I acknowledge Carers Tasmania and their important role in advocating for and supporting carers, which is why Carers Tasmania will receive peak body funding of \$115 005 per annum in 2020-21 - with annual indexation at 2.25 per cent. We know carers have been impacted by COVID-19, and our department has been meeting with Carers Tasmania regularly to understand this impact and the needs of our carers.

During the height of the pandemic, along with our office, Carers Tasmania was one of the key community organisations that engaged with the regular TasCOSS online meetings, sharing information and helping link people to the supports and services they needed.

Our Tasmanian Carer Policy 2016 raises awareness of the important and critical role of unpaid carers, and the associated carer action plan includes 22 actions to increase the recognition of carers, to improve the level of support and services they receive, and involve them in developing and evaluating policies, programs and services that affect them in their caring role.

For the purposes of our Tasmanian Carer Policy, carers are unpaid family members or friends, as opposed to paid carers, foster carers and kinship carers. They provide support for their loved ones because of disability, mental illness, drug or alcohol issues, dementia - all health conditions from chronic illness, frailty and ageing into palliative care. Importantly, our policy acknowledges the invaluable role unpaid carers play.

It recognises them as individuals in their own right, and respects them as the key partners in the care support team. The associated Care Action Plan 2017-20, as I say, includes those

22 actions to increase the recognition of carers, and improve the level of support and services they receive. The plan concludes in December, and I'm pleased to report that our department is progressing updating this important plan.

Broad consultation with stakeholders, including consultation through our Carer Issues Reference Group, is currently underway. The reference group includes representation from Carers Tasmania, Mental Health Family and Friends Tasmania, the National Disability Insurance Agency, and relevant Commonwealth Government and Tasmanian Government departments.

When I attended the Carer Issues Reference Group meeting on 4 August, I heard firsthand about what can be done to assist Tasmanian carers to access support, and Carers Tasmania's role in this. Importantly, we discussed options for the Tasmanian Carer Action Plan post-2020, when the current plan concludes.

I consider that the reference group will be vital in assisting with the development of this, regarding what additional support for carers might be needed. It was agreed that the updated plan needs to incorporate short-, medium- and long-term actions, as well as any learnings from the pandemic.

I look forward to the progression of this work. We are hoping to have that plan finalised by March 2021.

CHAIR - Will that identify the specific areas the reference group wants to focus on? Is that correct?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, that is right.

CHAIR - Three nods at the table, that is a good sign.

I want to ask now, minister, about a really important association, the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association. This support group delivers support to our Men's Sheds. They have morning tea from 10 a.m. to about 4 p.m. in most of the Men's Sheds that I have ever attended. If you go empty-handed, you are not that welcome, so you need to take morning tea with you.

There has been quite a bit of funding over the years. Are there any plans to establish any new Men's Sheds in this state?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you. You understand the value of our Men's Sheds, and I would agree with you. I have visited a number of them as a local MP.

CHAIR - There is always someone there, minister, so you can drop in any time, as long as you go on the right day, of course, because there are certain days.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I have visited the chaps at Zeehan, Port Sorell and others. I had correspondence during the week from the Bridport Men's Shed regarding a particular issue. So, of course we support our 55 Men's Sheds, and we acknowledge their vital role in promoting a sense of community, while providing a safe, supportive environment where men can form friendships, share skills and access support.

CHAIR - I understand all the good work, so that is fine. It is really about: is there any request to establish any new Men's Sheds?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, there have probably been requests in various forms. My answer to that is yes. As you know, each shed has its own particular uniqueness, and develops its own culture. We have continued our funding for the Men's Shed Association Grants Program - \$375 000 over three years to support the sustainable development of Men's Sheds, and increase their capacity to provide a safe and supportive environment.

In the 2019-20 funding round, \$125 000 was allocated to 25 projects to purchase tools, equipment, participate in training or undertake small capital works in Men's Sheds across the state.

The 2020-21 the grant program closed on 30 October this year, with 36 applications received, requesting a total \$237 000.

CHAIR - Over-subscribed.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Of course. The program is administered by the Department of Communities, and applications are currently being assessed.

Throughout COVID-19, we allocated \$65 000 to the association to ensure that participants in the Men's Sheds stay connected. The mental health and wellbeing value of Men's Sheds can never be understated. Our Roadmap to Recovery provides guidance for them to reopen their doors for up to 10 people so they can once again provide a place for Tasmanians to connect and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

We work with a peak body -

CHAIR - Are there any requests for new Men's Sheds in any particular communities?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am aware of requests in my patch for a relocation of an existing Men's Shed, the Devonport one.

CHAIR - They want to upgrade their facility?

Mr ROCKLIFF - No, their premises have no longer become available, because of the organisation they were working for.

Mr DEAN - Lilydale is certainly looking at one, and I have met with them a couple of times.

CHAIR - When will those grants be announced?

Mr ROCKLIFF - The one that finalised in October 2020, when will we be announcing those?

Ms HURWORTH - They'll be announced in the next fortnight. To answer the question around specific requests for new sheds, there's often ideas for new sheds in communities but 55 sheds is quite a lot for a small state, so the focus of our work has been to try to work with

the sheds we have, to make them sustainable and to meet the needs of the men in their communities.

For example, Hobart has 18 Men's Sheds in the Greater Hobart area, and so the work we have been doing with the TMSA has been about trying to help those sheds that are established, to meet the needs that might be there, and to be sustainable so that they can keep going and doing the work that they do.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I visited the Ravenswood Men's Shed recently, which is terrific.

Mr DEAN - It is really wonderful for that region.

CHAIR - I have 66 communities in my electorate so 55 sheds is not that many for Tasmania, but I take on board your point about sustainability.

Mr DEAN - Rocherlea has a very good shed and that is probably one of the better ones in the state really. Purpose- built; provides a lot of activities.

Ms ARMITAGE - As has Kings Meadows.

CHAIR - It might be we have a bidding war going on, as we often do.

Ms PALMER - I'm trying to get one for Riverside.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, it is important they are borne of the community and they have their own uniqueness and special culture, and you really need the community to come up with the ideas, the passion and the drive for it, and demonstrate that sustainability as well.

CHAIR - Thank you and my last question in this output area. This area administers the Companion Card and the Seniors Card programs. Can I have the numbers of Companion Cards and Seniors Cards, given that we are an ageing population apparently?

Mr ROCKLIFF - In 2019-20 the target number of new Seniors Cards was 7500. The new cards issued in that financial year was 6923. Currently there are more than 116 000 Seniors Cardholders, and the Seniors Card issue year-on-year goes from 2017-18, 7534; in 2018-19, 7895 were issued; and in 2019-20, 6923.

When it comes to Companion Cards, we had a target number of 230 new cards and in fact that year the new cards issued were 394 so it exceeded the target, and as at 30 June 2020, there are 2810 current cardholders and as of 30 June 2020, 223 total business affiliates.

Companion Cards issued, year-on-year comparison: if we start at 2016-17, 290; 2017-18, 287; 2018-19, 325; and 394 in the last financial year, as I have already stated.

CHAIR - In regard to new Seniors Card Program business partners, and in the table provided in the Budget Papers, the actual for 2019-20 was 52. Who does the work in signing up those partners? Do the partners present to this particular area or is it the other way around? Is there a request from the business to be a partner?

Ms HURWORTH - It is a request from the business to become a partner.

CHAIR - Thank you. I wasn't sure whether the department actively went searching for new partners, but thank you. They are significant numbers and obviously well received in the community.

Members, any other questions in this area?

Thank you very much for those who have joined us for this area, the second time to both Kate and Courtney. Thank you, Ingrid, always good to see you. Michael, thank you for being part of the panel.

Minister for Trade and Minister for Advanced Manufacturing and Defence

Mr ROCKLIFF - Tasmania has what the world wants. Our goods were increasingly in demand prior to COVID-19 as our reputation for high-quality products continued to grow across the globe. There are many opportunities for Tasmania to strengthen its trade ties and that is why we developed the Tasmania Trade Strategy 2019-25. That will provide the certainty and the strategic direction we promised business and industry to take Tasmania's international export activity to the next level.

This year has been an extremely challenging year for Tasmania's trade with local businesses having to contend with COVID-19 affected markets, border restrictions and freight difficulties. Exports are worth approximately \$5 billion a year to our economy, delivering jobs across key industry sectors and helping Tasmanian families and communities.

The global economy has changed dramatically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and trade will play a key role in our economic recovery. The Tasmanian Government recognises the significance of trade to Tasmania and the 2020-21 Budget reflects and focuses on supporting the recovery of our export sector, with an additional \$2.65 million committed to helping our producers, our exporters and our manufacturers in all regions of Tasmania to adjust to the new global business climate. We are committed now more than ever to achieving our target of growing the value of trade to \$15 billion a year by 2050.

The Budget builds upon the \$1.1 million already invested in the Tasmanian trade annual action plan in the 2019-20 year. These efforts will not only help businesses overcome the current crisis, but will also enhance the long-term resilience of our key sectors. In July this year, I launched the interim trade action plan that was developed in response to the disruption caused by COVID-19 and we have already made good progress in implementing the 41 actions, with 17 of the actions complete, and the remaining 24 have commenced.

In July, we launched a revitalised accelerating trade grants program, boosting funding to \$500 000 to assist businesses as they reconnect and re-establish trade in their key markets as well as explore new export markets. In August, we launched the Trade Alliance Program aimed at connecting businesses, networks and precincts to engage mainland and international markets, maximising the reach of Tasmanian local business and return on investment by the collective sharing of knowledge, equipment and infrastructure.

In recent months, I have met with many of our key export sectors, resources, manufacturing, food and agribusiness, Antarctic and science and technology. The industry

roundtables have been informative and inspiring, and I value their insight on trade and international relations, risks, opportunities and priorities.

The diversity of these conversations ensures our trade actions and plans remain current, targeted and responsive with commercially-focused outcomes, and we are committed to ensuring we maintain our pre-pandemic export momentum so that we can continue to remain competitive, open up new opportunities in global markets so that we can keep industry growing and creating more jobs across Tasmania.

Trade is at the very heart of business activity. It generates employment, innovation, investment, specialisation and efficiencies that cannot be achieved serving a purely local market. Even in these unpredictable times there is enormous potential to drive economic growth through increasing Tasmania's presence in the world stage. I appreciate very much the opportunity to answer your questions.

CHAIR - Thank you, and at the table you have -

Mr ROCKLIFF - Lara Hendriks.

CHAIR - Welcome, Lara.

Ms HENDRIKS - Thank you.

CHAIR - It must almost be the honourable Bob Rutherford, the way he's going.

Thanks, minister, I will hand straight over to Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - I have four questions in this area and they're not long questions so I might ask them together, minister, because some of them overlap.

CHAIR - Two at a time.

Mr DEAN - Can you update us on the outcomes of the trade activities undertaken in 2019-20? Can you advise us on the benefits of the free trade agreements and what they mean for the state, for Tasmania?

I will just mention the other two, if you don't mind?

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's fine.

Mr DEAN - Would you please let us know what work is being done to promote Tasmanian businesses and any collaboration between the agencies that's occurring?

The last question is to update the committee on recent trade statistics, which will be of value to know that.

There might be different answers but if I can ask -

Mr ROCKLIFF - I might start with the trade statistics. I mentioned \$5 billion-worth last financial year of our international exports, making up nearly 16 per cent of our gross state

product and 20 per cent of our total Tasmanian workforce in trade-related areas. It is not hard to see the value and the relevance of trade now and into the future.

This period captures nearly three full months of impacts since the global borders closed and COVID-19 restrictions were put in place. Goods exports were \$3.7 billion and services valued at approximately \$1.31 billion.

While only marginal, Tasmanian goods exports increased by 1.2 per cent compared with the 2018-19 year. Iron ore remains strong with both greater sales and higher values following production issues in Brazil, the world's second-largest exporter of iron ore. Food and agribusiness increased by approximately 25 per cent due to the increase in global demand for Tasmania's premium and healthy products. Our red meat exports increased \$38 million or by 13 per cent, with the USA and Japan importing the lion's share of beef and the Middle East importing the majority of our lamb.

Our seafood exports increased \$82 million, or up 27 per cent, particularly driven by increases in salmon exports. Dairy exports increased \$12 million - up 8 per cent with Thailand our biggest importer of milk powder and Japan, the biggest importer of Tasmanian cheese. Fruit and vegetable exports increased by \$4 million to \$85 million - that's up 5 per cent from the previous year - and animal and vegetable-based products were \$16 million, up by 21 per cent, largely based around the increased exports of prepared animal fodder.

It's also important to note the diversification in our markets for many of our agricultural commodities with demand for our premium produce spread across the globe and I am very proud to say, many of those are in my electorate of Braddon.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to visit BioMar and I congratulate them on their first international dispatch, which occurred just six weeks after production began at the site - a task made even more remarkable given it was achieved during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The milestone first shipment contained almost 200 tonnes of mainly King Salmon fish feed, equivalent to filling around 10 shipping containers bound for New Zealand.

Mining, which is synonymous with the west coast, also increased exports of ores and concentrates by 24 per cent to \$665 million. We will continue to respond to industry needs by developing strategies and initiatives to assist our Tasmanian businesses maximise their export potential, particularly through the post-COVID-19 arrangements.

CHAIR - Some significant numbers there, minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Good numbers.

In terms of the trade activities undertaken in 2019-20 -

CHAIR - You didn't travel far, I expect you're going to tell us.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I haven't travelled at all as Minister for Trade. I was scheduled for a trade mission to the USA, amongst other areas, in late March and early April, but it is still very much on the agenda. We are committed to empowering businesses to take their products to the world. This will be powered through the Tasmania Trade Strategy, which is a six-year strategy ending in 2025.

Trade outcomes are often months and years in the making, hence why the Tasmanian Trade strategy is designed around a six-year framework. It takes some time and relationships are very important in terms of those one-to-one relationships and to build that trust.

CHAIR - That is the same for the local market. It takes quite a while to build your brand and engage with your locals.

Mr ROCKLIFF - You mentioned building brand, it is important to foster business capability, brand awareness, reputation, relationships I have mentioned, across a number of markets, both domestically - as you have mentioned - and internationally as well. Trade deals and export growth outcomes are achieved through long-term commitments and effort by both government and business.

We can all see the benefits of those long-term relationships. Some examples of trade deals that can be traced back to specific support measures, such as previous trade missions and trade events and financial assistance, include a five-year memorandum of understanding was signed with the French Polar Institute and Paul-Emile Victor during the EU-UK trade investment mission in 2019, securing continuation of the French Antarctic and Southern Ocean program operations from Hobart, leading to \$9 million a year into the Tasmania economy.

Westhaven Dairy, Van Diemens Land Creamery and Meru Miso all reported new contracts valued at nearly \$2 million after participating in a Tasmanian pavilion at the Fine Food Australia Sydney fair in September 2019. Trade shows such as HOFEX expose Tasmanian businesses to over 40 000 trade visitors from 74 countries. Three of the seven Tasmania delegates at HOFEX in 2019 secured agreements to be in City Super and ParknShop supermarkets respectively across Hong Kong. Several Hong Kong newspapers and social media highlighted Tasmania presence at the trade show, increasing Tasmania brand awareness.

In March 2019, the former premier, Will Hodgman, led a trade and investment mission to Japan with the focus on Antarctic, premium food and beverage and forestry. Key outcomes included the signing of the new MOU with agricultural co-op, JA Biei, which I also signed an agreement with in February 2017, in Tokyo. With a crop trial valued at up to \$400 000 in the first year, new contracts for Tasmania wines and whisky, already valued in excess of \$100 000 and ongoing discussions with Japan in relation to Tasmania as an Antarctic gateway.

In December last year, our Minister for Primary Industries, Energy and Resources led a delegation to China. This visit was critical in supporting Tasmania's trade opportunities in wool, traditional Chinese medicines, seafood, minerals, forestry, timber and energy. As a result of this visit, an investor has already announced a willingness to invest \$1 million towards research into the growth and optimisation of herb production in Tasmania. Medicinal herb crops will help to further diversify the state's agricultural sector and the export potential goes beyond China into other Asian countries and other global markets.

Additionally, a delegation has visited Tasmania to discuss wind farm development and a pilot hydrogen facility. The visit also generated significant Tasmanian brand awareness, with 5.62 million viewing the minister's live seafood showcase stream and 1.64 million views of his [inaudible] post and over 2000 comments and 11 000 likes.

CHAIR - That is a very extensive briefing note, minister.

Mr DEAN - Just to follow up on that, export - we have a lot on that. The imports if you look at it the other way, into the state, obviously are creating a lot of concerns.

The complaints I am receiving is from people who are trying to do their Christmas shopping. They are saying that the products are just not in the shops. A lot of the retailers are saying we just can't get it. We can't get the product that is needed, that people want.

I have heard a lot of people saying, 'Well, we are going online to buy them. I can't get it here, therefore I have to go online to get the products.'. We have trade exporting, but I wonder about the importing side of it as well.

When is that going to really free up, I suppose is the question.

Mr ROCKLIFF - If you look at our local produce right now, to the domestic market's benefit, we have a lot of rock lobster for sale domestically at the moment.

I am sure our rock lobster fishermen, hardworking people as they are, would much prefer to export those internationally, but given the circumstances around the pandemic, and trade to China and the like, we will have a lot more crayfish or rock lobster - whatever you like to call it - on the domestic market, which is of benefit to local consumers.

But I am sure most Tasmanians would like to see our hardworking fishermen -

CHAIR - They just don't get the same return, with all due respect, into the domestic market, and that is the long and the short of it.

Mr ROCKLIFF - With your other areas of State Growth responsibility, in terms of freight logistics, Ms Hendriks might be able to provide some insight into imported goods.

Ms HENDRIKS - Perhaps if I think about the minister's other hat in Advanced Manufacturing and Defence, with the latest action plan that has just been released, there is a strong KPI in there, just not about export, but actually about import replacement.

Obviously, we talk very strongly - and you might hear that later in Defence - about sovereign capability. There is a very strong focus, and I think COVID-19 has really brought an awareness of some of those key issues, but Chair, you raised a very good point. It does come down to volume, capability, pricing, where they are going to get the best returns, but we are seeing a lot of businesses turn their focus to domestic markets. Perhaps not Tasmania, but in our trade strategy, we have international markets of focus.

Absolutely it recognises in there that one of the first markets we should look at, one of the strongest markets in opportunity, is actually the Australian domestic market.

I think industry is really aware of that. It doesn't matter what goes off island. Everything goes off water here, so we are happy to classify it as export. We talked about that yesterday.

Ms ARMITAGE - My question is with regard to the trade tensions between China and Australia. What are we actually doing to try to shore up our trade with China, and have we lost, or has China turned its back on any of our trade of recent times?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Well, of course it is always a very complex relationship.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yesterday we discovered with Mr Barnett that a lot of our trade, particularly in some of our commodities, the majority of it was actually going to China, and if that was all of a sudden to stop, there would be significant difficulties in some areas.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The latest export figures suggest that 41 per cent of our exports go to China. A lot of that includes -

Ms ARMITAGE - A lot of produce we were looking at yesterday as well.

Mr ROCKLIFF - resources component that Mr Barnett was talking about. Our next highest trading partner is Japan - 7.3 per cent of exports.

The trade strategy recognises the complex global trading environment, and prioritises the need to adapt, and to be proactive in responding to challenges and potential new opportunities. The overarching trade strategy has always been based on the core philosophy of market expansion, diversification, and managing those export risks, which I think you are alluding to.

This means that both the Tasmanian Trade Strategy 2019-25, and the Interim Trade Action Plan, make us well placed to enter the post-COVID-19 trade environment.

China, of course, is one of our key trading partners, and it is important that we continue to have an engaging and cooperative relationship with China.

Ms ARMITAGE - What are we doing towards that? I have been looking at media, like everyone else, and back in early November the media reported tons of Australian lobster stuck in Chinese airports amid trade tensions. It doesn't matter where you look, you will find that there are issues with trade. So, what is the Tasmanian Government doing with regard to tensions and trade with China?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We recognise that geopolitical tensions do present potential risks to trade, which is why our strategy is to diversify our markets. We build resilience and flexibility within Tasmanian businesses and industry.

The current Tasmanian Trade Strategy recognises China as one of the five priority markets for Tasmania in maintaining and growing future trade. As a government, we are committed to establishing a balanced approach to maintaining our strong relationships with China, while also providing opportunities for business to access other international markets, and growing opportunities in the Tasmanian domestic market.

Of course, our Australian Government has the jurisdiction of -

CHAIR - That is probably our Achilles heel right at this time, with due respect.

Mr ROCKLIFF - matters of foreign policy and diplomacy. I have been speaking with the federal Trade minister, Simon Birmingham. Early conversations this year were around - just as the impacts of the pandemic were being felt in terms of rock lobster in January, February, and the impact on the pandemic in China, and what that meant for our rock lobster fishermen

in terms of not being able to provide the resource for the Chinese New Year, and all these sorts of things. Since that time, we have often engaged with Mr Birmingham's office.

We need to stay across all our developments in this space, and work with them to provide any support required. We also work closely with the federal government to facilitate the global trade opportunities. We will continue to advocate for Tasmanian export businesses, and relay market access concerns to the Australian Government, and work with key industry stakeholders to ensure we are responding to, and creating, opportunities that benefit our state.

When it comes to issues around market access, it is important we respect every country's right to adhere to their import requirements, just as Australia has a right to uphold our import requirements. It is important we continue to work on this complex relationship, play our part, notwithstanding the fact that the Australian Government has jurisdiction over foreign policy and diplomacy.

We will play our part where we can as a state, of course, but it is important that we continue to have an engaging and cooperative relationship with all our trading partners, including China.

Mr DEAN - A friend of mine caught a flight the other day from Hobart to the Gold Coast. On board that aircraft, the pilot advised them that he was carrying two tonnes of abalone from Tasmania - so where would that product be going to? The reason it came up was the fact that they could only load half the fuel on board that they were able to take, so they had to stop in Sydney on the way to refuel to get through to the Gold Coast.

Would that have been an overseas shipment of abalone at the end, or would it be just going into the Queensland?

CHAIR - I am not sure they would have contacted the Minister for Trade to check with them.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We do export abalone.

Mr DEAN - No, I was just wondering. I would have thought that we would have known of that movement of fresh fish product.

CHAIR - I have seven blank faces.

Mr WILLIE - We need a GPS on every trade movement.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am happy to follow that up for you.

Mr DEAN - It would be interesting to know.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It is an important resource as well, our abalone. We could probably identify where -

Ms HENDRIKS - Underbellies of planes are being utilised a lot at the moment.

Mr DEAN - They are, and that is what the pilot was saying.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Supported by the federal government with the IFAM subsidy, we will call it, which has enabled exports to continue. Plane-loads of people are very good to carry freight across the globe but when there are not plane-loads of people, and flights are not going, it presents enormous logical challenges. The IFEM support from the Federal Government has been absolutely invaluable and is extended to the end of June 2021.

Ms ARMITAGE - Would you like me to answer the question, member for Windermere? Over the next 12 weeks, two flights per week, carrying 15 tonnes of goods, such as oysters, abalone, crayfish, vegetables and dairy, will depart for Sydney where produce will connect with international freight routes and be distributed to key Asian markets, including Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

CHAIR -The only reason it stopped in Sydney was to drop off the abalone, not to refuel.

Advanced Manufacturing and Defence

Mr ROCKLIFF - I have a short opening statement when it comes to Advanced Manufacturing. I have retired Rear Admiral Steve Gilmour, Tasmania's Defence Advocate.

We have a sector of Advanced Manufacturing Defence Industries which is a key contributor to our economy and a significant employer across the state. It is Tasmania's largest export industry and employs approximately 18 000 people directly, including well-paid, skilled and highly valued jobs. It is the fifth-largest industry in Tasmania by gross state product, generating some \$1.8 billion in 2018-19.

The Tasmanian Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan, which I launched recently, and the Tasmanian Defence Industry Strategy provide the certainty and strategic direction we promised industry to ensure they can take their manufacturing capability to the next level.

We have delivered in full the Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan 2016 and at its conclusion we undertook a review of the impact of the plan that identified direct outcomes, including \$51 million in increased sales directly related to grant programs; private investment of \$36.7 million generated from \$9.6 million of grant funding, equating to \$3.81 invested for every grant dollar; 756 new jobs created for Tasmanians and a further 69 new jobs from supported projects forecast to be completed by 2022.

In addition to the review findings, in 2019-20, Tasmanian business were awarded manufacturing contracts in excess of \$32 million in Defence and a further \$7.3 million in the Antarctic sector. To ensure we continue to maintain this momentum and success, we recently launched the new Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan 2024, which has been developed in consultation with industry. The plan recognises that we require an agile and collaborative approach to what we do to achieve success, and 2020 has been a stark reminder of the circumstances that can change quickly and our approach to work collaboratively is so important.

Our Defence Industry Strategy continues to support our defence industry, facilitating investment and development for Tasmanian businesses and institutions, and this follows a concerted effort to raise awareness of, and confidence in, Tasmania's defence industry capabilities across the Department of Defence and with key defence industry stakeholders.

The strategy is clearly working, with the Australian Government investing \$1.5 million in Tasmanian companies and more than 23 contracts awarded with a total value in excess of \$32 million in 2019-20; in recognition of the significant opportunities presented, 11 Tasmanian companies made the decision to explore Defence industry opportunities for the first time in 2019-20, with the Tasmanian Defence Advocate assisting the companies to navigate this complex sector and identify opportunities.

Retired Rear Admiral Steve Gilmore, to my left, Tasmania's Defence Advocate, is supporting these efforts and has broadened his role in the 2019-20 year to provide strategic support to our commercial maritime industry, and we will continue to create the right conditions for Tasmanian manufacturers to grow and prosper, to invest and to employ more Tasmanians.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, I am really interested in this electric bus trial, and given that the last 100 buses, I believe, for Metro came out of Wynyard, whether there is capability after that trial to maybe convert some of the existing busses to hydrogen-powered energy, or whether they could manufacture electric buses from scratch in Wynyard with the technology they have developed? I'm interested in that, and the opportunities for the state.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That's a very good question and that has been a tremendous success, as I understand it. I have visited the site a couple of times, you may well have done on your tours around the place. The design of the busses is that they've got diesel fuel now, but they can be retrofitted reasonably easily. I'm sure it's complex, but in terms of the space and the modifications around the bus design, the diesel engine comes out and electric battery and parts go in.

There are some challenges with electric-powered buses at the present time. The technology is always increasing, but in Tasmanian conditions - let's just take Hobart as an example, not all routes because we've got hills and some difficult terrain - we probably need to further enhance the storage capability of our electric vehicles because the range at the moment of the electric technology is probably not conducive to Tasmanian conditions, given the terrain and the power required to go up and down hills and those sorts of things. Flat areas, of course, are a little easier because they require less power. But in terms of the design of the bus, forward thinking was put in place in the design to be able to retrofit the vehicles from diesel to electric.

Hydrogen really falls across - in fact, most of what I've just said is really Mr Ferguson's portfolio - but you might be able to provide some more information, Ms Hendriks, on the hydrogen aspects.

Mr WILLIE - The hydrogen would have greater capability in terms of range and probably power, wouldn't it?

Ms HENDRIKS - There is a really strong focus in our manufacturing sector around conversion of where hydrogen and energy can be used. The minister gave an excellent explanation of the electric buses. He's right, the topography is the fundamental issue. The technology is getting there, and there are other applications. Some of the future applications might be around micromanufacturing facilities. Smaller buses, even autonomous smaller electric busses for smaller usage. Maybe there is a stepping stage to some of the larger buses, but that's certainly the aspiration.

Mr WILLIE - I heard the Premier say it during his speech, but how long is that trial supposed to be going for, and when can we see some of the fleet being switched over?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I'm interested too. We could get more detail on that.

CHAIR - I'm not interested in having an electric car for the terrain that I travel, no.

Mr WILLIE - I drive a hybrid. It's great.

CHAIR - You drive around Glenorchy. Thanks very much.

Mr WILLIE - I drive around the Huon as well.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The technology is increasing rapidly in electric and hydrogen but I'm sure Mr Ferguson would be more than happy to answer that for you and can probably provide some information as well.

CHAIR - Thank you. A briefing in the new year. Another question, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - No. I think it's just a good opportunity.

CHAIR - Yes, well, it probably is for some aspects of the fleet. Thank you, Mr Dean. Then I'm going to Ms Armitage.

Mr DEAN - What activities have been undertaken to promote the defence industries sector? In asking that question, I don't know if you're still making the ration packs at Scottsdale or has that ended now? All I remember of those ration packs were dog biscuits. You could chew on them for a week and still be eating the same biscuit you started with.

CHAIR - My understanding is the ration packs come from New Zealand.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We will tackle that issue first and the Defence Advocate - and I know it's important to -

Mr DEAN - The defence industry sector, what we're doing.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Ms Rattray's electorate as well, of course.

Mr GILMORE - On the issue of ration packs, it is correct that the totality of the ration packs are assembled or put together in New Zealand -

CHAIR - New Zealand.

Mr GILMORE - with some Australian content. Importantly, the DSC establishment at Scottsdale is now the centre of quite some significant innovation as it relates to the provision of what are now called meals ready to eat so MREs. They now have in place something which is referred to as MATS which stands for microwave-assisted sterilisation. It's not something to do with family planning; it is all about extending the longevity of the nutritional value of fresh food so it doesn't need refrigeration or freezing. This is quite a revolutionary step in the provision of those sorts of meals to our defence force.

Mr DEAN - No, it's great.

Mr GILMORE - Just very recently it was announced that a northern Tasmanian company - Forager Food - who are specialists in freeze-dried foods, leading in the country in that particular area, have been chosen to partner with DST Scottsdale. They will move people and equipment into Scottsdale to bring that commercial expertise into the Defence space so quite an exciting move for our industry.

Mr DEAN - I'm interested in that.

CHAIR - For a number of years now there has been a real question mark over the future of that facility, so that is good news.

Mr GILMORE - Yes, I think it's very much assured in a partnership role.

Mr DEAN - Great news. That's good.

CHAIR - Yes, it's good news.

Mr ROCKLIFF - In addition to that, last October, Tasmania's largest-ever contingent showcased their capabilities - products and services - at the Pacific 2019 International Maritime Exposition in Sydney. Pacific 2019 is one of the biggest maritime trade shows in the world and 11 Tasmanian advanced manufacturing, design and technology companies, along with the University of Tasmania and the university's Australian Maritime College, showcased their capabilities, products and services to more than 40 navies, 80 international delegations, 546 companies and almost 17 000 visitors from around the world.

Our former Premier, Will Hodgman, undertook a five-day trade and investment delegation to the UK and Europe to promote our world-class capabilities in the defence, maritime and Antarctic sectors back in November 2019. The delegation included Tasmania's defence advocate and representatives from the Tasmanian maritime and defence businesses to pursue trade opportunities. The visit included the Thales Underwater Systems facility in France and Navantia Shipyard in Spain to build ties and develop opportunities for Tasmanian exports in the civil maritime advanced manufacturing and technology sectors.

Navantia is the fifth-largest shipbuilder in the EU and services the military and civil sector worldwide. Three classes of warships in Australia are currently Navantia designs and the company is keen to explore opportunities to conduct designs and innovative developments in Tasmania.

In September this year, the Department of State Growth organised a maritime insights tour. That was aimed to raise awareness of Tasmania's impressive maritime industry capabilities amongst many of Tasmania's key maritime organisations and institutions. The participants visited three shipyards, a specialised watercraft manufacturer, other manufacturers providing inputs in the sector.

Our Defence Advocate hosted the tour, assisted by the Chair of the Tasmanian Maritime Network, Dr Jeff Hawkins, and departmental staff. We are also commencing a new trade marketing campaign, including the defence and maritime sectors as part of the Interim Trade Action Plan Response to COVID-19. The campaign will be developed in partnership with

Brand Tasmania and will promote Tasmanian products and services in key target markets. This will be particularly important whilst international travel restrictions are in place and businesses are unable to undertake their usual in-market trade activities.

In coming months, articles will be appearing in the key defence media, including the *Australian Defence Magazine* and *Defence Connect*, which are the two dominant media sources for the defence industry.

Additionally, we're delivering a number of the companies virtual tour videos that will enhance their ability to profile their capabilities with customers. This promotional work is already getting attention and I have been delighted to already welcome several interstate delegations keen to explore the world-class capability of the sector. So that's an update for you.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - What actions are being taken to support the advanced manufacturing sector during COVID-19?

You have given some reference on that but if you could just explain what is happening in that regard.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I touched on it a bit in my opening statement, but I will paraphrase it again for you.

We launched the Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan last week and the plan is continuing to support our manufacturers to remain competitive and grow through innovation, taking into account the impacts of COVID-19 and funded by a \$400 000 investment in this Budget. The plan sets out the priorities and actions for government that will guide the state's manufacturing future.

In response to COVID-19, the Government through the Tasmanian Development Board provided loans to 21 manufacturers totalling \$2.469 million. We provided 173 manufacturers with grants under Round 2 of the Emergency Support Grants totalling \$432 500; 114 manufacturers were provided with Hardship Grants totalling \$1.083 million. The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation and Growth Voucher System was extended from 1 July 2020 until the end of September for those businesses wishing to maximise opportunities during the pandemic, and five additional businesses received approval for the grants during the extension period.

The number of manufacturers who have also taken the opportunity to pivot their operations into other areas, such as manufacturing hand sanitiser, and support broader Tasmanian industry to continue to trade under new conditions. Others are pivoting into other areas of activity. It's very pleasing to see that many of our companies have adapted to produce critical PPE for the state. You might recall during the pandemic there were talks about shortages of hand sanitiser and the like. Our distilleries stepped up to the plate and produced some of that product, diversifying to meet our need.

CHAIR- There's going to be a shortage of alcohol if they keep on promoting sanitiser.

Mr DEAN - It won't be a bad thing.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Indeed.

Others are pivoting in other areas. More than 50 Tasmanian businesses registered with us to assist directly with the COVID-19 pandemic. We're continuing to explore other programs for assistance. We recognise the disruption but it has highlighted the fact that, right across Australia, we need to reset and have a look at what we can produce locally to ensure that we are -

CHAIR - And not rely on others so much.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. I think sovereign capability is the key phrase there.

Mr DEAN - The loans provided by the Government to these manufacturers that you referred to, are they repayable with interest? What are the conditions around the loans?

Mr STEWART - We've had two different loan programs roll out under Mr Ferguson's portfolio, through the administration of the TD board. Both those programs have an interest free period and then a period where interest is levied. The terms are three years. There is a period, depending on which scheme it is, of interest-free and then there's an interest accrual.

Mr DEAN - If they pay it back within that interest-free period, that's free, but over that they then accrue an interest, is that it?

Mr STEWART - Correct.

Ms ARMITAGE - Just looking at groups, gin distilleries were mentioned, but I think we also need to commend the Tassie Face Mask Project sewing group and Bronwyn Ballantyne. What help has the Government given, or is prepared to give? I know, having spoken to Bronwyn at one stage, that it almost became a full-time job without pay, trying to organise and get these sewers, I think, making thousands upon thousands of masks. I know at one stage they were supplying them to Victoria.

We only need to have a case back in Tasmania, and all of a sudden they will need to be working again, because there has been a shortage of the PPE and all the other equipment.

What is the Government doing to assist groups such as this that have been working very hard?

Mr ROCKLIFF - I recognise that, and I commend Ms Ballantyne for the work she has done in this particular area. Of course -

Ms ARMITAGE - I know assistance was desperately needed. She did ask me at one stage where they might actually get some funding or some assistance, because you can't expect people to be sewing and making these masks day in, day out, on a voluntary basis, indefinitely.

Mr ROCKLIFF - In terms of within our health system, and it's probably a question for our Health minister in terms of PPE supplies and the like -

Ms ARMITAGE - I guess it's still manufacturing. They are making.

Mr ROCKLIFF - More broadly, we're looking at what we can produce locally here - what we lent our mind to 12 months ago, for example. It cannot be - we can provide you an answer in terms of our support for community support -

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm thinking more of support rather than loans. Grants more so than loans, I guess, to help manufacturing.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes. Do we have any information on that?

Ms HENDRIKS - We had a dedicated officer from our department working as part of an interagency committee. The support around the PPE, I think the minister mentioned 40 businesses registered, of which they were one. I don't know the personal situation of that business, but we do have a dedicated client manager in Hobart who can perhaps work with that client. Obviously, COVID's not gone, so whether there's opportunities in other markets for those face masks. We're more than happy to get some -

CHAIR - They need them in the United States.

Ms ARMITAGE - They were concerned at one stage, and they really believed that every household in Tasmania should have some, just in case, and obviously there will be a shortage if for some reason we get cases back.

CHAIR - I have a question in relation to the number of the DST workforce at Scottsdale, is that known? I know there are people who have left recently, so that's why I was a bit surprised there was much going on.

Mr GILMORE - We can follow up with a definitive answer, but it is around 17 full-time Defence personnel.

Ms ARMITAGE - Defence personnel?

Mr GILMORE - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Not local people?

Mr GILMORE - No, they're not uniformed Defence, they are local people - I'm sorry if I misled you there - employed by Defence in varying capacities. There is also the Centre for Food Innovation, which is a partnership between the university and DSTO. So, there are a number of university folks there as well.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I think Mr Gilmore was going to add to an answer to Mr Dean's question in terms of investment into the state.

Mr GILMORE - It follows on from your question, Mr Dean, that relates to what are we doing to advertise, and what is the success of that. As the minister indicated, there are multiple paths that we're going down. Most recently we have put in place a Tasmanian Maritime Capabilities campaign. That is where we are dominant, not surprising as an island state; we are a maritime state. We have some unbelievably unique to the country - and in some cases

unique to the world - capabilities. That is what we have sought to put forward over the last few months and to educate and make our companies that are doing so well in the commercial space, aware of how to connect with Defence, and where the opportunities are.

When I spoke to this committee last year, I highlighted we were at that educate-connect stage to better position our companies from across the state. That has now proven to be very worthwhile. What I have seen as perhaps a great KPI, rather than us pushing our companies on to Defence and defence industry on the mainland, we are getting the pull factor. So we have gone from push to pull and most recently as an example of that, two of our companies have been shortlisted at the very start of a contracting process. Defence and Defence primes are seeing the rather unique capability down here. That has led to investment.

The Commonwealth Government has invested \$30 million over the next three years into the AMC to develop the Defence and Maritime Design and Innovation Precinct. This is a significant achievement by the university and AMC particularly, to be able to highlight to the Commonwealth Government and the Department of Defence that we are leading in so many ways. The first tranche of that funding has arrived and AMC is working to put in place the detail which will keep that institution at the very forefront of national capability.

CHAIR - Thank you. That is very good information, particularly for the north of the state as regards the AMC. It is a key area. Minister, there are no more questions in regard to advanced manufacturing and defence.

Ms HENDRIKS - Could I answer the trial question you asked about the buses? There will be one in the north and one in the south within the next two years, as a trial.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Electric or hydrogen?

Ms HENDRIKS - It says electric or hydrogen, so they are looking at both options.

CHAIR - Minister, on behalf of the committee I thank you for your contribution to this Estimates committee process. It has been enlightening and I particularly acknowledge the enormous amount of work that goes into preparing for these last four days. You may have drawn the short straw in having us for day 4. We all become a little weary after all these hours in this room but we appreciate the opportunity to ask the questions and we see the answers that are always received well and are detailed in their responses.

I particularly acknowledge your sensitive nature in the way that you answered the question from member for Launceston around the issue of suicide which we know is a very sensitive area; I thought you did an amazing job with that. Thank you and we wish you all the best. While the public record is going, I thank Lynne from Hansard, who has been with us for the entire four days and our secretariat support, Natasha and Allie, who are exceptional as well. I particularly thank the members of this committee who worked very hard to put together their questions.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Can I have a final word?

CHAIR - You may.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Can I thank your committee as well but also my team. I have had two days of full scrutiny and there was a lot of work leading up to that. Our departments and our public service are always outstanding, but particularly through this year. Every single department I have dealt with - and I know other ministers would say the same - our departments and our public service have stepped up to the plate magnificently, as they always do, but particularly through the pandemic, and our team as well led by my Chief of Staff, Mr Field, and all our wonderful advisers. They are very committed and believe very much in what they're doing.

CHAIR - I might have the last word because I can. The thing that I notice most of all and I am not sure other members have, was the reference to working within and between agencies really came forth through this Estimates process. I would like to think that would keep going because it would have better outcomes for everyone in Tasmania. Keep up the good work.

The Committee adjourned at 6.10 p.m.