

Monday 28 June 2010 Estimates Committee B (Thorp) - Part 2

CHAIR - Welcome back, Minister.

Mrs TAYLOR - My question was really about a line in the Budget.

Ms THORP - Page please.

Mrs TAYLOR - It is table 9.7 on page 9.9, the line about retained revenue. What does that represent, why is it held and why does the number not change from year to year?

Ms THORP - It is a contribution by MAIB.

Mr HINE - The Motor Accident Insurance Board

Mrs TAYLOR - I understand the letters.

Ms THORP - They pay money into police.

Mrs TAYLOR - Why is it called retained revenue?

Ms THORP - I asked that question of the Treasurer only a couple of weeks ago, what on earth does this mean. It is where there is an income stream into the department.

Mrs TAYLOR - That does not sound like retained revenue does it?

Ms THORP - I know but you know what accountants are like. That is what it means.

CHAIR - So why doesn't it increase because MAIB does?

Mr HINE - It does actually increase. There is an increase every year and next year it is going to be increased but it is not paid into Consolidated Revenue so it is retained by the department.

CHAIR - Forward estimates are right out to 2013-14.

Mrs TAYLOR - It still lists exactly the same. The question I am asking then is why does it not go into Consolidated Revenue. Why is it in retained revenue and why does it not change?

Mr HINE - It is actually negotiated each year so I am not sure why it remains the same there, but MAIB pay us direct for our services so that it does not go into Consolidated Revenue. Each year we negotiate the increase because there are four police officers per district so that is why we negotiate that increase in funding from the MAIB.

Mrs TAYLOR - If I was MAIB I would just offer you this much next year because that is all you have budgeted for.

Mr HINE - The consequence of that would be the services we supply would go down so it is a direct correlation. They give us certain benchmarks to meet and that money actually meets those. It is a really good partnership.

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Mrs TAYLOR - I understand that. Obviously the amount would go up year by year. I do not know what it was last year but I am presuming that if you offer the same service then it will be more.

Mr HINE - In 2008 it was \$1.779million, 2009 it was \$1.9 million, 2010 \$2.058 million and in 2011 it is \$2.158 million.

Ms THORP - It only shows up as retained revenue at that amount.

Mrs TAYLOR - It only shows up as \$1.736.

Mr HINE - I cannot answer that.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is even worse.

Ms THORP - I think it is an accounting issue rather than anything else.

Mr HINE - Someone from MAIB might be able to explain it to us.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you. That was my only question but I am not sure that I understand it a whole lot better.

Ms THORP - If MAIB made a direct allocation into Consolidated Revenue it would come back to us through the Budget, but because this is a direct payment it is referred to as retained revenue.

Mrs TAYLOR - I understand that, but obviously not all of it is because it goes up each year -

Ms THORP - Can I get some clarification for you why it is increasing because Darren has the figures in front of him, but that is not reflected in the budget papers.

Mrs TAYLOR - Some of it is going into Consolidated Revenue, obviously?

Mr HINE - It seems to be, but I think the minister is right -

Ms THORP - I think we are better off clarifying.

CHAIR - Can I keep you at that particular table then, Minister. In relation to the speeding offences and cameras the target is 2 770 less for this -

Ms THORP - The 57 000 refers to the expectation. In the general course of business, they would expect that many speed offences to be picked up by road safety cameras. The actual figures in the previous years refer to those that were picked up. I think people would be pretty worried if they thought that we were bumping that figure up all the time and saying that we are going to get more and more, so 57 000 has been deemed as a reasonable number of offences to have been detected by the cameras in any given year but in fact when we get the actual targets for 2009-10 we may find that it is 60 000.

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CHAIR - Then my next question is if we are banking on fewer infringements, that means less revenue I would expect, but then when you go to the budget papers and the table where it talks about the revenue being up how can fewer infringements -

Ms THORP - Because different offences have different amounts put next to them.

CHAIR - But we would still have to have an increase in fines to be able to -

Ms THORP - Penalties increased last year around some offences like exceeding the speed limit by more than 45 kilometres, driving dangerously and recklessly, using mobile phones and driving without a seat belt. I think that is right. The penalties on those were increased considerably so it is still one offence but the penalty is higher so you get a bigger fine.

CHAIR - Will those increases amount to \$7.2 million? That is only a small percentage I would expect of the fines.

Mr HINE - And it also the confiscation of vehicles as well so all that revenue is additional revenue that was raised through various offences and an increase of the fines.

CHAIR - With the confiscation of vehicles is there any sale of those or is it only repeats?

Mr HINE - After the third offence there is disposal of the vehicles but obviously there is a very substantial fine when a vehicle is confiscated through hooning.

CHAIR - So you are expecting that an increase of \$7.2 million in your revenue will come about because of those four particular areas of fining plus the confiscation of vehicles.

Mr HINE - Yes. That is the appropriation that we get from the Consolidated Revenue. We do not actually get that money directly, it comes up through our budget appropriation.

CHAIR - That tells me then that those particular areas are significant - the over 45 kilometres, the mobile phones. They are significant when they amount to \$7.2 million.

Ms THORP - Where is the \$7.2 million?

CHAIR - Back in the budget papers where it is talking about the budget expected in the increase.

Ms THORP - I am sorry, I cannot find the page you are referring to.

CHAIR - Page 4.15 in the Budget. That correlates to this particular table.

Ms THORP - I do not understand. There is an anticipated amount of money coming from -

Mr HINE - The increase in revenue through various fines and also the lower tolerances as well which is impacted into that. There is certainly through the clamping process as the fines are quite substantial.

CHAIR - Yet the targets are remaining the same, Minister. That is what I am saying that if you are not anticipating an extra offences committed, why is the money going up?

Ms THORP - The offences are backed by the penalty.

Mr WING - The variations in tolerance would have an effect too, wouldn't they?

Ms THORP - Yes. There is a special mandatory penalty of \$600 for clamping and we have already had more than 430 of those so that is a lot of money.

CHAIR - That was my question; what was going to make up that \$7.2 million?

Ms THORP - Significantly, from those increases.

In the main, a lot of that money can directly be traced back into increased road safety through other things that we do. That is fair to say.

Mr DEAN - I asked the question of the minister during the budget process on the loss of demerit points and we had a piece of paper recently where I think a police officer fell foul of this and was going to be demoted. So you might tell us a little bit more about what has happened in that instance.

Ms THORP - Well, I would rather not because this is about the Budget.

Mr DEAN - From a police point of view, is this offence one that is really standing out now; are there more offences in this area, that is, the charge, I guess, of perverting the course of justice and what can be done from a police perspective to try and put a stop to this type of behaviour? Is it that the fine is not sufficient? The penalty is not sufficient? What is the position with police regarding this matter?

Mr HINE - Basically there is a specific charge in relation to the sharing of points or putting down and making a false statutory declaration. There is a specific charge in relation to it but obviously if it goes to court it can be perverting the course of justice as well so it is actually quite a serious offence. If we actually find anyone doing it and any evidence is brought to us, like any charge, we will actually follow it up. Where they should be charged, if someone admits to being the driver when in fact they are not the driver but were actually filling out the back of the speed camera infringement notice then if we have evidence of that obviously we will take action, follow it up and charge those people.

Mr DEAN - Minister, does it appear as though there is an increase in this type of offence? Are police spending more time on it or is it fairly static?

Ms THORP - I have not had that brought to my attention.

Mr DEAN - I wonder whether the acting commissioner is able to answer that.

Ms THORP - Would you like us to take it on notice?

Mr DEAN - If you need to take it on notice, yes.

Ms THORP - The exact figures on the number of charges around this offence. We can do that.

Mr HINE - I think it is fair to say that it is reasonably low because when someone fills out what we call a SCIN, a speed camera infringement notice, the incidences of where we actually charge people are reasonably low. Again, if the evidence is there and someone brings it to our attention that the photograph might not look the same as the actual person that is put down we will follow it up. So people take a substantial risk by actually falsifying a speed camera infringement notice and if seen as an acceptable behaviour to share points, for want of a better term, they are taking a risk. If we have got the evidence there, we will follow it up and we will charge them.

Mr DEAN - The Auditor-General's report, Minister, and you would have obviously seen it -

Ms THORP - Yes.

Mr DEAN - And you would have identified from that report that the Auditor-General raised a number of issues relative to the placement of cameras and the act that he identified that speed cameras were being placed not in accordance with the statistical data that was available to identify with traffic offences, times of the day or night that the traffic offences were being committed and where they were being committed and suggested, I think, or inferred that a number of changes should be made in relation to this. Will that occur? Will the police take notice of the recommendations and the comments raised by the Auditor-General in that report?

CHAIR - And will it impact on the Budget?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Ms THORP - The report's findings in summary have been that speed detection devices have been effective. Indications are that additional enforcement activity and lower tolerance would further reduce the level of speeding and the number of serious crashes. DPEM, which is providing coverage of most locations, speeds and time zones, noted substantial imbalances between crash and speeding information and deployment of speed detection devices which were not maximising road safety goals. It may be a case for the greater use of fixed speed cameras. You would all know that the place where most people are caught is the Tasman Bridge; they know it is there and it is a fixed camera but they still get caught. There was some indication -

Mr DEAN - Most of them would be minor, but anyway.

Ms THORP - Well, they are still speeding. The report says:

'There were some indications equipment down time was excessive and the level of images adjudicated out was too high. Operational plans exist for the use of speed detection devices including objective strategies and performance indicators. However lower level plans lack substance and provide little guidance for operational personnel in making resource allocation decisions'.

Yes, there is some good information there to further inform police actions into the future. It is very good to have these research projects, because you get a good indication of how you can improve your practice.

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Mr FINCH - Minister, could you tell me the prevalence of people not carrying their driver's licence and being asked for it? I will be broadening the situation where warnings were going to be issued in the first instance, and then people were going to be fined after a third offence. Could I just get an update on whether revenue has been raised from that offence?

Ms THORP - Can we take that on notice please to get the detail?

Mr FINCH - Yes. Supplementary to that; I remember in the debate beforehand, I raised the having devices where you could have a driver sitting in front of you, they say who they are, you punch their name into a device - which I think was available in America at the time - and you could in fact get a picture back of the driver, whatever name they gave, and then you could see whether in fact they were driving illegally and then you could nab them on the spot rather than have people lie about who they are and turn up with their mate's driver's licence at the police station.

Ms THORP - In this budget, we have the mobile data terminals which are available in police cars which can do that.

Mr FINCH - Can do the trick? They can do that now?

Mr HINE - Yes. If the police pull someone up and they say they have not got their licence on them that is an offence. Then they can actually go back to their computer terminal in the car, do some checks in relation to it, and we are not actually working with DIER to actually get their photo as well so in the car they have all that information so the police officer can check them there and then.

Mr FINCH - How long will that be before you will be able to actually have a photo of the driver?

Mr HINE - It is not that far away. We are still working through some protocols in relation to that technology.

Ms THORP - Privacy and security and issues like this too.

Mr HINE - Yes but it is still an offence not to carry your driver's licence. It has actually worked very very well. Most of the driving population do carry their driver's licence.

Mr FINCH - Yes but I am wondering how many - oh, you are going to get that.

Ms THORP - As well as that we have also got now a vehicle in each district which has a permanently mounted camera on the roof and it does not require the driver of the vehicle to operate it, it is an automatically operated camera, and it takes photographs of number plates. So the person is driving along and they hear a beep and they realise that the car in front of them is unregistered or being driven by a disqualified driver.

There is one in each district and they go all the time so they are off doing their own normal policing business. In the month's trial more than a hundred unregistered drivers were detected. When you consider the over-representation of people driving without a licence how they appear in our serious crime, serious accident and fatality statistics, it is all the better because these are the people we need to get off the road.

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Mr FINCH - Yes, that is right. That was the premise that we were given before the introduction of the carriage of licence and I think Assistant Commissioner Johnston - I think that's what he was at that stage - assured me five years ago that technology was five years away.

Ms THORP - He was spot-on there. I think people should feel comfortable with the way the police detection methods are going with the use of technology. More and more the police are able to target the ones they need to target most, rather than just having a road stop - show us your licence, show us your registration papers, checking your sticker - where you might pull up 200 cars and get two or three offenders at the most - I am probably being generous here, aren't I? -

Mr HINE - Very.

Ms THORP - Because most people are pretty good. If in the normal course the day the police are driving around, as soon as they drive past an unregistered vehicle - and it could be acting completely properly, not doing anything wrong other than driving around unregistered - they would be on to it.

Mr FINCH - That is exactly as it should be.

Mr HINE - There certainly is a message out there now that people need to register their vehicles because if they do not the likelihood of getting caught has gone up in the last month. It is about 30 per hour that we are getting in relation to unlicensed and unregistered. We also have computer terminals in the motor vehicles and instead of doing 42 checks a day through the radio room, we can do more than 600 now so the productivity has increased and chances of getting unlicensed, disqualified and unregistered people has greatly increased. There is just no excuse for people to break the law and the likelihood of their getting caught has greatly increased.

CHAIR - Thank you. I am mindful of the productivity of this committee as well so we will move on now to the next output group - are you right, Mr Dean?

Mr DEAN - No, I am not.

CHAIR - Do you have one very important question because -

Mr DEAN - They are all important questions.

CHAIR - I know they are all important questions but some are more important.

Ms THORP - Mr Dean, I am more than happy to take questions on notice if that would expedite the work of the committee.

Mr DEAN - We might flag these to come back into the Chamber in accordance with the Estimates processes. There is a process that we are able to adopt, as I understand, with questions that we have not been able to fully cover or canvass.

Ms THORP - I want to be very cautious about a whole lot being dumped at the end. If you are able to weave them into your narrative and tell me now which information you require that is fine but if you get to the end of the day and everybody is giving me a stack of questions that high it is a very inefficient use of the time. If you could give us an indication of the question and I can

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let you know if it is something that can be answered quickly here verbally or take the information on notice.

Mr DEAN - This question deals with quotas.

Ms THORP - With quotas, I am not quite sure what you mean.

Mr DEAN - Benchmarks, quotas -

Ms THORP - Be quite specific with your language.

Mr DEAN - Numbers. I would have thought, Minister, with great respect, that we all understood what quotas were all about.

Ms THORP - I know what you mean by benchmarks but quotas I am not sure.

Mr DEAN - The position, Minister, is that police officers around the State are required to achieve a certain result over a period of time and speeding I think is one of those areas where they are benchmarked on and they are required to get a certain number per month, a certain number in a year and the yearly figures are probably somewhere in the range of 500 speeders in a year or thereabouts but probably more. I am just wondering, Minister, where does this really achieve road safety when police will tell you that in order to get those benchmarks they fish where the fish are, that is, they will set up in school zones and in the lower speed zone areas to ensure that they can meet their benchmarks and their requirements. Is that a desirable way to do this and do we ever have the figures on the speeding offences by uniformed police officers and where the majority of those offences have been detected? Do we have that statistical data?

Ms THORP - The first part of your question is whether there are benchmarks?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Ms THORP - And you are clear that there are, so I do not need to give you those.

Mr DEAN - I do not know what they are but I would like to know what some of these benchmarks are of uniformed police in stations?

Ms THORP - I can tell you that in the southern district for excessive speeding, that is, 15-plus kilometres, 1 850 in the southern district; 2 000 in the northern district; 1 800 in the western district and 1 800 in the eastern district for a total of the State of 7 450. Your second question was do I think this is good policing -

Mr DEAN - Does it achieve anything as far as road safety is concerned? That was my second question.

Ms THORP - Yes, I think it does.

Mr DEAN - If the offences are continuing to increase then have we got the strategy right or not?

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Ms THORP - A lot of our conversation today and in other forums has been about the multiplicity of techniques that are used by the police and DIER to ensure that road safety outcomes improve and one of the serious things that causes traffic accidents and injury to both property and people is speed. The use of speed cameras is there as a deterrent to the public. They would be useless if they were not associated with some kind of penalty. There is no point having a speed camera that tells you someone is speeding if there is not a commensurate penalty that goes with that that indicates the severity with which we see the fine.

I know that there have been conversations in the community over the years that say that these are only revenue raisers. I completely dispute that. I also think that the community is wrong to think that the main objective of our police officers is to go out and raise money.

Mr DEAN - So the headline in the *Mercury* the other day was wrong where it said that camera speeding offences were being used to prop up the Budget?

Ms THORP - Absolute rubbish.

Mr DEAN - And the third question there was: do we have the statistical data available, or can we get it, on where the majority of those offences are occurring with respect to the uniformed police officers out at the stations where they are required to achieve a certain number of bookings?

Ms THORP - In any given district there is a benchmark for a number in a whole lot of things - serious crime offences clear-up, total persons offences clear-up, home burglary offences clear-up, business burglaries, car burglaries, stolen motor vehicles, drug detection, serious drug offenders, property damage, public place assaults and then also excessive speeding, drink driving and stuff like that. The police have a whole range of measures, some of which are directly related to speeding, so you only want the speeding ones?

Mr DEAN - I am aware of that but what I want to know is where the uniformed police officers are required to get a certain number of bookings each week or each month, what I want to know is where most of those bookings are occurring that those uniformed police officers are making?

Ms THORP - The most common place for people to be detected speeding is on the bridge.

Mr HINE - You are excluding speed cameras?

Mr DEAN - No - well I think the uniformed police use a handheld radar, do they not?

Mr HINE - There are 12 speed cameras and there are 180 handheld devices throughout the State.

Mr DEAN - Say a uniformed police officer at Devonport, for instance, is required as I understand it to achieve a certain number of speeding bookings. What I want to know is where are they getting those bookings that they are achieving from - what areas; what zones?

Mr HINE - We can certainly get that data for you, but can I just indicate that a number of years ago there were 42 benchmarks and we are down to 17 now. I think speeding in school zones is very important. I do not think it can be underestimated. It might be low-level speeding

but speeding in school zones is serious, as it is in any built-up area including the highways. I think speeding anywhere is a concern. But there is only one benchmark in relation to speeding and that is total speed. We want to influence those speeding offences where we do know that it contributes to serious and fatal accidents. Excessive speeding of 15 plus, we benchmark that; excessive speeding of 30 plus, we benchmark that; and also total speeding, we benchmark that, because my opinion is that speeding in a school zone is a serious offence -

Ms THORP - You are likely to hit a child, aren't you?

Mr HINE - because it does put lives in danger.

Mr DEAN - That is what I am saying that they should be up where the dangerous speeding offences are occurring. That is exactly the question.

Ms THORP - If you look at some of the so-called black spots where there have been serious car accidents and say that is where the cameras should be -

Mr DEAN - That is right.

Ms THORP - But you could argue that speed is not always the cause of that accident. It can be lack of concentration; it can be a whole variety of things, not just speed. A little child being hit by a car going 55 kilometres an hour outside a school zone I would argue is as serious an offence as someone speeding down the Midland Highway.

Output group 4 Emergency management

4.1 State emergency management services -

Mr GAFFNEY - The snapshot description of the SES output makes reference to 'preparedness and response to emergency events, emergency risk management and disaster mitigation', and a lot of that information and data is contained in table 9.10. It then goes on to say, 'The development and retention of volunteers remains a high priority, with the use of volunteers.' If you do not mind, Minister, we might focus on the staffing situation of the SES. What are the numbers of permanent staff in the SES and where are they stationed?

Ms THORP - It is not a big area of permanent staff - are there 16?

Mr GAFFNEY - There were 24 in 2008-09.

Ms THORP - The SES actual staffing at a State service level is a few. The strong reliance is on volunteers of which we have - my latest figures are 560 volunteers over 31 units.

Mr GAFFNEY - And permanent?

Ms THORP - Twenty five.

[2.15 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, and it was 24 in 2008-09. Could you provide comment regarding predicted staffing numbers - FTEs, permanents - for 2010-11?

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Ms THORP - I do not think it is going to change.

Mr GAFFNEY - It will be the same. I notice that the target was 600 volunteer firefighters for this year and you have come up with 560?

Ms THORP - Each of the units is getting \$5 000 this year towards upgrading their facilities and equipment, which I think will go some distance to help that sense of valuing that we need to make of all our volunteers.

Mr GAFFNEY - I suppose I am more concerned with the volunteers: is there a project on a statewide basis or a regional basis where you try to promote volunteering for the SES? How does that work?

Mr HINE - The Director of SES has done a project in how to retain and attract SES volunteers, because sometimes it is the retention rate rather than the attraction rate. For example, 2006-07 was 516, 2007-08 was 546, 2008-09 was 548, and now we are up to 560. He has quite a detailed project to try to not only attract but also retain the volunteers. We think about 20 per cent actually volunteer for the SES and also for the fire department, so there is a crossover there as well. Those people are very active in their communities. The SES certainly work very hard to attract and retain their volunteers, and it seems to be working. They are going up in the number of volunteers and they are the backbone, as you well know, of an SES unit.

Ms THORP - Quite often in communities you will find that the volunteer fire fighters, volunteer ambulance and the SES people are the same people.

Mr WING - And probably interested in the police force too.

Ms THORP - I think they are too busy with everything else.

Mr GAFFNEY - Are there any age group breakdowns for those numbers that we could be provided with at a later date?

Ms THORP - I have gender breakdowns but I do not have age. I would be happy to get that for you.

Mr GAFFNEY - The gender is fine but age would be good. What type of training is provided for volunteers to maintain the standards and what amount of funding? You said \$5000 per unit but I notice that there is an increase for training, how much is that for training of volunteers throughout the State? Is there a budgeted figure for that?

Ms THORP - Not that I have available, but we could get that for you.

Mr HINE - 65 percent of the SES non-salary budget is allocated to supporting SES volunteers about training, equipment and the support. So it is certainly that 65 per cent of the budget, but I can get you the actual figures for you to see what goes into the training and the support of the volunteers.

Ms THORP - There have been a few other things go on, too, with the vehicle replacement program.

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Mr GAFFNEY - I will get to that. You mentioned there were 31 dedicated SES units. Is it envisioned that there will be more with the change in demographics and the changing needs of communities where there is a growth in a certain area? How does the SES monitor and manage that type of -

Ms THORP - Where they should be -

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, where they are shifting to and where they have come from so there could be a decrease in one area?

Ms THORP - Not that I am aware of. It seems to be with SES units in particular and the same to some extent with volunteer ambulance and also with sea rescue that the interest is generated more from the community. They perceive the need and they want those resources in the community. It is an unusual arrangement with SES because the facilities are actually provided by local government, which I find an interesting arrangement as such. I can see real value for the community in there being further discussion about SES moving more closely to volunteer fire. I can see real value in that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Can you give a brief recap of the 2010 election commitments, which are reflected in the budget increase? That was what you were talking about before.

Ms THORP - Each of the 31 units is getting \$5 000 to look at upgrading their facilities and other needs they may have around equipment and uniforms. There is also specific projects at two of the sites: Zeehan on the west coast to help them with their facilities, because even though the provision of facilities is the responsibility of the local government, they do not necessarily have the resources to do so; and Rosebery.

Mr GAFFNEY - Can you give us any statistical data or evidence of the type of injuries that may have been sustained by SES volunteers or staff during the course of the last 12 months and what type of injury?

Ms THORP - I would have to take that on notice, but I can tell you that there has been a total of 8 000 call-outs by SES officers - 1 700 due to road crash rescue, 1 500 in search and rescue and nearly 3 000 storm and severe weather, 500 due to flood and about 1 500 miscellaneous call-outs.

Mr GAFFNEY - I was actually referring to the number of injuries that may have been sustained by staff as well as volunteers.

Ms THORP - That is what I have to take on notice.

Mr GAFFNEY - Is there any other information you would like to give us about budget constraints within the SES because it is a really important service.

Ms THORP - It is a really important service and I think it has a very good future. We have the vehicle replacement program that I mentioned earlier for George Town and Glen Huon; a three-year \$32 000 per annum sponsorship through Lions Patrol and it has provided additional equipment purchases for volunteer units in the past two years, including pole saws for the removal of tree branches, traffic management kits, road crash rescue kits, tents, sleeping bags and packs for alpine search and rescue teams. The provision of road crash rescue hydraulic equipment

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within a seven-year replacement program is an ongoing commitment. Each region is supported with one full hydraulic replacement kit each year to the value of \$35 000 per kit. There is the annual provision of general duty uniform, personal protective equipment, wet weather clothing, safety boots, overalls, cold weather caps and sun hats - you need everything in Tasmania - for all newly inducted volunteer recruits and routine replacements for other volunteers and that commits the SES to approximately \$3 000 per volunteer. There is also ongoing provision of training and assessment in accordance with the Australian Quality Training Framework to uphold rescue and retrieval capability and to maintain currency of competency across the nationally accredited qualifications.

Mr GAFFNEY - One last question, I think there are three first response units now operating in Tasmania that I am aware of - at Port Sorell, Longford and Tasman.

Ms THORP - For road accident rescue?

Mr GAFFNEY - No, it is a new initiative and I am thinking there could be some synergies between the SES and the first response units in these areas. They were set up when ambulances could not get to areas in time, such as at Port Sorell which is a growth area. There is a first response unit there which is sponsored by the community and by the council and they can get to any accident within three minutes.

Ms THORP - This is separate from -

Mr GAFFNEY - It is a separate but I am saying there could be a study to have a relationship between the SES and that group of community workers as well.

Ms THORP - I agree with you. Whenever you have the opportunity for things to be connected then we should explore it most definitely.

Mr GAFFNEY - It would be good especially if there is some financial connectivity.

Ms THORP - I think you actually get a better service -

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, you do.

Ms THORP - rather than duplicating things. I have seen the volunteer ambulance here and then the SES there and the fire brigade there and they all have separate management structures and admin structures. I cannot help thinking to myself that there must be a way we can do this better. My biggest concern when we start talking about things like that is that we do not want to lose the identity of the specific organisations because there is a lot of brand loyalty and a very strong community link.

Mr GAFFNEY - The reason I mention that is the first response unit at Port Sorell actually works out of the Port Sorell Fire Station which means they have been able to support each other with training and knowledge. It is a much better way because they were stuck by themselves for a while so there seems to have been a growth in numbers, communication and knowledge.

Ms THORP - It is something that I am very keen to explore that I have already raised with the commissioner.

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Mr FINCH - It sounds like a volunteer police force to me.

Mr WING - Yes.

Ms RATTRAY - It sounds like amalgamation to me and that is not always a good.

Ms THORP - We have to explore the role of local government and whether it is appropriate or not.

Mr DEAN – Minister, did you cover the money available for properties in the SES, what properties are going to be upgraded? Where will that money be spent, in what areas of the State and what properties?

Ms THORP - Zeehan and Rosebery, \$100 000.

Mr DEAN - Are they the only two?

Ms THORP – With the \$5 000 that goes to each unit there is a degree of flexibility for each of those units to spend it how they wish. They might want to upgrade their toilets or whatever, but the facilities are actually the responsibility of the local government. Each of the councils is responsible for the provision of the facilities in its local government area, but because not all councils have those resources at their disposal, in this instance, Rosebery and Zeehan are receiving extra assistance from the State Government.

Mr DEAN - I take it all the local governments are making contributions to the SES in the areas that they are operating in. Is that right?

Ms THORP - It is their legislative responsibility, yes. The State Government would never see an area without the resources that it needs just because the local government organisation cannot manage properly.

Mr DEAN - Is there a move currently, Minister, to separate the two arms of the State Emergency Services, that is, the planning and policy of SES and the operational areas? Is there a move to separate those two areas?

Ms THORP - They operate reasonably separately now. There are actually moves towards an amalgamation, if you like.

Mr DEAN - There is something happening.

Ms THORP - Yes. It is to do with getting our counter-terrorism and other responses together. The State Security Unit review was initiated in 2009 and it has recommended amalgamating the SSU, the Office of Security and Emergency Management and central policy and planning elements of the State Emergency Service within a broader government group titled Tasmanian Security and Emergency Management Group. So, three lots are coming together.

Mr DEAN - Right. Will the operational area continue to operate separately?

Ms THORP - It won't change but that part of the SES that was more to do with policy and security is now amalgamating with those other two groups that I mentioned.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr HINE – There will be separate management structures actually working together because it is much better if they work together to get synergies but still have separate management structures.

Mr DEAN - So, Andrew Reid will still be the CEO sitting at the top of the organisation.

Mr HINE – Yes, but it works very nicely for the people from DPAC who have a responsibility for emergency management. SES and the police are all working in the same building. In fact, as we speak they are moving into our building at Liverpool Street. So they will be co-located to work much better together but still have their separate management structures.

Mr DEAN - Does it involve more staff, more administration?

Mr HINE - No, it is exactly the same.

Ms THORP - And there will be efficiencies because we will get a better outcome.

Mr DEAN - I do not disagree with that. When I heard a whisper of it I thought it was a good move.

Mrs TAYLOR - Going back to volunteers, I would like to place on record my thanks to both staff and SES volunteers for the fantastic job they do around the State. We would not be able to do without them. I think you said about the project for getting more volunteers was successful. Can you share that program with us, not necessarily now? For instance, we know Neighbourhood Watch are having difficulty getting volunteers, so if somebody has a good volunteer program on how to get and retain volunteers I think that would be really useful for other community -

Mr HINE - There could certainly be some learning through Emergency Management Australia and also from our local SES. I know that the fire department do a lot of work in relation to volunteers as well. That is where SES and fire coming under one department will mean we can actually share some of that voluntary information to make sure that we do get the best to attract and retain volunteers. About 20 per cent actually do both and we should support those people as best we can. We have seen about a 5 per cent increase of volunteers for SES and I know the fire department do very well in keeping their volunteers; attracting, retaining, training. That is the beauty of coming under one department with the fire, SES and police.

Ms THORP - It is a credit to the SES that they were able to help out in March with that big hailstorm in Victoria. We sent over 30 volunteers, one SES staff member and seven fully-equipped SES storm-response vehicles within 24 hours.

[2.30 p.m.]

Mrs TAYLOR - I have been aware at times within my own bailiwick of fire brigades and whatever going through difficult times in volunteering and overcoming those. But it seems to me that there are volunteer groups all over the place not just in emergency services who are having difficulty both in attracting and retaining volunteers. There are so many new ways of doing it, like making it easier for people to respond is one of the ways of doing it because people are more time poor than they were and very often they want to contribute but they do not actually get around to doing it - 'I must do that one day.' So if there are some good strategies it would be really useful to have those and be able to share with other volunteer groups.

Ms THORP - Sure.

4.2 State Security and Rescue Operations -

CHAIR - I will take you, Minister, to table 9.10 which gives the number of search and rescue operations that were carried out where it has increased from 57 to 102. Can you give the committee a precis of what the cause for this increase was, what areas they were and what regions? It is almost double.

Mr HINE - We can certainly get that information for you about the number of search and rescue -

Ms THORP - And you want the actual type, not just the gross number?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms THORP - Whether it be road crash response or?

CHAIR - Sea rescue, whatever. And with rescue operations occasionally, is there any recovery at any time in a financial aspect for people who have a non-genuine request for rescue services?

Mr HINE - The answer is no. The one that we do get cost recovery is if it relates to MAIB, so if it is a motor vehicle accident obviously we cost recover. But for other search and rescue missions we do not cost recover, because we want people to actually report and use our services. If there is the thought that they may be charged for it, they might not call when they actually need it. So there is always that balance that has been debated, and we have had matters where our search and rescue services have been used inappropriately. But I think it is a matter of erring on the side of caution. You want people to actually use the service when they need it rather than think about 'Gee, if I use it, I may get charged for it.' As we know, a helicopter or any search and rescue operation does cost money, but we would much rather err on the side of caution.

CHAIR - We will move on now to capital investment programs.

Ms THORP - This is relatively straightforward and is mainly around the upgrades of various police headquarters: Bellerive, Devonport and Glenorchy.

Mr GAFFNEY - My only question is that at times we see budget blowouts so what safety valves or measures are in place to ensure that, if something happens with Deloraine, Bellerive and Devonport, that that does not impact on Glenorchy?

Ms THORP - Are there contingencies into that?

Mr HINE - Basically that is put out for tender so we actually know what the costs are going to be, so therefore they have to build to certain specifications within a certain price. That is the biggest safeguard, and obviously there are contingencies built within a budget to make sure that, instead of a \$6 million building, it does not turn into a \$10 million building. But that is about the tender process and getting the cost to build -

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr GAFFNEY - The Devonport site is now secure and finalised?

Mr HINE - Yes - well it is not quite signed off but the transfers have actually gone ahead. But we have completed 99.9 per cent of the stage and we are really pleased where it is going. I think it is going to offer some really exciting opportunities for policing in Devonport.

Mr DEAN - Is that a greenfields site?

Mr HINE - Yes, a greenfields site.

Mrs TAYLOR - If I could ask a couple of questions about the Glenorchy one following up from the previous member's question: I am a little bit concerned that when you actually add up the figures, it does not even add up to \$6.150 million, it adds up to \$5.933 million, and we are looking at 2012-13 and I know that the prices in 2012-13 are not going to be the same as they are this year. In fact, I think that was the budgeted amount last year. I know how much the police will be looking forward to a new building in Glenorchy and I am very happy that it has been put out for a couple of years, because hopefully we will be able to do it in the whole Civic Square redevelopment, as you are aware. But I cannot see that it is going to cost the same amount in three years time as it cost last year - the budgeted amount - just because costs do go up.

Mr HINE - There is also the issue of if we go to a greenfield site that is similar to the Civic plan, obviously there is a building there that has a value as well?

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes. That would be in addition to this?

Mr HINE - We have to get permission from Treasury to be able to transfer the retained funding and all those issues as well, so that comes in as our planning. But when budgets are done, it normally takes into account those forward issues as in the costs of today are not going to be the same as tomorrow. If it is a refurbished building in Glenorchy we will do it within our budget, but if it is a greenfield site then it becomes another issue and we need to get permission from Government and Treasury to be able to do all those issues as well - but again it is pretty exciting times.

Mrs TAYLOR - Absolutely, and I am very grateful for the fact that the police are willing to cooperate with the other State departments in making that happen.

Mr FINCH - I just want to home in on this \$18.9 million for Bellerive, Glenorchy and Devonport: what do you expect the needs of the other divisional headquarters are - I suppose, how many others are there? There would be Launceston -

Mr HINE - We have divisional headquarters in each district. I could name them all but those are three that are going to be looked after with this process.

Mr FINCH - What about the requirements of those other centres, the other areas? I know Launceston has been worked on. Is that work completed?

Mr HINE - Yes.

Mr FINCH - What about other divisional headquarters, are they on the radar for the future to be upgraded?

Mr HINE - We are actually doing a strategic plan in relation to all our premises, which includes residences, police stations and major buildings, so that they are always on our strategic horizon to make sure that we forecast them in three to four years time. When we go to government in relation to getting them done up, we want to forecast these a number of years out. The short answer is we are doing a strategic plan in relation to all our police premises to make sure we know when they need some money spent on them we can go to government with a cogent business case.

Mr FINCH - So you have not got that forecast here though in your forward Estimates?

Mr HINE - No, that is right.

Mr FINCH - So that is to come. Thanks, Chair.

Mr DEAN - Minister, police housing has just been mentioned by the acting commissioner. What is the budget to be spent on police housing this year? Some of the police housing is quite deplorable. It needs a lot of work on these houses and particularly some of the houses that are connected with the stations where the partners of those police officers are utilised by the public a lot out of hours, et cetera, but some of their homes are very ordinary. What is in the budget to be spent on police houses this year? When will they all be updated and brought into this kind of century and the year 2010?

Ms THORP - What we are currently doing is looking at the amenity of all of those properties. The plan down the road would be to dispose of those that we do not need and use the funds to upgrade the others. But there is the ongoing maintenance budget, which this year is over \$500 000 but, as well as that, we are reviewing the need of all of the different premises. Those funds can and will be used to make sure that those properties that are retained are upgraded.

Mr DEAN - So all police housing will be brought up to a reasonable standard -

Ms THORP - No, I did not say that.

Mr DEAN - I am asking the question then -

Ms THORP - Well, I am not going to upgrade the ones we plan to sell, no.

Mr DEAN - What is going to happen there then? Will the police officers move out of those houses and go into new rental properties?

Ms THORP - We are reviewing which properties we need to retain and those we can dispose of, and any funds that come out of the disposal of those unneeded houses will be used to upgrade, purchase, build on or whatever the ones we need to keep.

Mr DEAN - So with police officers then who are moved from a home, for instance, that the department wishes to sell will that happen when the police officer vacates that home or will the home be sold and then they move into a rental property? I want to know how the process will occur?

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Ms THORP - As I just said, we are currently undergoing a review of which properties need to be retained and those which can be disposed of so it would be a little premature of me to be saying what would happen to any police officer living in one of those houses to have identified which houses we are talking about.

Mr DEAN - What is the position with Housing Tasmania and the police officers in those low rent homes? Have you many police officers living in those low rent homes and in what areas are they?

Mr HINE - It is still occurring but I cannot give you the exact numbers of where they are.

Ms THORP - It is not a good idea to give the addresses either.

Mr DEAN - I am not asking for an address, I am asking what the locations are. I guess there is still one at Gagebrook and Rokeby I think was one.

Mr HINE - There are still police officers that take up that offer from Housing. I can certainly get that information about the suburbs that they are in.

Mr DEAN - I would suspect the people in those locations would know where the police were very quickly I would think.

Ms THORP - We do not want to advertise it, though.

Mr DEAN - I do not think we have to broadcast it.

CHAIR - Minister, I certainly notice as well that there is no forward Estimate for 2013-14 in relation to upgrades but I hear what you say Acting Commissioner in relation to a review of all because I am still waiting to see St Helens on that list.

Ms THORP - It is something that I have had discussions with the assistant commissioner and others about already which is the need to look very carefully at the provision that we give to what I call our 'country cops' to make sure that where they live is in good circumstances, they have access to being able to go on leave and take family holidays and stay very connected to their communities.

CHAIR - This is the work environment I am speaking of.

Ms THORP - The work environment for a country cop is very important. If he wants to move with his wife and three children and they go in and inspect the property and it is not up to scratch it is very hard to get a happy family move and you need to have a happy family environment for a country cop to be happy in the service. I think we need to look at all of those things and not just one bit in isolation - the housing, the clustering where you can, particularly with other people so people can enjoy a proper family life and have proper time off and not do ridiculously long shifts. That way I think we get the best from our police but I also think we get the best for our community in the sense that people are happy to live there with their families and stay there and not see it as being banished to Woop-woop for 12 months and get out as soon as they can.

CHAIR - I should imagine you would never be thinking that at Gladstone, would you?

Ms THORP - They are lining up for Gladstone I have heard.

Mr DEAN - We have a police officer in a northern suburb in Launceston at Newnham, is there a move afoot, Minister, to have a police office in the southern suburbs of Kings Meadows and Youngtown? Has that been investigated?

Ms THORP - I have not been involved in that, no.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister. We will move on now to the State Fire Commission. Thank you, Acting Commissioner. I would like you to introduce your team at the table.

Ms THORP - Could I introduce Acting Chief Officer Gavin Freeman, Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer Tony Davidson and Director of Corporate Services Mike Gallagher.

CHAIR - Welcome, gentlemen.

Ms THORP - I was wondering if I could have an opportunity to make a few comments as an introduction.

Mr GAFFNEY - That would be very good, I think.

Ms THORP - Never mind, we will just go straight on.

Mr GAFFNEY - I will give you an opportunity at the end. Could you just provide some information regarding the staff numbers for the 2009-10 State Fire Service. Are they called permanent career or sessional firefighters?

Mr FREEMAN - Career fire fighters.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, the number of career fire fighters and the volunteer fire fighters.

Ms THORP - Do you want just the 2009-10?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

[2.45 p.m.]

Ms THORP - Operational firefighting and fire management roles, 279 and others, 174, making a total of 453. In the year to date we have 4 437 volunteers and the grand total is 4 890. Volunteer numbers exclude juniors but include cadets.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, thank you.

Are there any additional career firefighters planned for 2010-11? I know last year there was a bit of a freeze; are there any more intended this year?

Mr GALLAGHER - In terms of the budget we have not included any additional or any recruits, however, it really depends on our separations that drive the recruit course itself. It depends - if we start to lose then we will certainly look to run a recruit course, which takes some planning as well. It is not something you can run overnight; it is probably a six-month program.

Mr FREEMAN - Generally, we look to running a recruit course every two years because of the timing it takes. If our staffing numbers drop away further than we have predicted, we have the opportunity to take what we call lateral entry, which is when we advertise for experienced firefighters from other jurisdictions and we have recruited some people successfully that way in the past. So that allows us to top up at times when we might have missed the mark with our staffing predictions.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. I noticed table 24.1 gives a good rundown on different programs and issues, which reads really well. What feedback or evaluation will be used to measure the progress of the community fire protection plan program, which I believe should commence in 2009-10 - is there any feedback on how that has been going for a total of \$1.3 million?

Mr FREEMAN - The funding that we received from the Government for community protection planning positions includes the employment of three community protection planners, one for each region: the north-west, the north and the south. We have conducted interviews for one of those levels, which will be a coordinating role. We have completed that and in fact we will be offering employment this week to that person and as soon as that person is on line with us we will be advertising a further two as quickly as we can with a view to getting those people into the community within the next month or two, certainly before the fire season is upon us.

Mr GAFFNEY - Minister, what major priorities or initiatives can you expand on for this budget year?

Ms THORP - Over the last 12 months the TFS has participated in the Bushfire CRC research into fires, represented Australian fire agencies at the Royal Commission, collaborated through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council in the drafting of revised fire danger ratings and associated bushfire advice and warnings, formulated new sets of operational priorities and participated in the National Bushfire Warnings Taskforce to complete the work commenced by AFAC. So they have been constantly involved and have an ongoing role in these particular areas.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, Minister, a question to your staff: could you explain the situation regarding the career crews on the north-west coast? There has been some discussion that there is possibly a need for an extra crew and I am wondering what the -

Ms THORP - It is an operational matter and I am aware that there is some discussion at different times on the north-west coast about whether or not the staffing levels are appropriate, but given it is operational -

Mr FREEMAN - Certainly the United Firefighters Union have done some lobbying for an additional career crew on the north-west coast. Their claim is based on the perception of inadequate backup and response. We have had a risk assessment done that shows that there is no fear or compelling need for an additional career crew on the north-west coast, in fact it would cost the community in the order of \$2.2 million per year to do that.

What we have done is worked very closely with the volunteers and the career staff on the north-west coast to improve the backup that the volunteers are able to provide. We have good volunteer brigades that support Burnie, Devonport and Ulverstone and a number of other

volunteer brigades along the northwest coast. Our focus is on ensuring that they are supported well and able to provide timely and appropriate backup. In order to do that we have restructured some of the staffing on the north-west coast to make sure that we have appropriate career staff to manage that backup and ensure that we have good response for, particularly, the structure fires and known fires along the north-west coast. One of the strategies that we put in place is to reduce the number of false alarms that we are asking our volunteers to leave their families or their workplaces for, so when they get paged they know that they are going to have some work to do and that seems to be having some improved results. In fact for the second half of 2009, before we put that strategy in place, the backup for volunteers to structure fires in Burnie was 88 per cent and in Devonport, 53 per cent. Since we put those strategies in place it has increased to 100 per cent in Burnie and 80 per cent in Devonport. While there is still room for improvement, that strategy does appear to be working for us.

Mr GAFFNEY - Have the career firefighters have had any concerns with those reforms that you have initiated, and has that performance helped allay those to a certain extent?

MR FREEMAN - I think the United Firefighters Union will continue to lobby for more members for their union along the north-west coast.

Mr GAFFNEY - One last question, Minister: what other organisations or associations are very important for the Tasmanian Fire Service to be able to fulfil your role? That is, the relationships the service has within regions and communities. I would be interested to know how they impact.

MR FREEMAN - We explore opportunities for interactability incorporation and engagement with the community and a lot of the initiatives that were undertaken particularly around the community protection planning, which is about engaging the community and engaging other organisations to deliver a better service to the community. We work continually with police, particularly in regard to core reduction or bushfire arson reduction. We have had some trial programs in place, including one called Project Icarus. We have been working closely with Tasmania Police and there has been a reduction in the number of calls we have received in the areas of bushfire and we plan to continue to improve those sorts of relationships.

Ms THORP - I think that Tasmanians would feel quite comforted if they knew the amount of work that was going through the Tasmanian Fire Service on bushfire preparedness in our community. It is quite impressive.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you very much.

Mr DEAN - My question is about the road rescue units: how many do you have throughout the State?

MR FREEMAN - Each career centre - that is Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and Devonport - has a heavy rescue tender and there are some frontline pumpers which are equipped for primary intervention road accident rescue as well, and they are on a needs basis throughout the area.

Mr DEAN - I noticed this year the budget provided for the purchase of another road rescue unit. Am I right in saying that? I read it somewhere.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

MR FREEMAN - We budgeted for a heavy pumper but the four heavy road accident rescue units are in service.

Mr DEAN - You have probably completed it now; you had a strategy in place for the replacement of the vehicles over a number of years. Is that complete or is it ongoing?

Ms THORP - The five-year fire truck replacement program.

Mr DEAN - That is the one.

Ms THORP - It will see 94 trucks replaced over the next five years, 42 heavy four-wheel-drive, heavy crew cab vehicles, three heavy urban pumpers as well as fabricating 35 light tankers and 14 heavy tankers. That is well on the way.

Mr DEAN - That has been kept up to date.

Ms THORP - Yes. Another good-news story for Tasmania is that 35 light tankers and the 14 heavy tankers will be built by the fabrication section of Engineering Services, which is part of the Tasmania Fire Service, at a cost of \$2.5 million and \$3.2 million, respectively. That is good. In addition, there will be three heavy urban pumpers for career brigades at a cost of \$1.8 million. So I think they are pretty happy with that. I am trying to convince my colleagues to my right here that when they say 'a fire appliance', I think more of a blowtorch than a truck. They need to change their language a little around me.

CHAIR - That unit is building those heavy vehicles and supplying them outside Tasmania as well. Is that correct?

Mr GALLAGHER - No, it is very limited. We are really keen to stick to the core, to build for ourselves and not other fire stations, although we did build one a year or two ago for South Australia. We really are trying to keep it at a small level that is maintainable. We have seen other fire services in the past expand out and just destroy that whole business as a result.

Mr DEAN - The other issue that arose with, I think it was Todd, last year was in relation to the volunteers and any financial support that they would be given where they were attending fires in emergency situations alongside their full-time career officers, any reimbursement that they might be able to get through the Fire Service for any losses that they have incurred as a result of that engagement. Were there any changes in that, Minister? Did that go any further or are the volunteer members now relatively satisfied with their patch, or do we still have that concern?

Ms THORP - I think one of the difficulties is that once you start talking about reimbursement and fees for volunteers it sort of muddies what a volunteer is. I think it is fair to say that if a volunteer is severely out of pocket through loss of equipment or damage to clothing or equipment that there would be a path for that person to be reimbursed, but we do not want to blur the edges between a career firefighter and a volunteer by starting to talk about payments directly for labour. However, out of pocket expenses -

Mr FREEMAN - We certainly carry insurance; if glasses, mobile phones and those sorts of things are lost or destroyed they will be reimbursed, but the whole basis is that they have volunteered. There have been instances in the past when we have said to our volunteer members: 'You have to get clearance from your employer first of all; do not just take the time off and expect

that you will be paid by either your employer or by the Fire Service.' That is not the way we want to do business.

Mr DEAN - So, Minister, just so that I have got this correct; with a volunteer fire officer who is registered and recorded, are they on an availability program? How do you know if a volunteer is available to be recalled to work when needed? What is the system? How does it work?

Mr FREEMAN - We get people to go on our paging system, so it is 'call when needed' and the volunteer management of voluntary brigade is structured as such that the brigade chiefs and first officers will ensure, or do their very best to ensure, that they have recruited people who are available in the community at different times of the day.

Ms THORP - So they would have their own roster. So at the Sandford Brigade where I live, they have their regular meeting, I think, on Tuesday nights or every second Tuesday night, and they work out who is available over the next couple of weeks, who is going to be away on leave, that kind of thing, so that when a call comes through from the TFS that they need help, there are a couple of people who are tasked with the responsibility of making sure however many people needed are there and if they are not, that would be a responsibility to let them know that they cannot come because they do not have the resources.

Mr FREEMAN - And they do that very well. If there is a dynamics change and their people are all working out of the area, the brigade chiefs will soon let us know and we will put some alternative response arrangements in place until such time that we can recruit some more people.

Mr DEAN - My last question relates to the Victorian Royal Commission. I am wondering what the financial impact of any of the findings in any of the things that occurred there might be for our Fire Service here, Minister, and what significant or radical changes are likely to occur moving forward.

Ms THORP - The final report is coming out next month but we have already started to take action. When the interim report came out and there were interim recommendations, that was probably -

Mr DEAN - This is not a Dorothy Dixier either, I might add.

Ms THORP - No. I know you are going out of your way to get the most information. There is probably a little bit too much information to go through here because it outlines all the recommendations in the interim report. If you have a look at that sheet, we have considered all the interim recommendations and taken quite a bit of action - new fire danger ratings, bushfire warnings, fire reducing and changes to incident management. The Bushfire Ready schools program has come in. We are also trialling incorporation into the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre at UTas, a best practice community development program to engage communities in bushfire-prone areas. As I said, the final report is due out on 31 July and the work will be done to implement all those recommendations that are relevant in the Tasmanian context. Out of a terrible tragedy I think we can be confident in saying that Tasmania's fire readiness will only be improved.

Mr DEAN - And that the emergency centre will be manned properly at all times.

Ms THORP - I will not be going out to dinner.

Laughter.

Mr DEAN - Or getting your hair done?

CHAIR - Thank you Minister. I appreciate the TFS gentlemen waiting and that is it, thank you.

[3.00 p.m.]

Ms THORP – At the table are Mr Mark Byrne, State Manager, Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services and Deputy Secretary Alison Jacob.

DIVISION 5

(Department of Health and Human Services)

Output Group 3 Human Services

Ms THORP - The portfolio contains a number of critical areas of focus in this Government's intention to make Tasmania the best place to grow up in Australia. The Premier has tasked me to take responsibility for making sure our children get the best start in life and it was an honour to accept it.

We have already accepted the commenced work to make sure vulnerable children and their families are able to access the types of supports and services that will assist to improve outcomes for health, wellbeing and education. This includes \$76 million for the roll-out of child and family centres where in this budget we are investing an additional \$3.5 million over four years to employ centre co-ordinators with responsibilities for early years education. We expect to spend around \$11.5 million over four years on the Early Years Foundation. We have only had a couple of months, but we have already started quite a lot of work on a child and youth agenda for Tasmania, the idea being that you would identify all the universal services that all children have access to, such health checks and educational opportunities, and then we need to be able to look at that level of secondary services that are available for children so where a child needs extra help that help comes into place and then even further more on a tertiary level.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister, for that brief overview.

Mrs TAYLOR - One of the areas I am particularly interested in is foster care services. Can you tell me how many foster carers are actually registered with the department, if that is the right description these days, and how successful has the recent advertising campaign been, which incidentally I think was very good?

Ms THORP - While we are getting the exact figure for the honourable member, one of the reasons we wanted to run that particular program is the growing awareness that we are losing a number of foster carers each year as people get older in particular and they find the work that much more arduous. The whole general population of foster carers is ageing. We were able very fortunately to get the use of a Queensland program at very little expense for us compared with how much it would have cost if we had had to produce it ourselves and that was with the support of commercial television networks. It was reasonably successful. How many extra carers did we attract through it?

Mr BYRNE - It is approaching 60 with 49 actually approved as of today, but there are another 11.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is new ones?

Mr BYRNE - Yes, new ones.

Mrs TAYLOR - What is the total number of carers?

Ms THORP - The total is 453.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is before this?

Mr BYRNE - No, that is including the new ones.

Ms THORP - It is hard work and that is why I am so passionate about defending our foster carers because I do not know what we would do if we did not have them, quite frankly. I might need to clarify that the 453 is made up of 275 foster carers and 178 kinship carers. When we say kinship carers, they are different yet again from custodial grandparents because kinship carers have a very similar role to a foster carer in terms of financial and other levels of support, whereas custodial grandparents are in a very different situation.

Mrs TAYLOR - You are addressing that, are you not?

Ms THORP - Yes, we are. Basically, because a lot of children went to their grandparents the grandparent interventions meant that they did not need to take the further step to go on to a care and protection order and therefore into a form of either foster or kinship care. Those grandparents were looking after the children without the circumstances having got to that -

Mrs TAYLOR – Financially disadvantaged.

Ms THORP - Yes, but families look after each other and by the same token we did not want to be using grandparents and saying that if they did not take these children they would go into foster care and then we are prepared to pay for them. The existing custodial grandparents who were receiving relative carers allowance, which is not very much money but they do get other forms of support, have been offered the opportunity to be assessed and some are doing that. If that assessment shows that had that grandparent not intervened then the department would more than likely have to have gone on to a care and protection order with that child removed from the family then that grandparent can go onto the equivalent of kinship care.

Mrs TAYLOR - In addition to that, what is the per kilometre rate paid to foster parents for travel et cetera, and how does that compare with the rate paid to public servants for reimbursement for the cost of using their cars? Are they the same and, if not, why are they not the same?

Mr BYRNE - I do not have that information at the tip of my fingers.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Ms THORP - It will be more than just kilometres because there are also things like helping with actual purchase of vehicles and things like that as well. It is not an apple and apple situation, but I know where you are coming from.

Mr BYRNE - We would purchase a vehicle for a foster parent and then obviously the kilometre rate is a lower rate than for a public servant.

Mrs TAYLOR - Okay.

Mr BYRNE - Part of the new foster care payment system we are about to introduce will take into account normal mileage so they will not have to submit forms for money every time they drive. There is an expectation that there will be some block funding within there.

Mr DEAN - I notice that in the budget papers there has been quite a large increase and then it drops away significantly. This is all about the reviews and the reforms that are taking place in this area. Minister, could you explain that? Are all of the reviews and reforms expected to be completed within the next two years or 12 months? What is happening?

Ms THORP - It is a bit complicated, but I will try to explain it. The Budget for 2010-11 is \$96 million and that compares to the Budget last year of \$92.3 million. The major changes are the removal of the twenty-seventh pay which is \$1.7 million; salary and non-salary indexation of \$1.6 million; adjustment to gambling support program fund from the community support levy of \$1.2 million; and then a whole range of budget initiatives.

So not all of them are directly in my area, but some are. One, for example, is the additional child health checks. That is about it, really. A great deal of the money from Human Services - I think about 85 per cent of it - goes out to not-for-profit community groups for primary services that we purchase from them.

Mr DEAN - There has been quite a lot in the press of recent times about child abuse reports coming in. Is the reason for that that there is more of it occurring, or is there more transparency, more openness to it now, or is it some extreme or rare cases that have really brought it out?

Ms THORP - I think the real story here is that in Tasmania up until a few years ago about the only avenue that people had recourse to if they were concerned about the welfare of the child and its vulnerability to abuse or neglect was to notify Child Protection and, quite often, that situation had to be quite serious before there was intervention.

What has been happening over the last couple of years is quite a radical shift to early intervention. So now there is an avenue in the community called the Gateway Service for anyone to go to if they are in the least bit concerned about the welfare of a child. Sitting immediately behind the Gateway Service is the Integrated Family Support Service, which will do an assessment on that situation for that whole family.

What we are finding is that that early intervention and addressing some of the issues the family may be facing around drug and alcohol issues or mental health issues, or just an incapacity to budget with their finances has meant that help can be given early and the actual number of notifications to Child Protection is staggeringly better in terms of it being lower. However, you will notice the number of children in care has grown. We do not make any excuse or resile from removing a child when we seriously believe that child is at risk.

The problem that we are having is that it is proving more difficult to send the children back home because if the situation back home is still one of a dysfunctional family with a lot of violence, or drug and alcohol problems, or mental health problems, then we simply will not send those children back. That is why we are so dependent on the services of our foster carers to have kind and loving families for these children to go to.

Some of the cases that have been in the press - and once again, my apologies to the Fourth Estate or whatever it is called - were very poorly reported in that sometimes the children who go for foster homes do not necessarily go there as little angels and everything goes smoothly. Quite often there are a lot of problems in terms of their behaviour and damage to the property, abuse of the carers themselves. So it is hard work supporting those foster carers - but good on them, at least they are there - and it is also hard work helping those kids sort out their issues and hopefully to be able to go home if Mum and Dad can sort out theirs.

So, we are not seeing an increase in abuse. What we are seeing actually is a decrease in the number of kids that are notified to Child Protection, and we are seeing very good results in terms of early intervention in helping and supporting families. We do need more foster carers, so if this is being broadcast, please, we need more foster carers.

But, as a community, we need to recognise that some of these children are extremely damaged and they need a lot of TLC and a lot of proper therapies to help them get back on track. They are not easy kids to look after.

Mr DEAN - My next question follows on from that, Minister:

Ms THORP - The Deputy Secretary has just reminded me that this time last year there were 105 complaints about kids in care - that is, complaints about the level of care they were receiving. This year, at the same time, it is 70, so it is considerably less - a third less.

Mr DEAN - Yes. Minister, what is the ability and capacity of Child Protection Services to conduct investigations into child abuse cases?

[3.15 p.m.]

Ms THORP - Can I just get some clarification? If a child is out there in the community and there is an accusation made of abuse or neglect, there is immediate action.

Mr DEAN - Right. Or if there is a child in a foster care home -

Ms THORP - That is a slightly different situation.

Mr DEAN - It makes a complaint of abuse, who conducts that investigation and, if it is a complaint or an allegation of assault, is that not a criminal matter and should it not involve police immediately?

Ms THORP - It does, when that is verified. I will tell you what happens. Every child is looked after by a case manager. That person is a highly trained, sensitive individual who is there 100 per cent for the best interests of that child. If a complaint is received by that person who is tasked with looking after that vulnerable child, then that is reported to and investigated by their senior practice manager, who is that person above, if you like.

Mr DEAN - What experience and training do they have in investigation - and that is the point I am trying to make - as investigators?

Ms THORP - They are not police. They do not have the level of investigation that a police officer has. They are just like in any State public service, be it in education, nursing or anywhere where members of State Public Service are in contact with the public. There are protocols and rules and regulations and stepped procedure, if you like.

So, in the very first instance, the senior practice consultant is the first involved. If at any stage during this staged investigation or severity of investigation there is a possibility of criminal behaviour, then the police are notified immediately. That is standard practice.

All of those complaints of abuse in care go to a group, an abuse in care monitoring group, that meets quarterly. The Commissioner for Children sits on that group. Once again, if at any time during that group's investigation they thought there was criminal behaviour occurring, they go straight to the police.

On top of that we also have the Office of the Ombudsman. So, if it is not a police matter but people still are not happy or they still do not believe it has been taken seriously enough, then they have recourse to the Ombudsman.

Then, on top of that we have another layer for kids at Ashley. We have an advisory group and an independent visitor there, and we are also piloting another group for independent visitors to go and visit foster children in their homes on a regular basis to make sure everything is all right. That has been going now for about six months and we will review it at the end of 12 months. I am really looking forward to seeing the results of that. It may be a good way to go. But, before I laud something like that, I am always very loath to put extra layers of people in the lives of children who are already vulnerable and already being looked after by a whole range of people. Just having more people in the mix does not necessarily mean that the level of care the child receives is going to be better.

3.2 Youth Justice Services -

CHAIR - Minister, I am interested to know what the cost is per resident for -

Ms THORP - A fortune, if you are talking about Ashley.

CHAIR - I am.

Ms THORP - An absolute fortune.

CHAIR - So what is the cost and is it similar to previous years, the cost per resident?

Ms THORP - I can get you an exact figure. It is well over \$100 000 per kid per year, isn't it? It depends on how long they are there, the level of care and on which area they are in.

CHAIR - Will you supply that?

Ms THORP - It changes quite a lot.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr BYRNE - Some of the costs are static as well, regardless of the number, because it based on the model of rostering and things. So despite the numbers going down the cost is still a static cost.

Mrs TAYLOR - I was heading down a quick breakdown at some stage of average over total costs. I agree with you, it looks like something in the order of \$260 000 a year.

CHAIR - So it is over \$100 000 but we do not know how much per resident per year?

Ms THORP - Not everyone is in there for a year.

Mr WING - But at that rate.

Ms THORP - It is a lot of money but we will have it for you.

Mr BYRNE - All we can say is, the daily occupancy ranges around 25 to 30, and then there is the cost that Ashley costs. So you can work out an average figure based on what that would be. Obviously that is not the cost per child, that is on a daily occupancy rate.

CHAIR - Can we get a cost per resident, like we do with the prison system?

Mr BYRNE - We can.

Ms THORP - They come in and out. Sometimes it is just overnight, going back to Hobart for a court case, sometimes it is a custodial sentence, so there is quite a range there. The difficulty we have is that Tasmania is small and we only have one facility. This is our problem. We need a facility for those very small handful of people who have been convicted of very violent crimes like attempted murder. On occasions young people are incarcerated.

Mr BYRNE - What we are saying is that there are 30 beds and the cost of a bed is about \$300 000.

Ms THORP - Per annum.

Mrs TAYLOR - Sorry, I was out by \$50 000.

Ms THORP - So it's a lot. Everybody in the youth justice area I have spoken to would like to be able to spend fewer resources on having secure facilities for that tiny handful of people whom society would expect us to keep very secure and having a range of options for young people other than Ashley.

CHAIR - Have you considered another facility in the south of the State?

Ms THORP - There is so much debate on this issue. I could actually see some value, for example, in talking to Victoria about whether we could subcontract to them. People might say that would be too far away for mum and dad to visit but if you have a child at Deloraine in Ashley and you live at Port Huon and you want to go and visit them, I would argue that we could probably help you and facilitate visiting your child better, more quickly and efficiently if they were in Melbourne.

Mr WING - You could probably put them up in five-star accommodation and still be better off!

Laughter.

Ms THORP - The reality is it is only a tiny amount of the number of kids who go through Ashley that really require that level of security.

CHAIR - Maximum security.

Ms THORP - Yes. I would like us to be looking much more around bail options. There is a lot of interest in the department and more broadly in the community about this. For example, if a young person is in the courts on a Saturday night after being involved in a crime and the magistrate has seen young Johnny three, four or five times before so he is loath to just send him home on bail again, if they have the option of a youth facility that could be used as a bail house, for want of a better word, that kid can stay in their own community and can be immediately receiving the assistance they may need around health issues or drug and alcohol issues without the necessity of going all the way up to Ashley and into that very expensive facility.

Mrs TAYLOR - Through you, Madam Chair, and with respect to the minister, in actual fact aren't you saying that some of those diversionary programs like Chance on Main and TOOL and whatever - I do not know about TOOL but I presume it is the same kind of program as Chance on Main which I am very familiar with - the evaluations that have been done have actually shown how well that was working in keeping some previous offenders out of Ashley? We are looking at \$350 000 a year to fund that entire program, which is about the equivalent of keeping one child in Ashley.

Ms THORP - The trouble we have with programs that grow organically, if you like, where they get a grant from the Commonwealth for three years out of national crime prevention funds or whatever and they are set up, is that they have their own parameters and their own rules of doing it over which the State has no control or say into what those protocols may be. Then the Commonwealth money runs out and out of our tiny little precious youth justice budget we are supposed to find \$400 000 a year for that one and, in the case of Chance on Main, they wanted to duplicate it statewide. We would love to get our hands on \$1.2 million to do diversionary projects. My argument with Chance on Main, TOOL, the Lighthouse Project and Youth on Paterson and all the myriad programs that are out there for youth is let us have some clear ideas in our minds of what we mean when we say 'diversionary'. Is it diversionary on the part of the Department of Justice? Is it diversionary in the sense that the school cannot cope with them anymore so they send them for alternative programs? If that is the case, where is the responsibility for the education system to stay linked-up with this child and make sure that they get back to school?

So this is one of the things that it is not coming out of the youth justice budget; we are going to get some money from the education budget for alternative programs and part of that - and I hope we are able to get it up - will be used for a process whereby groups like TOOL, Chance on Main, Youth on Paterson, Lighthouse Project et cetera can apply to get the money to run a program, but that program will have strict protocols around our expectations about staffing levels, professionalism, return-to-school projects and so on because we do not want to give money out to projects over which we have no control.

CHAIR - I am very mindful of the time and we still have education today. Mr Finch.

Mr FINCH - I would like to keep talking about the tiny little precious youth justice budget allocation if I could. On page 5.7 table 5.2 of volume 1 I am interested in the service's successes and its failures. I was thinking, perhaps simplistically, that expenditure on youth justice helps to save expenditure on adult justice and on Risdon Prison, yet the estimates here for youth justice in this table shows very little change from year to year. In fact there seems to be a drop in 2013-14.

Ms THORP - That's accounted for by the 27th pay.

Mr FINCH - Okay.

Ms THORP - It's not an increase, though - you're quite right. It is not the \$34 million I would have liked.

Mr FINCH - To put it bluntly, are we spending enough on youth justice?

Ms THORP - No.

Mr FINCH - Right, so the signal is there and the remedies will be looked at?

Ms THORP - I think one of the clearest signals is the importance the Premier has put on the fact that we need to have a connected-up children and youth program for the whole State so that we do not have children being multi-serviced by a whole range of different services with some falling through the gaps and some overlapping. We need to have a whole range of services that are clearly mapped for a child right from birth and in fact we would argue from before birth right through until they are adults - and I would even argue that is as old as 24. I think whilst it is going to be great to have some more money for youth justice, let us spend a lot of money on youth at risk before they get to this point. That's what I would like to see happen.

Mr WING - Have any comparisons been made with the cost of keeping young people in youth detention centres in other States, say in Melbourne or Brisbane?

Ms THORP - I think Alison could answer this.

Ms JACOB - The fundamental problem we have is scale of operations. We are committed to staffing 24 hours a day, seven days a week all year with an establishment of staffing infrastructure costs and so forth which do not change regardless of the number of young people coming in and out. It is a bit like class size; you do not save money by having a couple of less children in the class. You still have to pay for the teacher and all the infrastructure and that is exactly the situation as far as Ashley is concerned. Our fixed costs are comparable with other States and Territories but obviously because of our small scale and the relatively small number of young people who come through Ashley, that makes our costs at the higher end of the average range.

Ms THORP - We do not have the range of provisions. In some of the larger States they are able to have, for want of a better word, segregation, so you are not having really young kids coming through. How young do we get them?

Mr BYRNE - Over 10.

Ms THORP - Over 10 - in the same facility as someone who is serving a sentence and because they committed it as a young person they are going to be there until they are 19 if not older.

Mr WING - So you have more limited opportunity to have unit management?

Ms THORP - It is in units now. You have been to Ashley, haven't you?

Mr WING - Yes.

Ms THORP - So you have seen the set-up, but in Victoria they have age-specific facilities.

Mr WING - I have been to the Melbourne youth detention centre as well. How many residents can be accommodated at Ashley?

Ms JACOB - The maximum is 36. Our average is around 24 or 25.

Mr WING - The Melbourne youth detention centre would accommodate quite a lot more, wouldn't it?

Ms JACOB - There are a number of Melbourne youth detention centres. They have three or four different ones.

Mr WING - I went to what was then the most modern of them and that was probably about eight years ago.

Ms JACOB - I think there are four in Victoria and they have varying populations. Some deal with women, some deal with the younger populations, some only have remandees and so on. They have more capacity for specialised populations.

Mr WING - I do not know what it costs per day to keep a prisoner at Risdon now, but it would not be more than \$300 a day. It used to be about \$220.

Ms THORP - The level of care for children, of course, has to be higher because they are not prisoners.

Mr WING - That would not make the cost of keeping the children at Ashley at least three times the cost of keeping a prisoner at Risdon, but I understand the different circumstances.

Ms JACOB - That is really a ballpark figure too. It just dividing the total cost by the number of residents. I think it is an inflated figure if you take into consideration all the other corporate costs which would be included.

Ms THORP - Another thing we would like to see is proper youth trained bail officers in courts so that if young Freddie comes up and the magistrate is not confident that this young fellow cannot be sent home or for whatever reason there is no home then there are a range of options, someone to contact, a reliable family friend or relative, who is happy to take them rather than sending them to Ashley as there is no home to bail them to.

Mr DEAN - You do not have the options.

Ms THORP - That is exactly right. One of the things that the department has been putting time and effort in to as part of the Youth at Risk strategy is exploring those options. I am getting very positive feedback from both the Premier and the Treasurer that when we get our Child and Young Persons strategy up that they will look favourably at funding it.

CHAIR - Thank you. We will move on now to the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

Mr DEAN - Did you see the program on *ABC Stateline* on Friday 18 June? The program was about youth through the justice system and those getting into the justice system et cetera. It was outlined and identified that there are many, many - I think in the hundreds - youths who are living rough, living on the streets, in and out of the justice system et cetera. Minister, do we have any idea how many would be living rough in this State in those sort of circumstances?

Ms THORP - The most reliable figures are ABS figures and ABS figures for 2006,

Mr DEAN - It was 400.

Ms THORP - We do not have anything more up-to-date than that. We have reports from agencies like the Salvos, Colony 47, groups at Centacare that suggest that they are constantly turning young people away. But every visit does not represent an extra person. It might be that if a young person is going through a period of homelessness they may turn up to two or three refuges two or three times a week. That is what makes the count a little difficult.

Mr DEAN - It was also identified in the program that one way of probably getting some of those people off the street and giving them support that they need before they get back into the justice system is by communal facilities, the opening up or provision of communal facilities.

Ms THORP - Worldwide research proves that that is a very dangerous way to go. If you want to engage with young people and you want to provide them with the kind of wrap-around support they need to change their lives, concentrating young people in, say, an empty hall, the regatta ground or city hall on a cold winter night and providing them with a blanket and a stretcher, it might seem - and I do not mean this in an insulting manner - superficially like a good way to go, but in fact it is not the way to go at all.

Mr DEAN - It is better than living in the Hobart Rivulet which a lot of them are doing apparently.

Ms THORP - I was teaching young people with problems back in the late 70s and early 80s and there were kids going through cycles in their lives when they were staying in the Hobart Rivulet. I do not think you will ever stop kids running away from home. What you need to do is to help them get back on track.

Mr DEAN - Yes.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney, last question in this output.

Mr GAFFNEY - I have a question in the next output.

Ms THORP - May I briefly read this so it is no longer on notice?

The level of payment for travel is the same as the public servant occasional user rate - that is, 41.17 cents per kilometre for a vehicle less than 2 litre and 47.8 cents per kilometre for a vehicle with more than 2 litre capacity. It is a higher rate than the hospital patient scheme.

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister. We now move on.

**Output Group 4
Independent Children's Review Services**

4.1 Office of the Commissioner for children -

Mr GAFFNEY - Congratulations on this role, Minister. I think it is terrific; you have come a long way at a political level in recognising the rights of the child. I am very pleased that you are the Minister for Children.

Ms THORP - Thank you.

Mr GAFFNEY - Would you like to provide a brief overview about the role of the Commissioner and the relationship that his office has with your own? I think it is important for us to understand how it works.

Ms THORP - The role of the Commissioner for Children is independent and must be. It is a general advice role so I may, for example, as I have done in the past, ask the Commissioner to look into a particular issue, whether it be young children with disabilities living inappropriately for a long time in respite care, for example. He also has lots of other roles. He is in charge of that pilot program I mentioned earlier, the Children's Visitors pilot. In July this year, complaints and care orders; that is the annual one -

Mr BYRNE - An audit of children in care.

Ms THORP - Yes. He takes, by interview et cetera, the views of residents at Ashley Detention Centre. That is the report that I referred to. He works with the children and vulnerable people screening checks steering group. He is a member of the child death review steering committee. He is responsible for the residents advocate at Ashley Youth Detention Centre and that person visits weekly. Several reviews have been done, one of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act. He is on that steering committee. He is on the steering committee to review the Disabilities Services Act. He has several other interests around corporal punishment, child protection and human services reforms locally and nationally, Child Rights Information Network and several other things. For instance, he was involved in that Charter of Rights for Children in Care and several other things.

It is certainly not an investigative role in intent though we have asked him to look at the procedures. In one case it has been in the news quite a lot leading up to the point where there was police involvement just to see where the different agencies intermeshed, why and if there were holes and how we had to address that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. In the 2009 annual report from the Commissioner, he acknowledged an enormous amount of work is going on to develop the Tasmanian child

protection system from child rescue to true child protection which is a great step. He also commented that despite a longstanding office focus on a statewide system to check the criminal histories of people who work with children, there is still no system in place in Tasmania but I am assured that a clear plan of action is before the Government. I am just wondering -

Ms THORP - Yes. Do you want to know where that is at?

Mr GAFFNEY - That would help.

Ms THORP - Ms Jacobs, you jump in, because you know better than I. What happened was that there was a national agreement that that would be worked out for children. Tasmania, as it often does, has decided to expand that scope, so that is around working with children, vulnerable people and the elderly.

Ms JACOB - I will jump in. There was a national agreement that we would put in place a screening process for people working with children. We thought it would be useful in canvassing how that might work to consider the option of expanding that to people who work with other vulnerable people, like people with disabilities, people with mental illness and so on, because if there is an infrastructure, you might want to look at it a bit more broadly. So we put out a discussion paper that was out for consultation for several months at the beginning of this year. The responses to that process of consultation are being analysed at the moment, and we are in the process of hopefully getting that to a stage where we can provide advice to Cabinet about how that process might proceed. It is one of those ones where we have to be really careful that we do not go too far overboard so that you actually create a system where people cannot even engage in normal recreational activities.

Ms THORP - There goes breakfast programs.

Mr GAFFNEY - My question regarding the Budget is: where does the funding reside for the outcomes of that plan?

Ms JACOB - At the moment we are at the point of doing the work which would then lead to the drafting of the legislation, and the legislation then has to go through the Parliament. From that point, we will know what the cost of that program will be, and then that will need to be budgeted for.

Ms THORP - It will be in next year's budget rather than this one.

Mr GAFFNEY - In sections 79 and 80 of the functions and powers of the commissioner it clearly shows that, on the request of the minister, the commission is able to undertake a range of investigations, as you just alluded to. Does the 2010-11 Budget already include funds to cover the cost of those potential investigations? If there is an issue where you think the Commissioner should become involved, because his budget is fairly streamlined, how does that work?

Ms THORP - He is funded to do it.

Mr GAFFNEY - He is funded to do that in the present allocation?

Ms THORP - Yes.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr GAFFNEY - I was going to ask him, but how many staff does he have?

Ms THORP - Full time staff: the Commissioner, a senior policy officer, an executive officer and two research officers.

Mr GAFFNEY - And within his budgets he is allowed to, if he needs extra assistance, manipulate his budget to get in other research officers and whatever to help out or not?

Ms THORP - I presume so.

Mr BYRNE - If he uses the Community Visiting Scheme, for example. We have given him additional funds to resource that to free him up to be able to carry on doing his core tasks.

Ms THORP - He has a task and he is expected to prioritise them at those levels. There is also part-time staff, an Ashley Youth Detention resident advocate, another research officer is on there temporarily and there has been a position for a youth liaison officer part time, but that funding has ceased from now.

Mrs TAYLOR - So are all those salaries covered in that \$647 000?

Ms THORP - Yes.

Mrs TAYLOR - I was going to ask what do we get for the \$700 000, but if we get all those people and a very, very busy commissioner, then that is really good. My other question is about the grants and subsidies line, can we go onto that?

CHAIR - We can.

Mrs TAYLOR - We are still on page 5.7.

Mr WING - Something needs to happen about these pages to make them easier to understand. I think it is done deliberately to confuse me.

CHAIR - So far the only person who has been confused today is the Minister.

Ms THORP - So where are we at?

Mrs TAYLOR - In the grants and subsidies line item on page 5.7, there is a very large reduction in the allocation and note 14 on the following page says that in essence this is due to the reduction in the allocation for the Children Abused in Care Scheme.'

Ms THORP - That is right, we have nearly finished the third round.

Mrs TAYLOR - I would like to place on record my appreciation for what the Government has done by way of providing some compensation for those children. My question is: how many more people came forward to make a claim during the extension period?

[3.45 p.m.]

Ms THORP - It is round three, because that is not the end of it either.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mrs TAYLOR - It nearly needs to be at the end because you have not allocated anything beyond 2011.

Ms THORP - Two rounds have been completed, and the third and final round was established in March 2008. This round closed on 31 July 2008 and close to 1 000 completed applications were received, and some of those were from overseas.

Mrs TAYLOR - In the last round?

Ms THORP - Some 978 assessments of eligibility have been completed and people advised. Of the 16 remaining cases, there are four applications where eligibility has been difficult to establish and further checking of files is being undertaken. Interviews are nearly complete, and 577 have received their payment. The quantum of payments to 27 May 2010 is \$18.9 million - and that is just round three. That is not rounds one and two. It is \$43 million all up. But that is not the end of it, because now we have the trust fund capacity. So basically out into the future, if a case should arise then people can still apply, and that is because people will be eligible under the trust fund.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is since the close of round three?

Ms THORP - Yes, since the close of round three.

Ms JACOB - An additional 351 people have received information packages and 236 people have registered to be assessed - this is following the closure of round three.

Ms THORP - And former magistrate Arnold Shott has been doing the job.

Mr WING - Is it possible to say what the average payment is?

Ms THORP - Under the trust fund my understanding is that it is \$35 000. In the previous rounds the amount was assessed on the level that the assessor felt the person deserved. They were quite variable, were they not?

Mr BYRNE - There was a whole range.

Mrs TAYLOR - Can you tell us off the top of your head - the top one would have been \$100 000?

Mr BYRNE - No, about \$70 000.

Mr WING - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, members. Thank you, Minister. I would like to take a 10-minute break and be back at about 3.55 p.m. for education. I thank all those who have been with you today thus far and they will be leaving you now for others to join. We will start with early years in education.

Ms THORP - Thank you.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

The committee suspended from 3.47 p.m. to 4.01 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you, members.

Ms THORP - Could I just give this answer to a previously-asked question and then it is one less for you guys to worry about later?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms THORP - The total budget for AYDC, that is Ashley, is \$8.8 million. There were 245 admission events into in Ashley 2009-10, so on that basis the cost per child would be approximately \$36 000. The admission events vary in length.

Mr WING - I see.

Ms THORP - The total budget is \$8.8 million and 245 children were admitted over the year so if you divide the 245 admissions into the \$8.8 million you come up with a basic cost per child of \$36 000.

Mr DEAN - Over what period?

Ms THORP - That is what I am saying - each event is a varying length of time so one might be for a couple of days, one might be for the year, but when you average them out per child it is \$36 000.

Mr DEAN - Per year per child.

Ms THORP - No, it is not per year because it is a very rare occurrence that a child is there for a year and that would be after they have been charged, convicted and found guilty of a crime which means a period of incarceration for two years or so.

Mr WING - Is it \$36 000 or \$360 000, because you said earlier \$300 000 per child per year at Ashley?

Ms THORP - Yes, I know; it didn't sound right to me either so that's why we've double-checked and the total budget is \$8.8 million for the year to run Ashley. In any given year 245 children are admitted so if you divide the \$8.8 million by the number of children admitted that comes down to a cost per child of \$36 000.

Mr WING - That's not apples and apples, is it, because that is much cheaper than Risdon on that basis.

Ms THORP - Yes, but the Risdon figures are to keep a prisoner for a year and you cannot do that here because it is -

Mr WING - It's apples and oranges in comparison, isn't it?

Ms THORP - Yes, that's right. Do you want that?

CHAIR - Thank you, Minister, you can table that and we will get our calculators out at a later date.

DIVISION 3

(Department of Education)

Ms THORP - At the table we have Jenny Gale, General Manager, Strategic Policy and Performance, John Smyth, Secretary of the Department of Education and Skills; Greg Glass, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services; and Nick May, Acting Director, Finance and Resources.

CHAIR - Thank you and welcome to the table. Minister, I will invite you to give a brief overview as Minister for Children but also Minister for Education and first up is pre-compulsory and compulsory education in the early years so that will be covered in that first output group.

Ms THORP - I think it is better to see it as a whole as well because that is very much how we are seeing it and that is from birth right through. We see it as a lifelong exercise. If you look at that diagram there you will notice that it is circular if you take this line here, so we are not seeing it as a start and finish but something that is continuous, so I will talk to that.

The education and training portfolio strategy drives what we do. It has developed from Student at the Centre to now Learner at the Centre so it has become more broad. It relates to every stage of life, from child to parent to citizen to worker to parent and then back to child, because as you can clearly see, how the parent is educated is going to have a direct impact on how that child learns as well. The focus is on improvement. We are open and transparent with data about where we are now as, for example, on our web site, and where we need to improve we resource and support our leaders to lead to better outcomes.

We can demonstrate good improvement over the three years using data in the schools, so if you would like to have a look at this page, this kind of information is available on the web site. On the web site it breaks down into regions and also into individual schools so this is the overview for the whole lot. We measure and report on 17 criteria. If you look at this page here and the 7 in this area here it explains how the whole thing is worked out. We are either looking at things trending up, which would show an improvement, stable or trending down. If the achievement of any given school is high and trending up then the result for that is excellent, or any particular measure, for that matter. For example, if you go up to the top one, in 2009 readiness for school is good, and good refers to either a high achievement that is stable or an intermediate achievement that is improving. I hope that is making sense.

If you look at a trending down, for example, it might be about student satisfaction with school and it is a very high achievement but is slightly less than it was the year before so it was trending down, that would still be considered acceptable. If however that rating was an intermediate rating and trending down, we would consider it an issue and if the achievement in any given area was low and trending down we would consider it a real concern.

If you look down at the bottom at the very last diagram you will note that in 2007, of the different criteria, six were either good or excellent. In 2009, 10 were either good or excellent.

Mr WING - These are schools?

Ms THORP - It is collated for the State so you get an overall rating for the whole State.

Mr WING - So six of the categories were good or excellent there?

Ms THORP - Yes. Five were of a concern or an issue in 2007 and in 2009, only three. We are not interested in comparing school to school or region to region but rather at any point in time how that region or district or individual school is going. If every particular criteria was a high achievement and either stable or trending up, that is an excellent or good result. If you are not moving and your achievement is only low, that is of concern. If your results are excellent and you are not moving, that is good because you are as good as you can get, basically.

When people talk about league tables and things like that, we get concerned because we do not use this information to make comparisons from one community to another. It is about how is that school community moving in terms of its own self. It also means that we can use things such as the NAPLAN testing, for example, to say a given school is not high enough in its achievement and the trend is not moving, either stable or up. If that is the case and there is a problem, that means we can direct the Raising the Bar Closing the Gap resources to that school to put extra resources in to improve that. There are also things such as school attendance, retention, literacy and numeracy, and general levels around if the staff is happy and staff is attending, if the kids are happy and if the parents are happy.

Then the last couple of measures are around equity. It takes into account the socioeconomic status of the population from which the school draws, and relativities are made around that. If a school with quite a low socioeconomic status is showing trending up excellent results, that is fantastic. But if a school with a high socioeconomic level is not moving or is trending down, that is a more serious concern. I hope that is making sense.

Mr WING - I understand that there is no category here for community service or maturity of students or preparedness for globalisation and things like that. Are they irrelevant?

Ms THORP - The reason these are chosen is that they are readily measurable. When you are going to use data this way, it has to be something that you can be confident in the data you are collecting and its comparability over time. Whilst there are lots of other measures, such as the ones you mentioned, as John just said, if a school is rating well in all the measurement categories, with a reasonable degree of confidence you can believe that the other kinds of measures that you were talking about would be okay as well. These are the guts of it, if you like.

Mr WING - It would not be difficult to evaluate the level of community service in which students are involved, would it?

Ms THORP - No, but how that would directly relate to education performance in a measurable way is probably not the most useful of measures.

Mr WING - It would be for the whole-of-life experience - a very important one, I would have thought.

Ms THORP - Individual schools within their own school programs do put emphasis on community service, but that is very much a school-based decision rather than something that is imposed from on high. I have already mentioned the fact that the improvement is there to be seen in the data. Student attendance is of concern. If you look across at student attendance it could be

better, but there is a direct explanation there as to the swine flu, which had up to a third of some school populations being absent on any given day last year. So that has distorted those statistics.

I mentioned some of the resources. One of the beauties of this is being able to put your resources where they are most required. So that is why the \$5 million that is in this budget for the early years child and family centres are going to be so important. There was specific criteria about where they were going to be placed, and the communities they have gone into very closely match the communities that need the extra assistance at educational level. It is through these facilities that we are able to work very early on with mums. Quite often our first indicator is a visit from a CHAPS nurse who is doing the home visit after a baby is born. You will notice in the budget we went from 10 universal checks and visits up to a potential 12. In the past, it has been as low as six and in recent times up to 10. That extra two gives us the flexibility. So if a CHAPS nurse goes to a family home and sees a young mum struggling on her own, for example, they may choose to put far more than the 10 basic visits in place and say, 'This young mum needs 20.'

[4.15 p.m.]

That also means with the child and family centres being placed in her local community - as the Premier is fond of saying, in pram pushing distance - then it may be that that mum goes to the child and family centre with just one service in mind but, on getting there, finds out that she can also get access to some on-site learning with child care provided and a whole range of other services that can help turn that life around. If a young mum's life is improved in that regard, our hope and I think a reasonable expectation would be that is going to have positive impacts on the life of the child.

Another thing that is happening too is the Launching into Learning program. Once again, that is targeted to those particular areas where we all know just in our life experience that, if a child is in a home where there are lots of books, lots of reading, lots of conversation, lots of practise in counting and all the rest of it, that child is going to go to school more ready for learning than a child who has not had those advantages. So the whole idea of Launching into Learning is trying to correct that imbalance so that kids can all start school all ready to go.

Then the Raising the Bar Closing the Gap, which has been going on through primary schools for two years, is already demonstrating good results, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and the Budget this year allows us to move that program into high schools. So we are hoping to see those improvements continue to flow through. So working on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and getting away from that community perception that literacy and numeracy is English and maths - any teacher present will know that is not the case.

Student participation and improving learning opportunities for the most disadvantaged students harks back to what I was talking about before about the importance of having a ministry for children which is an overseeing portfolio which picks up those things that happen through other areas like the CHAPS nurse visits that live within Human Services right through to the young people who end up at Ashley which falls under Youth Justice. So rather than have a child with difficulties being the responsibility of one area for a couple of years and then all of sudden it is someone else's turn and someone else's turn, we want to close those gaps and bring those services together so there is a continuous stream of support as and when the child requires it.

One big message we are trying to get out there all the time is that one about making every school day matter. Whilst we have, I think, the best attendance figures in the country - they are up around 98 per cent, are they not?

Mr SMYTH - Ninety-five.

Ms THORP - We have a long way to go and that is fine; we will do it.

Major work underway: you are aware of all the work that is going on improving school facilities through Building the Education Revolution. This has been a fantastic opportunity for Tasmania to spend a lot of money on our schools and facilities. The money is going also into the child and family centres that I have mentioned. The trade training centres which I hope - now with a change of government - we do not lose because they are so vital particularly around communities like St Helens and George Town. These communities are really going to be able to benefit from these facilities, and of course the new LINC's.

Mr WING - So which government are you hoping will not change?

Ms THORP - The Federal Opposition has said that if they win the election they will withdraw funding for the trade training centres, which is distressing.

Mr WING - You are not thinking of the State Government?

Ms THORP - No. PY10 reforms: unless you have been living in a vacuum for the last three months, you would have to know about this work that has been going on in PY10. This diagram here is included to give you some idea of the work we need to do. It is looking at the highest attainment for Tasmanians. If you look to the far right of the diagram, you will notice that in 2005 about 42 per cent of Tasmanians did not have a qualification post year 10 because that was as far as they got.

Mr WING - So that is the cup being half empty?

Ms THORP - The Australian amount, if you look at the pale lemon coloured column on the far right of the diagram that is where Australia is. So Australia-wide less than 25 per cent of Australians have stopped their education at year 10. In Tasmania, in 2005, that was between 40 per cent and 45 per cent. Between 2005 and 2009 we managed to bring that down by 11.8 per cent, but it needs to be at least down there at 22 per cent. Australia-wide, if you look at years 11 and 12, far fewer of our young people have a qualification post-year 11, fewer have a qualification post-year 12, but we are starting to make inroads into certificates I and II and certificate III. That is the impact of the polytechnic reforms, in my opinion. I think generally what is being accepted is that the greater access for young people to get into to certificate I, II and III subjects is already starting to show an impact. In the advanced diploma, which is like post-certificate IV, we are still well below the Australian average but that should be starting to bite in the next 12 months or so. In higher education, we are improving but we still have a way to go there. That is why we have to make changes around what happens to our kids post-year 10, to give them at least the same chances as kids in the broader community.

You would know that the stakeholder task force chaired by Tim Doe is meeting, I think, next Tuesday for its first meeting. That group will be made up of all the relevant unions: the LHMU, the AEU and the CPSU. It will also be made up of representatives of the Polytechnic, the Academy, Skills Tasmania, the Skills Institute, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Principals' Association, the State Parents and Friends - all of the stakeholder groups around the State that have a real interest in education particularly as it relates to post-year 10.

CHAIR - Can I ask, Minister, how each of those persons are chosen?

Ms THORP - They will choose their own. I have written to the heads of all of those organisations and said, 'You or your representative is invited'. In the case of the AEU, because of their particular interest, it was a letter to Leanne Wright as president of the AEU, and a letter to Greg Brown as head of the secondary colleges subgroup of the AEU asking for him or his representative, and the same courtesy was given to the TAFE teachers' organisation. So the AEU will be very well represented, with three reps as opposed to every other group getting one.

Mr FINCH - What is the name of that group under Tim Doe?

Ms THORP - The stakeholder task force. Their role is advisory to me, so that when we are making the changes to the post-year 10 reforms that were required because of our changing political landscape, they will be feeding advice directly back into how those changes are implemented to minimise the problems for students and staff on the ground and around it.

CHAIR - So each organisation will nominate somebody from within their own circle in whatever processes they see fit? You have no role?

Ms THORP - Yes. I was not going to do that. I thought it was better that it came from them. They are best placed to know who their people are.

CHAIR - So that will be a board of 15 or thereabouts?

Ms THORP - It is a group of about 15, yes. It is a largish group.

CHAIR - You do not think that is too large a group to be trying to get some consensus out of?

Ms THORP - We may not. We may find that two-thirds of the group think we should do something one way and one-third the other, but it is an advisory group. They are not going to dictate to the minister how these will be implemented but rather give informed advice. If I have a concern it is student representation and one of the tasks I have asked Tim Doe to consider at their first meeting is how best to ensure we get the voice of the young people.

CHAIR - Will the President of the Legislative Council be asked to seek a nomination? I notice that the Tasmanian Legislative Council is listed.

Ms THORP - Yes, I actually have taken that a step further and asked Mike Gaffney to do it because of his educational background.

CHAIR - So that is the only one that didn't look at their own group and nominate someone?

Ms THORP - I think there was a letter to the president as well, so there may be one other, but because of Mr Gaffney particular interest -

CHAIR - I was just interested in the process surrounding that.

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Ms THORP - Yes. We are getting a drafting implementation plan together which I will take to Cabinet next Monday and the first task of that group will be to examine that implementation plan and give me feedback on it - identify things that they think are missed and give a tick on things they think are going well. That may mean a couple of meetings at least, I imagine, and then the next task will be around the draft legislation to make sure that the legislation comes to both Houses of Parliament having been very widely consulted and, as far as possible, consensus and agreement developed on. But it is like most things, you cannot please all of the people all of the time.

Mr WING - It's a pleasant change, though.

Ms THORP - I do my best.

Mr WING - Last time education legislation came to our House, everything was in place.

Ms THORP - They were probably trying to save us a lot of work, Mr Wing. In this case, we will not do it that way.

A really important part is the adult literacy strategy, and just last week the Australian Industry Group released a national report showing that 75 per cent of employers reported that their businesses were affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy in the adult work force. There are several issues there but the big ones are around productivity and employers being able to have workers in their employ that can do the job they require of them. So productivity is a big one. Of course it is also a big one when it comes to personal and individual satisfaction, as an adult, to be literate and numerate to participate fully in community life. One that I particularly care about is the fact that adult literacy and numeracy has such a direct impact on the learning outcomes for our young people, and there are more advantages than that. A community that is involved in lifelong learning is a much richer, happier and a more productive community.

As I said earlier, the number of Tasmanians who have no education beyond year 10 has been reduced by 12 per cent between 2005 and 2009. We still need to do more in years 12 and higher level qualifications. A really important statistic that I thought you would be interested in is that information on the back of this sheet which reported under what is known as the ROGS or Report on Government Services. This is national data that is collected and reported on annually.

The important one there is if you have a look at out-of-school costs per student, this is the amount of money per capita that the department spends on things other than that that is directly on the students. You will notice that, back in 2005-06, Tasmania was nearly at the top, so for every student in our State attending school, \$916 was spent at departmental level on things other than direct delivery to students.

Mr WING - That is other than teachers, education, or equipment?

Ms THORP - Other than that which goes in through the school door as part of the school resource packages for teachers' employment.

Mr WING - What type of things does it cover then?

Ms THORP - Corporate services, learning services administration and that kind of thing is caught up in that figure. You will notice that by 2007-08 Tasmania was coming down. You

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would have heard the Premier saying often whilst he was still education minister that he wanted to see the money going through the school gate and not spent elsewhere. This is a very graphic description of how that has been achieved. In 2008-09 - were we the lowest?

Mr SMYTH - No, we were second lowest.

Ms THORP - They are our figures but that has yet to be reported. If you look at the percentage change over that three-year period, we have decreased our out-of-school costs per student by 30 per cent, and that has not been a diminution in the education budget, quite the contrary.

Mr WING - I see.

Ms THORP - It just recognises that far more money now is going directly to students, as opposed to running the admin.

Mr WING - So the costs on students have not gone down, unfortunately.

Ms THORP - No. There are rankings available that show how much is spent per student per State on a comparative basis.

Mr WING - What does that show?

Ms THORP - It shows us going up in almost direct comparison.

Mr WING - It compares to this?

Ms THORP - Yes. The bottom line stays the same but, instead of spending it centrally on admin type services, it now goes to the schools. All our out-of-school costs have been minimised probably as far as we can, without making everyone drive around on pogo sticks, write with pencils and get rid of computers. I do not know what else we can do on that level, quite frankly.

CHAIR - Have you taken all the mobile phones?

Ms THORP - Quite a few - quite a few cars and 24 per cent in phones -

CHAIR - That is in what?

Mr GLASS - In mobile phones in a non-school area as part of reductions.

CHAIR - But has that diminished some of the productivity of people who were using the phone and it was actually being effective? Have they come from the right areas?

Ms THORP - Every one of those decisions was made after proper consideration. If that phone was required then it was kept. If it was arguable that that phone was not required, it went. This was about the education department making a really hard-nosed decision about the global financial crisis being upon us. We had to find efficiency dividends; we were not going to take the money away from kids so we took it away from elsewhere.

CHAIR - But there was a turnaround in the GFC issue. My understanding is that there were some mobile phones taken from people who were looking after outside of the school area, the immediate school cluster, and that impacted on their ability to do their job because they were not able to be contacted during the day. For instance, if they had travelled to a particular location and they could call in on the way back but because they were out of contact, they were coming back to their centre and then having to go out again.

Ms THORP - I would be really disappointed to think that some of those decisions had those kinds of consequences. I suppose my thinking would be that that is something that you always need to reflect upon. If you have made a decision to take a phone or a particular car away or whatever from a service and it become apparent that that had negative consequences, then I would like to think that could be reinstated.

CHAIR - There would be an opportunity, in your view, to reassess those situations where it may have had a negative impact.

Ms THORP - Yes, that is right. There was also a statement made by a member in another place reported in the media recently about cuts to education which were quite erroneous. I would like to put on the record that during the 2009-10 financial year the Consolidated Fund budget increased by \$84 million, but there is \$94 million less Australian Government funding in this 2010-11 budget compared to the 2009-10 mainly due, I would suspect, to capital items finishing. But the 2010-11 budget has an additional \$28 million in it from the Australian Government for non-government schools. You get a budget figure for a particular year given in the budget papers and then through that school year funds come in from other sources. For all we know now that we have a new Federal Minister for Education, Simon Crean, he may have a particular passion -

Mr WING - Honestly?

Ms THORP - Yes, just announced today, I believe. He might have a particular passion for say languages in primary school and decide that he is going to find \$200 million and distribute it across the states to encourage us to have more LOTE teaching in our junior years. If that is the case, that will be in addition to the money allocated this year. Is that making sense?

We do not know exactly all the money we are going to get. We know what we have been given at this point in time but we do not to know what other funds may come in during the 12 months. For example, if the allocation for last year was \$100 million and this year it is \$120 million, it has gone up by \$20 million. But if during the year after the budget of \$100 million came in, out of the blue unexpectedly we got \$50 million from the Federal Government that would read as an actual of \$150 million. And then someone looks at the \$120 million for this year and says, 'You have gone down \$30 million.' That is a very simplistic reading of the Budget that has no relation to reality whatsoever.

CHAIR - Do you as Minister have any requests in to the Federal Government for particular areas of funding that you do not know whether you have been successful or not yet?

Ms THORP - We have signed up for the national partnerships - Jenny, would you like to talk about where we are with those?

Ms GALE - The Commonwealth Government already gives a considerable amount of money for national partnerships and that comes in over a seven-year period. I think it is \$70-odd million

for this next financial year, so we already get considerable amounts of money through the Commonwealth out of national partnerships. Some of the funding that we are not quite sure of yet in relation to that is reward funding for the literacy and numeracy national partnership and the teacher quality national partnership. They are the only two amounts at the moment that we are not sure whether we will be successful in getting.

Ms THORP - Some national partnerships - and I know probably a bit more about the ones I was involved in more recently with Human Services - were direct amounts that were given to do particular tasks and others are unmatched funding. So the Commonwealth might give you \$10 million for a particular task or outcome as long as the State matches it to make it \$20 million; and in others there is a certain amount of money given to try to encourage certain outcomes, such as the literacy and numeracy that Jenny mentioned, and if you achieved those outcomes well then there is almost like a bonus payment on top of that.

Ms GALE - For example, for the Smarter Schools National Partnerships, we will receive \$2.2 million approximately in facilitation funding but we can receive reward funding of up to \$8 million, depending on how we go against the targets that were set in the performance measures that have been agreed between the State Government and the Commonwealth Government; whereas for the access to 15 hours of kindergarten time, we know that we have a set amount of funding to be expecting between now and 2013 by which time we will have all children accessing 15 hours of kindergarten, and that is not dependent on anything except the numbers of children that we have in our schools. So that is a set amount.

Ms THORP - Some have more carrots than others, so to speak.

CHAIR - We have just about covered our overview. I think we might have gone into a few other areas as well.

Ms THORP - But it gives us a pretty good range of what is going on in education. I am happy to drill down.

CHAIR - That is exactly where we are going.

Output group 1 Pre-Compulsory and Compulsory Education

Mr FINCH - Minister, just on this page of the sheet that you gave us, and I am referring to page 3.8 at the moment, I notice that in the early years section you have here some nice dark greens with excellent on them and then when you go to overall progress, I am assuming it is back down to a green with good. There is some excellent there and some highs and trends up, but I am just wondering whether you could explain that to me. Is that of concern or is that still okay?

Ms THORP - That is still okay.

Mr FINCH - Even though we were excellent in 2008?

Ms THORP - Was that around attendance, that one?

Mr FINCH - It is readiness for school, early literacy and early numeracy.

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Ms THORP - That was on those three there?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Ms THORP - The excellent refers to trending up. If something is already pretty good but it is going up, that is excellent; if something is pretty good and staying pretty good, that is good.

Mr WING - If it is constant.

Ms THORP - Yes, if it is constant, that is good. These things are looked at pretty regularly to make sure that they do reflect adequately what schools are actually doing. If a school was getting up to 95 per cent in any particular category, rather than drop it from excellent to good you might leave it at excellent because there is nowhere else for them to go. They are getting as good as they can get.

Mr FINCH - Yes. Just the way it reads there it looks as though there is some diminution there rather than holding at excellent.

Ms THORP - Yes, that is why you need to cross-reference with that table there about trending up, stable or trending down. If something is really good, it is going really well in this school and it has been for some years, that is called stable and under the current rate it would get good. If it is coming from a pretty high position anyway but still improving, that gets excellent.

Mr FINCH - Then the other one there that is a concern with a red is that issue of student attendance. It was an issue in 2007-08. It is a concern in 2009 and you have it trending down.

Ms THORP - That was the swine flu one.

Mr FINCH - Was that the swine flu the one you were talking about? It was in 2009 but it has still been an issue over a few years, has it not?

Ms THORP - The secretary just reminded me that it is an issue because we set such a high standard. We want our kids to be at school every day because I think the old catch cry is 'every day matters.' So it is not acceptable for parents who have had a late night and cannot be bothered getting up and sending the child the school. It is just not on. One particular issue that I am really hoping we can spend some time and effort on is emerging patterns of absenteeism amongst our junior primary school kids. I am of the belief, I may not be right here, that if you put some time and effort into investigating absenteeism amongst grade 1s, 2s, 3s, you may well be able to detect patterns such that, if you can sort them out early, you may not be dealing with a kid who is missing two days a week by high school. Once again it is trying to work with the issues you have that are current and present but also trying to get in early and avoid problems before they grow. But we do set ourselves very, very high standards.

Mr DEAN - So every absentee is checked out closely. Is that right?

Ms THORP - Well, yes, they are followed very well. There are lots of things in place to record absenteeism and what the reasons are. Most absences are explained absences, either the child is accompanied by a note when they come back to school or there is a phone call and the absence is explained. But there is a small proportion of absences that are not, and they are the ones we need to focus on.

Mr FINCH - It is monitored strongly in the State?

Ms THORP - Absolutely but that is not to say there is not more that we do at all. We want to spend time and effort on attendance - yes.

Mr FINCH - Is it worse in this day and age than it has been in eons back if we went back over time?

Ms THORP - We are certainly better than many of our counterparts interstate.

Mr FINCH - I am not just thinking about the last couple of years though, Minister, I am thinking about over decades. Are times changing? Is there a reflection of life pressures on families more or that kids are not getting scrutinised in respect of their attendance at school from home?

Ms THORP - I would argue that there is more scrutiny now than there has been in the past. I suspect that, particularly when you are looking at high school, in the past where a child who has been problematic at school is absent a lot of people have breathed a sigh of relief. But that is not accepted by any of our school communities now at all. They really do care about those kids.

Mr FINCH - Thanks. If I can go to a reference on page 3.8 in the 3.2 table and note 9 on the early years funding states:

'... transfer of the Australian Government funded Achieving Universal Access to Early Childhood Education program to In School Education.'

I am wondering whether, Minister or Ms Gale, somebody could give me some assessment of who is paying for what. What happened there; what was the total of the funding; and what has changed?

Ms THORP - It was the money that came to us from the Commonwealth, and that has now gone into school resource packages. Is that correct?

Ms GALE - Previously we were funding kindergarten students for 10 hours a week, and every kindergarten student in the State had 10 hours a week.

Mr FINCH - We were - the State?

Ms GALE - The State Government was funding that, which included teacher time as well as teacher aide time for every student. The Commonwealth is now funding some schools in the State and it is being rolled out and will have full implementation by 2013. So the Commonwealth is paying for the additional five hours, both for teacher time and teacher aide time. So the funding that is in the budget figure will be the current allocation for the number of schools that are being funded for 15 hours at the moment. So they have been rolled out from last year through to 2013.

Mr FINCH - Thanks very much. There seems to have been these big structural changes in State policies for the early years. I suppose we have seen the reflection from previous years and that is why the structural changes have needed to be made. Minister, did you want to make a comment on that?

Ms THORP - You might find this useful, which is our key highlights of what is happening in the early years area. There are 120 schools running the Launching Into Learning initiative, which is about \$4.25 million per year. What we have found is that students who participated in Launching Into Learning - that is the real littlies I was talking about - has almost halved the gap between the usual results for children in reading and numeracy at these schools compared to state-wide results for children in Prep. Could you explain that please?

Ms GALE - The previous reading gap for those students who were in the Launching Into Learning schools was about 11.4 per cent using the PIPS testing that we have for Prep students.

Ms THORP - So that means they were 11 per cent?

Ms GALE - They were 11 per cent lower than for other schools. And those schools then that were Launching Into Learning schools and the first time that we could assess the students, the gap has now reduced to 4.9 per cent, so that is a significant difference. In numeracy, the previous gap for those schools was 6.8 per cent, and that has reduced now to 3.2 per cent. Likewise, in the kindergarten development check, previously those Launching Into Learning schools had a gap of about 7 per cent between their performance and those of other schools, and that is now down to about 2 per cent. So it is a significant decrease in the gap in the early years.

Ms THORP - So if you can imagine in a community where for a variety of reasons parents have not had the skills at their disposal to make sure their children were ready for school - I mentioned earlier about the reading, doing the counting games and the other things that parents can do with their children if they know how and if it has been demonstrated to them - it meant that those littlies were turning up at school in some areas considerably behind the eight ball than kids from other areas. So the whole point of this Launching Into Learning exercise was to give all this extra time and effort to these children coming into school, and we are finding in a really short period of time it is already making that marked difference. If you think about the catch-up those children would have to do, starting behind the eight ball that much - about 11 per cent with the literacy and about 6 per cent with numeracy - by being able to address that early on you are really giving them a help and precluding the need for extra help later on.

CHAIR - When is it going to be rolled out to the rest of the schools that are not picked up in the 120?

Ms THORP - Well, the 120 schools are those schools that are identified as having the need.

CHAIR - So the others do not need it?

Ms THORP - That is fair enough, there is no perceived need. The kiddies are starting with a good chance of success. So that covers off on the highlights. There is quite a bit on the back as well.

Mr FINCH - It is good information. Are there any questions on that section?

CHAIR - Have you finished with this?

Mr FINCH - No, I have not. On page 3.10 there is a reference to early years that speaks of assistance and advice to childcare services and also funding contributions to NGOs. I want to

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flesh out how that advice is given and how is the funding to the NGOs determined. What is that notation about?

Ms GALE - The advice to childcare services is through the childcare unit when they do their licensing of the units. They provide different advice to those services that they believe need to have some assistance through their licensing and the way that they run their services. So that is what that refers to. I am sorry; I did not hear the second part of your question.

Mr FINCH - How is the funding for NGOs determined and how is the advice given? They were the two questions.

Ms GALE - The funding for NGOs is basically on facilities type issues, so it is done again through the licensing program. Where there are potential issues raised about licensing and whether perhaps they need additional equipment or part of the facilities need to be upgraded, it is then that those grants are provided to those non-government organisations to enable them to keep their licences.

Ms THORP - It is through an application system, is it not?

Ms GALE - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Is that quantified, Minister?

Ms THORP - Do we have figures on how much is distributed.

Ms GALE - We do.

Ms THORP - In the 2009-10 year, we have not totalled it, but under the neighbourhood model occasional care program, seven services received about \$500 000 -

Mr FINCH - Each or total?

Ms THORP - Total. Eighteen play centres received \$122 000 totalled; play groups with Play Group Tasmania, which is one group but it assists a lot of other play groups, received nearly \$50 000. Then there was Play Group Tasmania Children's Week, \$2 000; vacation care to four different services was nearly \$23 000; Lady Gowrie Resource Library, \$3 000; scholarships through Early Childhood Australia, 60 individuals - and that varies from year to year but it is up to 60 - of \$35 000; mentorship as required \$35 000; capital upgrade program, which is what Jenny was referring to, is ongoing but different services are funded each year, about \$140 000.

Mr FINCH - How do NGOs find out about those services that are required?

Ms THORP - It is part of their licensing requirements so they would be inspected.

Mr FINCH - Yes, but is there a prospectus put out by the education department that these are the services that we are seeking to have introduced into our schools?

Ms THORP - The information on these grants would be on the website?

Ms GALE - Yes.

Ms THORP - Like all the other grant programs that are out there.

Mr FINCH - Then NGOs submit to get the funding?

Ms THORP - Yes. Then depending on whether or not their application measures up and fits the criteria they would be given the funds or not.

Mr FINCH - One question from my electorate: does the childcare unit that we have heard about relate to the Child and Family Centre, like the one at Beaconsfield?

Ms THORP - No. The childcare unit has an oversight licensing -

Ms GALE - It would licence the childcare centre at Beaconsfield but not the broader Child and Family Centre itself.

Ms THORP - It is more an oversight group, keeping an eye on quality issues and licensing issues. The Child and Family Centre - Beaconsfield is getting a different sort of a centre though, is it not?

Mr FINCH - Yes, it is quite an interesting one. It is federally funding linking up with the State -

Ms THORP - Beaconsfield is interesting like that, because they are like that with their health centre too, are they not? Their model for their health centre is a bit different too.

Mr FINCH - Yes.

1.4 Early Years -

Ms THORP - Where we at please?

Mr GAFFNEY - Where you talk about continuing projects for early years funding. I have heard around the traps that the child and family centres have suffered a bit of a delay or it is a lengthy period - that is what I have been hearing. I am wondering what is the reason for that and will that be alleviated?

Ms THORP - I will get Jenny to answer this, but one of the prime things that the child and family centres is based on is the need for them to be very well supported and very well received by the community. So a lot of time and effort has gone in to making sure that there is the outcome.

Ms GALE - The Minister has answered that. It is because we want to get strong community ownership for the child and family centres. So we have formed local enabling groups which have representatives from the community sitting on the group. They play a major role in the decision-making, in the set-up of the child and family centres, in what the nature of the services are, looking at what the gaps are in the community, and so on - and that takes some time. That is really why there has been a protracted time in getting them set up. It is very important for ownership. It is a best practice model that is modelled on the child and family centres in the UK. We have had the assistance of Margy Whalley, who is the coordinator of a child and family centre

in the UK, working with the child and family centre team. The most important thing that she stressed to us is making sure that we have community ownership of the centres, and that is why we have gone about it in that way.

Ms THORP - Otherwise they will just be buildings sitting in the community, and no one will be using them.

Mr GAFFNEY - I appreciate that. It was some time ago that the Latrobe one was announced, and we made contact some months ago and yet waited to have that first initial meeting to get it started. But I realise with the election and all of that, it has been some time. That is not setting up the committee, that is having the first meeting to get something set up - just for the record.

Ms THORP - I think we have a preference, from the conversations I have had with senior people in the department, to make sure these things are done well. We would rather they took a bit more time and had the best possible outcomes than to get to a particular point in time where they are built, but people do not like them or do not think they are built in the right place or do not fit their community.

CHAIR - I just want to take you, Minister, to the new projects, and obviously Campbell Town Child Care Centre is one of those, and there has been a significant budget allocation.

Ms THORP - Which page are you on, please?

CHAIR - I am on page 3.17, table 3.9. But there is another option if you would like to take that.

Ms THORP - I am happy with this one.

CHAIR - It is always interesting matching up these particular tables; they do not always come together.

Ms THORP - This is the capital investment program?

CHAIR - Yes. I take it from the forward Estimates and the Budget in this year that it is going to take until the end of next financial year to be able to see the whole project completed?

Ms THORP - This is at Campbell Town - yes, I am a bit disappointed that this money appeared in this particular section because it is more a grant than a capital works in the sense that the Campbell Town Child Care Centre is going to receive \$1 million. These decisions about where they pop things in the Budget are made at Treasury, but in a sense it would be more accurate to say that \$1 million will go to Campbell Town.

Mr GLASS - As the Minister said, the cash flow is provided by Treasury. If we need to pay that \$1 million in 2010-11 as a contribution towards that child care centre, we usually work with a Treasury officer where they usually facilitate that. Across all capital projects there is usually a bit of give and take around the timing of things. As Mr Gaffney has just been talking about with child and family centres as an example, some things slip back a little for some reasons, and we sometimes bring projects forward and get the cash flow happening -

Ms THORP - If they were ready and needed that \$800 000 earlier -

CHAIR - So I can call in on Friday and let them know that they can get started and we can get it finished this financial year.

Mr GLASS - Yes, we will be working on it this coming financial year.

CHAIR - Does that apply to every particular project or is it just because it is a one only?

Mr GLASS - This is an interesting one because it is a contribution towards a project. The vast majority of our projects, of course, are building projects where we are actually doing the building works ourselves. By the time you get architects involved and you get council approval, et cetera, you cannot always get everything neatly into the a 1 July to 30 June window, so there is usually a bit of to-ing and fro-ing, particularly around financial year ends, about how some capital expenditure gets slipped into the mixture. When that happens, we usually bring other projects slightly forward so that we can get most of the total capital expenditure out in one year. What we look to do on this one, because it is of a grant-type nature, is to bring the \$800 000 forward so that it all happens in the 2010-11 year.

Ms THORP - If they can spend it, they will get it. But it is there.

CHAIR - Good news.

Output group 1 Pre-Compulsory and Compulsory Education

1.1 In School Education -

[5.00 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY - I again say congratulations to the Minister of Education.

Ms THORP - Thank you.

Mr GAFFNEY - I am very pleased that the circle is complete. I am going to change the discussion point here because you have given a really good overview and we will come back to some of those things. We are aware of population demographic changes which affects where we need our schools. Could you provide an overview and some statements regarding the schools which have chosen to combine or partner under the State Government's voluntary amalgamation program and if there are any more discussions on the table about schools that may wish to undertake it?

Ms THORP - I think one of the main points I would really like to make here is that school amalgamations and changes of that nature rely completely on the community. There is no way known we are going to impose them. You may have noticed a newspaper article in *The Sunday Tasmanian* talking about -

CHAIR - I have a few with me.

Ms THORP - the fullness of different schools. A lot of factors come into account, so there would be an educational case developed to see whether the quality of the learning and teaching

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environment is good enough, and they would look at travel distances and times. Tasmania has a very dispersed population so even though a school might be tiny you may decide you cannot close it because it is just too far for the children to travel. Then you could look at another situation where you could say, 'Well, this school at this time is not particularly full', but we know that there are new subdivisions going into the area so you would be foolish to close a school and then determine five years down the track or even longer that that school is still required. Then there is also community use and other uses for school buildings. For example, the teacher learning centre is based at Rokeby High so whilst the student population could be considerably higher, the facilities are not being wasted and in fact are being used for really good purposes.

In terms of what has happened, for the year ending 2010 Claremont High merged with Rosetta High to create Montrose Bay High, which I feel extraordinarily sad about; and Rosetta High merged with Claremont, so that is the two mergers. Acton Primary, Brooklyn Primary and Upper Burnie Primary are merging into a new school called Romaine Park Primary School; and Claremont Primary, Mt Faulkner Primary, Rosetta Primary and Abbotsfield Primary are merging into two new schools, one called Austins Ferry Primary School and the other called Windermere Primary School.

Mr DEAN - Why is it Windermere?

Ms THORP - Because there is an area on the river near Austins Ferry known as Windermere.

Mr DEAN - Is that right?

Ms THORP - Yes.

Mr WING - That will be confusing, won't it?

Ms THORP - For some people. Fingal Primary and St Marys District High are merging into a new school with two campuses; Brent Street Primary and Glenorchy Primary are merging into Glenorchy Primary; Somerset Primary and West Somerset Primary are merging into Somerset Primary School; and a previously agreed merger between Waverley and St Leonards has been put on hold.

Mr DEAN - I have some questions on that.

Ms THORP - Well, it has been put on hold. The school community withdrew its support for the amalgamation.

Mr DEAN - They never gave their support, they did not withdraw it.

Ms GALE - It is not going ahead anyway.

Mr GAFFNEY - The other part of that question was whether you are aware of discussions going on with any other schools to continue that amalgamation practice?

Ms THORP - Are there any others on the drawing board?

Ms GALE - Not that I am aware of.

CHAIR - Any carrots?

Ms THORP - Well, that has been one of the beauties of the BER money because if people are being able to see if they use the funds available in the community and pool them and amalgamate their schools they get all these wonderful new facilities. You know what is going on at St Helens - it is looking absolutely fantastic - so money in that sense often is the carrot. I believe it is an integral part of it to balance things up, because if parents are only seeing what they are losing, which is their little local primary school, there is not a lot of incentive there unless you can demonstrate to them that their child is going to be fundamentally better off by improved facilities or whatever. Often an improvement of facilities requires capital input.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you for that. You mentioned the BER funding. Whenever you have national programs there is always a chance for that money not to be well spent, so I would like to know within the State - and I know that State and local government here have worked very well with that - how is the BER funding being monitored and assessed and evaluated in this State? Is there a report available for us to see?

Ms THORP - Andrew Finch is present here today. Andrew and his team oversaw the projects in Tasmania and they have done an absolutely superb job, but I will let him tell you about the details. One point that is important is that one of the problems that seemed to occur in other jurisdictions was excessive oncosts and wastage and in Tasmania that has not been the case. In fact, part of the costs that go to council expenses and architects et cetera has been kept down to below 8 per cent, which is half the national average.

Mr ANDREW FINCH - I think in Tasmania the key aspects of our rollout has been strong communication with the key stakeholders, firstly with the schools and their communities. We have made sure that schools are getting the projects that they consider the highest priority for their school community. We have not come in with template designs -

Ms THORP - Like everyone must have a new canteen.

Mr ANDREW FINCH - That is right. We have let schools and school communities develop their own priority projects based on what they consider they need to suit their local community. That is first and foremost. The other key aspects are that we have worked closely with the industry - the Master Builders Association and the Institute of Architects - again, to take advice about how we should roll out the program and how we should now put the projects to tender.

Ms THORP - And timing, too, I suppose.

Mr ANDREW FINCH - Yes, that is right, and the timing of it so that we did not overheat the construction market. At each stage we have taken advice from the key stakeholders to ensure that we could engage small, medium and large builders at the one time. Given the rate of work going on, we really needed to get all sectors of the market involved at any one time. All the tenders have been done through a public process in a traditional procurement method, so we have avoided any major managing contract-type arrangement and have dealt directly with local architects and building firms. Because we have done it publicly we have had the element of competitiveness in the process which has ensured that we have received good value for money throughout the projects. We have also been participating in a number of reviews and audits that have taken place

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and are ongoing but to date, we have not had any registered formal complaints about our processes. We consider that we are meeting the guidelines associated with the program.

Mr GAFFNEY - Through you, Minister - how many of the BER projects percentage-wise would be complete now? I know there are a few unveilings and handshakes around the place -

Ms THORP - Building to a crescendo.

Mr ANDREW FINCH - We have some statistics on the independent schools and Catholic schools. There are about 600 projects going on in the State and we have now completed close to 350 of those, which is getting close to 60 per cent - about 58 per cent - of projects that are complete. A little over 50 per cent of the allocation available has now been expended also.

Mr GAFFNEY - What is the time frame for the BER sign-off?

Mr ANDREW FINCH - The time frame written in the guidelines is March 2011, however there was an announcement in about November last year where the Australian Government rephased about \$500 million nationally, which is approximately \$9 million in Tasmania, into the 2011-12 financial year. That gives a bit of flexibility for any project that may have some delay to go into July 2011 but most projects will be finished early in 2011.

Mr GAFFNEY - Have you found that there has been difficulty, being capital works programs through the Tasmanian Government, about sites and lack of being able to get builders or architects? Has that impacted at all on your own program maintenance and that sort of thing?

Mr ANDREW FINCH - No, it has not. Again, we have had a record level of State capital investment going on, an \$8 million or \$9 million program, in the current financial year, but we have managed that simultaneously with the BER projects and in some cases we have been able to get really good efficiencies by using the same architect working with a school community and the same builder that obviously already has a set-up and has site sheds and everything in place at a school to maximise that funding available and to let the projects proceed simultaneously. We have not really had any significant delays with projects. A couple of issues we experienced were one at King Island where we struggled for a little while to get a builder but we now have an outcome there and the project has commenced, and a couple of pockets on the east coast but, again, we worked closely with the local community and were able to get builders in fairly quickly. So we have not really encountered any delays with the amount of work going on.

Mr GAFFNEY - Are you required as part of the funding of BER to give an overview or report back specifically, and is every State required to do that at the end of the project?

Mr ANDREW FINCH - Yes. There is very rigorous reporting to the Australian Government that it is done on a monthly basis and we are handling that on behalf of the schools but working with them to be able to provide that information. We are also participating in local audit processes. We have our own internal audit people who look at it, we have the Auditor-General's audit team look at it as well and we also recently provided some information to the implementation task force. Again, although we have not had any official complaints in Tasmania we are actually going to be used to benchmark our schools and our projects and results against what is happening in other States. We are participating in all those.

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Mr GAFFNEY - I know that special legislation or requirements had to go through local government. How have you found that relationship with the councils in getting these projects up and running on time and the planning and building applications?

Mr ANDREW FINCH - That was the nation-building schools facilitation legislation where we undertook the planning processes for the schools. We advertised every project in local papers and sent details of every project as well as the plans to local councils, and that process ran very smoothly. We had very few issues involved in any of the projects and, again, I think it was because most of the projects had a local design team with a local architect and the local community was strongly involved so any problems that may have arisen were anticipated and addressed locally. That process went very well.

Mr GAFFNEY - Contrary to some reports, planning building applications through local government in Tasmania is better than what is sometimes put out there.

Ms THORP - Could I follow up from your questions because I know Andrew would not do this himself, but I would just like to quote from Michael Kerschbaum, the Executive Director of the Master Builders, who said on 15 April:

'It is critical that the Tasmanian taxpayers understand that the procurement process that was used in Tasmania for the schools project was totally different to that used in some other States. The association is confident that the task force investigation will confirm that Tasmania has delivered value-for-money school projects. Our involvement with the Education Department during the process for the public school component gives us every confidence that the projects are being delivered effectively.'

That is quite a fillip for the department. It was great. Any more questions of Andrew?

CHAIR - Thanks very much, Andrew. Minister, I want to ask about an issue in relation to the Productivity Commission report where it identifies Tasmanian students with an IQ of 55 and below as being on the high-needs register. I think it comes under school education.

[5.15 p.m.]

Ms THORP - It is in school education, yes. So you are talking about, if I can just make sure I am on the right track, support for high-needs students.

CHAIR - Yes, because an IQ of 70 or below is nationally recognised as a requirement to provide additional support and funding. I am curious why Tasmania does not recognise that IQ level.

Ms THORP - I am not confident about the facts around that. Did you get that from -

CHAIR - From a very reliable source.

Ms THORP - I am sure it was but what you are talking about is a categorisation issue about students.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms THORP - And it is very variable, isn't it?

CHAIR - If it is recognised nationally - and we have all these national benchmarks that we are benchmarking ourselves against - why wouldn't something as basic as IQ come under at least your view?

Ms THORP - It is a fair enough question.

Ms GALE - One of the relevant points there, Minister, if I may, is that the Australian Government is setting up a group to look at definitions around special education because what you may find if you look at individual States and Territories is that, even though some recognise IQs of 70 or below, the actual funding allocations that they give are minuscule in comparison to the funding allocations that we give for students on the SDR. Again, that varies from State to State so there is a lack of consistency nationally in terms of definitions and the way in which special needs funding is allocated. That is going to be part of a project through the Australian Government but, as I said, in comparison to other States and Territories I think you would find, if you looked at them individually and if more detail was gone into, that while they may be recognised the amount of resourcing they get is actually much less than what we currently provide our students.

CHAIR - Minister, would you be able to confirm that?

Ms THORP - Having been a teacher of students with additional needs and special needs, I know that one of the advantages of being a small State is the flexibility we have about seeing kids in the round, if you like, and not making determinations on quite cold and clinical measures like an IQ score. But I would agree with Jenny that, simply because one State might start hitting a level of support to a student who has an IQ level that may be higher than the average in Tasmania, there is no direct relationship between that and the level of need that child might have. I hope that measure does not alarm you to think there are kids here in Tasmania who are not receiving the level of care they receive simply because our measurements are different. Is that fair to say?

Mr SMYTH - I guess we are much more interested in giving money for additional-needs students to schools and letting them make the choice of where they use that funding. For example, there are many students in that IQ category of 55 to 70 who do not need a lot of additional support and extra help. Yet you might find someone who is on a borderline of 70 to 80 who, because of behavioural problems or other reasons, needs a lot of support. In some States, as I recall, the payment to a school with those children in the IQ range of 70 is something like \$10 per child. It gets down to tokenism because it is graduated. We would much rather give the money in a lump sum to schools and let them make the decisions about how they want to use that money to help students.

CHAIR - Minister, obviously that will be something that you will be putting forward when you next sit on - I am not sure what the acronym is -

Ms THORP - I think that is MCEETYA, isn't it?

Mr SMYTH - It is, yes.

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Ms THORP - I think you will take some comfort, too, to know that the total value of resourcing students with high and additional needs has gone from 31.7 million in 2004 to 59.8 million this year, so it has pretty well doubled in six years.

CHAIR - So are there more available persons or has that just been a significant increase in what it costs to put those specialists on?

Ms THORP - The really big growth has been in the area of specialist staff. The number of regular teachers involved has stayed pretty well constant. It has fluctuated a little bit and there has been some movement in non-salary costs but the big growth is in specialist staff, which has gone from 95 in 2004 to 140 in 2010.

Mr GAFFNEY - I think that might have been to do with the devolution of special schools transferring a lot of those students into the so-called normal schools.

Ms THORP - No, it is the funding for students with high and additional needs.

CHAIR - So all clusters - and correct me if I am wrong - have adequate special needs teachers available at their request?

Ms THORP - I do not believe we will ever reach a point where every parent, teacher and educationalist involved in the teaching of any given child is going to say we have all the money we need to do everything we need. I do not think that will ever happen but we are committed to doing the very best we can.

Teachers aides have gone up in that period of time by 300-400; over 320 FTEs, so regardless of where they are situated, be it in a mainstream classroom or a special school, those resources are flowing more and more.

Mr DEAN - Just on teacher aides, why does that number continually go up? Is it that you are employing teacher aides because they are a cheaper option to employing a teacher?

Ms THORP - Oh, heavens no!

Mr DEAN - Well, what is the reason for it?

Ms THORP - They are a supplement. Quite often if you have a child who is coming to school and is able to join in for all the very good reasons we want children to come to our regular schools rather than be socially isolated in another environment, then a requirement of that is that that child has an aide with them for all sorts of reasons, whether it be around toileting or whatever. So extra aides mean that more kids can spend time in regular schools and for longer periods of time. The number of children on the Severe Disability Register, or SDR that Jenny was referring to earlier, went from 564 in 2001 to 832 in 2010.

Mr DEAN - That is what I wanted.

Ms THORP - It is a big increase.

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CHAIR - Minister, there has been quite a bit of press around the back-pay liability from some three decades ago in relation to administration staff. Have you as minister received any requests from any individual schools in relation to that issue?

Ms THORP - No. As you know, there is quite a long, protracted industrial thing going on with that. These payments were paid at a local school level over the years and, of course, it has now become apparent that some schools were not doing that during the renegotiation of the industrial agreement, so there have been requests for information made from individual schools to ask, 'Is this an issue for you? Are you affected by this? Where are the claims and can they be substantiated?', and each principal is being talked with on a case-by-case basis. Be assured no school will be sent to the wall because they have not paid someone who does the checks on the weekends or whatever is required.

CHAIR - So you are not aware of any at this stage but there could be a number of large claims outstanding?

Ms THORP - There could be.

Mr GLASS - The issue arose in 2007-08 across all of the State Service. The Community and Public Sector Union had a campaign called You've Earned It and they ran it across the State Service. As a result of that, it was raised in the Tasmanian Industrial Commission by the CPSU with the DOE and following that we have been working with the union to get further information so we can analyse any specific claims that are made in relation to some of our employees in schools. We got further information from the CPSU in October 2009 as part of that process, and again, it is under the auspices of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. There is a small number of claims that have been made that we are working through with the union in consultation with them. That process is ongoing, but we are looking for it to be resolved in the not-too-distant future.

CHAIR - So you do not know how much you are up for yet?

Mr GLASS - No.

CHAIR - Any other questions in relation to this particular area?

Mr DEAN - Just going back to the school amalgamations and so on, Minister, would it be a part of the process into the future that wherever that is likely to happen or being investigated, local government will be involved in the process?

Ms THORP - Absolutely.

Mr DEAN - Okay, good. I did have two questions that probably involve Andrew, but you can probably answer for him, Minister.

Ms THORP - I will see how I go and I will bring in the expert if I cannot.

Mr DEAN - Is the matter with St Michaels concluded now, the position with St Michaels?

Ms THORP - You might need to come back to the table, Andrew.

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Mr ANDREW FINCH - We are getting much closer; we are very close now. Because the process has involved the subdivision of that land that we owned at St Michaels into land that we could sell to St Michaels Association and also some to Housing for housing, we have had to go through a subdivision process, and that also means that you have to separate the services like sewerage and stormwater and electricity. There has also been an Aurora substation that needed to be relocated, so all these things take a little bit of time to work through. They are now virtually completed and we have asked the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment to organise the sale process and we have also asked Crown Law to prepare the contractual documentation for the sale. So the transfer process is very imminent.

Mr DEAN - That is a good result. Mr Wing will be happy with that as well. Just one further matter. First of all I want to congratulate the Education department on its support of the Rocherlea community with the old Rocherlea school site.

CHAIR - There we are - accolades.

Mr DEAN - That is an accolade. I know a lot of this hinges on the removal of the gymnasium by the Rocherlea community and the football club, but the building has fallen into absolute disrepair; it has been vandalised now, with windows and walls broken and so on, so it is a matter that needs to be brought to a conclusion as quickly as possible. Obviously we are moving in that direction.

CHAIR - I think the question is then when is that going to happen?

Mr DEAN - Are we moving in that direction?

Ms THORP - Do you have an update you could provide, Andrew?

Mr ANDREW FINCH - Yes. We have contacted the Rocherlea Football Club again and asked if they could please remove the building and walkways as quickly as possible because we cannot actually declare the site surplus and proceed with the disposal until that has happened. But we understand it will happen within the next month and then we will be proceeding with the sale, so hopefully the building and land will be disposed of before the end of the year.

Mr DEAN - Thank you. I think this area covers the issue of assaults on principals and teachers and school bullying, and I know there has been a lot on school bullying, but, Minister, where are we on that? What are the figures on assaults on teachers, stress leave, workers comp?

Ms THORP - The figures I have in front of me - no, they are the reasons.

[5.30 p.m.]

Ms GALE - We have the reasons which do not equate to numbers of students because of the number of times that those reasons are put down for any suspension, so it is not one-to-one equivalence. But 38 per cent were for physical abuse and harassment.

Mr DEAN - Was that through suspension?

Ms GALE - Yes, that is right. Of all the reasons for suspension given in 2009, 38 per cent were for physical abuse and harassment. That is about equivalent to previous years. We had, for

example, in 2008, 37 per cent, 2007, 40 per cent and 40 per cent for the previous two years. So it is about the same as has been the case.

Ms THORP - Greg has given me some figures and they show that in the year ending March 2010, there were 38 stress claims for teachers and principals. That is exactly the same number as last year. It represents a decrease from 47 the year before, despite what we hear sometimes.

Mr DEAN - I ask this question every year, there are a lot of kids that receive suspensions and a lot of them receive multiple suspensions. Is there another system that the Department of Education is looking at to try to get control of these wayward kids – and a lot of them get into our justice system in the end - to deal with them other than by suspending them from school.

Ms THORP - I can absolutely guarantee you that is the case.

CHAIR - Big stick?

Ms THORP - It has been the case for sometime. All the issues surrounding trying to make sure a student remains engaged at school are complex. Suspension is not done lightly and suspension is not done without consequences being determined into the future. If a student is suspended for a short suspension it is on a scale: what other factors are taken into account, what other programs are in place? There are quite a few different programs in schools addressing that kind of behaviour and trying to delve down into the reasons that child might be acting up in the first place. Quite often it is to do - and this would come as no surprise to you - with issues at home and outside the school's control, but the school invariably has a whole range of techniques to deal with a child that is acting up in school. Suspension is only one of them and it certainly is not taken lightly.

That refers back to what we were talking about earlier, having a whole-of-government response to these issues because the schools can only do so much in their given surroundings, but if they had closer connections with police and community service organisations they could come up with a package that helps that child. You might have noticed the amount for Safe and Secure Schools in the budget. A lot of that is going to be used around bullying.

Mr DEAN - Right.

Ms THORP - We can implement lots of programs. I have just had pointed out to me that the Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support program in Tasmanian schools has been so successful that a group of educators from Victoria is coming to visit Tasmanian government schools next week to see the program in progress. We are cutting edge in a lot of these issues.

Mr DEAN – I think I noticed an item in the budget papers on home schooling. Is home schooling on the increase?

Ms THORP - Home schooling is not paid for by us. It is licensed by the Department of Education.

Mr DEAN – Is there is no payment from you at all?

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Ms THORP - People have to get permission to home school and there are quite strict requirements about the capacity of the family to provide a decent level of schooling and supports are available.

Mr DEAN - How many in the State at this stage are being home schooled.

Ms THORP - I can give you some exact numbers, but it has just been pointed out to me that the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council receives about \$185 000 in funding per year.

Mr DEAN – For home schooling?

Ms THORP - It is funded through the sundry education grants scheme and that is the support for people who home school.

Mr DEAN - Minister, is that paid, say, if a child is being home schooled by the mother or the father? Does it cover that?

Ms THORP - No, this is paid to the organisation. It gives them educational support.

Mr DEAN - Right.

Ms THORP - On 7 June this year there were 612 students registered for home schooling and they belonged to 325 families. As you can imagine, there is usually more than one child in the family.

CHAIR - Is that recurrent funding or do they apply each year according to the numbers?

Ms THORP - We fund the Tasmanian Home Education Council triennially. They provide the support for their members basically and then on a departmental level people have to apply for permission to home school. Otherwise they would be in contravention for not sending their child to school as they are supposed to.

CHAIR – Minister, do they have to provide you with a statement of achievement?

Ms THORP - Not to me.

Ms GALE - The Home Education Advisory Committee audits home educators and they approve curriculum assignments that are going to be provided by home educators.

CHAIR – The government would not supply \$185 000 and have nothing to measure it by, I expect.

Ms GALE - No funding is provided to the families.

CHAIR - No, it is provided to the organisation. They would still have to be giving some.

Ms THORP - They have an oversight role.

CHAIR - They would have to be providing some feedback. They would not be receiving \$185 000.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Ms THORP - We would not be happy to continue to allow that number of students to be home schooled if we did not have a degree of confidence that the quality of education that they are receiving is adequate.

Ms GALE - One of the measures that we are putting in place this year is to include the home educated children in the early leavers survey so that we can follow up on the outcomes for students who would normally be going from year 10 through to year 11. All of the home-educated students will be included in that so that will be a measure of their outcomes and of their future intentions.

Ms THORP - Keeping an eye on them, basically. It is a parent's right to make that decision, but we do have a responsibility to the children that the way they are being taught, the surroundings they have, the facilities they have, capacity of the parent to provide their education is good enough otherwise we are letting the children down.

Mr GAFFNEY - I might table some questions for a response, if I could just pass them over.

Ms THORP - Sure.

Mr GAFFNEY – They are about staffing numbers, K-10, additional staff, staff long-term sick leave and workers compensation.

Ms THORP - You may find that we can give you the answers.

Mr GAFFNEY – I would like the breakdown of permanent and temporary staffing numbers in table 10 for 2009-10.

Ms THORP - In total primary, district, secondary colleges, special students, supporting, inclusive learning, ESL and learning services at March 2009 was 6 972.9 and in March of this year was 6 890.8 which is a decrease of 82.1.

Mr GAFFNEY – What is the reason for the decrease?

Ms THORP - That decrease of 82 was made up of Elizabeth College staff becoming Polytechnic/Academy staff and the Northern Vocational School came in which added 23.3.

Mr GAFFNEY – How many staff are on long term sick leave or workers compensation leave?

Ms THORP - That is different from the stress leave I was talking about earlier.

Mr GAFFNEY – I do not think you had a number.

Ms THORP - We had 489 claims for workers compensation in the year ending 31 March this year which was a slight decrease from 497 the year before. That is divided into back, head, lower and upper limbs and those kinds of injury. In cases where people are out because of stress, we have 27 back at work. That is the 57 I referred to earlier over here, which was inclusive of attendance, clerical admin - I said 38, which was principals and teachers, but of course there are other categories of school staff. The whole amount added up to 57 for the whole department and,

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of that 57, 27 back at work, six are back at work on rehab, 19 are classified as incapacitated, one is on sick leave, and four are either on long service leave or whatever.

Mr GAFFNEY - How much accrued annual or long service leave is the agency liable for?

Ms THORP - Lots, but I guess that is not detailed enough for you. Long service leave liability is \$93.365 million, which is an increase of 3.48 per cent over the previous year.

Mr GAFFNEY - How many staff are supplied with vehicles as part of their employment -

Ms THORP - From the whole department?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, and on what basis are they supplied and the cost of that service?

Ms THORP - As at April 2010, we had 130 G-plated that are non-school based, 81 G-plated school based, and 26 private plated to a total of 237, which is a decrease on the previous year from 271.

Mr GAFFNEY - And what colour were they?

Laughter.

Ms THORP - They were all white.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you.

CHAIR - Minister, given that there is a huge range of figures there and we will digest them in committee at a later stage, how did the Department meet their budget management strategy obligations?

Ms THORP - I think I covered it off, generally speaking, when I said that over the last four years we have decreased the amount of money that has gone - while we have not decreased the bottom line, we have made sure that the maximum amount of money was going in through the school gate and putting huge efficiencies on our -

CHAIR - You cut back on vehicles for a start.

Ms THORP - Exactly.

CHAIR - That is one area. Is that basically where the savings were?

Ms THORP - We have quite a few non-school staff - we have 36.3 fewer people in the corporate services area; 14.6 fewer people in the strategic policy and performance area; and 1.2 fewer people in the teachers registration board, for example. I do not think there is much spare left. If we start cutting much more, we are going to be taking the risk of - the very thing you said about taking away someone's mobile phone so they cannot do their job properly. I can honestly say that I do not believe there is very much fat left in the education and skills department at all.

Mr GLASS - I could probably add a comment on the overall efficiencies. In the mobile phones one - I was reflecting on your comments earlier, Mrs Rattray - it is an interesting issue

because what we did in the non school areas when picking mobile phones as an efficiency area is that each manager looked at the needs of each of the employees in their area. Those phones that they believed were needed on an infrequent basis, basically they have been retrieved. But what we did - and I can talk about corporate services, my own area of responsibility - was where there was believed to be a need in a particular working group area, we might have taken six phones back from individual employees because they were not used extensively but we would keep two or three as a pool so that, if any of those employees had to go out, they could take a pool phone so they were still contactable and they could still do that work. As I say, 75 per cent of staff have still got those mobile phones, but we really went through their use with some rigour just to make sure that the mobile phones that were retained were required. With the G-plated vehicles that were retained, we now have much better use of car pooling and access to vehicles. And that goes across all areas of the departmental budget. We have really looked and will continue to look for efficiencies wherever we can to ensure that we maintain the frontline services at schools - be it library staff or whatever - at the greatest level of resourcing that we can.

[5.45 p.m.]

1.2 Learning Services -

CHAIR - Minister, obviously learning services is divided into four regions. Is the funding for learning services subsequently allocated and distributed to managers of each of the services in each of the four regions; or is it controlled at a higher level of the department?

Ms THORP - There are two parts to that. Some things like salaries are paid centrally but, in the main, the budget for each of the learning services is devolved to that level for distribution.

CHAIR - Is that allocated on the number of clusters or is it on the needs of students? How is it actually distributed?

Ms THORP - It is primarily on the needs of students so that in the south-east region quarter which has the largest proportion of students with higher needs, and lower socio-economic status comes into it too, they get a higher proportion of the funds. It is all about the kid.

CHAIR - Obviously they share resources within clusters, but do you share resources within regions as well? If you are very low on a speech therapist or a guidance officer, do you use one from another region?

Ms THORP - If you could extract it from them, I suppose they might let you. But basically the needs are in each of the learning service areas. I cannot envisage where Learning Services South would lend a speech pathologist to the south-east, would they? Brendan, you know a lot about this. Would you like to come to the table? Brendan Kelly is the head of Learning Services South.

CHAIR - I am surprised Brendan was not at the table. Welcome, Brendan.

Ms THORP - You have no doubt been following this but the questions that are coming from Madam Chair are in relation to how each of the learning services receives its proportion of the funds, and I explained that that is on a needs basis. But then she was asking are there efficiencies whereby resources are shared from one learning service to another. I was saying that if you have extra speech pathologists, you would probably hold on to them.

Mr KELLY - I certainly would hold on to what we have. But as an example, I work in Learning Services South and a colleague of mine Bob Phillips works in Learning Services South-East. We work cooperatively together and we will work and share such that, if there is an identified concern and we are in the capacity or the position to be able to give support, then we certainly would do that. We would have a number of shared officers working across both learning services - it creates some efficiencies. But also what we do not want to get into the habit of is the river becoming a geographical divide and get in the way of students and students' needs. So we all work cooperatively and support each other.

Ms THORP - There are cross-agency cooperations occurring as well, I think it is fair to say, because of the matching up of the regions - south, south-east, north and north-west - with health and also with police. There are synergies there as well that you may wish to expand on, Jenny.

Ms GALE - Just as an example in the Bridgewater area, there is a local area team where health and education are working together to take a much more case management approach, which is about sharing resources of professionals in that area to assist with particular issues with individual students and/or their families. So that is a way of making the best of the resources that are available. And in the north of the State, for example, there is an agreement between police and education in the restorative practice model that they have in place in the north where, again, police resources are shared with education to address some of the issues that are there. So we have examples of that all over the State where we have agencies working together to make the best of the resources that we have.

CHAIR - Table 3.3 on page 3.9 talks about the funding being decreased because some programs were funded by the Australian Government. Have we touched on any of those programs already that are no longer funded?

Ms THORP - This is at 1.2 Learning Services where it has got the little 2 next to it?

CHAIR - Yes and you go down to 2 and there is a notation talking about the programs that have ceased. I am interested to know what those programs were and how vital they are?

Mr GLASS – Through you, Minister, we might have to take that one on notice.

CHAIR - Thank you, I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr DEAN - I just wanted to know what the makeup of the school improvement board is; who sits on it and does it involve any extra funding?

Ms THORP - In each region it is an external person like Ross Fairbrother on the north-west coast and six principals.

Mr DEAN - Make up the school improvement board?

Ms THORP – Yes.

Mr DEAN - Do any payments that go with that? Is this an extra position?

Ms THORP – Yes, there is a payment to the Chair as a sitting fee. We are very lucky to have the service of these people. John was just saying that Ross Fairbrother is down in

Queenstown today with Malcolm Wells who is the general manager of that learning service doing work with local government.

Mr DEAN - Is that right?

Ms THORP - Yes.

1.3 Education Performance Services -

Mr DEAN – Regarding the performance assessments that were completed on literacy and numeracy, and the publicising of the schools and their positions or pecking order around the state; has that had any impact on morale at the schools? Has it impacted on enrolment at the schools? What will the Education Department do in those schools that did not perform so well to try and pick up the literacy and numeracy areas?

Ms THORP - Literacy and numeracy are fundamental to anything you try to do throughout education. That is recognised nationally and it is recognised in the state through a variety of programs like Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap; trying to make the difference between the achievement levels in schools and comparable SEI areas is a major concentration of the department.

If I could refer you back to the education performance reports - obviously when adverse publicity comes out and tends to label a school as not being particularly well, one of the first impacts is on staff. The Tasmanian teaching profession is a pretty resilient, robust lot and are excellent teachers. If you look at staff satisfaction; excellent, high and trending up, you will find that regardless of where our teachers are they are pretty happy, confident and very hard working.

Mr DEAN - I suppose the performance in three or four schools probably would not affect that result too much.

Ms THORP - I have not got it on me but if you want to go to the web and look up this report on the departmental website you can actually go to any given school. Some of our finest teachers are actually attracted to the most challenging schools because that is where they get their greatest satisfaction.

Mr DEAN - The Rocherlea Primary School did not fare well at all and the numbers were dropping off there. Are they still continuing to drop off there and how do we target those?

Ms THORP - I have not got figures for individual schools on me I am sorry.

Mr DEAN - I will ask the question again: The publishing of these results, does it appear to be having an impact on enrolments in those schools, because I have heard of parents removing students from schools?

Ms THORP - No, not markedly and to be fair to the press in Tasmania they have been pretty good, in my opinion, in terms of not misinterpreting this kind of data and league-tabling at all. Remember the data that we get in through things like NAPLAN is specifically to tell us where we need to spend more money.

Mr DEAN - I just think it is an indictment on these children to publish those results.

Ms THORP - Yes, and just to give you an idea - and this is a pretty lengthy list so I will not read it out - this is an indication of the scope of the programs that are going into schools in each of our regions, and they vary as the needs of the regions vary to address the very issues that you are talking about.

Mr DEAN - I wonder what the educational influence could be across the nation. It can only be damaging for children for these results to be published and I do not support it at all.

Ms THORP - I agree with you. The NAPLAN testing is not designed for that purpose and I have not spoken to an educational professional who supports the use of comparative data. It has to be along a continuum, it has to be longitudinal and it has to reflect how that school community is progressing so as to pinpoint where the extra support needs to be. Just comparing one school to another is useless.

1.5 Grants and Financial Assistance -

Mr FINCH - On page 3.7, table 3.2, item 1.5, Grants and financial assistance there is a decrease for next year and the two succeeding years. There is a drop from \$8.588 million this year to a steady \$8.168 million for the next three years. It is not a huge drop but it is a decrease and do we know what is behind that? Could we have some explanation of that drop?

Ms THORP - There were some one-off payments. The Streets Alive Youth Arts Festival was \$70 000. There was a pilot project of \$350 000 in this year's Budget which is not reflected in next year's figures for supporting children in water orientation activities, and then there is extra money in there for the School Sports Association. They are the ones that will come out in the forward Estimates and will result in the decrease.

Mr FINCH - What has happened to Streets Alive?

Ms THORP - It was a one-off.

Mr FINCH - A one-off extra to what they do, because that has been a longstanding program, has it not, Streets Alive?

Ms THORP - It has just been extended for 12 months but it is not in the Budget for next year and the Support Children in Water Orientation pilot is in this year's Budget but it is not in next year.

Mr FINCH - Because it was a pilot?

Ms THORP - We have not done it yet. It is in this Budget and we will see how it goes and we will make a determination on whether it is value-for-money and whether the community supports it.

Mr FINCH - Is that for one around the State?

Ms THORP - I do not think we have worked out how we are going to do it yet. It is connected to Launching into Learning, which is for littlies, but how it is going to be rolled out to make sure that there is equitable access to it - there is not a lot of point in giving access to a

community that is a long way away from a swimming pool - so we are yet to work out the details of how to spend that money most effectively. It was an election commitment.

Mr FINCH - Thanks very much.

CHAIR - Was that a not a very considered election commitment?

Ms THORP - I am not implying that in the least, Madam Chair.

The committee suspended from 5.59 p.m. to 6.12 p.m.

**Output group 2
Post-compulsory Education and Skills Development**

2.1 Skills Development Contestable Funding -

Mr WING - I realise that the significant decrease in funding this year has been caused by the new system and a reallocation over the Polytechnic and the Tasmanian Academy.

Ms THORP - Probably the easiest way to look at any of those statistics is to look at the totals.

Mr WING - I will leave it to other members to ask about how the amount being transferred is being used. How is the remaining balance being used, in the main?

Ms THORP - Basically all the funding allocated to the Polytechnic and the Academy in this Budget will be transferred to DOE.

Mr WING - I am concerned about item 2.1 Skills Development Contestable Funding, \$83 million last year down to \$48 million.

Ms THORP - And you would like that explained.

Mr WING - No, I understand what has happened there. The difference has been reallocated but it leaves a balance of \$48 228 000. How is that to be used this year?

Ms THORP - I will pass to Mark Sayer, who is the General Manager of Skills Tasmania.

Mr WING - I was hoping you would deflect the question to Mr Sayer because I know he will give a very good answer.

Ms THORP - As he always does.

CHAIR - As long as it is concise because we want to get out of here tonight.

Laughter.

Mr SAYER - What has happened here is that figures were probably recorded incorrectly in 2009-10 and rectified for 2010-11. As the minister pointed out, the most important aspect there is to look at the aggregate at the bottom there and see that there is an increase. Your concern is about the difference between 2.1 and 2.2?

[6.15 p.m.]

Mr WING - No, the difference in 2.1 between 2009-10 and 2010-11. I know the reason for the difference. What I am asking is, this year there is a remaining amount under this pilot of \$48 million and I am just asking generally, how is that going to be utilised?

Mr SAYER - It will be used in two ways. First of all it will be used to provide funds to the Tasmanian Skills Institute to operate and secondly, it will be used for competitive bids - so out in the market place - for registered training organisations to compete for delivery of vocational education and training.

Mr WING - To what extent will that training be undertaken as a result of competitive bids? How much will be used for that?

Mr SAYER - About \$25 million will be used for the delivery of training by the Skills Institute and the remainder will be put out to the marketplace.

Mr WING - Where will most of this be undertaken; in former TAFE buildings? There is a request for a transfer back of ownership or occupation.

Mr SAYER - Well, the \$25 million that I have mentioned around that figure for the Skills Institute, that training will be delivered at old TAFE campuses that you refer to, but also a lot in the workplace now. A lot of this training is delivered in the workplace. That funding which is won in a competitive way will be delivered using all sorts of methods around the State: in the workplace, in communities, to equity groups and in a variety of means.

Mr WING - What qualifications will be available? There is an increased level of certification and qualifications in the Polytechnic under the new scheme which is now being changed. What will be the case now with the Skills Institute, compared with the Tasmanian Polytechnic, in terms of graduation and qualifications?

Mr SAYER - With the Skills Institute, the funding that they are provided with is used for training apprentices and trainees, and it is demand-based. I think Malcolm White could testify that it is truly demand-based. There is no apprentice or trainee that is turned away from training. That is how quite a large amount of that money is used. The remainder is used for a range of qualifications starting at low certificate levels to diplomas. There is much more emphasis now on higher qualifications. It is driven by an agreement between the Commonwealth and the States, and that is certainly our emphasis now. It is quite a range of qualifications that we are looking for, because we want those high qualifications, but we want to find more learners as well, which means that with the agreement that we have with the Commonwealth now, there is funding that is guaranteed for people who are re-entering the labour market. So it is quite a scope of qualifications.

2.2 Tasmanian Polytechnic -

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Ms THORP - Could I ask the CEO of the Tasmanian Polytechnic, Belinda McLennan, to join us at the table, please. This might be an appropriate time to give you this data because it is reflective of the work that we are covering.

CHAIR - Is this going to clear up all our questions, Minister?

Ms THORP - It may well.

Mr DEAN - What has been the cost to the State in relation to what has happened within the polytechnic side of things and all the changes made and, as I understand it, there are now changes to be made to roll back into whatever areas they are rolling back into? What has been the cost of all of that process?

Ms THORP - The implementation projects to establish the three new entities had an allocation of \$680 000. Additional funding was provided at the end of 2009 which supported the new organisations in managing their boards and CEO-related costs, costs arising from reconciling the TAFE and college awards, and in recognition of additional activity. These funds also supported the shared services project. That is a sum of just over \$5 million. Capital funding provided work on the transformation of senior secondary colleges and TAFE facilities. So that was the upgrade of facilities to provide new science learning centres and stuff like that, which one could argue needed to be done anyway.

Mr DEAN - What now, then, is the position with the boards that were put in place for the polytechnics and academies?

Ms THORP - I think it is fair to say that the changes that needed to be negotiated over the previous weeks have put the CEOs and the chairs and boards of these institutions in quite an invidious position in many ways, because they have put an incredible commitment into making these reforms work and now have to go through significant modification.

Mr DEAN - I do not think anybody disputes that, and we feel for them, but I am asking what will happen? Will they now be removed from those positions because of the changes?

Ms THORP - Legislatively, the boards will be abolished - that has been public knowledge for some time now - and conversations will occur with persons like Ms McLennan privately to discuss a way forward for her because what she wants to see happen will be, of course, of paramount importance. But I would prefer not to discuss that any further until we have had the opportunity to have those discussions.

Mr DEAN - I appreciate the tricky part -

CHAIR - Sensitive.

Mr DEAN - or the emotional side of this and I am not going to develop that any further at this time. What is the position now with those colleges that did not make the change? What happens with the Launceston College now, for instance, and those other colleges that did not come onboard?

Ms THORP - Assuming that the legislation passes both Houses of Parliament, from the beginning of the year all of the eight college campuses -

Mr DEAN - It passed last time with two of us objecting strongly but, anyway, keep going.

Ms THORP - Those campuses will be campuses of the Academy but also responsible for being the enrolment point and negotiation of educational pathways for those students who wish to go down the polytechnic path. So they will all be the same. There will be some changes for the ones who have stayed in the old system and there will be changes for those who have made the move to the new reform, but they will be brought to a position where they will be consistent.

Mr DEAN - That brings me to the next question. If we look at Newstead College enrolments have dropped quite considerably, as I understand it, compared to Launceston College, where enrolments went up, on the information I have. How are we going to get that back on track to find out exactly what happened and why it occurred?

Ms THORP - I think it might be useful to look at some of the facts on enrolments on that sheet. Generally, enrolments increased by 5 per cent, with the Academy and Polytechnic by 12 per cent and colleges by 1 per cent. The distribution of students to various campuses was, of course, based on student enrolment decisions. Would you like to comment further?

Ms McLENNAN - Only insofar as the enrolments at Newstead College really reflect the enhanced options that the students have there. So many of the students that are enrolled at Newstead also spend quite a bit of time on other polytechnic campuses, particularly where they are accessing trade facilities, which means that they are not measured as a whole student at Newstead. They are measured as part of a student there because they are elsewhere as well.

Mr DEAN - Right, so they are doing some courses at Newstead and some at the academy.

Ms McLENNAN - No, they would be at a polytechnic campus like, for example, Inveresk where arts is or at Alanvale where a lot of the trades are or in the city at Launceston where they might be doing community services as well, especially if there are specialised facilities on those campuses.

Mr DEAN - So they are being recorded as a part-time student, say, at Newstead College and the Inveresk site as a part-time student. How is it done?

Ms GALE - That is right. The FTE is attributed to the site at which they undertake their learning, so if a student, for example, was 0.5 at Hellyer College and 0.5 at one of the other institutions that Belinda spoke about they would be counted at 0.5 at each. It is attributed to where they go.

Ms THORP - Where they actually physically go.

Mr DEAN - Will these students enrolled in that process be challenged in any way in relation to the time it will take them to complete their courses? Will they still achieve the same in the same period of time? What is the formula?

Ms THORP - I think that is the major concentration for us; our major concern is for that not to occur. So for a student currently enrolled at Newstead and doing other courses at either Inveresk or Alanvale as well, there is no reason why that should change whilst they are completing their course.

Mr DEAN - I ask that question because many of these same students, as one parent said to me, were the recipients of a failed ELs process and then have come into this process where they found all of these changes and difficulties are occurring as well, and have been damaged.

Ms THORP - I think you will find the students at Newstead who are attending at Inveresk and Alanvale as well are an extremely happy and productive student body, far from being guinea pigs who had a failed system imposed on them. Quite the contrary. I think they have benefited from it greatly. Of course, a huge concern for us with these changes that we needed to make was to make sure that we do not roll back to the old system where they are disadvantaged. Through the Polytechnic and the Academy, they have increased attainment by 4.7 per cent. So through the academy and the polytechnic attainment, the number of students with at least one unit of credit has gone up by 5.8 per cent. In the colleges in the same period of time, it went up by 3.7 per cent. So the increases in attainment have actually gone on more significantly in those campuses where the change has been made to the new model.

Mr WING - What does 'attainment' actually mean?

Ms THORP - It means actually getting a qualification.

Ms McLENNAN - One credit or one part of it.

Mr WING - One credit? That is the level?

Ms THORP - At least one; that is the base level - they have spent the time and attained at least one credit.

Mr WING - So are you suggesting that the results of Newstead College are better than those at Launceston College?

Ms THORP - I am certainly suggesting that that increase at the Academy and Polytechnic has been more significant than in a specific college. There is a lot of misconception out there, Don.

Mr DEAN - Minister, do we roll along with the current process with the polytechnics and the academies and everything in the schools until such time that legislation is formed and brought into the House. Is that it? How long is that likely to take?

Ms THORP - The aim is to have all the changes in place for the school year commencing next year to minimise interruption for students.

Mr DEAN - Right, so it is hoped that the legislation framework will be done soon?

Ms THORP - There is still a lot of planning and work that can be done and is ongoing. There are a lot of discussions that are ongoing currently. As you know, the actual legislative change will be reliant on our legislative program and making sure the legislation is drawn up, drafted, consulted on and then brought to the attention of Parliament.

Mr DEAN - So this obviously has a huge impact on the Budget and a huge impact on education and learning.

Ms THORP - As far as the bottom baseline of the Budget is concerned it doesn't because the figures are simply rolled over to DoE. In terms of the impact on students, it is with some regret that I say that not all Tasmanian students are going to have the advantage of being able to be part of the academy and polytechnic changes, but the effort we are putting in around this is to make sure that, as far as we are able, the intent and the best parts of the reform are retained for all students. There were very good reasons for these reforms.

[6.30 p.m.]

Mr DEAN - I think we were given a very similar assurance previously when it changed over as well.

Ms THORP - But all the indications - with respect, Mr Dean - are that the very improvements these reforms were meant to achieve are being achieved.

CHAIR - So why are we rolling it back, then?

Ms THORP - Because of the intense political community perception.

CHAIR - But that is not a good enough reason if we are talking about the kids, wouldn't you agree?

Ms THORP - That is why it is a bit of a challenge.

Mr DEAN - I just cannot understand that, and this is what people have been saying to me and that is why I wanted to go down that track. If it is as good as what you say, why did we change it back again? Why didn't you persevere?

Ms THORP - It is undeniable that there have been issues that we -

Mr DEAN - The implementation appears to have been a huge problem.

Ms THORP - There were some issues around the ability of each of the newly-formed institutions to work at the level of collaboration that had been planned, given all the workloads that they had, but all of these things potentially could have been sorted out into the future.

CHAIR - Can they still be sorted out or has the deal been done?

Ms THORP - The problem is that we were faced with a situation where had not the Labor party in very good faith negotiated with the Greens party we would be staring down the barrel of a full rollback to an old, failing system. So to maintain the very best we could for the students of this State there has been a lot of sacrifice around this, I think it is fair to say, to as far as possible maintain the core of the intent of the reform and the good things that were going on to try to satisfy the concerns. If you dig down into them you will find a lot of the concerns are about teachers. A lot of the stories you hear are about teachers not being happy about changes, as opposed to the students.

CHAIR - Back to my same question - isn't it about the kids?

Ms THORP - The Government of which I am a member went to this election with full support for this reform but unfortunately that was not the outcome that occurred, so we have to try as hard as we can and work collaboratively and cooperatively to make sure that the very good changes that were on the way can be as far as possible retained with minimal damage to all the good work that has been done, but also facing the reality that there was - I believe fairly ill-founded - criticism of the way the reforms were rolling out. I do not think people were given sufficient time to work some of these things out at the micro level and we are now facing a compromise situation which, to the best of the abilities of everyone I am working with, will be to make sure that those good intents and reforms are as far as possible retained for the benefit of students.

Mr WING - They were not given sufficient time because it was rushed too much and that was the whole problem, wasn't it?

Ms THORP - Well, 20:20 hindsight is a wonderful thing. What we are dealing with now -

Mr WING - Some of us had foresight about that.

Ms THORP - is the reality of the situation we have now. We have a system that was halfway through significant reform and somehow we have to make sure that by the beginning of the 2011 school year we have real clarity and certainty so that all of our students are going into the same system.

Mr DEAN - Minister, it probably wasn't even six months ago that long ago that we were being told by the Premier at the time that this system was the best we could ever have in relation to ensuring that students were going to get everything they wanted, it was going to improve retention rates, university attendance and qualifications. We were told that six months ago. Now we are told it will not deliver on many of those things, or are we being told that and we are now flipping back?

Ms THORP - You would have been following the events of the previous month.

Mr DEAN - I have been trying to follow it and it is not easy.

Ms THORP - Well, basically both the Greens and the Liberal Party went to the State election in March saying that they would roll back the Tasmania Tomorrow post-year 10 reforms. Now they won 15 seats and the Labor Party won 10. I am the Minister for Education and my responsibility is to make sure that the best result came out of this situation. I have to commend the Greens because they worked very hard to try to come up with a compromise situation here, which we both believe will, as far as we are able, retain the best parts of the post-year 10 reforms.

Mr DEAN - Their position was very similar to the Liberals, was it not, when going into the election?

Ms THORP - I understand so. But I would like to point out to you that the Auditor-General put out *Special Report 89 - Post-year 10 Enrolments* just this month in which he said that the study patterns that we are observing are consistent with an increase in participation by students who would otherwise would not have been engaged in post-year 10 education and training. The largest increase in enrolments took place at Hellyer campus in Burnie where the Academy, Polytechnic and Skills Institute were fully implemented.

Mr DEAN - Is it right to say then that you are currently embarking on a process here that you do not agree with, that you do not believe in, and you believe that the current Polytechnic, Academy and Skills Institute position that we have is the best for Tasmania moving forward?

Ms THORP - I will just reiterate what I said, and that is that the Labor Party went into the last State election with a clear position on Tasmania Tomorrow and post-year 10 reforms, and that was to continue going down the reform path that we are currently on. The political reality is that, unless negotiations occurred with the Greens party, we would have lost much more than we are losing now. Our hope is to all work as constructively as we possibly can to keep the best -

Mr DEAN - Where do the students fit in this? You are saying it is not in the best interests -

CHAIR - Please let the Minister finish, thank you.

Ms THORP - I am saying that I am trying my level best to do the very best that I can for the interests of students in Tasmania.

Mrs TAYLOR - I agree that the minister is actually doing her very best to try to solve the problems that exist. But there is a certain amount of - I am trying not to be too blunt and say 'wool pulling over eyes' happening here. I hear other members' concerns about roll back and change, but there is no roll back and there is no significant change here.

Ms THORP - I think that you will find the CEO of the Polytechnic will seriously disagree you there.

Mr DEAN - Yes, that is right.

Mrs TAYLOR - There are significant changes in that the boards have been abolished and each college will have a principal again. But the polytechnics and the academies are still going to be established on each campus - will every campus still not have an academy and a polytechnic?

Ms THORP - No, each of the campuses will be an academy campus responsible for enrolment and arrangement for students to access polytechnic courses.

Mrs TAYLOR - Right, so the polytechnic courses will be delivered on that same campus?

Ms THORP - Some may; some may not.

Mrs TAYLOR - As they are now, because they are not all delivered on one campus now. We have just heard the example of Launceston where people go to several campuses. I suppose I am trying to comfort people in that from the students' point of view there will still be academy subjects and polytechnic subjects available on each campus. So it is not a roll back to the old system. Is that not right?

Ms THORP - One of the things that is getting lost in all of this is that we were not through the reforms. Had the reforms had the opportunity to be fully implemented, quite frankly, I do not think we would be having this discussion. I think Tasmanians would have been very happy, we would have been moving from the bottom of the pile to up the top. As it is, we are going to have to work harder now to keep the kinds of results that we were hoping to get.

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As far as the budget is concerned as opposed to philosophical arguments about educational delivery, in terms of the dollars involved, the budgets for the Polytechnic and the Academy will be rolled into DoE. So in terms of the bottom lines on these columns, that is the budget. We have Mike Brakey here from the Academy. Would you like me to bring him to the table?

CHAIR - That is the next output group. So we will do one at a time, albeit that they do cross over somewhat in this area.

Ms THORP - The same things apply in terms of the fact that they are being affected by the changes to the post-year 10 reforms and that their respective budgets will be rolled into DoE.

Mrs TAYLOR - May I ask one more question: one of the good things about the Polytechnic is that students are going to be able to get much better qualifications trade wise than they would under the old system. That is not going to change, is it? Students will still be able to get those qualifications? You are not actually downgrading the Polytechnic back to the VET -

Ms McLENNAN - As it is envisaged at the moment, that will still be the case. Students in the Polytechnic do many more than just trade qualifications; they do a lot of other things as well.

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, true. I did not know what to call it because it used to be called VET and now I do not what to call it except Polytechnic.

Ms McLENNAN - It is still VET.

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, that is what I mean. So students are not going to be disadvantaged in that sense?

Ms McLENNAN - The aim of the exercise is always to put the students at the centre.

Mrs TAYLOR - So, the answer is no, they are not going to be disadvantaged?

Ms McLENNAN - I do not know that it will be my responsibility to ensure that.

Mrs TAYLOR - Fine.

Ms McLENNAN - Yes, I suppose that is true. We were just talking about the fact that what we have been working on is a model of polytechnic learning, which is much more than what TAFE offered because it has a significant element of support and a more holistic approach. The aim is as much as possible, particularly for 16- to 19-year-olds, to ensure that that support is still available.

Mrs TAYLOR - Absolutely.

Mr DEAN - Minister, I think I detect around the room the frustrations and probably there is anger as to what is going on. How do you now as a minister resolve the situation with the senior staff within the education department who have been so strongly behind this - I am not saying there is anything wrong with that at all - and have pushed it so strongly and have done a very good job in many respects? How do you now as a minister try to get on top of that?

Ms THORP - Valuing teachers and valuing the other professions who have been part of these reforms and putting in an extraordinary amount of work, time and personal commitment to this is a challenge. To make sure that those people appreciate that the work they have done is not undervalued, yes, you are right; it is a challenge. It will be more people than just me who will need to be applying their heads to it.

Do remember that next week Tim Doe, who is a respected educationalist in this State, has virtually come out of retirement to head up an advisory group. I would imagine that issues such as teacher morale, teacher career paths and the future of those professionals who have given so much of themselves to this process will have to be very sensitively handled.

CHAIR - We will move on now to the Tasmanian Academy.

2.3 Tasmanian Academy

CHAIR - Minister, it was reported in a newspaper article back in May that there would be the latest enrolment and attendance figures available in the next few weeks. Does this snapshot that was provided incorporate those figures or are there new figures that we are waiting on at this point in time?

Ms THORP - Those figures referred to in the article were from the February census about data collected and reported just recently from 2008 to 2010. Generally, there was an overall increase in enrolment which reflects the growing number of young people coming on from year 10 around the State. The statewide increase was 9 per cent; in the Academy and Polytechnic, the increase was 13 per cent; in college it was 11 per cent; and in district high school the decrease was 35 per cent.

CHAIR - So they are the up-to-date figures?

Ms THORP - Yes. Please do not find that district high school figure depressing because one of the big successes from the reforms has been the increased number of district high school students who have enrolled in both academy and polytechnic subjects.

CHAIR - So they have a half enrolment in one and a half enrolment in the other. That is what we heard earlier.

Ms THORP - Some may, but I think the vast majority of the kids I met at St Helens recently were enrolled at the Polytechnic. There were a couple enrolled in academy subjects, but the vast majority were enrolled in the Polytechnic.

CHAIR - This same article also highlights the fact that Launceston College enrolments were up 250 on last year. Are the figures that were reported correct?

Ms THORP - Yes, that true.

CHAIR - Was any additional staff needed to cover those extra 250 enrolments?

Ms THORP - Staffing allocations at any campus or school are a reflection of the enrolments.

CHAIR - Have they been taken from other areas and I instance the Newstead College. I am not sure what the equivalents are in the south - I am not across those entirely.

Ms THORP - The August census shows that there was a 5 per cent in general enrolments - that is in the national schools statistics collection - 12 per cent at the Polytechnic/Academy and 1 per cent at colleges. Whilst there might be a little bubble in one particular school at any given time, generally speaking the increase in enrolments and in attainment has been through the Academy and Polytechnic.

CHAIR - Do you envisage that more academies will be set up?

Ms THORP - There is only one Academy and one Polytechnic.

CHAIR - Will more campuses be set up around Tasmania?

Ms THORP - No, I would imagine we would probably use the ones that up until recently were known as colleges. There will still be those eight campuses. I think one of the things that people were still grieving a little for were the campuses that moved, that loss of identity, name and brand if you like. That branding will be brought back so that people in Launceston know they have Newstead, Launceston, and those in Hobart have Claremont, Rosny, Hobart and Elizabeth.

Some good things will be kept because do not forget that one of the problems in the old system, what I called fiefdoms, the colleges were competitive and often not terribly collaborative. You could get a really good program in one particular place but there was no sharing. People would hold on to things whereas one of the beauties of the Academy is it is one institute that deals directly, for example, with UTas about what is required. By maintaining that structure in the sense that each of the colleges is a campus of the Academy, we can still have that collective communication with the university which can only be better for our students.

The other significant one, of course, is we want more of our students to go on post year 10 and getting an attainment, but also we want the attainment to be of a high quality, a higher level if you like.

CHAIR - Do you have any figures on the number of students that have gone to university?

Ms THORP - There have been rises in Academy figures. The problem with that is you need figures for two years.

CHAIR - So they will be available at the end of this year.

Ms THORP - But not for all of the institutes. Our indications are that it has been a success. John is saying it is at the end of this year that the first cohort of two years will have their results.

CHAIR - All of which will mean very little.

Ms THORP - No, they will not. They will be getting the subjects they need to go to university.

Mr FINCH - In spite of the positive messages, why am I feeling so depressed? I think it might have been because we came along with the process the Legislative Council supported it, but it has not been successful.

Ms THORP - What we are saying is we are so far through a three-year reform and now we have to change tack a bit.

Mr FINCH - That is right.

Ms THORP - Changing horses midstream is never the optimal way to go. In my opinion I wish we could have at least given the reforms their full time because I do not think we have even begun to scratch the surfaces on all the successes that were possible.

Mr WING - Just started one year too soon, unfortunately.

Ms THORP - We have to live with political realities.

Mr FINCH - Just to mention another key highlight here, the 2010 students, 11 701 - it has got a mention here that it sets the baseline data. How many were there previously?

Ms THORP - This is one of the challenges with data. There has been a lot of work and effort go into making sure that data collection is consistent and that figure sets the baseline data from which we will be able to

Mr FINCH - Why would that go into it as a highlight? Is that because of the breakthrough in data?

Ms THORP - Quite a few of those students were not counted in Department of Education figures because they were not students of the Department of Education; they were enrolled at TAFE. Prior to that date there is not consistent data set, so that figure will set the baseline.

Mr FINCH - So that it why it becomes a highlight, because we now have a figure to work on as we go into the future to see whether we are increasing or decreasing?

Ms THORP - One of the main things that everyone is trying to do is make sure more of our students go on from year 10. That would be the baseline data from which we will be able to ascertain whether that is happening. Modifying that to some extent because we also need to recognise that a number of students in any given year cohort is not the same. There will be factors that will impact on that baseline but we should be able to factor those things in, I hope.

One of the things that is very significant, I think, and one of the things I am really looking forward to seeing happen is at the beginning of any school year, whether it be at Rosny College, Hobart College or wherever, we will have a cohort of students come in - let us use 1 000 just for an arbitrary argument - we have 1 000 students enrol in year 11 and they each have a pathway that they determine they will go along. The best way to measure that success is to look at exactly where those 1 000 students are two years later. If at the end of that two years all those students have successfully completed what they set out to do, that is 100 per cent success. If only half of them have, that is 50 per cent success. That is where it is really important.

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If you look at the back of your sheet you can see the drop off. In 2007, 6 664 records of participation were lodged, so kids have gone to grade 10. By the end of year 11 only 78 per cent of them had completed one credit of learning. If you look at year 12, 67 per cent, one unit of credit. Of that cohort - going back to the 6 000 - 4 260 completed a full-time program, and 2 383 or 35 per cent of that year 10 group back in 2007 met the standards for a TCE. That is really recent times - 35 per cent, of those 6 664 kids only 35 per cent of them attained a TCE. That is why we had to have the reforms.

Mr DEAN - Correct me if I am wrong, but after years 10, 11 and 12 at the polytechnics and academy was compulsory unless they had a job or employment to go into. Was that not the situation?

Ms THORP - Until they turn 17. Say you were 16 in November at the end of year 10, if you turn 17 in February of that year it is no longer compulsory.

Mr DEAN - How many of those dropped out before their time? Is that that figure that tells you that drop out?

Ms THORP - That 6 664 is every year 10 kid who did year 10 in 2007. The 2009 figure shows us that, of that 6 600, 67 per cent completed at least one unit of credit, so it may have been just one subject which is the minimum expectation, if you like. Forty per cent of that 6 664 completed the full-time program, but only 2 383 of that 6 664 actually got the TCE. That is the challenge; that is the figure that needs to be improved. So 2.4 basically refers to those colleges who had not moved to the Polytechnic and Academy.

CHAIR - But then it refers to district high schools as well. I am just looking for some clarification to make sure that district high schools are not disadvantaged.

Ms THORP - No, only in year 11 and 12 in those figures, if my understanding is correct. If you add up 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 basically you are getting all our kids post-year 10.

Mrs TAYLOR - And Skills Institute.

Ms THORP - Well, the Skills Institute is for employers. They are not taking any year 10 kids - and correct me if I am wrong there, Mike. The Skills Institute is not providing education to our grade 10 leavers - no.

Mrs TAYLOR - When can you enter the Skills Institute?

Mr SAYER - The Skills Institute works with people who are apprentices or trainees and have an employment contract.

Mrs TAYLOR - Correct, but they could be post-year 10?

Ms THORP - Yes, but they are employed.

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, I understand that. That is the difficulty I have here with numbers and with percentages.

Ms THORP - A lot of people do.

Mrs TAYLOR - Because we had a TAFE, and perhaps some of the students who were in TAFE went into the Skills Institute, those ones who were employed, and the ones who were not employed have gone into the Polytechnic.

Mr SAYER - Some of them would be employed as well.

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, but some of them would not be employed, and the ones who were not employed and in TAFE before have gone into Polytechnic.

Mr SAYER - You can have that mix.

Mrs TAYLOR - So that is where some of those numbers have gone. The Skills Institute has fewer people in it than the TAFE did?

Mr SAYER - The old TAFE is -

CHAIR - Order! I think we have too many conversations going here and I cannot listen to them all at once, thank you.

Ms THORP - There is no distortion of these figures by the existence of the Skills Institute.

Mrs TAYLOR - No, I understand that.

Ms THORP - We are still looking at the post-year 10 cohort.

Mrs TAYLOR - We are still looking at post-year 10, but some of the people who are now in polytechnic figures were people who would have gone to TAFE only TAFE does not exist any longer - is that not correct? - because the Skills Institute is only those who are employed, apprentices and whatever, but there were people going to TAFE who were not employed.

Mr SMYTH - In coming to these figures we used the rules for the National Schools Statistics Collection. So those students who were still doing that course on an old TAFE campus, as they would have been in the old model, were counted in the data. We used national coding rules which defines a year 11 and year 12 student, and those are the data that you would find the students counted there. If a student was on a TAFE campus doing an all VET course, as they were in 2008 and in 2009, they were counted in these figures here.

Mrs TAYLOR - But those courses are now in the Polytechnic, are they not?

Mr SMYTH - Even though they are in the Polytechnic, they were not counted.

Mrs TAYLOR - They are still not counted?

Mr SMYTH - In these figures as National Schools Statistics Collection. They are in the bottom group though, the total of 11 701; in other words, we counted similar students who are in colleges to similar students who are in the Polytechnic and the Academy.

Mrs TAYLOR - What will happen in the future, because the students will now in future enrol in Polytechnic, will they not?

Mr SMYTH - Yes, and that is why we have moved to the new baseline that says, 'Let us take note of the total population collection,' but for comparison between the two systems when they existed, we had to use the same set of rules to do the count.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you, that clarifies that.

CHAIR - It is probably as clear as mud to some, I suspect. We will move on.

[7.00 p.m.]

2.5 Skills Tasmania -

Mr FINCH - Bearing in mind the public's confusion over the changing education labels, I am looking for the description of the future now of Skills Tasmania. I have looked at the description here and I have read it through a few times. Can you allay my fears that Skills Tasmania does not have the characteristics of a bureaucratic overlay? Can you just tell me about the role of Skills Tasmania now and in the future?

Ms THORP - I will let Mark do that, if I may, because Skills Tasmania is not one of the three institutes that we have been referring to with the Polytechnic, the Academy and the Skills Institute. Skills Tasmania has different roles.

Mr FINCH - As I say, with the characteristics of a bureaucratic overlay. I would just like to hear more.

Mr SAYER - Skills Tasmania is an independent statutory authority set up under legislation about three years ago and it has three primary roles under legislation. The first is to develop a skills strategy and policies on behalf of the State to inform its second function, which is a purchasing role to spend your taxpayer dollars to subsidise the delivery of vocational education and training. Its third function is to provide support services to its three client groups, which are industry, training organisations and learners. That is simply it.

Mr FINCH - How many FTEs are there employed in this area?

Mr SAYER - Currently there are 49.2 FTEs in Skills Tasmania, which has reduced quite markedly over the last 12 months so it is a fairly lean, efficient organisation.

Mr FINCH - Can you tell me those numbers where it has been reduced from? Do you have the figures?

Mr SAYER - I can tell you roughly that it has been reduced from the high 50s, close to 60, to 49.2.

Mr FINCH - Is that because of the cessation of the Productivity Places Program?

Mr SAYER - No, the Productivity Places Program will continue until 2012. In fact, we will put more money out the door in 2012 than in the earlier years. As you would know, Productivity Places is a program that is funded by the State and the Commonwealth, and by industry.

Mr FINCH - There is the cessation of that - did you say that is in three years time?

Mr SAYER - In 2012.

Mr FINCH - Was it always going to cease at that time?

Mr SAYER - Yes, that is the agreement. We hoped that it would continue because it has been a highly successful program and competitively based, and that is where the role of a purchaser like Skills Tasmania comes into play. You would prefer not to see a government agency being a purchaser in the marketplace. That is why you set up a statutory authority to provide that distinction between public purchaser and provider.

Mr FINCH - Can I get an explanation of the purchasing of vocational education and training, I want some idea of this purchasing process that you go through.

Mr SAYER - Those funds are public funds. About 70 per cent of those funds are provided by the State and 30 per cent are provided by the Commonwealth.

Mr FINCH - There was a mention of a \$25 million figure some time before. Is that the figure you are dealing with for purchasing?

Mr SAYER - No. Skills Tasmania spends just over \$100 million a year to subsidise vocational education and training in this State, so it is a significant amount of money.

Mr FINCH - Just tell me something about the purchasing and the organisations that you deal with.

Mr SAYER - It is quite complex really in that, when public funds are provided to support the delivery of vocational education and training, it does not cover the full cost. So there have to be other means to meet that full cost, so we provide that subsidy but also industry contributes to the full cost of the delivery of vocational education and training, and learners do as well through paying fees. I guess overlaid with that - if you would like to know a little more - as an organisation we need to study very closely how the economy is performing, which sectors need support, which communities need support and start prioritising where we put those public funds. That is really important because we do not want to just throw the money out the door willy-nilly, we really need to decide which are the priorities of the State. That is a fairly complex task.

Mr FINCH - Is that your work too? Of the 49 people you employ, apart from administrative staff, you need to be out there investigating and talking with business. Is that on an Australia-wide basis?

Mr SAYER - Each jurisdiction does this to varying levels of sophistication. Tasmania can be pretty proud in that it has quite a distinct purchaser-provider relationship and we have quite a sophisticated and developing system to identify priorities in terms of which industries should be supported and which learners and which communities should be supported.

Ms THORP - Is it fair to say, Mark, that Tasmania's reputation in VET provision, regulation et cetera is top-notch?

Mr SAYER - It is very, very strong and it is partly assisted by the smallness of our State. For example, Skills Tasmania has been able to collaborate with the Tasmanian Chamber of

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Commerce and Industry and work hand in glove when it comes to getting the message out to employers about more people now leaving the labour market than entering it and our ageing population, how difficult it will be in the future to get the numbers of people that we need which makes gaining higher qualifications much more important than it was in the past.

Mr FINCH - Through you, Minister, this million-dollar diminution in the allocation to Skills Tasmania - is that because of the lower numbers?

Mr SAYER - It is certainly in part due to that. We are a much more efficient operation than we were in the past.

Mr FINCH - How will that having a budget less \$1 million from the previous year impact on you?

Mr SAYER - It will not affect putting around \$100 million of money out the door at all. We shield those funds and we have invested in better business systems to become more efficient as a public sector organisation.

Mr FINCH - Thanks.

Mr DEAN - I think this fits in this area - that is, the training centre at George Town.

Ms THORP - The trade training centres?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Ms THORP - No under the Polytechnic.

Mr DEAN - I am asking this on behalf of the George Town Council. What are the proposed staffing levels of the George Town Trade Training Centre? Will it open in term 3 as stated; is it likely to do that? What are the student enrolment numbers expected to be? Have you any idea of what is happening there? It is critical to George Town.

Ms McLENNAN - I probably can give you some certainty around when they will open. In terms of the numbers, that is entirely dependent on the students coming through from the local schools and obviously that drives the staffing allocation. It is intended that the way that the trade training centres will operate will be very collaborative with the local schools and so it is quite likely we will do have arrangements in place whereby we work with the teachers in the schools, much as we are doing now with the district high schools in jointly funding programs.

In March 2009, we were successful with the first round of applications which covered Dorset, Bridgewater and Port Dalrymple. Late last year we put in two more submissions to the Commonwealth for Break O'Day, Circular Head and Huon Valley. The opening dates for them are mid-2010 for Georgetown and Dorset with Bridgewater around September 2010.

Ms McLENNAN - We are in the process of design at the moment for the next three and then they will go into a construction phase.

Mr DEAN - Thank you very much for that.

2.6 Tasmanian Qualifications Authority -

Mr GAFFNEY - The Auditor-General's Report highlighted that the TQA's attainment data is accurate and provides a useful measure of student engagement. I noticed last year that it was indicated that there needed to be further work undertaken by the Education Performance Services and TQA. I read in *Hansard* about some of the challenges they might face.

Mr SMYTH - I think you will see in the first part of the Auditor-General's recommendation that he did recommend that that work should continue, people should come together to try to get a better source of data more quickly and more easily. We will certainly be doing that in the next 12 months.

Mr GAFFNEY - There appear to be sufficient funds in the Budget to be able to do that because the Auditor-General's report did not highlight not having sufficient funds, so I am not at all fussed by what is there. There seems to be enough money to be able to continue that.

Mr SMYTH - I think that is well within our capabilities to do and bring together.

Mr GAFFNEY - That is all.

2.7 Grants and financial assistance -

Mr GAFFNEY - It says that the aim is to provide more support to apprentices and trainees. Could someone fill us in on how that funding is spent? I note it remains fairly constant until 2013-14.

Mr SAYER - Most of those funds are used to assist group training organisations to employ apprentices and trainees. Group training organisation are really useful in a State like Tasmania, in that they are the employer of the apprentice or trainee and then they hire them out to employers who need them at the time. This creates a lot more flexibility in the system. Employers really like that and that takes up the bulk of those funds. The remainder is used to fund industry liaison officers who work with industry to find out more about their needs. As I said before, getting hold of information and industry advice is really important to an organisation like Skills Tasmania because it helps to inform the spending of those taxpayer dollars to subsidise vocational education and training.

Mr GAFFNEY - What numbers are we talking about for apprentices and for the liaison officers? How many students or young people would that assist in the course of a year?

Mr SAYER - We only have three industry liaison officers in this State.

Mr GAFFNEY - Is that one in each region?

Mr SAYER - Yes, one in each region supported by people from Skills Tasmania. In terms of total numbers of apprentices and trainees employed by group training organisation, I will have to take that one on notice.

Mr GAFFNEY - Please that on notice so that we get an understanding of how much that funding is helping.

**Output Group 3
Youth and Knowledge Network**

3.1 Information Services and Community -

CHAIR - Minister, on page 3.16 in table 3.8, community education enrolments, is that adult ed?

[7.15 p.m.]

Ms GASKELL - It is broader than adult education. The Community Knowledge Network brings together online access centres, adult education and libraries. It is a fairly significant change that we have gone through in establishing this new organisation. What we are attempting to do is offer adult education as it was traditionally, where we can, but we are trying to broaden the offerings out into more life skills areas as well.

These figures were attempting to add in adult education, which obviously is a large chunk of it, but start to add in the online access centre courses and other courses that were developed over time.

CHAIR - I am struggling to understand why there were no figures, if it is a bringing together of those particular organisations. We would obviously have the number for adult education classes and the target is 26 500 people. Where has that number come from if there is nothing available before -

Ms GASKELL - We have looked at the previous figures and have struck a number that we believe is the target that we need to be aiming for. Getting a consistent way of counting that across courses that have derived from different areas is something that we have been working through so we are looking at a 1 July start.

Ms THORP - I think it is fair to say that these new measures that we are counting.

CHAIR - I take that. I am just saying if we have arrived at 26 500 people, obviously that number has come from somewhere. There must have been some sort of actions before.

Yes, and they were taken into account with the setting of the target but rather than put a comparison there that was dubious, we will just start from that point. We may find next year that it was 40 000 that actually occurred, in which case we would have to revise.

Ms GASKELL - Part of it is that the system that we have for enrolments, which we have recently gone to - the online enrolment system - we still have to get the online access centres enrolling their students. The first phase was the traditional adult education program. As we start opening those other courses such as the ones that run in the online access centres, they will be added into that.

CHAIR - There is a decrease in the amount of budget allocated to this particular area, and I hear what Siobhan said previously, and there was outrage from the adult education fraternity - I attended a meeting and they were pretty irate.

Ms THORP - I think I can say, categorically here, that adult education is extremely valued and supported and has a good, strong future.

CHAIR - So the decrease is just meeting the budget and managing its strategies and nothing to do with a reduction in opportunities that are going to be offered.

Ms THORP - Greg is a good one to answer this one.

Mr GLASS - Through you, Minister, the budget decrease is an accounting policy change which is inherent in the 2010-11 Budget relative to the 2009-10 Budget. It relates to what is known within the department as the library book vote, or the purchase of library books. Previously, for all the years I have been with the department up until 2009-10, that budget has resided within the output group. To comply with Australian accounting standards, the purchase of those books are all capitalised in the balance sheet, so this year that budget - and it is \$2.130 million - has come out and it actually appears in the department's balance sheet under plant and equipment, which is where it has to go from an accounting perspective.

CHAIR - That is a lot of books!

Mr GLASS - Yes - Siobhan can probably talk about how that is spent - but it is \$2 million each year to replenish book stocks. Siobhan is obviously the expert in this area. From that total, if you can think about not only the main libraries but the regional libraries and the branch libraries, there are quite a few books that are retiring because they pass their use-by date and are replenished with brand new stock.

The significant decrease in the budget reflects that accounting treatment change where we have to take out and actually capitalise those, whereas in the past, through the budget, it looked like they were an expense.

CHAIR - Given new technology - people buy books and put them on their iphones now - should I expect that people will be able to loan technology like that from the online centres?

Ms GASKELL - That is something we are about to bring out. We have signed a subscription to trial those. It is that issue of straddling between the old world of paper and the new world, but we think it is really important through that process too, it is part of education in the more general population about accessing that sort of technology. We will roll that trial out in this next year.

Mr WING - There seemed to have been a change of policy in relation to adult education about two years ago and there was quite a lot of anecdotal evidence that all of a sudden it became more difficult for people to enrol. In some cases I think they were required to enrol online and a lot of people did not have the capacity to do that. As the chair has said, there was a public meeting in Launceston expressing outrage about this and there does seem to have been a decline. Was there a change of policy?

Ms THORP - I have some enrolment figures that might put those concerns to bed.

Mr WING - I would like to know whether there was a change of policy and a different emphasis.

Ms GASKELL - It is an additional service for people enrolling online, but people can also go in in person and enrol.

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Mr WING - Was there a change of emphasis? You mentioned some policy matter a moment ago, I thought.

Ms GASKELL - We brought in the online enrolment system and we have encouraged people to use it. We have had an online access centre and library staff in the new LINC's to work with clients and enrol them online. If individuals want to do it in person they can as well, so I guess the policy has been about finding the best way to get the enrolments in.

Mr WING - No change of emphasis towards vocational courses rather than pastime ones?

Ms GASKELL - In terms of the offerings that we are extending the range into vocational and what we call 'second-chance adults'; the skills courses that, in part, the online access centres had provided in the past. We are starting to populate the database with that as well.

Mr WING - Was there a reduction in other courses to allow for those new courses?

Ms GASKELL - No. The courses with the higher fees – primarily what we call the leisure courses now - we will run those wherever there is a viable number of people enrolling in them.

Ms THORP - Just for your information, Mr Wing, in 2007-08 there were 14 529 students in adult education and in 2009-10 there were 15 424, so it has seen an increase.

Mr WING - And no scaling down of courses or discouragement?

Ms THORP - No, course viability is based on whether or not people enrol and often that is based on course costs. That is a fee-for-service situation because the person who is running the course has to cover their costs.

Mr WING - I think Mr Finch spoke at one of the meetings about this and he may well have more details than I have, but I am concerned about adult education.

Mr FINCH - I was the guest speaker there but it was only to threaten the Government.

Laughter.

Ms THORP - It has occurred. It has also seen an increase in enrolments.

Mr FINCH - I want to ask about online access centres, and highlight that we have an issue with mine in Exeter, which is inappropriately placed. It has been decided over the years that it is not well placed. I am wondering about the opportunity that might exist for that online access centre to come out of the property that it is on, probably about 1.5 kilometres from the centre of town, to come off that area that they share with Neighbourhood House and that sort of operation and into the main street of Exeter. There may be an opportunity at the Exeter RSL, which is about to close. I am wondering if there is any opportunity in the Budget for some consideration for the re-establishment - maybe with the library - that is there on the main street of Exeter.

Ms THORP - When the community online access centres came on board, we are going back at least 10 years and the community has changed considerably since they were first established, they needed to be there because people did not have access to computers at home and it was important that Tasmanians got skilled-up in that area. I think there is scope to look at the long-

term future of our online access centres in the very way you are talking about in terms of them being incorporated into other services.

Mr FINCH - There is a library at Exeter which has space at the back. There could be a marriage there.

Ms THORP - If you would like to write me a letter and describe what you see as options that you think would be good for this area, I will certainly look into it.

Mr FINCH - Thank you very much. There is a lovely chestnut that you would know very little about but Ms Gaskell at the far end of the table would suspect that it is going to be brought up as soon as she saw me here. I have talked since I have been here at Budget Estimates - this is my eighth time - about an oral history program. In fact, a couple of years ago I was assured vociferously by the Premier as the Minister for Education that yes, it had the tick, it was a special interest of his and it was going ahead.

Ms THORP - Well, I will not be saying that.

Mr FINCH - No, okay. I am wondering, through you, Minister, if Ms Gaskell can apprise us of the state of play as far as oral history goes - or has it become oral history?

Ms THORP - Do we need to declare a pecuniary interest about issues like this?

CHAIR - No, absolutely not. It is our opportunity.

Ms GASKELL - I am actually hopeful that, possibly through the literacy funding we have, that may be one of the ways that we can get some of our community members to actually become involved and assist us through digital story telling. So there is always more than one way to skin a cat, and that is my hope that we can do that. And particularly I know in Queensland with the Indigenous knowledge centres there, that has been a key way that they have got some individuals into the literacy programs. So you might get a small group.

Mr FINCH - Through you, Minister, in your investigations, Ms Gaskell, what do you guesstimate would be the cost of establishing a program like that in Tasmania, from your modest idea that you are suggesting now to perhaps the Rolls Royce of oral history set-ups around Australia?

Ms THORP - We will have to take that on notice.

Mr FINCH - But I would like some idea -

Ms THORP - We could send one person out with a ratty old cassette player and it would be really cheap but if we do a really good project it will cost a lot more.

Mr FINCH - The point is that this could be incorporated into the online access centres, into your community centres, so that it could be part of every community in Tasmania that has an online access centre if you could just install that equipment where people could present their stories, capture the history and build the skills of how to do it.

Ms THORP - I can see the value in it. Perhaps we could take that question on notice and give you a better response than someone with a ratty old cassette player.

Mr FINCH - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

3.2 Tasmania Archives and Heritage Office -

Mrs TAYLOR - In starting, can I refer back to the last one to say that I think the way Tasmanian libraries, online centres and whatever have reinvented themselves is amazing and a much better way for the community to be able to access all kinds of communication and literacy. It is fantastic. In relation to the Archives and Heritage Office, again there is not a great deal of informative performance information in table 3.8 on page 316. It would be nice to know how many people use the facility in person and online.

[7.30 p.m.]

Ms THORP - We do have some performance data available. The number of visits to the i-Zone - well, 2009-10 is a bit of an estimate because the figures were taken at May 2010 but around 150 000 people or visits, which is not people really. The number of TAHO remote research and copy requests was 5761, and the archive and heritage research materials accessed by clients was - once again because the year is not complete with this data - 10 555.

Mrs TAYLOR - Are they increasing numbers from previous years?

Ms THORP - Absolutely. That same measure in 2008-09 was 7 494.

Mrs TAYLOR - I would also like to know whether there can be more publicity given to the sorts of material that can be examined in the archives, because it is an absolute goldmine of information and I think many people still do not know that it is there.

Ms THORP - That is probably a good question for you, Siobhan.

Ms GASKELL - In the broad sense a constant goal across all of the services that we provide is how do you get more people to engage. I think part of the bringing together of the Community Knowledge Network is addressing that fact. We are now drawing in a broader clientele and, as part of that, you can tell them about that broader range of resources that are available.

Mrs TAYLOR - And in fact through online and through the links they could access this, could they not? There is not reason why they could not -

Ms GASKELL - Certainly with the physical walk-in clients, we call them, and then with the online clients, the online area is certainly growing. The digitisation program that we have under way is increasing usages significantly through the online channel. Our goal is to try to get as much of that heritage material digitised in order to make more available to all Tasmanians and to researchers globally.

Mrs TAYLOR - Your budget is not increasing much over the foreseeable future so, if you are going to offer more and try to service more people, are you not going to need more money?

Ms GASKELL - I guess that is the constant reworking of priorities and pushing money into those priority areas and saying, 'These are things that we stop doing in order to do the priority.'

Mrs TAYLOR - My last question is: there has obviously been a change of name to include heritage; why is that so?

Ms GASKELL - We have combined the State Library's heritage collections and the Archives Office into one sub organisation, and that is simply about recognising how particularly the online world brings the two together closer than they have been in the past. A lot of the materials and the research that is going on is common and we have pulled back from the artificial splits of the past. For a decade the two had been separated and we have pulled them back. Since then the Northern Territory and New Zealand have followed in our tracks, and a couple of the others are starting to look at that as well.

Mrs TAYLOR - So you got both budgets then?

Ms GASKELL - Yes.

CHAIR - Before I leave that output group, Minister, I want to ask you about the LINC centres. There was one identified for Sorell and another for Dorset, I have not seen any shovels and I have not been to any openings so I am wondering where they are. Have we rolled out any?

Ms THORP - The location of all five regional LINC have now been announced: Bridgewater-Brighton, Scottsdale, Queenstown, George Town and Sorell. Five of them will be rolled out from 2010 to 2013. The Bridgewater-Brighton one is part of the Learning Federation out there. Preliminary meetings have been held with all five local councils, and the projects have entered the consultation phase to determine the scope of services to partners, co-tenants and possible users. Consultations continue to progress in close association with councils, child and family centre project groups and key organisations including TACH, some of the district highs and skills centres, Service Tasmania, DHHS, the Social Inclusion Unit within Premier and Cabinet, and Centrelink. In addition, individual organisations particular to each community are being approached, and expressions of interest through local newspapers will also ensure maximum participation.

CHAIR - So there has been a lot of talk and no action?

Ms THORP - No, it varies from site to site. The Scottsdale and Sorell LINC are in initial planning and the Department of Education is investigating site options. That is where it stands.

CHAIR - That is about 12 months old, I expect.

Ms THORP - Is there an update on the LINC?

Ms GASKELL - At Queenstown the spade is about to go into the ground so it is not far off and that is simply going through that process so we are looking at that one opening probably about April, May next year. The Bridgewater-Brighton one is very close now to going to tender and the land has been decided on, and George Town is the other one that we are progressing at the moment.

CHAIR - Can I suggest, Minister, that there will be another of those announcements that was not terribly well considered in some areas?

Ms THORP - I think the community is looking forward to having a LINC, though, aren't they?

CHAIR - Yes, but they make the announcements before they have thoroughly investigated where it could even be housed and then the expectation is there but nothing happens, and that has been going on a bit over 12 months.

Ms THORP - I understand the frustration but the same process is being used with the LINC's as with the child and family centres in making sure that they are localised, there is maximum community input and the community gets the best bang for its buck from what is being offered.

CHAIR - Let's hope they don't fall off the radar.

Ms THORP - I might ask Mr Andrew Finch to rejoin us because this is in his patch too.

Mr GAFFNEY - Under the capital investment program we see \$247.5 million for schools and education infrastructure which is terrific, and if I just randomly put my pen onto the paper, look at that - Port Sorell Primary School!

Laughter.

Mr GAFFNEY - Just for the help of everybody there are some new huge schools coming on whether it is through amalgamations or whatever and I think it will be interesting to see over four years. Just what is the process the department has just in planning for something like the new school, whether it be at Port Sorell or Cosgrove or whatever? What is in your thinking and how do you do that?

Mr ANDREW FINCH - Well, again, it goes back to what I mentioned about part of the BER process. It is important to identify the key stakeholder group and work with them to work out the particular aspects of that local community and what we need to build in for the educational provisions which will suit that community.

Ms THORP - It is fair to say, Andrew, isn't it, that there is communication between us and the local council about the likely make-up of that consultation group to ensure the appropriate people are there and everyone's interests are covered and you have the level of expertise you need as well.

Mr ANDREW FINCH - Yes. I think the cash flow of that project, with \$500 000 in the first year, allows us to undertake that process effectively and then one of the next aspects after that would be to appoint an architect to come in and help put some of those ideas into reality and look at some of the designs and so on and then work through to a tender process. So hopefully towards the end of that first year we would start to see some construction taking place.

Mr DEAN - I just wanted to raise the question of the High Street premises and the Adult Education Centre there.

Ms THORP - The which - I am sorry?

Mr DEAN - In High Street in Launceston.

Ms THORP - Oh, Launceston.

Mr DEAN - It has been said previously about the Education Department might want to move out of that building and get rid of it. Is that on the agenda?

Ms THORP - Could I take that question on notice and get some information about that for you, please? I think that would be appropriate rather than taking the risk of misinforming the committee.

Mrs TAYLOR - I want to ask a question generally in this capital investment program about where figures do not match up. For instance, you have school amalgamations for Burnie estimated at a total cost of \$7.7 million.

Ms THORP - That is where money has been expended in previous years.

Mrs TAYLOR - Okay, thank you.

Ms THORP - For example, school amalgamations for Glenorchy has a total of \$18.7 million of which there is \$13.9 million yet to spend.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you; that is good. Can I ask you about the Cosgrove specialist sports school? There were many people who fell over when that announcement was made because there appeared to be very little in community consultation or research or anything else done before that was announced as an election promise.

Ms THORP - We recognise that there are some works that need to be done - whether they be minor works or whatever - at Cosgrove, which is why the \$1 million is there.

Mrs TAYLOR - I understand that if you are looking at a process.

Ms THORP - That \$1 million is also going to give us the opportunity to develop a full business case which will involve consultation.

Mrs TAYLOR - Good - that's not going to cost \$1 million, is it?

Ms THORP - No, the consultation will not and the business case will not but we would be using some of that money to make sure a full business case was developed before the rest of that plan was implemented.

Mrs TAYLOR - Thank you. Obviously Cosgrove needs some kind of specialty, that is fine, and the fact that you want to develop a sports centre somewhere in the northern suburbs does not faze me either. It will be wonderful, and the same with the home for the Chargers, which was included in this promise, but to go and spend \$1 million starting something for which there is no business plan -

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Ms THORP - I am not saying that that would be wasted because there is a whole range of small works that could be done virtually immediately, I imagine. We can get some more information to you if you like.

Mrs TAYLOR - That would be good. I would like to know what you are planning to spend that \$1 million on.

Ms THORP - You will be the first to know.

CHAIR - Minister, do you have any plans to establish a learn-to-swim pool in the St Helens area?

Ms THORP - No, that's not on the immediate radar.

CHAIR - Is it something that you will consider?

Ms THORP - I am open to lobbying.

CHAIR - Any other lobbying which is required at the table at this point in time?

Mrs TAYLOR - I have a question about Montrose Bay High School which is going well, I think, and hopefully on budget and those kind of things and it will be wonderful. There were two problems with it. One was accessibility for all students and I hope that has been addressed.

Ms THORP - Wheelchair access?

Mrs TAYLOR - Yes, to make it an accessible site, because the department says every school will be accessible to all students. It is a challenge on that campus because it is on various levels. I am more concerned about the traffic issue, which I know is not your concern in a sense.

Ms THORP - It is a concern for us.

Mrs TAYLOR - It is a concern State Government-wise.

Mr ANDREW FINCH- It is something that we want to work through with the council and DIER. We have to work through the issue of that intersection.

Mrs TAYLOR - My concern is that there is no work going on. It has been sitting there for months and at the beginning of next year you are going to want to put 780 students on that campus and as the traffic arrangement situation currently stands you are not going to be able to do that. It is really a matter of urgency that DIER works through that with the council. It is your bailiwick in the sense that it is your students that are going to have a problem with it. If you can encourage the rest of your State Government colleagues to move on that that would be really good because I would hate this not to be able to happen.

Ms THORP - I will undertake to write a letter to the relevant minister and make sure this issue is progressed.

Mrs TAYLOR - It needs to be moved on really quickly.

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Ms THORP - Not a problem - happy to.

CHAIR - Thank you members; I do not believe that there is anything else.

Minister, I thank you for your input today into these Estimates hearings and also thank everybody that stayed with you all day and obviously the other people that have come and gone. I think it has been very productive and we certainly appreciate the way in which everyone interacted. It is very much appreciated. I invite you and anybody that you see fit to bring with you to further discuss any issues that might be unresolved in Madam President's rooms.

Ms THORP - Thank you kindly but I may well decline at this point in time.

CHAIR - I see no reason why another 10 minutes would not be of value. There are a couple of local government mayors here that you could have those discussions with immediately. Thank you very much and we appreciate your time.

Ms THORP - Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 7.45 p.m.