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THE PARLIAMENTARY JOINT SESSIONAL COMMITTEE MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON MONDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS OF FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

CHAIR - This is our further hearing into the commission of inquiry recommendations and the government's response to those. Today, we had Guy Barnett MP scheduled to appear before the Committee.

Members of the public would be aware of the significant weather event that has occurred and it has impacted a lot of health facilities in the north and north west of the state. The minister rang me this morning to discuss the options for his appearance and we determined that it is best if we defer his appearance to another day so his team can fully focus on correcting and dealing with the challenges in our health system, noting that the North West Regional Hospital is in an area with no power at the moment and other health facilities, including Deloraine, are in similar situations.

Before adjourning the meeting until this afternoon, when the Minister for Education will appear, I pay my respects and give my great thanks to all the SES volunteers, Tasmania Police, the fire service and all the others, particularly the TasNetworks lines people who are out there in these terrible conditions doing their very best to get power back on to people and support people where they are.

That being said, we will resume this hearing at 2:15 p.m., when we will have the Minister for Education.

The Committee was adjourned from 9:01 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.

CHAIR (Ms Forrest) - Welcome, minister, and your team to the hearing into the government's response to the commission of inquiry recommendations.

We appreciate you coming along. We did have an interruption this morning from the Minister for Health for the reasons I outlined earlier in the day.

This is an open public hearing. As you would be aware, it is being broadcast and transcribed by Hansard. We are using voice to text, so please pull your microphones down and try to use them effectively. This hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege. Everything that you say is protected during this hearing but may not extend beyond this room. If there was anything of a confidential nature you wish to share with the committee, you could make that request. Otherwise it is all in public session.

Before I ask you to introduce your witnesses and even though the secretary has appeared before, you possibly need to swear again today. I will make a statement before you do that. Thank you.

I also recognise that during these public hearings we will discuss highly sensitive matters that have deeply impacted the lives of Tasmanians. This might trigger trauma for committee members, ministers, departmental officials and members of the community.

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I also acknowledge the victim/survivors who bravely shared their experiences with the commission of inquiry and thank them all for their courage.

I remind that both sides of the table need to keep this in mind and take a trauma-informed approach to questions and responses provided.

I also encourage anyone impacted by the content matter in this hearing to make contact with the services and supports. These include the statewide sexual assault Support Line 24/7 and support from local specialist councillors provided by the sex assaults support service, SASS, and Laurel House on 1800 697 877 or 1800 My Support; Lifeline 24-hour Crisis Support 13 11 14; Tasmania Lifeline 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. every day of the year, 1800 984 434 for support and referral; 13 Yarn and 24/7 Crisis Support for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people on 13 92 76; and Relationships Australia Tasmania, Specialist Complex Trauma Counselling, Trauma Informed Counselling Well-Being and Referral open 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday on 1300 364 277.

That is the introduction, minister. I invite you to introduce the members of your team at the table and have them take the statutory declaration. Then if you wish to make some opening comments and broad statements about the progress to date in the Education department, or DECYP, I invite you to do so. The intention is to work through the recommendations as they are listed in numerical order, acknowledging we have not got through all of them yet in any portfolio. We have one, sorry, we hope to do so today. If we just keep in mind, we want to try to keep moving a little bit where we can. Thanks.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. I introduce Tim Bullard and Jen Burgess here from DECYP to support me today.

Mr TIM BULLARD, CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND DISABILITY SERVICES and Ms JENNY BURGESS WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION, AND WAS EXAMINED.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I thank you for your opening comments as well. I take this moment to acknowledge and to offer my deepest apologies to all victim/survivors of abuse that has occurred in our state government institutions. We regret where we have failed and we must learn from our failures to ensure the atrocities of the past are never repeated.

I acknowledge the victim/survivors listening to the hearings today online and those who may be in the committee room with us. I thank them for joining us. I acknowledge those who have spoken out and acknowledge those who have not.

We are working towards a future where all children and young people in Tasmania have bright lives and positive futures by ensuring they are known, safe, well and learning. Our government is fully committed and working hard to implement all the recommendations from the commission of inquiry.

Chapter 6 of the commission of inquiry's final report makes recommendations to improve the safety of children and young people in the education system. Work is ongoing and I note that we have already addressed many of the commission of inquiry's recommendations.

As per your comments, Chair, I will not comment on progress against specific recommendations now, as we will discuss those recommendations in detail throughout this afternoon's hearing.

Our key achievements to date in the Education portfolio include:

- Introducing safeguarding leads in every Tasmanian government school, all child and family learning centres and in Tier 4 sites;
- Employing additional psychologists and social workers to support student wellbeing and safety;
- Updating staff resources and training related to preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse;
- Revising safeguarding training, which is compulsory for all departmental staff, contractors and volunteers;
- Developing and releasing the safeguarding framework 'Safe, Secure Supported', which directly aligns with the Child and Youth Safe Standards; and
- Launching the Tell Someone website and accompanying multimedia campaign.

Going forward, our priorities include:

- Undertaking a substantive review of the *Teachers Registration Act*;
- Releasing new and updated evidence-based child sexual abuse training modules and mandatory reporting training modules for all workers to complete on induction as part of their ongoing employment;
- Continuing to improve complaints policies and processes to ensure they are child-focused and easily accessible;
- Continuing to develop education-specific policies, protocols and guidelines for preventing, identifying and responding to harmful sexual behaviours in schools; and
- Developing and implementing age and developmental appropriate mandated sexual abuse prevention curriculum as part of respectful relationships education.

In closing with my opening comments, Chair, every Tasmanian child is entitled to the best start in life. Every Tasmanian child has an inherent right to feel safe, be well and to engage in learning. I want all Tasmanians to know this government is listening and acting. I thank the staff who are working hard to implement these changes. Staff in all areas of my portfolio are working every day to ensure the rights of children and young people are upheld in all that they do, particularly the right to an education, to influence decisions that affect them, and to be safe from harm.

We are focused on putting children and young people at the centre of all we do and are absolutely committed to rebuild the community's trust. We are committed to achieve true reform as we work to ensure people feel safe and are safe in all Tasmanian government schools and education settings.

Thank you, Chair. I happy to move to recommendations.

CHAIR - I will see if any members have any overarching questions from those initial statements.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, minister. One of the things that I was interested in is that in the commission of inquiry report, they specifically said they were conscious that an independent review had only recently been undertaken that closely examined child sexual abuse in schools. The commission report said, 'For that reason, we looked more closely at matters that fell outside the scope of the independent education review'.

Given that the government also committed to implementing recommendations from that independent review, I am wondering whether you would regard that in the same way that we're scrutinising the commission of inquiry recommendations and their implementation, would we not do well to also scrutinise the implementation of the independent review, given the commission clearly saw that as relevant and aligned to their work and they didn't go to those same areas because that work had just been done?

Do you see that we should be scrutinising and checking in on progress against those independent review recommendations?

Ms PALMER - Chair, I'm quite happy to address that review from 2021 if you would like me to. There were quite a number of recommendations that came out of that body of work. It's that body of work that has really set up our response even prior to the commission of inquiry. All those recommendations are completed. I have them listed here except for the first one which is underway. That is all sexual abuse concerns, complaints, responses and outcomes be systematically recorded by what was then the Department of Education, now DECYP, and that those records are periodically analysed to monitor patterns and trends.

In addressing that particular one, I can say that that remaining recommendation 1, systematically recording and analysing all sexual abuse concerns, complaints, responses and outcomes. To that, departmental workers are required to report concerns about the conduct of a former or current DECYP worker's behaviour about children and young people using an online concern notice. This allows the department to record concerns, responses and outcomes, and analyse the data to monitor patterns and trends and target resources accordingly.

The Commission of Inquiry recommendation 6.9 relates to harmful sexual behaviours, and this work will enhance the way the department captures and analyses child sexual exploitation and harmful sexual behaviours. The delivery deadline for this recommendation is in July 2026, which you would be aware of.

The department has established a Complaints Management Oversight Unit to strengthen the complaints management process for children and young people. This also aligns with the commission of inquiry recommendation 9.31. Work that has already been undertaken in relation to the completed recommendation includes release of the department's 'Safe. Secure. Supported. Our Safeguarding Framework', which aligns with the Tasmanian Children and Youth Safe Standards and describes the department's approach to safeguarding children and young people from abuse; the appointment of a safeguarding lead in every government school, child and family learning centres, and our tier four sites, and our safeguarding champions in our libraries; the development of a safeguarding risk management procedure and specific risk

management plans for each Tasmanian government school; and the employment of additional support staff in school, with 16 additional support positions, social workers and psychologists being filled in Tasmanian government schools since 2022, and an additional 4 positions to be filled in the 2025-26 financial year.

We've updated resources for school staff in preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse and released updated mandatory reporting training in February 2024, as well as a new specialised training module on child sexual abuse awareness. These are compulsory for all department employees. There is a requirement for all volunteers and external providers working with children and young people in the department to complete a video version of the safeguarding training module. Advanced training modules are also available for volunteers and external providers at DECYP sites.

You can see there's been quite an amount of work that has been done. With regard to the other recommendations, they've all been completed in previous years. I'll see if the secretary has anything he'd like to add.

Mr BULLARD - Thank you, minister, just to note that the independent Implementation Monitor will also be overseeing the implementation of the recommendations from what we now call the Professor's report - the 2021 report.

Ms WEBB - It would be your view, minister, that this Committee could inquire into the implementation and the ongoing impact and success of those also?

Mr BULLARD - From our perspective, they're all being rolled into one. We're not running them in separate streams. In fact, we've taken the professor's work as the basis of the commission of inquiry work, as the commission did. They all align, yes.

Ms ROSOL - My question relates to the modules that were rolled out for staff that you mentioned. I recently became aware that about six months ago there was a DECYP school principal who was in contact with police about a child safety matter that had gone unreported. The principal claimed they were unaware that they were a mandatory reporter in that instance. While the training and the modules have been rolled out, how are you evaluating the effectiveness of the training so that it is not just people attending it, but we know that they are taking it on board and understanding responsibilities and requirements, and following them?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, I will seek some advice from my secretary.

It's very surprising to us that a principal would not be aware of that - very surprising indeed. If you would like to address that with me offline and give me a specific name, we can look into that, but that would be very surprising. We've had over 13,000 staff who have done these modules, which obviously and absolutely address mandatory reporting. I am very surprised at your comments and would want to follow that up if that was the case.

Ms ROSOL - I agree it's concerning and surprising. My question goes to how you're evaluating the effectiveness of the modules.

Mr BULLARD - The first question is, are people undertaking the modules? As the minister said, over 13,000 members of staff. The modules have tests within them; you can't actually complete the training without answering a number of stop points throughout the

training correctly, and if you don't do that, you are sent back to the beginning of that. There is an inherent block there for people to jump through.

The training is always being updated. We had some really good feedback from this year's, and people made suggestions about other ways it could be presented to make it more accessible or easier. They are certainly being implemented. Every single year, every member of staff needs to undertake that training.

Over the course of time, I'd be very surprised if there's a member of staff that doesn't understand their responsibilities to report - that is module one - but also, the other module is about safeguarding, which was introduced this year, which is looking at issues such as how you might identify, for example, grooming in the workplace.

CHAIR - Some of these matters are covered under recommendations too. Have you got any other overarching ones, Cecily? Otherwise, have any other members got any overarching questions or can we go to 6.1?

Ms WEBB - What is in this interim action we have? Do they all correlate to a recommendation, I wonder? We'll see how we go.

CHAIR - Let's go to the recommendations first. Recommendation 6.1 is a phase two recommendation. Maybe we will identify rather than read it out because it is quite long. It's about introduction and funding of mandatory child sex abuse prevention curriculum as part of the mandatory respectful behaviour's curriculum for early years - early learning programs to year 12. In broad terms, if you could speak to that, minister, as to where that's at.

Ms PALMER - The introduction of a mandatory child sexual abuse prevention curriculum for all students in government schools from early learning through to year 12 will ensure children and young people have increased confidence to identify and report safety issues, reducing their vulnerability to grooming and exploitation. This action will contribute to reducing the occurrence and impacts of child sexual abuse through a coordinated approach. I probably should have said at the beginning that this is a recommendation due for completion in July 2026.

The action will contribute to reducing the occurrence and impacts of child sexual abuse through a coordinated approach to protect prevention, identification and response to child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours. This recommendation reflects the views of children and young people reported in 'Take Notice, Believe Us and Act!' We know there is a wider call from children and young people for clearer and more explicit teaching around inappropriate behaviours and consent as captured by the Commissioner for Children and Young People's 2022 report, 'I think adults play a big role in this'.

Our response to recommendation 6.1 will be informed by our existing efforts to embed respectful relationships education in our schools, and will be closely linked to many other recommendations of the commission, which is including the work of the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People under recommendation 6.2, safeguarding training for education staff and volunteers under recommendation 6.5, and the whole-of-government sexual abuse reform strategy under recommendation 19.01.

If you're looking at our progress to date, as of the 31 July 2024, initial planning activities have been completed to determine what is required to deliver this recommendation, including actions and additional resources to support its implementation. The department is undertaking desktop mapping of system level programs and policies that contribute to respectful relationships education across Tasmanian government schools. This work will distinguish between existing efforts to support embedding respectful relationships education within schools and the work required to implement this recommendation. The next steps that we have with this one are separate to the desktop mapping. The department will examine the way current respectful relationships education works and how optional programs in schools are supporting children and young people to practise protective and help-seeking behaviours. This will be informed by the evidence and findings of the commission. In undertaking this process, we will consult and examine:

- Delivery of respectful relationships education from early learning to year 12;
- The supports required to deliver child sexual abuse prevention content;
- The role of school-based programs within broader community-wide prevention strategies as noted by the commission;
- The voices of children and young people, acknowledging the right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting them; and
- The voices of victim/survivors presented to the commission

We will re-examine best practice approaches and evidence from other jurisdictions including South Australia's mandatory curriculum referenced by the commission with a view to identifying key features of an equivalent curriculum in Tasmania. This includes the considerations noted by the secretary in his appearance before the commission, curriculum alignment and school timetabling, key roles in delivery and resources required, and parent/carers rights to request their child not participate in programs.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Thank you, minister. You mentioned there were going to be desktop reviews. Will you be seeking feedback from schools and what supports the schools will be needing as well to deliver it? I noticed that it's based on South Australia and everything else, but is there some way to find out from our schools what they need for support?

Ms PALMER - Yes, it is really important as we see strains and stresses on our workforce. It's absolutely vital that their voice is heard in this space. That will certainly form part of the work that we need to do. I think the voices of our workforce will be loud and clear throughout this work.

Do you want to add anything to that, secretary?

Mr BULLARD - It's important to note that a lot of this is already covered in Australian curriculum content, but this is about understanding why the intended curriculum isn't being taught. That is asking the question: what support do you need to teach it? It's also about understanding whether or not it's working for the young people in terms of being age appropriate and engaging. Each of the areas covered, from early years, prep to year 10, then years 11 and 12, do already have key outcomes that we're looking at in our respectful relationships teaching and learning package. This is a refinement. The commission was clear in mandating that it actually occurs.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, in terms of the desktop mapping that you've done on that, and the resources required you mentioned, has that looked into resources required both within schools and by curriculum services to be able to do the work to include this in - looking at what needs to be included in the curriculum? What has that shown you about what additional resources will be required?

Mr BULLARD - At this point we're looking at what, for example, the South Australian curriculum requires and then the question will be: is that appropriate or not for a Tasmanian context? If it is, we would be working with South Australia to see how we could reuse parts or all of that curriculum. In terms of the additional materials, I think we've already looked at lowering the cost or the resource impost of developing those. That would also inform what schools need in terms of the rollout of those materials. We have found South Australia to be a very good partner to us in education. We have a very similar system and we have shared resources previously, so if it looks like it's fit for purpose, that's where we'll be going.

Ms WHITE - I'm keen to understand what programs are available for students in Tasmanian schools now. I know that there are a variety, you spoke about the fact that we do deliver some, but they're not compulsory. The question is trying to find out why they're not being delivered in the way that I think we would probably hope. Can you name the different programs that are currently available for students in public schools, please?

Mr BULLARD - Thank you, minister. There are some that have been centrally supported. You might be aware, for example, of Bravehearts, which operates in a number of schools. Family Planning Tasmania also provides a level of relationship or sex education in schools.

Schools have had some scope about how they want to deliver those components of the curriculum. Some have chosen to buy-in external providers and we have looked at those. Others have chosen or come and asked whether they could have something else. Others have said we are competent within our health and physical education curriculum and our teacher workforce to deliver those. If you want a list that is more comprehensive than that, we will need to take that on notice as, at the moment, it is a school-based decision.

Ms WHITE - I think that answers the question. I am just keen to understand why it has been patchy in delivery, but that explains it. Thank you.

Mr BULLARD - Certainly we have had a system - in terms of the curriculum delivery for this area, schools and school communities have had strong preferences for what they want to see in terms of delivery and we've been guided by that. As we move to something that is more mandated as the commission required, we will be providing much more detailed guidance about what should or should not be delivered.

CHAIR - In terms of content?

Mr BULLARD - In terms of providers. The content is really clearly set out in version nine of the Australian curriculum. You can find if you look here - these things really resonate - key learnings in prep to year 10: recognising and describing feelings and emotions that can be warning signals of unsafe or uncomfortable situations, taking responsibility for your own safety, applying and practising strategies for seeking help and support. That sits really

comfortably, the mechanism by which that is delivered. Do I just deliver that in terms of my curriculum delivery in HPE or do we get someone in to do that? That's where we have used Bravehearts, for example, because that is for very young children, I think from prep to year 2, and the way that it operates is through Ditto the Lion and his safety messages. When we get into senior secondary and upper secondary, then school nursing plays a bigger role as well because the advice is often much more tailored to particular individuals.

Ms WEBB - If I could I just follow-up on that I might, as it ties into what I was interested to hear about. When it does shift into that mandatory space are you still anticipating that there will be a school-by-school choice as to how delivery occurs as long as it meets the mandatory requirements?

Mr BULLARD - We want to look at what the curriculum requirements are and then we will want to look at the modes of delivery. As we have evolved as a system, we have either made very clear directions around the underpinning principles of anything that a course or program needs to meet, or we have provided a suite that schools can choose from. We just need to look at that.

The other thing, too, to note in this area, is that it is highly sensitive for some parents and carers and close consultation with school communities and school associations around modes of delivery and mechanisms for delivery will also need to take place to ensure that the community feels that it is appropriate.

Ms WEBB - What I was interested to know, too, is about the funding. Given the situation where it is not mandatory yet, do we fund schools to deliver in the manner that they wish at this present time? Are all schools offered additional funding in order to deliver now? And, when we move to mandatory, will we be anticipating providing the additional funding required to deliver that unit?

Ms PALMER - I will ask the secretary to address the funding.

Mr BULLARD - Thank you, minister. Again, coming back, we are not starting from ground zero here, we already have respectful relationships and resources available to deliver that. There is also a requirement around health and physical education and resources to deliver that.

The question will be: what is the gap between what is being delivered and what is required? We will then need to look at that on a case-by-case basis. My hunch is some schools will already be going above and beyond in this area and others will need some additional support. But we will need to do that. Once we know what is mandatory, we will need to see how close or far away individual schools are to delivering that and then we will need to look at whether additional resources are required or if it's something that can be delivered in their current resource package.

Ms WEBB - When we move to a mandatory situation, is that going to, in some cases in schools that aren't currently covering this area, going to displace other curriculum or other elements that are being covered in their curriculum currently?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I think that's work that is to be done. That's the body of work that we're doing at the moment. We know what's available and, as the secretary said, we know some

schools are at a certain level and others are at others. The work that we need to do is actually to work that out so that we can make sure that it's delivered appropriately.

Ms WEBB - I presume the resource that's being applied to implementing this recommendation sits within the curriculum team in the department or the curriculum area. Would that be right?

Mr BULLARD - Child and student wellbeing are doing the initial research and scan on the work, I understand.

Ms WEBB - That's - forgive me for not being really familiar with the internal structures.

Mr BULLARD - No.

Ms WEBB - Is that separate to the curriculum team currently, then?

Mr BULLARD - It sits within the same portfolio. It sits in the portfolio that supports schools and teachers with materials, resources and professional learning, but it sits slightly to one side of that. It is concentrated on those areas of personal development for children and young people, which this fits within at the moment.

Ms WEBB - What would be the resource that we're applying at the moment to implement this recommendation?

Mr BULLARD - I know that there is an officer who is working on that, but I'm not sure how she is managing her team to deliver on that. We'd need to look at that. I think at the moment the resource impost is not great, because it is looking at what other jurisdictions have done and what the requirements of a high-quality program in this area look like, a lot of which can be done through desktop review. The resource here goes into developing the curriculum materials. Once we've decided what is that approach, the resource - the part that is resource heavy - is developing the curriculum materials and the professional learning to support that and then rolling that out to staff.

Again, if we were to look at South Australia and we were in agreement that that looked like a curriculum that would sit well within a Tasmanian context, then some of that resource impost wouldn't exist, certainly in terms of the material development and the scope and sequence et cetera. The resource would then go into providing the time for staff to undertake that professional learning who were going to be either teaching or involved in the delivery of this program.

Ms WEBB - The reason I'm asking questions about the resource being applied now is that I'm aware that, in the curriculum area, we've already cut back that resource within the department. We've sent people back into schools rather than continue in roles in that area. I'm just trying to, I guess, understand what we're actually allocating from what seems to be quite a scarce area in the department, at the moment, when it comes to curriculum. We've got other course development work that's been paused, I believe, because of resource constraints in the curriculum area. Have we taken people offline off another project in order to do this project?

Mr BULLARD - No, in the child and student wellbeing team, that is one of their priority areas. I think, as you have absolutely alluded to, we have had to redeploy staff back into schools

who are teacher qualified. It doesn't mean that we don't have the resource to contract in from other states or from external providers for the delivery of some of the curriculum areas that were previously being serviced in-house. There is some flexibility there in the way that we use the resource, but at the moment it's not sitting in curriculum. It is sitting in an area that doesn't rely on teachers to do the work. It's policy analysts effectively doing some of that work. We're not at the point where they're developing the curriculum resource.

Ms WEBB - As a not-frontline, in-school area of the department, is that an area of the department that we're anticipating will be subject to an efficiency dividend in this Budget coming up and therefore may have an impact on the work that's being undertaken in this space?

Ms PALMER - I don't think there's been any question that we are making sure that whatever resources are required to see through the recommendations from the commission of inquiry, that will come to fruition. I don't think there's any question there.

CHAIR - Can I just clarify, does this include non-public schools or is your focus entirely on the public school system?

Mr BULLARD - There's a later recommendation about sharing with non-government and independent schools. Do you want us to talk more broadly there or would you like to address the respectful relationships component here?

CHAIR - That component here. We can go to the more - what these other parts in that. If you wouldn't mind.

Mr BULLARD - Without pre-empting the other recommendation, we're in active discussions and working closely with the independent and Catholic sectors on the delivery of aspects of the commission of inquiry. It would be foreseeable that as we've developed these curriculum resources that we would look at ways of sharing or offering those to the non-government schools. We've certainly done that, for example, with the reading work that we're doing around the intensive approach to the teaching of reading and that's gone really well.

Independent schools obviously make their own decisions, as does the Catholic system, but we have offered that. That really is for prep to year 10 to 11 and 12 is a TASC course that covers all sectors. The elements of 11 and 12 provision would by their very nature become available if not required to be taught in 11 and 12 because that would be the course specification.

CHAIR - When you say 'if not required', why wouldn't it be required?

Mr BULLARD - Well, required if the schools - it would depend, and I would need to seek some advice from Jenny. It depends whether the course is mandated or not, or whether students choose to do the course. That's what I'm saying. The course requirements would be there, but whether or not the students are undertaking that course.

CHAIR - Yes, I understand what you mean in year 11 and 12. The example that the [inaudible 2.52.16 p.m.] had about sharing reading resources is a little bit different from sharing this, when you look at the philosophical matters that may guide some of the areas that non-public schools might consider. Do we have any expectation that we're mandatory for all schools who operate under the relevant state legislation?

Mr BULLARD - The mechanism for requiring the Catholic and independent systems to meet particular standards - it might be standards for delivery - would be through the non-government schools registration board, which sets the standards for those schools. It would be foreseeable in the future about safeguarding matters and child safety more broadly that there could be a mandated standard that that sector needs to meet. That is a matter for an independent board to make. However, the minister can, through a process of sending out a letter of expectation, set out some things that she would like that board to turn its mind to through the course of a year. That's open.

CHAIR - Without pre-empting the minister's actions, is there an intention to go down that path?

Ms PALMER - For me, it has been fantastic to see the collaboration that we are now seeing between the Catholic education system and our independents and the department. There is such goodwill on all sides. I think there's also a real acknowledgement that this can be a potential loophole when things can go wrong if we're operating in silos here. We do address this a bit more at the other recommendation, but we are working far more collaboratively in a stringent process with regular meetings and topics for discussion. We are absolutely identifying that we have to make sure that a child, regardless of what school they are in, that we have the same expectation that that child will be safe and heard and known.

CHAIR - I want to come back to that but move to another recommendation. We will go to 6.2, which I think you touched on in your opening statements in terms of this establishment of the Office of Safeguarding within the department. You also talked about appointment of safeguarding officers in every school. Is there anything further to add?

Ms PALMER - This recommendation has been completed. Our government recognises the value of ensuring that there is a school focus team within the department that concentrates on learning from systemic reviews and trend data and is independent from responding to critical incidences. The department acknowledges the commissioner's view that a focus safeguarding unit for schools is required, and agrees that schools in early years, which is the part of the department specialised in school operations, is best placed to provide this support.

I can confirm that from term 1 of 2024, the Safeguarding in Schools unit has been operational within schools and early years with a focus on safeguarding children and young people in the education context, as well as educating and informing school staff and the broader school community. The Safeguarding in Schools unit works with school safeguarding leads as they continue to build their risk assessment and management skills to put in place risk management plans that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating the risks of child sexual abuse.

The team's work centres around cultural change and education about identification, prevention, early intervention and support in schools and the early years. The Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People continues to lead the implementation of *Safe. Secure. Supported* and DECYP's safeguarding framework, and in turn the Child and Youth Safe standards across DECYP. I can confirm that neither the Safeguarding in Schools unit nor the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People are involved in critical incident management beyond learning from systemic reviews and trend data. That recommendation has been met. I don't know if you want to add anything to that, secretary?

Mr BULLARD - Thank you, minister. I think it is worth noting the intent here. The commission were actually very impressed with the work that we'd done through the safeguarding unit when we were the Department of Education, and they were very keen that there was a schools focus. They recognised it was important that those services and supports were available to Child Safety and Youth Justice, but this was about maintaining what they saw and it not getting diluted. We did make a structural change earlier this year where we moved the Safeguarding in School's unit out into the learning service operations. We still have a central safeguarding unit that services the whole agency and supports those people that are closer to the front line, but this is about moving that expertise and that support closer to schools.

CHAIR - You also said in this update you provided that there's been safeguarding officers appointed to every school. Was that someone who was trained up from within the school? Notionally, if that is a person who's already had a fairly heavy workload, how did you manage that? I'm interested in where that person came from and how they were appointed.

Mr BULLARD - Every school has a proportion of FTE that is a safeguarding lead. We provided them with the funding so that they could, if they wished to, recruit an additional person to come into that school setting. Some chose to, for example, move people who are on a part-time load to a full-time load, and I think overall there were about 70 FTE additional funded into the system.

Those individuals at the moment do hold a teacher qualification; they are supported externally through that Safeguarding in School's unit with appropriate professional learning and training, and that is really hands-on. If I give an example, every school is required to have a safeguarding risk management plan identifying those safety risks. They might be to do with areas of the school, for example, those areas of the playground or toilets that need to be supervised.

Every single school has had an opportunity to come together. There was a few that were left that couldn't make it to a number of sessions, but by 16 September, every school will have been supported in a very collaborative way to come together and put those plans together. We're not leaving those individuals out to work this out for themselves. The other thing is that they do have a level of training so that they know exactly where to go if there's an issue that occurs on their site. They're not responsible. For example, they're not the only mandatory reporter or the people that need to work with workplace relations, but they are a first point of contact for staff to say, 'What do we do in this situation?'

CHAIR - Their training is above and beyond what all the other staff have to have? There's bespoke training, if you like?

Mr BULLARD - Yes. Much more nuanced and in a higher level of detail.

Ms WEBB - Where that training sourced? Was that picked up from somewhere in particular - from an existing training package?

Mr BULLARD - A lot of it comes from the child safe organisations' parameters and what's required. Some of it is just very technical - how do we do a particular process within this agency, for example, when a child raises a concern about an adult and their behaviour. The central safeguarding team did a lot of work through its *Safe. Secure. Supported.* That's our

safeguarding framework that sets out how we meet each of the child safe standards, which are now overseen by the independent regulator.

CHAIR - In terms of those that were trained up from within the school, I don't imagine there's people in a school without that full load. You said that sometimes the part-timer would have been made a full-time. What's the expectation of this person in terms of the number of hours they would spend on this role?

Mr BULLARD - The hours are prescribed by the funding that the school receives. The minimum is 0.2 and the maximum is 1 FTE. That is dictated by the complexity of the site, therefore, someone will know, 'I'm on this one day a week' or 'I'm on this five days a week', or something in between.

CHAIR - You're talking about the physical structure of the school or the demographic structure of the school? What are we talking about?

Mr BULLARD - I think there's a mix in there. It started off with enrolments.

CHAIR - The number of enrolments?

Mr BULLARD - Yes. There have been some reflections made by particular schools and therefore I think we have - I'd need to check that, but we were going to look at resourcing around complex sites, where there are multiple buildings. They were certainly in discussion around that, where there were other parameters.

CHAIR - A lot of the really old buildings, minister, as you're well aware, have a lot of hidden spaces where children go that are not in view of any adult on the site. I would have thought that even having one day a week to deal with some of those schools would be a stretch when that person may have been engaged from within the school staff to undertake this role as well.

Mr BULLARD - Their role is not to police, for want of a better term, their safety. It's to, for example, coordinate the risk management plan. Some of those plans, for example, have identified, recommended or have implemented that some parts of the playground just aren't used anymore. Some have said that there need to be additional staff on duty if a part of the playground is to be activated. I was at a primary school recently where they had actually cordoned off, if you like, they had put it as being out of bounds, because just as you've described, it allowed young people to go behind a building and be totally out of sight.

CHAIR - It limits the options.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, I recall from when these positions were first announced and the commitment was made to introduce the safeguarding leads that at that time they were to be managed from within schools' existing budgets. Now we've heard that there's been some additional funding. Can you elaborate on that a little - when that funding started to be provided and also whether every school in the state has had the opportunity or been offered that funding?

Mr BULLARD - The Professor's report had its own stream of funding. I don't want to say the figure in case I'm wrong, but I have \$42 million in my head - I'm sure someone will correct me if I'm wrong - and these FTE were brought on in two phases. Schools got an initial

additional allocation and then the full allocation came on this year - I think in 2024. But no school was asked to do it within its existing resources.

Ms LOVELL - No, I wouldn't imagine that they would.

Mr BULLARD - They all had access to the additional funding, but it did come on in two steps. We'll try and qualify that figure.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. Sorry, can I just ask you to confirm when those two stages - I've just missed that, sorry. I was trying to write things down.

Ms PALMER - The 2022-23 state budget committed \$36.4 million over four years to implement safeguarding measures. Of this, \$26.1 million was allocated to implement the Safeguarding in Schools model for all state government schools, including appointing safeguarding leads, formerly safeguarding officers. Ongoing funding of \$9.7 million each year will support these appointments beyond 2025-26.

Schools received an FTE funding allocation of an advanced skills teacher AST level position to fulfil safeguarding functions based on enrolment numbers and as the secretary said, it was ranging from 0.2 FTE to 1 FTE. For the 2024 school year, a total of 70 FTEs allocated to schools and in 2023 schools received 50 per cent of this allocation. In 2024 and beyond they received the full allocation.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - That answers your question?

Mrs PETRUSMA - Thanks, minister. I see that under 6.2 like policy development is one of the key deliverables and I was just wondering how is the new Safeguarding Schools and early years unit feeding information back to policy makers in the department about what it's seeing on the ground and is there any initial trends or feedback at all coming?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I have to pass to the secretary about any initial trends or feedback, but there certainly is a really strong relationship between Safeguarding Schools and early years unit and the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People and the new operational team regularly is providing information to central areas of the department, which is informing that policy and decision-making process. With regard to early trends, secretary, do you have anything you could add to that?

Mr BULLARD - I don't know if we've had early trends. Probably the biggest feedback that we've had is how do we make the complex as simple as possible. Certainly, that has been one of the things that we've worked on. This area is very important and can be made very complex. Looking at how we get those key messages out, I think moving to the Safeguarding in Schools unit out in our schools and early years portfolio and also making sure that it's working really closely with our student support area and our social workers and psychologists in particular is meaning that the product that's been developed to support schools is very practical by its very nature.

CHAIR - Thank you. Meg?

Ms WEBB - Thank you. First, just to check the safeguarding leads that are there, is that a common position description across all the schools?

Mr BULLARD - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Great. Is that available somewhere in the public domain or could you provide that to us just for reference as something - thank you. We can request it of you?

Mr BULLARD - Yes. Sorry, probably nodding is not useful. I could actually talk. Yes. We could provide that. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I wanted to ask about 6.2. Is the Office of Safeguarding being established and that's done, and then the safeguarding leads into the school connected to that? What has been put in place to evaluate and monitor and measure success with these initiatives? What are we doing to know whether and how well these new approaches are working?

Ms PALMER - Outcomes.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Both of that at office level, but then also in the schools with the leads?

Mr BULLARD - One of the things that we are looking at is actually - and it's going to come back to how well staff actually understand their obligations and responsibilities - so as the training and the assessment of that becomes more nuanced, that's going to give us the most important - I should say one of the most important - outcomes. The second that we want to look at is the voices of children and young people and whether or not they feel safe to speak up, whether they feel that they have a trusted adult that they can make a disclosure to. The child and student wellbeing survey has those questions in it. We would hope to see an upward trend, if we can create an environment where children and young people have the confidence to raise issues that concern them, then we will be 80 per cent of the way there, the other 20 per cent being that adults know what to do with that information.

The other thing is that we want to ensure that we have people in the right jobs. At the moment, the safeguarding leads are our best guess at how we can have a positive impact in schools. Why I say that, in terms of picking, for example, an advanced skills teacher as having the right level of seniority and expertise, however we are constantly reviewing that. One thing that we know is, for example, that teachers aren't a dime a dozen anymore. Are there other roles within that school that could be undertaking that, or is there a model where some of those roles could actually sit outside of school but service a number of schools? As you'd be aware, if you're a small school and you're getting a point two allocation, that might be difficult to feel, but if you're five small schools, for example, on the West Coast, then having one FTE that's working across those schools has a benefit not only in the quality of the person that you can retain, but it also has a benefit in terms of cross-pollinating the work that's going on across those schools.

Ms WEBB - Can I just clarify though, have we got an evaluation framework or a structured way that we're going to be monitoring measuring? Have we got a set of criteria or outcomes that can report back to us, for example, when we come back to you in a year's time to ask how well this has done, rather than just anecdotal?

Mr BULLARD - That's actively under development, our outcomes framework. Our strategic plan was set this year. We spent 12 months as an agency coming together around our strategic plan. The next piece of work which is in active design is the outcomes framework, which we'll report against the plan around safety. There's one whole stream about safety and another whole stream about workforce knowledge and capability.

CHAIR - Minister, the secretary made some comments about some of this data being collected through the child wellbeing survey. That's been around for a while now. Have the questions been modified to elicit more direct outcomes-focused feedback regarding the safety of a child to raise a matter like this? I haven't looked at the survey questions for a while now, but I'm just thinking that if they've always had this same question, it may be that we're actually talking about something else, not whether I feel safe on the swing, for example.

Mr BULLARD - I don't have the questions top of mind either, so we would need to go and do that.

CHAIR - The question is: have they been modified to try and pick up on this more focused child safety factor?

Mr BULLARD - I think there are two questions that that are worth asking. One is, first of all, can we actually correlate or put a number of questions together to get a good idea about whether or not you're safe? Certainly, that's work that we've done on engagement. We know that there's not one question in there that says, 'I'm engaged', but we've worked out that by correlating three or four or five questions together, we can actually start to get, 'Oh, there the elements have engaged.'

There are certainly questions in there - and one is about having a trusted adult at school - that we know directly correlate to safety. That was one of the things that the professor anecdotally told us, that one of the biggest protective measures was, 'I have an adult at school that I trust and I feel that I could raise a matter with', but I think the question's a good one. We need to go and look at whether or not we can correlate the current questions, or whether there needs to be other questions.

Ms PALMER - Interestingly, at a primary school I was visiting recently, they were actually - I joined a class where they were doing a body of work on this, where they had a cut-out of their hand, and on that hand they were saying who are the people of school, home, and community that you know you could go to if you felt uncomfortable or unsafe, that you could tell anything to.

CHAIR - I used to do this in sex-ed when I was in schools years ago.

Ms PALMER - I thought that was really good, because it brought to the front of mind to those children to think about, 'Where would I go?' It is good to see that schools are actually on the ground playing their role in making sure that kids know or at least are thinking about, 'Who could I go to?'

CHAIR - One would assume, as we have seen with other areas of making it easier and more acceptable to report, that we could see an increase in reports, which would not necessarily be a bad thing. It is not what the action was taken to follow.

Ms PALMER - Yes. How do we monitor that? It might be that there is a spike. Then how do you monitor the actions that are taken to ensure that the children are adequately cared for in that - with a view to getting these reports down, because it will not be happening any more, hopefully.

Mr BULLARD - Certainly, there are increased disclosures from children and young people as we have spoken about some of these things and said it is alright to speak up. It is actually alright to speak up because you just do not feel safe, you do not actually need to say, it does not need to be a catastrophe. What we have done as we are building the capacity of the system to better know how to respond is we have centralised the way that that response occurs. All disclosures need to be centrally reported immediately and then support is provided to the school to manage those disclosures, rather than saying to a school, 'You choose your own adventure about the level of importance or support that you provide.'

CHAIR - The response comes from outside that particular school or the action to ensure there is a response?

Mr BULLARD - The support for that response. Two things happen on a disclosure being made or a concern, we call them a concern notice because we do not want to get into it being anything until it is something, so you raise a concern.

The first is that workplace relations are advised that there is a concern that has been raised by a young person. Alongside that, and more importantly, is that student support are advised that there has been a disclosure made by a young person. Both sides of the business then go and do what they need to do, but the most important part of that is supporting that young person who has disclosed that concern, making sure that if it is a very serious disclosure that they are absolutely safe, but in every single one of those making sure that they feel supported.

Ms PALMER - If I could just add to that, I think one of the things that I have found very interesting in the months that I have been Education minister is talking about, even if it seems quite minimal, children will actually test adults out - 'If I say this, will I just be ignored or will I be responded to?' - and that is why sometimes those concerns could initially appear perhaps on the lesser end of the spectrum, but sometimes that is a child going, 'Well, I wonder if they will do anything about that and, if they do something about that, maybe I can feel a bit safer to say, "Well, actually, it is a bit more, and it is this and it is this."' It is understanding the psyche of children and how they might gauge whether they will be heard. It has been quite fascinating to learn about that.

Ms WEBB - Just some further questions on the safeguarding leads in schools. You have described the formula where schools may range from either 0.2 or up to full-time depending and that has resulted in an additional funded 70 FTE positions for this year.

However, secretary, you also identified that some schools might have had trouble potentially recruiting for their allocation. While that is what has been funded, what is actually there on the ground right now? How many schools have their safeguarding lead in place in the way envisaged and funding provided for but, in reality, what does it look like?

Mr BULLARD - It is a priority that they have one. I think the other question is what is not happening if they have not been able to recruit one. It is not about, 'We do not have one, therefore we are not safeguarding on our school.' They know that is a priority staff allocation that they need to have in place. The requirements of the role are being acquitted on that site.

PUBLIC

The question would be: where is it falling if they haven't been able to get a new person to be allocated into that role?

CHAIR - Every school has one, some will have newly recruited people, others will have people doing it off the side of their desk?

Mr BULLARD - They will have done role redefinition, yes.

Ms WEBB - To what extent have you heard back from schools about any situations in which schools feel that they aren't adequately funded to be doing the work in this space? That's not just about allocating someone to a role, but for their size and capacity and what's needed to fulfil the criteria and the intent of the safeguarding requirements. Have any schools been feeding back to you that they're not able to do that with the funding that's currently being provided to them?

Mr BULLARD - We could take that on notice. Schools do an annual acquittal about the safeguarding activity on their site and so we could look at whether any had reported they didn't feel they were able to meet the expectations.

I should have noted earlier, too, that there is a full review of the model in 2025. We've let it run for two years, half-funding effect for 2023, full-funding effect for 2024, then in 2025 we will go back and look at that model to see whether or not it was appropriate.

Ms WEBB - Will we have our outcomes framework in place by then when we do the review?

Mr BULLARD - Yes, the outcomes framework will be in place as well, so we'll be able to look at the measures moving forward.

Ms WEBB - Is that expected to be there prior to 2025? Are we anticipating completing the outcomes framework work ahead of 2025?

Mr BULLARD - For 2025.

Ms WEBB - Right. If the things that are developed in that outcomes framework, if certain criteria or measures or outcomes are in that framework that require data or information being collected along the way, across the time we've had this in place through 2023-24, is it too late to get it in 2025 if we haven't been collecting the data or the metrics that we need for it?

Mr BULLARD - Would you be happy for me to hand to Jenny?

Ms PALMER - Sure.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. For any school year - the 2025 school year by way of example - schools will be thinking about and working towards what their own improvement plans and outcomes frameworks will look like for the following school year and what data they will use out of the data that is centrally collected, as well as the data that is collected at an individual school level.

Our aim is to have that outcome framework developed, ready for about the October period. Schools can then use that as an input into how they are going to reflect that in their school-improvement plan, how the system is going to collect data, and then how they will monitor that and embed that within their school-improvement planning for 2025. We work on a cycle where, if we're asking schools to do something new for the following year, that has to be in place by about September or October.

Ms WEBB - Through you, minister. We're talking about September-October 2024, which we're in now. We're having an outcomes framework ready now for them to do their planning for 2025 that we would then be reviewing and monitoring, measuring how well we're doing in 2025, based on an outcomes framework that's about to be rolled out now?

Ms BURGESS - We'd be starting to collect the data. Some of that data, based on the outcomes framework, would be centrally collected and some of that would align to the data that's already collected in the student wellbeing survey, as well as other surveys that are being collected across the system. From there, depending on what's required of the school, we would start to implement it.

Ms WEBB - I'm just trying to understand, the outcomes framework is about to be completed and released?

Ms BURGESS - We're on version six of the outcomes framework, so it's still being modified. We're at the process now to say, if that's the outcome we're seeking to achieve as a system, what is the data that we need to have to be able to say that that is either the right outcome or a proxy measure for that outcome.

Ms WEBB - Excellent. What you've described to me is, the schools need to get that outcomes framework and what it describes in this month or the next, in order to do their planning for next year. Are we expecting that to be provided to the schools being completing that work this month or next month?

Ms BURGESS - Every school would review their school-improvement plan every year. They would do a review of where they are and where they're at. They take signals from the system about what is non-negotiable versus what is negotiable at an individual school level. From there we would be giving them guidance and working with them about how they start to address the outcomes framework in all of the elements - the outcomes framework goes to known, safe, well, and learning - therefore, all of those elements would then be worked out at an operational level.

Leadership teams in schools would come together with their staff and work through a process of: how did we go this year? What do we need to focus on for next year? What does that look like? How will we measure that?

Ms WEBB - I appreciate the information being provided. I think we're talking a little bit at cross-purposes. I'm trying to track back to the answer given a little bit earlier by the secretary about being, apparently, in a process at the moment of developing an outcomes framework. The question I am trying to get a straightforward answer to: when is that work developing the outcomes framework going to be completed? When will that outcomes framework be able to be presented to us in a document?

Mr BULLARD - I'm just clarifying the question.

Ms BURGESS - Are you asking the question about when would the outcomes framework be public? Is that the nature of the question, or is it when will schools have greater levels of visibility on the outcomes framework?

Ms WEBB - If those are two different answers, you are welcome to give me both. I was focused on when will the work on the outcomes framework be complete? The following question then is: when is it public? If it's going to be public, let's start with those two questions. When is it going to be complete? When will it be public?

Ms PALMER - Can I try to answer this question? I won't have the fabulous words, but I think there's never a full stop at the end of this. My understanding is that every year a body of work is done with schools looking at the next year and this is part of the work. It's not something that is separate, it's part of what is normal practice in schools. Please stop me if I'm not interpreting this right, but this is my understanding of normal practice of what is in schools. This body of work will become part of that, as part of looking to the next year, they're looking at what are the outcomes of, for example, what we're talking about now with the leads in schools.

It is part of the work that is happening now. This would be one part of a bigger conversation that schools are having. My expectation would be that every year you would grow on that. It wouldn't just be, 'Here's the list that says, if you tick all these boxes, you're nailing these outcomes'. It would be that something that we would keep evolving. There wouldn't be a full stop.

Is that going towards answering your question?

Ms WEBB - I'm not quite sure. I'm struggling to figure out how we're not quite landing together in the same spot here. Thank you, that is useful information and I agree, I would expect that's the way it's approached. I'm trying to track back to the answer provided by the secretary earlier when he referred to the fact that in development was an outcomes framework.

My simple question is: that piece of work that was referred to, when is that work going to be completed? Which isn't to say, we might not then refresh and redo and improve it again next year and there might not be an iterative ongoing process, but he referred to a piece of work in development.

CHAIR - Try to rephrase it perhaps.

Ms WEBB - You referred to a piece of work in development. I'm wondering when that will be complete.

Mr BULLARD - As Jenny said, we're up to version six. We will need to go out with a good draft of that in October to allow schools to plan. I would hope that that is settled by the end of the year, at least in a penultimate draft sense that we could put out for broader discussion. One of the things that we have had to tackle is that schools have for a number of years had a measuring school progress dashboard. They already have a set of measures that they are measured against and report against, but we've moved into a bigger agency. In doing that we

have had to look at how we're going to measure not only learning and wellbeing, but also safety and being known.

The second thing is, too, that we've been very clear in the department executive that we don't just want to retrofit measures. We can see that a lot of it can be widget counting if you let it. The underlying outcome stands there around students being involved in decisions that affect them, for example. I'll take that as a notional outcome. I don't want to see a system whereby we go, 'How many times was a student asked what they wanted for lunch?' We actually need to be measuring or asking children and young people, 'Do you feel like you have agency in your learning?', for example, or in decisions that have been made for them in child safety.

That's the hesitancy in saying it's all going to be done and dusted by December. We could absolutely recycle a range of measures from data we hold in the department, but I don't believe it would be the right data to be collecting that's going to inform better decisions of the department, of schools, and of Child Safety and Youth Justice, but ultimately as we move forward - of the parliament - in terms of scrutinising how well we're doing.

Ms WEBB - I agree, because I'm not asking the question with an intent behind it to tell you to rush. I started this line of questioning by asking about how we're going to be measuring the success and achievement of the Office of Safeguarding and the leads in schools. That's where we began this line of questioning, because, as you rightly identify, it will be not just the work of the department but the work of the parliament. That's what I'm trying to understand. What are those frameworks? What are those measures going to be that we will all understand to be the way we are measuring success?

Mr BULLARD - Yes, and it's a good question.

CHAIR - Can I try and nail the question down?

Ms WEBB - No, I think we've got there.

Mr BULLARD - I think we agree that we want to have those high-level outcomes with actual meaningful measures. We will aim to have that finished by the end of the year, but I suppose I'm flagging there might be data gaps, because there might be new collections that we need to do.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

CHAIR - We'll move to 6.3. This relates to the department making child safeguarding policies publicly available. It is phase one. I assume most of this has been done for policies that have been finished or finalised.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I have some comments that I can make, or we can just go straight to questions if members feel comfortable. This is a recommendation that has been met. I'm happy to go straight to questions in light of the fact -

CHAIR - A question I have is: are there any policies that are still under development that are not yet published?

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - I might as well just read it because I think it has the answer to your question in it.

Making the department's safeguarding policies publicly available ensures that all Tasmanians are able to see how the protection of children and young people is prioritised through clear and enforceable policies and a culture that champions the rights of children. The department has made all child safeguarding policies and related documents publicly accessible on their website.

CHAIR - There are no more in development? They've all been completed? That's the question.

Mr BULLARD - There is a separate recommendation which we'll come to about code of conduct. That really was the last piece of architecture in terms of the policy suite that needed to be addressed. I would say that we do have the whole policy library in review at the moment. Coming back to that concept of simplicity - really tangible, able to be accessed by staff and understood - that's the lens that we're now coming back to the policy suite and making sure that they all align.

CHAIR - I think it might be in 6.4. If members want to go there, we might just do that and then we'll have a 10- or 15-minute break. 6.4, minister, which is talking about developing a professional conduct policy, which is recommendation 20.2 in addition to this.

Ms PALMER - If we look at progress to date, the department has completed the development of a conduct and behaviour policy - general conduct standards - for all workers, and an additional set of conduct standards for workers in schools and child and family learning centres.

These documents have been developed with key internal stakeholders, which enables identification of areas for improving and strengthening of the existing framework to provide a clear structure and practice for safeguarding children and young people from abuse. The department has also worked closely through discussions with the Department of Premier and Cabinet to ensure this work aligns with the whole-of-government approach, which is under recommendation 20.2. Consultation was undertaken with DECYP staff and relevant unions on the draft documents and concluded in mid-August of this year.

Feedback on the documents was sought from the Commissioner for Children, and the final documents, I've been advised, have been published on DECYP's website, so they are online. Looking at next steps, that's to implement a communication campaign to staff and all other workers to ensure awareness of understanding of the required standards of conduct and behaviour, just to make sure that all staff are aware and also know where to look, which is really important. A professional learning module will be developed in the second half of 2024. That work's underway.

CHAIR - That training will be mandatory?

Mr BULLARD - Certainly we've put the policy out, which I did last week, but we recognise that a policy in itself is not going to -

CHAIR - Change anybody.

Mr BULLARD - No. It was agreed in the department's executive that there needs to be some intensive work starting with making sure managers are across the changes in the policy. There has been for a very long time conduct and behaviour standards in what was the Department of Education, so staff are very familiar with that. Some other parts of the agency haven't had that, so there will need to be a different level of work, but what we will be concentrating on is what the requirements are, and then we will look at how we ensure that all staff know what is and isn't appropriate and how they need to act.

We've cut it up into a number of phases. Obviously, we've launched the policy, so we're going to now go through a phase of raising awareness. That will move through August/September, but by the end of October, we'll start to look at how we're embedding the standards that are in the behaviour management code of conduct into our contracts, our worker induction checklists and ultimately our position descriptions.

As we move into the next year, it's always a really good time in schools when they have their start-up days to be doing some intensive work, and we'll ensure that all principals have the necessary training module available so that they can be working with their staff around that. We'd be looking at all staff undertaking training in this area to ensure that they know what is and isn't appropriate.

To us, a lot of it might sound obvious, but actually when you're on the ground, some of it can be quite complex. We know from concerns we've had raised by children and young people that I've dealt with in my time - use of social media is a big one, being contacted, sharing personal addresses and personal information, transport in cars. This policy really worked hard to take any ambiguity out, because not every person that displays that behaviour is a paedophile, but we don't want staff to get themselves into trouble either. This is really clear. It used to make suggestions; now it says: 'You must not' and 'Do not'.

CHAIR - That training is mandatory?

Mr BULLARD - That training will be mandatory. We want all staff to be aware of the policy for the safety of children and young people and for their own safety as well.

Ms WHITE - The recommendation also talks about this extending to volunteers and subcontractors. I didn't hear you talk about the safeguarding module that's required to be undertaken now in order to attend school or to attend an excursion with children. Will it also be included in that? I'm reading 6.4. It says here that, 'the professional conduct policy for schools spells out expected standards of behaviours of volunteers, relief teachers, contractors and subcontractors'. These are people external to their direct staff. Will you update that online training module that is required to be undertaken to get your safeguarding certificate?

Mr BULLARD - Yes. You'd be aware there is a level of training already. All people entering as volunteers or what we might call workers, so contractors, are required to view a video and ensure that they understand it before entering the site. That will be updated in line with the new expectations.

The policy is split into a general conduct and behaviour policy and there are sub policies that relate to different cohorts of workers. We've been talking previously about the one that

relates to teachers. There is a general workplace conduct and behaviour policy as well. I'm told that by the end of March 2025 we will have deployed that module - the module that we're providing to staff over the course of the next months - to all other workers which is non DECYP.

Ms WHITE - Will that include volunteers? For an example, I've got a safeguarding certificate because I join with my daughter on school excursions sometimes. Will that also be changed to reflect the policy around code of conduct or professional conduct? Will people who've got one of those certificates be required to upgrade their training so they can be aware of the policy?

Mr BULLARD - What we will do is roll that forward. I should say that 'workers' does include volunteers and other non DECYP workers. It's very broad. Parts of the general code of conduct will require particular conduct and behaviour of volunteers and other workers and, yes, that training module. People will have to redo the elements of the training, if not the module in total.

Ms WEBB - How will you provide advice to those people that they need to do that? I'm assuming you've got a record of everybody who's completed those modules of training and you can contact them to inform them that there's additional training they now need to undertake.

Mr BULLARD - I'd need to check where we landed and my hesitancy is around some licencing arrangements that we had around that module, which we've now resolved by paying for a licence for everyone. To be able to do that, we'd need to see how we're tracking that in the back. I don't have that information, but we could certainly take that on notice.

CHAIR - One would assume when the training is updated or the policy updates that it would trigger at least the immediate staff to have to redo the training.

Mr BULLARD - For current or future staff, it's annual training anyway. They'll all just go through the new module rather than the old one. For the volunteers, we just need to check the way in which we're capturing that information. I have had a figure of around 13,000 volunteers have undertaken the training to date. In terms of how we track whether or not you've done it, for example, coming onto the site, we'd need to check that.

CHAIR - I know I had to do it before I went to visit a school a little while back, so I guess if I go again, they will know when I last did it? Would the system show that if I was going to a different school?

Mr BULLARD - I think that's what we'd have to check about what's captured in the background. Part of that was to do with ensuring that we had a licence that allowed anyone who wanted to do it.

CHAIR - Is there anything else on 6.4, acknowledging some of these things can be further asked about 6.5? If not, we'll have a 15-minute break.

The Committee suspended from 3.44 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.

CHAIR - Thanks, minister. I understand you have a response to a question, 6.4?

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Ms PALMER - Yes, I do. Thank you, Chair. I'll just get the secretary to address that. The question was about whether we knew how we were keeping track of volunteers who had done the particular training?

Mr BULLARD - Yes, I'm advised that every volunteer's e-mail address is captured and, therefore, we know whether or not the training's been undertaken.

Ms WHITE - Which will allow you to recontact them once the training's updated?

Mr BULLARD - Absolutely. We have a register there that we can go back and remind people that there might be an existing obligation or new obligation.

Ms WHITE - I appreciate that.

CHAIR - We'll go to 6.5 then, minister. This is a phase two recommendation that the department should adopt an independent training certification program that is mandatory for education staff and volunteers, there is a number of components there. If you can update the committee as to where that's at and there'll be questions on that one.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. This is in progress, with a delivery date of 1 July. All Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) staff are required to undertake annual training to identify the signs of child sexual abuse and respond in a trauma-informed way - believing children, listening to them and telling them that it is not their fault.

That is in addition to mandatory reporting training, a new specialised training module on child sexual abuse awareness that was released in February 2024, which is also compulsory for all employees. That also extends to all volunteers and external providers working with children in the department and they are now required to complete a video version of the safeguarding training module and provide their certificate to their supervisor.

I am advised that progress to now is that 13,209 staff have completed the mandatory safeguarding training and an additional 13,229 volunteers and external providers have also completed the safeguard training. Optional advanced training modules are available on the department's public internet site for volunteers and external providers at DECYP sites, and anyone else in the community who wants to learn more about how to keep children and young people safe.

The University of Tasmania has mandated the Introduction to Children's Rights and Safety and Child Safety, Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention modules within the curriculum for all UTAS Education students from 2024, and these courses are available online for the community as well, free of charge.

The next steps that we'll be taking here are the training modules being reviewed and updated periodically and the department will work with the Teacher Registration Board and will continue to work with the University of Tasmania to establish minimum training requirements for teachers.

I am happy to take any questions.

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Mrs PETRUSMA - Minister, you said that 13,209 staff members have completed the training. What about those who haven't? What steps are in place to make sure that those who haven't do undertake it?

Ms PALMER - As I said, 13,209 individuals - and that's the vast majority of all staff - the annual training is mandatory for all department staff to complete. Where we will see that some may not have - they could, for example, be on long service leave - the requirement is that when they return, they will have to do the mandatory training. They could be on maternity leave. There could be a number of reasons why staff may not be engaged at this particular point in time, but it is mandatory for them when they return as well.

There can be exemptions that can be given, and that could be, I'm advised, for someone who could be triggered by the trauma. That's a conversation that they have and we do give an exemption there. My understanding is that there were approximately 10 staff members this year.

Ms WEBB - Thanks. I'll follow on from there. I'm interested in a more granular breakdown of numbers which, if you're not able to provide now, we can take on notice or you can consider taking on notice. Apart from that raw overall number, I would like to have that broken down into teachers, educational support personnel, relief teachers on the HR system, and relief educational support personnel. I'm interested to know not just the raw numbers in each of those categories, but also what percentage of the total staff pool they are. Is that something you could provide?

Mr BULLARD - We'll have to take that on notice, and I just would say, on a caveat, that I'm not sure that the system knows your job. It just knows that you're an employee.

Ms WEBB - Right.

Mr BULLARD - So I'm not sure that we could easily get that information out of the system. Does that make sense? Because what you're asking is -

Ms WEBB - So, for example, you couldn't tell me what number and proportion of your relief teachers have done it, because when they did the training, it didn't ask them to identify that they were a relief teacher in the system.

Mr BULLARD - It identifies you as someone who is an employee of the department.

Ms WEBB - So how do we go about tracking down whether people - for example, even if the vast majority have done it, some obviously maybe haven't yet. How are we then, if we're not capturing detail about them, knowing who hasn't done it yet and taking steps to track that down?

Mr BULLARD - How about we take that on notice and just see what we can farm out of the system that might attend to the question.

Ms WEBB - Okay.

Mr BULLARD - I understand the sentiment of the question. One thing is the requirement for principals and managers to ensure their staff have done it and to follow up if they haven't.

The other is through induction or re-onboarding. So one of the things is, for example, as the minister has said, you're coming back from a period of maternity or long service leave, then you will be followed up and asked just before you come back onto site or in your first couple of hours of being on site to do the training.

If I can just understand where that question's going, you actually want to understand, though, not the individuals who have done it, but the classes of individuals who have done it in terms of their job role?

Ms WEBB - What proportion of each of those categories have done it and where are we sitting in terms of achieving mandatory coverage there?

Mr BULLARD - Yes.

Ms WEBB - We'll put it through on notice.

CHAIR - But is it safe to say, though, that people who are currently onsite in educational facilities have done it or have got an exemption, and those who haven't are those who are not currently engaged in the workplace? Is that a fair statement or is that not? You can't say that for sure?

Mr BULLARD - I wouldn't want to say 100 per cent, because we know that there might be people who are in and out or whatever. What we do know is 13,000 plus - over 13,500 - have undertaken it who are staff, but I think it is probably best that we just take that question on notice so we can see what data we can extract out of the back.

Ms WEBB - We are working on a time line of: this is a phase-2 recommendation, so they might not quite be there yet.

CHAIR - Do you have a total number of the workforce?

Mr BULLARD - I just asked that question because I knew that would be the next one. I think - take these figures as approximately 12,500 - or 12,492 - individuals as a head count, so actual staff members, recognising not all of those work in the education side of the business. That's across the whole agency. Then in addition there are 4542 individuals on the relief register. So you would note that there seems to be a shortfall, because you're saying you've got about 17,000 and yet 13,500 have done the training. Not every relief teacher who is genuinely on the register will have worked in the period of time that the training has been required.

Ms WEBB - But just to clarify, though, that 13,209 staff figure that you gave us for having completed the training - that wouldn't just have included current teachers and relief teachers. Would that also have included education personnel - other people working at the school who aren't teachers?

Mr BULLARD - That's the whole agency. I've had to do the training. Every employee in the agency had to undertake that training, but the number that I've quoted around the 12,492 is the whole agency. Our teaching workforce is around 5000.

Ms WEBB - Right. Do you mind if we put a question through on notice laying that out and perhaps you can drop some figures in where you have them?

Ms PALMER - I think that would be best, because then we can actually look at what information we do have, and if we can break that down any further, then we will break that down for you.

Ms WEBB - In terms of people being required to do the training who are working in the schools in whatever capacity that is, how has it been made available to them? Have they had to complete it within their existing work hours? Have they been provided with additional paid work hours to do it? What's been the expectation?

Mr BULLARD - There have been a variety of mechanisms deployed. Principals were aware at the beginning of the year that this needed to be something that staff did or undertook, and so in the 'start-up days', as we call them - the student-free days - they made arrangements for there to be time for teaching staff and teacher assistants in those staff days to undertake and complete the training.

However, for other employment groups there have been different ways that we've approached that. For example, I know for the education facility attendants who don't have access to devices because they don't need them in their role, they have been brought together on school sites and, with the safeguarding leader and other senior staff member, taken through the training. Corporate, out-of-school areas - we were just expected to undertake it either in work time or our own time, which we did.

Ms WEBB - In terms of, say, the EFAs, was that additional paid time that they did when you brought them together on school sites to do it on devices? Was that additional to their work hours?

Mr BULLARD - I think it was within their work hours because they are rostered.

Ms WEBB - Okay, but did that impinge then on them having less time to do their actual work and being put under pressure because they had to do the training?

Mr BULLARD - I'd be surprised. I believe the mandatory reporting took about 20 minutes and the safeguarding one probably the same, so it's not an enormous time impost to undertake that training.

Ms WEBB - Acknowledging that some people may have taken longer than that to work through modules online - what might take you 20 minutes might take somebody else longer.

Mr BULLARD - Certainly principals organise the staff and the tasks that need to be undertaken on a particular day in terms of staff availability and what needs to be done. We made it really clear that this needed to be a priority, and we also accepted that that means that on that particular day other things might not get done.

Ms WEBB - Just to be utterly clear, there wasn't additional resourcing provided to schools in order for coverage of the mandatory training to be done?

Mr BULLARD - The expectation was that it was done during their work hours. If there was a requirement for extra time - and I'm not saying that there was - they would have been paid for that extra time.

Ms WEBB - I'm interested to know about how we landed on the training that we have in this space, and about consistency of safeguarding training across the department and the different areas of the department, but also across other government departments, because we're bringing this in. My understanding is - and perhaps you can help clarify - that there's different safeguarding training being done in different areas, both within the department that education sits in - DECYP - but also across other government. It makes me wonder how are we ensuring consistency and consistent standard in that safeguarding training if every department or every aspect of a department is taking a different approach?

Mr BULLARD - We have one set of core training for all staff within the agency, absent of which part of the agency they work in, so there is a consistency. There may be additional child safeguarding training, for example, in the Ashley Youth Detention Centre because there's another level of care that's required in those settings. In terms, though, of training across government, the training around issues such as mandatory reporting is a legislative obligation; therefore the training would look similar.

However, we need to recognise different settings. In a hospital setting, for example, your interaction with a child or young person or their family would be intermittent, whereas our interaction is on a daily basis, so it makes sense that there is some nuance across the different settings.

We do, for example, recognise Health as the other major provider of services to children and young people, and we are talking to them about the materials that we use and that they use. We're also talking to Premier and Cabinet about that. For example, part of the information I provided previously around needing to get a super licence, if you like, was so we can provide that, or Premier and Cabinet can choose to point people to that, who might be working in other community organisations, and that they can utilise that training. Where we can harmonise, we will certainly look to do that. However, we always recognise we have a pretty particular context with a lot of our interactions.

Ms WEBB - So, there's an active conversation about harmonisation and consistency, and potentially for external groups to be able to look to safeguarding training provided through a government department and regard, say, their volunteer - whether a community group or a sporting group - having had done the Department of Education training, can be ticked off for them as well.

Mr BULLARD - Yes. Certainly we know, for example, with child safe organisations bringing on a whole range of other NGO and private providers, that the demand for easily accessible training will increase, so we didn't see any reason to hold ours back. We already had it out there on the internet available for our volunteers and other DECYP workers. When it was drawn to our attention that others may want to use it, we moved to get a whole licence so that it could be utilised.

CHAIR - Any other questions? We'll move to 6.6.

Ms WEBB - Sorry, can I add one more question to follow up on that, if I may? Was there discussion around, for example, having some sort of core training in this space? Say, a requirement alongside getting a working with vulnerable person card - so it sat attached to that, which is something we expect people in all those different circumstances to do. Then if there

was something over and above whatever that core training was, required for specific places, that was provided in that context? Has that ever been a discussion?

CHAIR - It could be a DPAC question. It could be a Justice one, too.

Ms PALMER - Yes - that you would obviously have to adjust your core training to be specific too. I think it was a good example the secretary gave between someone in Health having an intermittent and short-time interaction with a child, compared to a teacher where it's day in, day out. So I feel we have answered that question. I'm not sure what we can add to that.

CHAIR - We might go to 6.7 then, which is about the department developing guidelines that outline the ongoing supports that should be provided for victim/survivors, family, staff and school community where there are allegations or incidents of child sexual abuse by staff or harmful sexual behaviours, and a number of components of that.

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you. This one is, of course, a delivery date of 1 July 2026. This recommendation requires the department to develop guidelines that set out the supports that should be provided for victim/survivors, family, staff and the school community where there are allegations or incidents of child sexual abuse by staff, or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour.

In recognising the need for a consistent collaborative and trauma-informed approach to support children and young people impacted by child sexual abuse, the department has created two Student Support Response Coordinators. These coordinators help workers in schools and our Child and Family Learning Centres to ensure ongoing support is provided to children and young people who are impacted by child sexual abuse or harmful sexual behaviour, and their families. In line with recommendation 9.28 - and I've been advised that the minister for Children and Youth provided general information about this recommendation last Thursday - the department will establish a harmful sexual behaviour support unit. This unit will review the department's governance processes, training and guidance to ensure our responses to harmful sexual behaviour are clearly defined, consistent, proactive, therapeutic and underpinned by ongoing training and development across the entire department.

All departmental staff also follow step-by-step guidance to ensure they respond to incidents of child abuse or harmful sexual behaviour in a trauma-informed way. This is supported by the completion of mandatory reporting, training and child sexual abuse awareness training for all departmental employees, safeguarding training by all volunteers, contractors and external providers, and by supporting information contained in the Safe, Secure, Supported - our Safeguarding Framework.

We know that the impacts of child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours are far-reaching. In addition to the supports in place for children and their families, workers are supported to look after themselves when they are impacted vicariously. The Employee Assistance Program supports departmental staff who are impacted in this way. If we look at progress to date - remembering this is for 2026 - in February 2024, updated mandatory reporting training was released alongside the training module. These - in combination with a condensed video version for viewing by volunteers and external providers, and the updated step-by-step guidance for concerns, information and incidents of child abuse - provide departmental workers with the knowledge and tools to respond and support victim/survivors in a trauma-informed way.

The department will ensure existing resources are strengthened and will prepare comprehensive guidelines and resources relevant to all of the department, including child safety services, Out of Home Care, and youth justice, to provide ongoing support for victim/survivors, families, staff and school communities. The department will also establish the harmful sexual behaviours unit in line with the commission of inquiry's recommendation 9.28. Is there anything you want to add to that, secretary?

Mr BULLARD - Just to reinforce, it's a 2026 recommendation and there's obviously guidance and materials that need to be provided. To reiterate the minister's point, we did employ two FTEs whose job is to support the children and young people who might be impacted by child sex abuse or harmful sexual behaviours, and to support their family. We recognised that it was - and this was either during the commission or even before - that it was an area that needed really careful and tailored management.

(Unknown) - Did you check that?

CHAIR - I'll go to Rebecca and come back to you.

Ms WHITE - Thank you, Chair. I'm really keen to understand how you're providing support to people who might've provided evidence to the commission of inquiry. I know there were a range of supports stood up at that time, but I have heard from some of those people who have given evidence that they feel a little like they've been forgotten about. We've heard some of that reported publicly through the media as well.

How have you communicated with people who've been victims of child sexual abuse, particularly in the department of Education, who may have given evidence and since that time continued to struggle or have impacts on their work, so they have access to the support they need? I'm keen to understand how you've been in contact with them, but also what further efforts are being made by the department to make sure people aren't just- not ignored - that's a pretty harsh word - but some people feel like they have been ignored since participating in the commission of inquiry process.

Mr BULLARD - There are two parts to your question. One is, how have we interacted with or supported them. The other is, how are they now being supported. The first I can talk to, because that sits within the remit of the department of Education and the victim/survivors who really bravely came forward to tell their stories. The second, though, around their ongoing support, is a question for Premier and Cabinet, as there's now centralised support.

Ms WHITE - Can you elaborate on what your department is doing, please?

Mr BULLARD - In terms of the interaction with the victim/survivors who provided evidence, I made contact with each of the people who appeared in the commission and offered to meet with them individually. Some of those individuals took up that offer; others didn't, and I absolutely respect either of those choices.

In terms of meeting with them - I just want to say I learned so much from their courage and bravery to speak about their experience but also, in so many ways, positively reflect on what we need to see now to ensure that what happened to them doesn't happen to others. Over time, I know that the supports have been provided through Premier and Cabinet, but there have

been individuals I've kept in contact with because they've either reached out to me or I've checked in with them. It's different for each individual. If the question is, do I have ongoing interaction with some of those individuals who appeared? Yes, I do.

Ms WHITE - Thank you and I appreciate that. It wasn't so much asking whether you did - that's an extraordinary responsibility to take on, if I may say so - but more broadly, if the department has structures in place to make it clear for people how they access support. You mentioned that DPAC has centralised some of those supports. How has your department connected the people you've been working with to that central support so that nobody falls through the gaps?

Mr BULLARD - Well, certainly in terms of ensuring that they knew other support was available. So, I'm not going to say that we substituted support. We actually just said, 'as well as this there is that', then each of those individuals was contacted and advised of that. And Premier and Cabinet, I understand, provide various levels of support to individuals depending on what they need. So, that's really for those matters pertaining to individuals that came forward during the commission.

On this recommendation, we're very attuned to the fact that we need to properly support not only the children and young people, but the families of people who are experiencing or have experienced child sexual abuse in our contexts now. And, certainly, we are much more nuanced in the way that we do that with the two FTE whose job it is to support the children and their families.

Ms WHITE - When were those two FTE employed? One example is adult survivors who've participated in the commission of inquiry process, who've spoken out publicly - I won't use names, but who have shared their sense of feeling abandoned. That they've provided evidence to the commission of inquiry and then, after the fact, there really hasn't been ongoing support provided to them. Obviously, secretary, you've provided an update on what the department has done, but the lived experience of some survivors is different to what's just been described. So, when were those two FTE employed? Also, how have they engaged with adult survivors, not just those young people who are known to the department, who might still be at school, for instance?

Mr BULLARD - The job of those two FTEs is to support children, and your question, I think, is pertaining to adults.

Ms WHITE - It is.

Mr BULLARD - As I outlined, we have provided support and we have provided opportunities. Where those victim/survivors want to tell their stories, we've provided opportunities for them to do that. However, the central support for those individuals is now provided through Premier and Cabinet. We could take that on notice if you wanted to receive more nuanced information around how that support occurs.

Ms WHITE - I'd be keen to know when those two FTEs were employed in the first place, which I hope you can share with the committee now.

CHAIR - For the children?

Ms WHITE - Yes. For the children as one matter.

Ms PALMER - Chair, if you're happy, I'd like to ask the head of the public service.

Ms KATHRINE MORGAN-WICKS, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION, AND WAS EXAMINED.

Ms PALMER - Thank you. Do you want the question again?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - Was it to provide an update in relation to the centralisation of support for victim/survivors?

Ms WHITE - Yes, that would be wonderful, thank you minister, and also -

Ms PALMER - And we'll try to get the answer to the other question.

Ms WHITE - Thank you.

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - DPAC, since creating the reform unit to deal with the coordination of the 191 recommendations of the commission of inquiry, has included within that team some resource that has actually come from the commission of inquiry; so, to try to get that continuation of the relationship of support from the commission of inquiry through to, now, implementation of the commission's recommendations. That resource has been in regular contact, however it's with victim/survivors who have probably also initiated. We have done some that's proactive out from the Premier and Cabinet to advise as to, you know, whether the government was tabling a response or if there are particular updates on recommendations, or to advise or seek their input, for example, to the strategy that we released recently. We have also had requests to meet with victim/survivors, and both for myself to meet with them now that I've moved over from the secretary of Health role. So, obviously similar to Tim, had met the victim/survivors that had presented in the Health hearings but was less familiar with some of the individuals who had assisted the commission so bravely on other matters. So, I have met several of those and together with the Premier, for example.

There has been a range of support needs that have been identified by victim/survivors. They range probably in the main, without trying to identify anyone individually, but significantly relating to medical or psychological support. So, with, for example, the release of, (a), the tabling of the final report of the commission, but also the tabling of the government's response to the report, Premier and Cabinet had stood up additional funding to community organisations, So SASS, Laurel House, et cetera and Relationships Australia. I've got details, obviously, of all of those if the committees would like to receive them. To make sure that there was additional supporting community, particularly if it provoked - or encouraged, I should say, is a much better word than 'provoked' - people to come forward to also share their experience or to make a complaint.

So from victim/survivors participating in the commission, so psychological support, medical support, some living expense or other supports. That's really been on an ad hoc or case-by-case basis. Some stepping in to assist with some employment arrangements or to encourage - and if I could do a bit of a public plea in terms of the encouragement. We have victim/survivors who have given up a significant amount of their time and their lives to actually

provide, you know, this to the community of Tasmania, but they're not all employed by the Tasmanian government. So it is actually quite significant for some private employers to understand what has occurred here and nearly the healing that needs to occur for those victim/survivors post the event, and how long that may take.

So, we certainly have been trying to work with people if they require some additional support and we've been working with some private employers with that respect to see if that's something that the government can assist with. Or if there are other ways that victim/survivors, for example, could be employed or contracted, because they keep telling their story and it's a huge time commitment too, and has the impact on these people's families each time they do it. But it's not a paid job, for example. And I think that's one of the key learnings coming out of the inquiry - that this is going to have impact on them for some time. They've been talked about in the media and that then has impact on their own employment prospects. So we are alive to that in trying to provide support where we can. But it is very much on an individual-by-individual basis, but we are working, picking each of those experiences and going back to the team to say, 'Right, what do we need to do on a more whole-of-cohort level, if that's appropriate?'.

Ms WHITE - Thank you. Minister, I appreciate that update. I think it's really useful for the committee to have that evidence presented so that anyone who's watching or listening knows that they can reach out and seek that support. You would be aware there was some criticism early on about the lack of communication around how people might have accessed such support. How have you modified the way that you're engaging with victim/survivors so that they are aware of the level of support that can be provided to them?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - We have learned as we have also been communicating with victim/survivors. Certainly, I note the public criticism that was raised not so much just by that particular individual but, you know, on behalf of people who were talking to her. And, certainly, she was very kind to share that with us and we are continuing to work with that particular individual as circumstances are changing also for some of our victim/survivors as they move through the process of civil litigation or other legal matters with the state. It is a delicate balance, and that's another reason why we thought if it's centralised to Premier and Cabinet, noting that some individuals may have litigation that's playing out with other agencies - it's all with the Crown, but they're probably dealing with either the department of Health or the department of Education, et cetera - that we're able to take that more independent, continuing support process.

Ms WHITE - May I ask as well, minister, the parliament's currently considering the Justice Miscellaneous (Commission of Inquiry) Bill, which provides for apologies to victim/survivors. I understand that the departments are willing to engage in that process, but will those apologies be provided by individual departments or, again, will that be something that's centralised and dealt with through DPAC?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - That's really up to the individual victim/survivor. A really important part of offering an apology is to ask them, 'Who do you wish to receive it from?'

I'd be very hesitant to make a blanket statement, 'Well, DPAC will do them all', and they might say, 'Well, that's lovely, DPAC, I like talking to you, but I actually want to hear it from the school or from the hospital or from a particular entity'. So that is one of the steps. The Department of Justice has done some amazing work through the many apologies and the

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detailed training people actually have to undertake before they provide an apology to a victim/survivor.

Ms WHITE - That's helpful. Thank you.

CHAIR - Do we have the dates in which those two officers for the children were engaged?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I do - February 2023.

Ms WHITE - Thanks, minister.

Ms WEBB - If I can follow up, because we were focusing that conversation about support around victim/survivors but, of course, there would have been whistleblowers involved in various aspects of the commission of inquiry, so is there an update, potentially? Again, this might not be relevant to the department of Education - maybe it is, but since it's centralised and we have the head of the State Service, is there an update to provide similarly about support in that space?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - Certainly we have not differentiated, as far as I'm aware, from a Premier and Cabinet perspective, between the support that we are offering to victim/survivors and key whistleblowers who have participated in the commission. Where we have received requests in relation to, for example, psychological support or medical expenses, travel or other support persons, we have responded in the same way, noting that they have both provided evidence to the commission and we believe that they require our continuing support.

Ms WHITE - Minister, I'm also just keen to understand, given the way that supports are being provided evolves based on the feedback and lived experience of those who provided evidence to the commission of inquiry, whether there's a way to get that feedback that doesn't mean that you're depending on just one or two people helping shape the response? Because that can be quite an emotional burden for those individuals.

I'm not sure if this is through you or to the secretary but I'd be keen to understand how you plan to make sure you continue to have the lived experience inform the way the government provides support without emotionally draining a couple of those people who are currently participating. I don't know how they feel about me asking this question, but I'm just observing that it might be quite taxing on them to keep being at the table making suggestions for how things can be improved.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I absolutely respect and understand where you're coming from. I just want to be cautious. I'm the minister for Education, Chair, and I feel that these questions are weighing into the Premier's space. I'm very hesitant to be going down that path -

CHAIR - We can ask questions off a different route, perhaps. We've still got a fair bit to get through on your area.

Ms PALMER - There is a lot to get through, and it's not that we don't want to answer the question, I just don't think it's appropriate for me as the minister for Education to be weighing into the Premier's space without him being here.

Ms WHITE - I accept that. There are victim/survivors who have had terrible experiences with the department of Education, who I know are providing some of this guidance and support to the department. Maybe it's just something to reflect upon.

Ms PALMER - I think so, yes.

Ms WHITE - We'll see if we can get the Premier back this year some time.

CHAIR - That will be a challenge, won't it?

Ms WHITE - Might be hard.

CHAIR - Okay. We'll go to 6.8, and we did touch on this earlier. This is about the interaction with the non-government schools; if you want to give us any further information above what was provided earlier?

Ms PALMER - We probably have spoken to all of this. I'm happy to take questions if there are further questions.

CHAIR - We'll go to 6.9 then, which is about the department developing detailed education-specific policies, protocols and guidelines for preventing, identifying and responding to harmful sexual behaviours in schools. Again, we talked a little bit about some aspects of this already.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I will make some comments, Chair. The department's student support team has developed training on child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours, and in September 2023 began delivering this training to professional support staff in schools, so that includes our social workers, psychologists and school nurses. The training is being offered more broadly to other education staff throughout the 2024 school year.

Progress on this: the department has commenced working with relevant business units including student support, the Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People, services for children and families, our out-of-home care and youth justice as well as the Department of Premier and Cabinet, to begin the unit of the harmful sexual behaviour support.

The next steps on this: cycles of professional learning will be embedded in schools to ensure that new staff are provided with the education to identify and respond to harmful sexual behaviours in schools. A harmful sexual behaviour support unit, which is recommendation 9.28, will be established and this team will review the department's governance processes, training and guidance to ensure its responses to harmful sexual behaviour across all areas of the department are clearly defined, consistent, proactive, therapeutic and underpinned by ongoing training and development.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, minister. There was an aspect of this that I had raised and I was interested to check. One way, potentially, that harmful sexual behaviour needs to be managed in a school environment at times is through using a tier-4 support, and the child is moved away from the school or the campus while that's occurring and supported separately, but tier-4 currently ends at the end of year 10. For example, if we are expecting to utilise tier-4 supports as a way of managing harmful sexual behaviours for a child in high school, what happens at

the end of year 10 when that child transitions to college and tier-4 support is no longer available?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Tier-3 support is offered in colleges, just to let you know that. I was asked this question in regard to colleges and tier-4 support just recently, and it was something that I felt as the minister, I needed to explore a bit further. At that point that I was asked the question I wasn't aware that tier 4 only went to year 10, and I think it is something that does need to be looked at to see what is possible for years 11 and 12. That is something that is on my list.

Ms WEBB - I appreciate the commitment to be looking at that, minister. I was not aware either until it was brought to my attention. Was there a current rationale for why tier 4 ends at the end of year 10 and doesn't extend to colleges?

Ms PALMER - I will pass to the secretary for that.

Mr BULLARD - It is historic. We have been on a journey with tier 4. When I came into the agency, coalitions of schools had pulled some resource to have off-site learning provision for students that couldn't engage at school, and there was actually no formal tier-4 program as it stood. In fact I don't know that it was overly supported as a department thing because there was a belief that every student needed to be in a school.

Certainly we have worked through that. There has been a lot of work done on ensuring that tier 4 is seen as an alternative learning opportunity for students and that it sits within and is funded centrally as something that students can access should they benefit from it. Traditionally, however, those schools that put together the coalitions were only years 7 to 10 schools, and so I think that is where we haven't yet extended.

When we are talking about the provision, you have got to think why are they in a tier-4 setting? It does not necessarily mean that a child who has displayed harmful sexual behaviours has to be removed from sight. It is all around the risk management planning. If there is no tier-4 opportunity available, there will be other risk mitigations put in place to ensure that everyone is safe.

Ms WEBB - Minister, at this present time, are colleges provided with additional funding in order to manage harmful sexual behaviours that they may encounter in their student groups above and beyond, or do they have to manage it within their existing resources?

Mr BULLARD - Harmful sexual behaviours are very complex and seen as such by the department. Where there are instances of harmful sexual behaviours between students, whatever their age, student support will come in and assist the school to manage that. It is not so much about having 194 individual schools with 194 individual resources. They certainly need to have a base level of training and understanding, but it is the school social workers and school psychologists, student support leaders and student support coordinators that will come in and assist the school to put those plans together and then to monitor whether or not the plans are having the intended effect.

We talked earlier about the two student support coordinators. We know that for both the family of the child that's displaying the behaviours as well as the family of the child that might be the object of those behaviours it is an incredibly stressful time, so part of the role of those

two individuals is to work with those families to ensure that they know what is happening for their young people, whichever category they are in, but also to support the family to support the child.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that information. I understand that we would not necessarily allocate a specific amount to each and every school - it is a case-by-case basis - but I just wanted to be very clear, is there additional funding available if a school finds itself in a situation of having to manage these behaviours and, by the supports and the interactions that you have just described, secretary, it has identified that there is a need for some additional support to be put in place. Is that funding available separately to the school from some source of funding that is not drawing from within their current funding?

Mr BULLARD - Certainly, if the school did not have the resource available to acquit a plan, then we would look at where that resource should come from. For example, in a primary school setting, if there is a young person who is displaying behaviours that are concerning, the plan might recommend that there is a teacher assistant that works exclusively with that young person and monitors their behaviour. If the school does not have the resource to do that, we would look at other parts of the agency to fund that. The safety of children is absolutely paramount, so we wouldn't say, 'Oh, sorry, you can't have that teacher assistant' if that's what's been recommended by the school social worker and the psychologist.

Ms WEBB - I'm sure you can appreciate that I'm approaching it with a slightly sceptical frame of mind because we know that often within these sorts of environments, just through practicalities, resources that need to be applied in one area can often be cribbed from another, so I just want to clarify that in order to meet requirements that might be there because of harmful sexual behaviours and the plans put in place around them, we're not then depriving support from within existing resources from other areas. For example, we're not having to reduce TA support for other students who qualify for TA support because of other circumstances in order to provide TA support to that child with harmful sexual behaviour. Can you guarantee that's not happening, that we're not depriving support elsewhere in order to support harmful sexual behaviour responses?

Mr BULLARD - Can I guarantee it? No, I can't, because they are individual people making individual decisions. Is it my expectation that that doesn't happen? Yes, it is, and schools know - and student support knows - that there are other avenues of funding available for particular circumstances, especially where the safety of children and young people is at risk. I imagine if you went and audited, anyone could find an example, but again it's really important that we know of those examples so we can put them right, but the expectation is you wouldn't be cribbing from one area to attend to a harmful sexual behaviour risk management plan.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that being articulated nice and clearly here.

CHAIR - We will move to 6.10, legislation regarding the Teachers Registration Board and other relevant matters.

Ms PALMER - Chair, 6.10 through to 6.16 all sit with the *Teachers Registration Act*. Would you be happy for me to make some opening statements that relate to all of those recommendations?

CHAIR - Sure, that would be fine.

Ms PALMER - Recognising the critically important role that teachers hold and the power and influence they have in children and young people's lives, teacher registration is one of the key mechanisms we have as a state to ensure that teachers meet professional standards and to assess their suitability to work with children and young people. The *Teachers Registration Act 2000* regulates the teaching profession in Tasmania and the act sets minimum professional standards for Tasmanian teachers and establishes the Teachers Registration Board.

The board plays a vitally important role in regulating the profession across all school sectors to ensure the safety, wellbeing and interests of Tasmanian students through ensuring registered teachers are of good character and fit to be a teacher; checking that teachers have the relevant qualifications and English proficiency to fulfil their role; assessing compliance with the professional standards for teachers; managing complaints and conducting investigations and enforcement measures such as placing conditions on suspending or cancelling registrations when necessary to ensure child safety.

The Department of Education, Children and Young People is responsible for administering the act and is currently undertaking a substantive review of the *Teachers Registration Act*. A lot has changed since the act was first established, so it was timely to do a wholesale review and consider how we can better protect children and young people in schools, address concerns raised by the commission of inquiry and ensure alignment with national standards.

The key objectives of the review will be to ensure that children are safe while they learn, that early childhood teachers in early childhood education and care settings are registered as teachers, and that we have quality teachers who are well prepared to support learning and are able to contribute to delivering outcomes for all Tasmanian children.

As I said, there are five recommendations from the commission of inquiry which require specific amendments to the act, and these five recommendations will be implemented as part of the review. I will answer questions today regarding each of these specific recommendations, but I wanted to be clear from the outset that our response to delivering each of these recommendations will be to manage them all concurrently through the *Teachers Registration Act* review.

The terms of reference for the overarching review of the act, which will also address the commission's recommendations, will be released in the last quarter of this year. They will outline the objectives and intended outcomes of the review and the role of the steering committee. They will also step out how the process will include opportunities for children and young people, teachers, key stakeholders including Aboriginal communities, and the broader Tasmanian community to participate in the review. It is my expectation that this will be a highly consultative and collaborative process.

The review will be overseen by a skills-based steering committee which will make recommendations to me as minister on how to deliver the objectives of the review and the changes required to the act. The skills-based steering committee will ensure that the review is guided by expertise and informed perspectives, leading to meaningful improvements in the act. The review is currently in the initiation phase. Ahead of releasing terms of reference, extensive research has been undertaken. This has included early engagement with the TRB; research, analysis and jurisdictional scans on what best-practice teacher registration looks like in order

to keep children safe; the role of early childhood teachers and early childhood education and care settings; the application of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; and professional development to support quality curriculum implementation.

Subject to the parliamentary sitting schedule, the proposed legislative amendments from the review will be considered by parliament by 1 July 2026. This means we are on track to implement all five of the commission of inquiry recommendations in relation to teacher registration, in line with our agreed commitment.

I also want to be clear for the committee that this review of the act and the review of Tasmania's education system are two quite distinct processes. However, the findings from the independent review of Tasmania's education system in relation to teacher registration will be considered as part of the review of the act. We would have loved to have had the Director of Education Regulation join us here today. Unfortunately, with the change of date for this, it didn't work out for her, but we've spent some time with her in the lead-up to being with you today and we'll do our best to answer any questions you have. I felt it was important to stress for the committee that all five of these recommendations will sit in that review.

CHAIR - To clarify, the expectation is that the terms of reference will be out before the end of the year?

Ms PALMER - Yes, the final quarter of 2024.

CHAIR - Was it a draft bill or a position paper for consultation at that point? The terms of reference will come out - they'll be determined, or are we consulting on the terms of reference? I was a bit unclear as to what's being consulted on once the terms of reference are set.

Ms PALMER - It will be a position paper.

CHAIR - Yes, okay. Subsequent to that, do you expect a draft bill to be released for comment and when will that be?

Ms PALMER - I think it would go through the usual process for legislation, where we'll have the discussion paper, then it will go out to consultation, and then I imagine we'll be reporting back on it as well - scrutiny from this committee and then the draft bill. Does the secretary want to add to that?

Mr BULLARD - The process will mirror closely the process that was followed for setting up the new regulatory arrangements. You'll recall that we put the Teachers Registration Board, we set up a TASC board, the non-government schools registration board and the associated legislation under one entity, the Education regulator, Katharine O'Donnell. Because it's multi-sector - the Teachers Registration Board services not only government schools but the independents and Catholics as well - we've agreed that we'll have a similar process with the steering committee which the minister will appoint, but we'll have the heads of each sector on it. The steering committee developed a draft position paper for consultation and then went to the minister with some recommendations around changes that needed to be made.

CHAIR - That's in addition to what's already been recommended by the commission of inquiry? They're pretty specific about some of the changes that are needed.

Mr BULLARD - This is a wholesale review of the *Teachers Registration Act*. Obviously there are these issues that pertain to safety. There is a number of other issues that have been raised by various manifestations of the board over the time, by unions and by teachers themselves, so this will be looking at all of the changes needed to ensure that the board and its registration processes are contemporary, but a subset of that work pertains specifically to safety and will be each of the recommendations set out, making sure that they're active.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. Minister, you talked about five recommendations related to legislative change for the Teachers Registration Board (TRB). I count seven related to the TRB itself. I'm assuming - and I shouldn't assume, I'll clarify with you. One of those, 6.14, is a phase one recommendation and doesn't necessarily look like it's related to legislative change, so I was wondering if you could provide an update on that one specifically.

The other one perhaps might be 6.16, which is about funding, not necessarily legislative change. Can you provide an update on that one as well, or what will inform that funding recommendation?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll start with 6.14. So, the AMR, the Automatic Mutual Recognition, is a Commonwealth scheme set out in the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992*. It enables individuals who are registered in an occupation in one state or territory to go to work in another state or territory and use their home state registration, and teachers have been included in that scheme.

At the time that the scheme was introduced, the department and the Teachers Registration Board advocated at a national level for the Automatic Mutual Recognition scheme that takes into account the risks for child safety and allowing greater mobility within the teaching profession. In recognition of this, our Treasurer has granted the teaching profession an exemption from participating in the AMR scheme until 1 July 2027. Significant work will be undertaken before then to enable Tasmania to participate fully in automatic mutual recognition and to ensure the risks of child safety are mitigated.

The government has continued to advocate for the implementation of the scheme to take into account risks to child safety and to impose measures to address these risks through the education ministers' meetings and through associated national education architecture. In February, the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA) met to discuss national AMR actions. In March 2024, there was a ministerial level communication regarding the AMR scheme with the federal Minister for Education. In June of this year, cybersecurity consultants CyberSage commenced developing a proof of concept for an AMR information-sharing platform with the aim of creating a solution relevant to as many licensing arrangements as possible. This work was made possible with a grant under a business research and innovation initiative. In July, ATRA senior officials established a dedicated Automatic Mutual Recognition information-sharing working group to work collectively to operationalise improvements to existing mutual recognition and information-sharing practices as a basis for robust shared implementation of AMR.

We won't stop advocating and we will keep reaffirming. But I think what's really powerful here, and an example to what we're trying to do, is that we do have an exemption until 2027.

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Ms LOVELL - That was till 1 July 2027? And forgive me, if it's a silly question.

Ms PALMER - No, it isn't.

Ms LOVELL - The Treasurer has granted an exemption for teachers to participate, so that means they can't use that scheme, essentially. Is that teachers coming from the mainland to Tasmania and teachers going from Tasmania to the mainland, or just coming into Tasmania?

Mr BULLARD - It's definitely coming in. We'd need to check going out.

CHAIR - It wouldn't be our responsibility going out, would it?

Ms LOVELL - It would be up to the other states, I'd imagine.

Mr BULLARD - It would be other states, so we would need to accept. But we could check that quickly. The issue that we've identified is that there are slightly different standards between states and what we might judge as unsafe behaviour other states don't. Without some intermittent or intermediary where you land here and you need to go and say, 'I'm here', and without a way of sharing that information easily for our board to make its own judgement about your suitability to teach, there was a risk of mismatch.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - I think the other part of your question was 6.16?

Ms LOVELL - Yes.

Ms PALMER - The TRB is funded through the collection of registration fees and funding support from the government through DECYP. Conduct and investigation officers undertake the TRB's discipline inquiries and other functions under part 4 of the *Teachers Registration Act*. In the 2022-23 Budget, the government provided the TRB with additional funding of \$760,000 over two years. This was to support the employment of additional conduct and investigation officers to assist with the commission of inquiry and review any pending cases. DECYP is providing funding for 5.14 FTE conduct and investigation officers and is supportive of this being continued. Ongoing funding to replace the current interim funding arrangements for these positions will be considered as part of the Budget process.

Ms LOVELL - Sorry, that is for the conduct and investigation officers?

Ms PALMER - Yes, 5.14 FTE.

Ms LOVELL - That was a 12-month funding, was it?

Ms PALMER - It was over two years. That was \$760,000 over two years.

Ms LOVELL - That was the \$760,000 that funded the 5.14 FTE?

Ms PALMER - This was to support the employment of additional conduct and investigation officers to assist with the commission of inquiry and review any pending cases.

Ms LOVELL - That funding finishes this now, I assume? Yes. We're waiting to see if that's continued in this year's Budget.

Ms PALMER - We're certainly supportive of this being continued.

Ms WEBB - On that same 6.16, which is the Tasmanian government to ensure that TRB is funded to perform its core function of regulating the professional conduct of teachers, do you consider currently that the TRB is appropriately funded to perform its core function of regulating the professional conduct of teachers?

Ms PALMER - I'll get the secretary to address that question.

Mr BULLARD - I think there are two states: one is current and one is what the future mechanics of the board might look like, so that is off in the future. We have requested advice about, I suppose, an area, when we're talking about safety, about whether they feel that they have the establishment and resourcing at the moment to immediately examine any matters of concern that are referred to them. We were advised by the Registrar that they do look within the week of receiving that allegation or they have two meetings to triage all of those and to put them into a process, and that they would then work through those. From a safety perspective, that's the main question that the department wants to have answered. It doesn't mean that we don't take immediate action ourselves, but we're also cognisant of the fact that, whilst you maintain your teacher registration, you could be teaching in either the independent or Catholic sectors.

Ms WEBB - My question was about not just can they undertake investigations when needed promptly, which is what you've provided me with an answer about. My question was: is the TRB currently funded adequately to perform its legislated functions and whether the minister regards that it is or not?

Mr BULLARD - We've recognised that they are subject to historic funding arrangements and so we have supported them to undertake a review of their actual cost of doing business, and so the review of Education Regulation Steering Committee report. That established the new regulatory arrangements across the TRB and the Non-Government Schools Recommendation Board recommended at the time that the Department of Education, the then department, commissioned an independent methodology with input from the boards to determine the sustainable funding of the regulators, so move them off that historic base. The procurement of the external consultancy's in the final stages of the tender process and we are talking to the Teachers Registration Board about progressing that review for and with them.

But ahead of that methodology, there is funding that the department has provided to ensure that it is sustainable. Future funding will be the subject of the state Budget.

Ms WEBB - What is the timeframe since we passed that legislation and it came into effect, where we brought those entities together under the one, and the need to identify, to review funding arrangements was part of that. What's been the time lapse to now?

Mr BULLARD - The report that went up in 2020 was one recommendation of a whole lot of other recommendations that then flowed through into the legislation that then went through Parliament, which has then established the boards. The boards have now been up and running for 12 months, so we haven't had a new entity to examine, if that makes sense. TASC

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didn't have a board and it had quite a different operating environment. The Non-Government Schools Registration Board has been reconstituted in a different form, and the TRB likewise.

We haven't had an entity to go in and do that review until we waited for the boards to be established and the entities to run under the new legislation. We would have been reviewing the old operating arrangements, which probably would have got us to a similar point on the historic funding that's been in place.

Ms WEBB - In terms of the minister's confidence that the TRB is currently funded adequately to perform its legislated functions, that was back to the core question to you, minister, about that and your level of confidence that that's the case. Are they funded adequately to perform legislative functions?

Ms PALMER - Well, no, I am not sure, and that is why we are having it reviewed, so that we - or I - can better understand what the true cost drivers of the activity of the board actually are. That is the whole point of having the review, so we have a really good and comprehensive understanding of that.

CHAIR - That is also a future focus though, as well as exactly what the new act is going to look like.

Ms WEBB - Even just for the new situation, which came into play 12 months ago, that is what we are looking at as well.

Ms PALMER - It is now and it is into the future. It is obviously going to take into account the body of work that needs to be done here.

CHAIR - There are other requirements that will increase the demands on the board.

Mr BULLARD - That's right, and absent of that review being in place, additional funding has also been provided.

Ms WEBB - Beyond the positions that the minister outlined a short while ago, do you mean additional to that?

Ms PALMER - I think there are other things as well. We now have a framework agreement which actually provides support, so while we are waiting for that funding methodology to be developed, we have a framework agreement which is actually providing support to the TRB - I guess 'in kind' would be a good way to describe it - such as AR, finance, communications, IT, et cetera, which in turn provides a budget saving to the TRB. It gives them more flexibility to review its staffing needs.

There is support coming in from the department as well during this period of time, but it will be important to have this review done - that it looks at what needs to be done now and into the future to set the board up.

Ms WEBB - The timeline on that review then, minister - are we expecting that to occur concurrently with the review of the legislation and whatever may come of that in terms of updating the act, or are we expecting the review of the funding arrangements to occur sooner

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and inform funding decisions for the TRB sooner than the timeline we have for the review of the act itself and the new legislation that might flow from that?

Ms PALMER - My understanding is that the funding methodology will inform the 2025-26 budget process.

CHAIR - Next week.

Ms WEBB - No, the one after. May next year. The review will be occurring obviously prior to May next year?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - Other questions? I'm going broader, because it is all related to concurrent pieces of work.

Ms WEBB - I had some other questions that didn't fit anywhere.

CHAIR - We have a few minutes if you want to just put them.

Ms WEBB - Yes, please. It might have been actually back in that document we had that was interim.

CHAIR - There are some questions that we'll put in writing to you as well - not many, I don't think.

Ms PALMER - We'll try and answer anything now. We've got 15 minutes.

Ms WEBB - In a document we received prior to these hearings that outlined the interim actions implementation, on page 17, what's described there in no. 13 and no. 14 talks about the employment of four full-time equivalent senior support staff, two psychologists and two social workers to increase support for children and young people affected by harmful sexual behaviours and employing additional professional support staff, including eight full-time equivalent psychologists and eight full-time equivalent social workers.

The questions were relating to those new appointments that were made under those interim actions. They probably did relate to some other recommendations, but I want to ask questions about those new appointments. It was a document we received that looked like that. It outlines interim actions and then it goes into phase 1 and phase 2 in other parts of the document.

I wanted to double check about, in terms of the employment of, as those actions describe, additional psychologists and social workers - there are some different numbers there. I want to check where we sit with numbers around social workers and psychologists in schools, and what our net gain is if we go back to before we put these additional ones in, and where we're sitting now. What I understand is that we've added some, but we've also lost some along the way. I am looking for net gain from prior to these new appointments to now - a comparison of those numbers.

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Ms PALMER - I think I have what you're looking for. If I'm looking at school psychologists, approved establishment as of 1 July 2024 was 79.05, and the actual FTE as per the payroll date of 28 August 2024 is 78.9.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, minister. I know it could get a bit tricky with this, going through. It might be easier for me to put a question to you on notice so that you can provide data back, if you would take it.

Ms PALMER - Is that not answering your question?

Ms WEBB - I'm looking for the net gain. Because we've announced the additional positions being appointed in those interim actions, which sounds really positive, my understanding is that we've also lost staff in those areas across an intervening time as well. I'm looking for a comparison of how many we had - and that could be a raw number and an FTE equivalent - prior to announcing and recruiting these additional staff, and how many we have now, so that we can see what the net gain is when you take into account the recruitments announced but also the loss of staff in those areas.

Mr BULLARD - We'll have to take that one on notice, but I just want to check that we're clear. If we had a base level in 2022 or 2023, and then we've added in these additional specific roles related to the commission of inquiry, what does that take us up to, in terms of our expected FTE and then how many additional have we recruited to fill those roles?

Ms WEBB - Also how many have we lost during that time? I'm looking for what our net gain is. Theoretically, on paper, we would have kept all the psychologists and social workers we had in schools across that whole time and added in the ones that are announced here in those interim actions. That would have been an ideal world. My understanding is that we've had some people step out of those positions across the same -

Ms PALMER - We're looking for that number there -

Ms WEBB - Net gain at the end: numbers there, numbers now. But taking into account who has stepped away as well.

Ms WHITE - You should ask the establishment and the actual for the two periods of time.

Mr BULLARD - I think it's the establishment and the actual at two periods of time, because people come on and off all the time. Establishment and actual pre-COI positions coming on and then establishment and actual post-COI positions coming on, so you can see the roles are actually staffed.

Ms WHITE - You could ask for today's staffing levels, for instance, Meg, if you wanted to be -

Ms WEBB - For today's date?

CHAIR - Well, it needs be at a point in time. People come and go.

Ms WEBB - 1 September, 31 August?

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Mr BULLARD - We'll look for the same two dates. I think that's going to be really important because you actually want a point in time A and a point in time B that are like for like and not holiday-specific or everyone was on leave, so 12 months apart. We'll find a date that works 12 months apart. I am just thinking about payroll date, which the minister has today, which is very useful for giving us what's happening today might not be able to be replicated for 28 August or the payroll date for this time last year necessarily.

Ms WEBB - only if 12 months is enough to represent prior to these announced new positions.

Mr BULLARD - I think we could do 2022.

CHAIR - Since 2022, you've employed these people, so maybe it's before those people were employed. What was the level then?

Ms PALMER - I think if you put that question to us, I think I understand exactly what you're after.

CHAIR - Any others, Meg, or does that cover that?

Ms WEBB - I am mindful of time. There's probably some material here that will get covered in Estimates. I'm interested more about current vacancies and things like that in those areas, but again, it'll get data-heavy then.

CHAIR - Some of those things could be looked at in Estimates, I suspect.

Ms WEBB - Yes, it might come up in Estimates, I suspect.

CHAIR - Okay. Is there anything else, anyone? Is there anything you wish you'd told you haven't, minister?

Ms PALMER - I don't think so.

CHAIR - That was just the catch-all. Like, any other matters there too, anything you want to tell us.

Thanks for your time. It's been a long day for you, so thank you. We'll write to you with those couple of questions on notice and look forward to getting responses. Thanks for your time today.

The witnesses withdrew.

The Committee adjourned at 5.24 p.m.