



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Jo Palmer MLC

Thursday 20 November 2025

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC (Chair)

Hon Luke Edmunds MLC

Hon Mike Gaffney MLC

Hon Casey Hiscutt MLC

Hon Meg Webb MLC

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. JO PALMER MLC

Minister for Education, Minister for Children and Youth, Minister for Disability

Ministerial Office representatives

Lisa Free

Chief of Staff

Emma Lovibond

Senior Adviser

Lucy Mercier

Senior Adviser

Rachel Andrews

Senior Adviser

Kristie Trambas

Adviser

Education Portfolio

Department of Education, Children and Young People representatives

Ginna Webster

Secretary

Sue McKerracher

Deputy Secretary People and Culture

Trudy Pearce

Deputy Secretary Schools and Early Years

Jenny Burgess

Deputy Secretary Strategy and Performance

Peter Whitcombe

Deputy Secretary Child Safety and Youth Justice Operations

Tiffany Black

Executive Director Services for Children and Young People and Families

Katharine O'Donnell

Director Education Regulation

Jason Sowell

Director Business Planning and Improvement

Disability Services Portfolio

Output 7.1

Department of Premier and Cabinet representatives

Melissa (Mel) Gray

Deputy Secretary, Policy and Reform

Ingrid Ganley

Acting Executive Director, Disability and Reform

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

CHAIR - Welcome, minister, to our final day of Budget Estimates. I will introduce the members of Committee Estimates B at the table. The Honourable Luke Edmunds, member for Pembroke; Honourable Michael Gaffney, member for Mersey; myself, Rosemary Armitage, member for Launceston; Honourable Casey Hiscutt; member for Montgomery; and the Honourable Meg Webb, member for Nelson. We also have secretarial support from James and Julie, and Gaye from Hansard. This is our team at the table, minister, and we invite you to introduce your team.

DIVISION 2

Department for Education, Children and Young Children Minister for Education

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that, Chair. I'd like to introduce Ginna Webster, secretary of the department. Also, starting from my left, we have Jenny Burgess, the deputy secretary, Strategy and Performance; Trudy Pearce, deputy secretary, Schools and Early Years; and Sue McKerracher, deputy secretary of People and Culture, and then of course quite a team behind me, a great support team.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. If you wish to take some questions on notice, the committee will consolidate the outstanding responses to these questions and provide them to you for a written response. If you could provide a brief opening statement and the committee will then have some short questions around the overview. I note also that you are prepared to make a statement on the recent issue to do with sand in schools. Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I thank you very much for the opportunity to do that. I will start with some opening comments.

Our government is making bold system-wide changes to lift learning outcomes for every student in every school. In 2025-26 state Budget certainly reflects this commitment. Across the next four years, more than \$8.9 billion is being invested across the education portfolio, including \$1.45 billion for in-school education alone in 2024-25.

Over the last decade, Education portfolio funding has increased by an average of 5 per cent per year. In the 2025 school year, we've seen an increase of \$31.8 million provided through the school resource packages directly to schools. This investment reflects our unwavering focus on learners, their outcomes, their wellbeing and their futures. The Budget responds to the recommendations of the commission of inquiry and the Independent Education Review, both of which provide a strong foundation for lasting reform.

Our next step is to bring this important work we are already doing together under one long term strategy, education together, transforming learning through collaboration. This will be our vision, outlining how we strengthen our education system over the next five years, and importantly, why this work matters so deeply for every child, every educator and every community. I look forward to releasing a draft for consultation next year. Key investments in this budget include the supercharging of the Lifting Literacy initiative, accelerating the

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transition to structured literacy across all year levels and the implementation of a new school staff well-being model supporting our frontline educators.

The budget also supports the delivery of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, the rollout of the Variety School Breakfast program and the extension of the School Lunch Program. It increases support for students with disability and boosts early childhood services through our Child and Family Learning Centres.

We remain committed to closing the gap for Aboriginal learners by providing inclusive culturally rich resources that embed Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultures into teaching and learning. Finally, with \$294 million committed to education infrastructure, we continue to build inspiring places to learn. Together, this budget reflects not just investment, but a deep belief, a belief in our learners, in our educators and in the future of education in Tasmania.

Chair, I do appreciate the opportunity to include in my opening comments this morning, we would like to provide an update on the issue of the recalled sand that has been taking place right across Australia. I start by acknowledging the uncertainty, the disruption and the concern this issue has created for the community, for families, certainly for our staff, and most importantly, our students and young people. I would again like to reiterate that the risks to health are low and the actions that have been taken are highly precautionary in nature.

Yesterday we saw a number of schools that were either fully or partially closed across Tasmania. What I would like to update the committee on today is that a number of those schools have reopened. I'm pleased to confirm that 11 schools that were fully closed yesterday are now partially open today. There were four schools that were either partially or fully closed yesterday that are now fully open today. It is going to take time to work through the remaining schools that remain either partially or fully closed at this stage.

Following on from testing of the recalled sand that commenced on Monday, and air sampling conducted yesterday, cleaning work is under way across a number of schools this morning. I will ask my secretary to give you an update on the results of the testing that's been done. Our focus is on ensuring these schools can open safely and as soon as possible. DECYP has prioritised the schools based on the audit conducted across the state and is working with our contracted advisors and licensed cleaners to ensure that schools are able to reopen safely and open as soon as possible.

Timing for reopening of individual schools is a case-by-case basis, and it will only be done when it is safe to do so. The pre-cleaning samples have now come in, and I'm going to hand to my secretary to give you that information.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms WEBSTER -Thank you, minister, through you. Early indications from the physical testing of the samples conducted to date have not indicated the presence of asbestos. A number of these pre-cleaning samples provide a baseline to confirm that even where the product was in extensive and recent use, the early indications are encouraging but still require formal confirmation.

CHAIR - Sorry, could you put the microphone closer to the -

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Ms WEBSTER - Sorry.

Ms PALMER - Do you need that to be repeated, Chair, or is that okay? Is that clear enough?

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Happy to take questions.

CHAIR - Thank you. Members, do we have any questions on the overview or on the statement?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Thank you, Chair. My question is about the timeline of events. I was watching the news from last night, and it had, Thursday, ACCC notification, Friday, WorkSafe notification, and then it skipped three days and it was Tuesday before there was any kind of action. I'm interested at a departmental level, when was the notification given to look into this?

We had schools that were basically functioning as normal on Monday and Tuesday with this product, as we know - and I appreciate the comments about the risk level. That will be really reassuring for a lot of parents and students who watch the TV. How did we get - because clearly closing schools is a massive inconvenience for everybody. How did we waste the weekend and Monday when this was on the desk of the department from WorkSafe on Friday?

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair. Thank you for the question. I am going to push back on some elements of your question that are factually incorrect. We have already publicly stated that on Friday morning the department reached out with information to all of our schools. In fact, I believe it was all our 200 sites and certainly to all our principals to advise them to make sure they were aware of the notification from the ACCC. The response to this actually began on the Friday. I will get the secretary to speak through the processes that the department has and the setting up of certain response units within the department as soon as this came out.

Mr EDMUNDS - That would be good.

Ms PALMER - It's important to have on the record that all the advice that was coming to us is that this was low risk. Now, if the advice had been coming that this was high risk, it would have been a very different response. Even if it had been a medium risk, it would have been a different response. It wasn't. That was not the scenario. We were presented with recall notifications about a product, and all the advice was saying that this is a low risk, therefore the response needs to be in proportion to that. The fact that it had asbestos, I think, is the reason that we have had the response that we have. The response began on Friday morning with direct contact from the department, certainly out to our principals. I will get the secretary to speak to that because there was also a lot of work that happened in the background as part of moving in this response.

Ms WEBSTER - Thanks, minister. Through you, as we said, the department provided advice to schools and our CFLC sites and other sites across the department on Friday morning to follow the advice from the ACCC. Then the department's Work Health and Safety team commenced providing that advice to sites in relation to the disposal of the product at that time.

We then spoke to WorkSafe Tasmania that day and advised them what we were doing based on the ACCC advice. WorkSafe Tasmania issued a safety alert through media release at 4.59pm on 14 November on that Friday. Then we then outlined an update to schools and CFLCs and other business units on Monday providing further guidance on actions following the WorkSafe advice. As the minister said, all the advice coming through from the Commonwealth Health and also the ACCC was that it was a low risk. On Monday, as we said, we engaged with a consulting firm and asbestos experts to provide that expert advice in relation to potential risk and actions that we require to mitigate the risk. On Monday we engaged with WorkSafe Tasmania to ensure our approach was consistent with their alert.

On Monday samples of the sand were collected from a small number of schools and were sent for testing, and they're some of the results that I've provided feedback on today. We commenced a survey of over 200 sites. There was action taken; it was proportionate to the advice from the ACCC and Health. We then worked with WorkSafe, and we worked with our schools CFLC sites to determine where the sand was in use.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, I appreciate that. But what changed then to the point where schools were getting closed? Did the advice change or was the risk higher on Tuesday than it was on Friday or Monday from the department?

Ms PALMER - No, that's not the case. The information that we have been receiving from the very beginning of the recall of this product is that it was low risk. There's actually even differing ratings of that low risk, even out today with the information we have is at low risk. We've also seen other information on other national sites that say very low risk, but the official line that we have is that it's low risk, which was in accordance with the response that we took.

On the Monday, one of the first actions that was taken is that we had an extraordinary 24 hour audit across all 200 of our sites. It's important to remember we're not talking about one school with one management team that can make a decision. This is 200 different sites across the state. I want to place on the record my thanks to the department. It was a huge amount of work and more specifically my thanks to the school staff, the school business managers, the principals who had to fill in that information and get that back to us, and that was done in 24 hours, just so that we knew where the product was, where was it being held, so we had a really good understanding statewide of where the product was.

Alongside the commencement of that audit, as the secretary has said, we engaged the services of an accredited asbestos assessor who was then able to look at that information and give us advice, which is what we needed to do. We needed to have that sound advice. So that was what was happening over those 24 hours.

I pass to the secretary to advise about how then there was the collation of the advice from the ACCC, then we had notification from WorkSafe Tasmania and we had to put all of that together along with the information from our audit, along with the advice from our accredited asbestos adviser, and that's when we started to make the decisions that we'd made.

I must reiterate, all the advice coming to us is that this was low risk, and we took advice from the areas we should have been taking advice, and we moved through this process in a reasonable response to a low risk situation, and if anything, as we have stated a number of times, we're actually taking quite a precautionary response to this situation.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The risk level did not change. The audit process determined whether schools could undertake what the advice of WorkSafe was, which was to isolate, to relocate, or in the ones that couldn't do that were able to - were the ones that had to fully or partially close, and then that was that. So the risk level did not change. The audit process provided that information to us.

We were also getting that expert advice that we - the expert advice indicated that if the area had actually been cleaned, it was safe to use. We took the precautionary step to say we want seven days because that would do several cleaning cycles to reassure. There's a reassurance element in this as well, and a precautionary element. We took that seven days and then we worked through that process with schools.

Mr EDMUNDS - What do you mean by seven days?

Ms WEBSTER - So the seven days since it had been used. That was the advice.

Mr EDMUNDS - Is that what's going to inform the reopening of schools?

Ms WEBSTER - The cleaning will inform the reopening of schools, and the testing will inform the reopening of schools.

Mr EDMUNDS - Right. Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - I want to reiterate, though, that the risk level did not change.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - It would be really good to highlight that there have been no schools - government schools - across Australia where there have been bulk closures or partial closures. We are taking a very proportionate and precautionary approach.

Ms PALMER - Outside of the ACT.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, sorry, outside of the ACT.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm really trying to piece together the timeline here. The audit is what informed the closure of the schools?

Ms WEBSTER - The audit advised whether or not we could isolate or relocate, and then if we couldn't relocate, we had to close or partially close those schools based on that seven day time frame.

Ms PALMER - A good example of that is where there's a school and the product could have been in a kindergarten and prep area. If it was possible to relocate those children to the library, then we were able to do that, if the product had been used in the last - in line with that seven days. But then if it had been used in say five or six classrooms, you can't relocate all those children to a library or another space. That's when we had to make those decisions so that we were in line with the advice that was coming from WorkSafe Tasmania as well.

Mr EDMUNDS - Considering the impact that's occurred this week into families, workplaces, et cetera, is it not possibly a matter where the inconvenience it would have caused to have perhaps done this audit over the weekend with senior people from schools might have been a better way to react than to have done it on Monday? Taking your comment about low risk, but is it not arguable that that would have been less impact on people than what we've had this week?

Ms PALMER - To be fair, Mr Edmunds, if this had been a high-risk situation, perhaps even a medium-risk situation, I imagine we would have called 200 principals and 200 school business leaders and teachers and reopened all the 200 sites, quite possibly, but this was not a high-risk situation, or even a medium-risk situation. So that would have been a disproportionate response to a low-risk situation to reopen all of those sites. We had already notified the schools. The processes in the background to manage this complex situation were already being established by the department and I think -

Mr EDMUNDS - Over the weekend?

Ms PALMER - Yes, work began with this on Friday. Through you, secretary, perhaps Ms Pearce, who is our deputy secretary for schools and in those early years may wish to speak to how that the impact that that would have had to have opened up all of those sites.

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister. The advice was provided to schools on the Friday. They had preliminary advice around the recall of the products, and they commenced their audit around locating the sand. We provided them with documentation to fill in early on Monday for us to be able to have a state-wide audit of the use of the product, which we were able to have in full early Tuesday.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 1

Education

1.1 In School Education

CHAIR - If we could now move to output 1.1, In School Education, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. Minister, I'll start in an area that I've been checking in on with ministers of each portfolio we've had, which is around progress on Closing the Gap actions that sit with you. I'm interested to know how we're tracking on delivering our Closing the Gap commitments, recognising that some of the key actions have a longer target implementation.

The ones I'm going to ask about are the ones that are in the near future completion dates. Target 3 which is allocated to you: by 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal children enrolled in year before full-time schooling/early childhood education to 95 per cent. Can you update us on whether that target 95 per cent was achieved this year?

Ms PALMER - For the detail around your question, I will pass to the secretary, but I'll make some opening comments around this. The Tasmanian government is committed to Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Each Aboriginal student has a learning plan that is developed in partnership with their family and with teachers. These learning plans allow for tailored goals to be developed to meet the needs of each child or young person. While we still have work to do, it is worth noting that NAPLAN results for Tasmanian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all year levels shows a smaller gap to non-Indigenous students than the rest of Australia.

DECYP's Aboriginal Educational Services, AES, works to build a deeper understanding and respect for Tasmanian Aboriginal history and living culture in schools, child and family learning centres, and libraries. AES developed a culturally safe online resource aligned with the Australian curriculum and guided and reviewed by Tasmanian Aboriginal people called The Orb, and this resource provides teachers and students with local historical and cultural information, and new content is being developed to complement the Australian curriculum Deep Time content. For more details around your question, I will hand that to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. In terms of the Closing the Gap commitment and the focus on improving literacy, attendance and attainment outcomes for Aboriginal learners, I can advise that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have tailored learning plans. Can I just confirm, Ms Webb, it was the proportion of children enrolled in the year before full-time school?

Ms WEBB - That's right, target 3.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. I can tell you that its 100 per cent.

Ms WEBB - Great. Can I ask about action 29, which is to assist in delivering target 4: this requires the state to develop an Aboriginal literacy strategy with Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation sector by the end of 2026-27. Where are we on track with that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Engagement has continued with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and community-controlled organisations and service providers to inform an Aboriginal literacy strategy. A draft strategy and consultation report has been shared with Aboriginal partnerships in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, who will now support final engagement with the Tasmanian Aboriginals as the Closing the Gap Coalition of Peaks partner.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Target 5 requires the state to engage with the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation sector in consideration of recommendations of the Aboriginal Education Services review and the next steps by the end of 2025-26. Is this one on track?

Ms PALMER - Ms Webb, would you mind just repeating the question? Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Sure, I will. It's relating to target 5, and it requires the state to engage with the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations sector in consideration of recommendations of the Aboriginal Education Services review and the next steps, and that's got a completion time by the end of 2025-26.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair. We will be able to get that information for Ms Webb.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Do you have any further -

Ms WEBB - I can keep going, and you can interrupt to me whenever we want to throw to -

CHAIR - Perhaps you do another question, and then I'll ask something in a moment.

Ms WEBB - Okay, great. I wanted to follow up on something from a session yesterday that touches into the space of schools, and it relates to lab technicians. Minister, lab technicians employed in schools and colleges are expected to commence working in laboratories with knowledge and experience required to safely support teachers and students in areas of resource acquisition and management, preparation of practical experiments, repair of equipment, management of lab facilities, chemical storage, waste management, and work health and safety in the lab environments.

My question about lab technicians in schools is, is it not a fact that DECYP requires applicants to hold a minimum of a Certificate III or a Certificate IV in Lab Techniques to be considered for a position in a school or a college in Tasmania?

Ms PALMER - For the detail of that, I will pass to the secretary. I will say that our school and college laboratory technicians are highly valued for their expertise and the vital services they provide, certainly, for students that are studying science. I am advised that the Department for Education, Children and Young People is not aware of any immediate laboratory technician workforce shortages across our government schools and colleges. I will pass to the secretary to provide those -

Ms WEBB - I've got a series of questions. The first one, what's the minimum qualification you require them to hold to be employed into those positions?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. We've got a number of levels around laboratory technicians: Band 3, the minimum requirement is a Certificate III or IV in Laboratory Techniques or equivalent TAFE or post-secondary qualification; and then we move to Band 4, which requires a Diploma of Laboratory Technology.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can you confirm there's over 100 lab technicians employed across Tasmania? My information is that 67 per cent or so of those are trained through TasTAFE. Do you have that information on the numbers and where they've drawn from?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I can give you the numbers, Ms Webb. The number of laboratory technicians, as at 22 October, through schools is 49.49 or a headcount of 67 FTE. I certainly don't have their actual qualifications. Sorry, we do have those. We've got in the north Band 3 lab techs, 22 headcount. Band 4 lab techs in the north is 11. That's a total of 33. In the southern region, it's a total of 34, adding up to that 67.

Ms WEBB - Which is the headcount?

Ms WEBSTER - The headcount. Did you want the FTE?

Ms WEBB - Sorry. I think you just said it the other way round earlier on.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, I did. Sorry.

Ms WEBB - Because you said the headcount was a higher number than the -

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, the headcount is a higher number than the FTE. That's right, yes.

Ms WEBB - So 49 FTE?

Ms WEBSTER - 49.49 FTE; 67 head count across the state.

Ms WEBB - Okay. You haven't got information on where they were trained, just the qualifications they hold?

Ms WEBSTER - Just where they sit within the Band 3 and what they require.

Ms WEBB - Anecdotally, are you aware that a majority of them - perhaps two-thirds - have come through the TasTAFE training courses?

Ms WEBSTER - I might just ask Ms Pearce.

Ms PEARCE - I wouldn't be able to comment on that.

Ms WEBB - Okay, that's fine. Next question I have is what is the usual recruitment rate for lab technicians? For example, over the last five years, in each year, how many were recruited on an annual basis? I'm interested to understand if this is an ageing workforce, so that's partly where my question's going.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. What we can say is that we're fully staffed in our lab technicians. We wouldn't have the level of detail that you're asking around the number of the age of those particular workforce.

Ms WEBSTER - What about the recruitments over the last five years? How many were recruited into those roles each year?

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister. We have increased the number of laboratory technicians in the last five years. It was part of the most recent award in relation to an increase.

Ms WEBB - Will you be able to provide me with numbers of recruitments of each year over the last five years?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I think we can get you that information. I'm not taking it on notice, but we will get that.

Ms WEBB - Today while we're here?

Ms PALMER - While we're here, yes.

Ms WEBB - Yes, thank you. I have another question.

CHAIR - Same area?

Ms WEBB - Same area, yes. Sorry, I'm still working through a series of questions on this. TasTAFE is no longer training lab techs after this year, and the narrative is that people who will be training in that area will have to do so through an employment situation, be employed in an area already and access a private RTO on the mainland to do training, largely online. Is that something the department has considered and agreed to in terms of a source of future employees in this area? Will the department be employing people who are untrained and then putting them through a private RTO to be trained once they are in a school?

Ms PALMER - I might have to hand a number of questions - I think I need to be cautious that the responsibility of this sits in another portfolio with another minister and where my -

Ms WEBB - No, I'm not asking about TAFE.

Ms PALMER - Our absolute focus is, is certainly in ensuring that we are developing that opportunity in our schools. I will hand to the secretary for the detail of what you are asking, but we want as a government to see more young people undertake vocational education and training courses in our schools in their secondary years.

VET for school students in Tasmania provides opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in specific industries which can, of course, lead to nationally recognised qualifications. We know the benefits that come with that. VET certainly provides students with hands-on experience and connection to real jobs and does contribute to their Tasmanian Certificate of Education. I'll ask the secretary to manage the rest of your question.

Ms WEBB - Just to be clear, minister, if I can clarify the question. It's not about VET training. It's not about TasTAFE. The question is about the Department of Education: the Education employment of lab techs in years to come and where they'll be drawing those from, because TasTAFE is no longer training them. You won't have a source of lab technicians trained in this state. The only options, according to your minister for TAFE, is to do external training in private RTOs based on the mainland. Those RTOs require an employment situation to be in place first before they offer the training.

So is it the department's intention, when you are replacing lab techs into the future - which naturally we will over time, as people retire or move on - will we be employing unqualified people into those roles and putting them through a private RTO to gain the qualifications that we require currently for the roles?

Ms PALMER - As I said, Chair, to Ms Webb that I would pass to the secretary for the detail of her question, but I will reiterate that the department is not aware of any immediate lab tech workforce shortages across our government schools or colleges. I certainly continue to seek updates from the department to keep across any current or emerging impacts of this decision. I'll ask the secretary to address Ms Webb's question.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. To answer your first question, Ms Webb, we don't have any agreement at the moment in that space. We'd certainly be looking at what we will need to do in the future, but we haven't got any plans at this stage, but we will have to look at that as we move forward.

Ms WEBB - So the department is aware that there won't be an on-island source of training for people and therefore there won't be qualified people ready to apply for these roles

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as they come up in years to come as a result of the decision made in terms of the TAFE course? Clearly this is something that's necessary in our schools, so we will be needing to fill the role.

Ms PALMER - Yes. We continue to seek updates and we'll need to work through any impacts of the decision that's been taken. But it's very much on our radar.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, we're very aware of the role that lab technicians play and we would not want to see people that are not trained into those roles, to answer your question, Ms Webb. It's a very important role.

Ms WEBB - You're aware though, having said that - and I accept that and I'm pleased to hear you say that, but the RTOs that will be the only options for training in this area from next year require a person to be employed in the role, in order to provide the training. In fact, they require not an individual but a group to be providing the training. Will that present a difficulty for the department in years to come in terms of employing lab techs as we require them, as roles come up?

Ms PALMER - I think I've answered the question. In years to come: that's a very broad statement. We know where we are at the moment. We know how important these positions are, and we will work through any impacts of the decision that's been made in another - outside of the control of the Education Department.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. One very final simple one on that. Was the Department of Education or you, minister, consulted before the decision was made to cut the course in TAFE?

Ms PALMER - I'll need to seek some advice around that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I'll wait for the minister to return to the table.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, I heard your voice, Mr Hiscutt, but can I respond to Ms Webb's question?

CHAIR - Yes, you can.

Ms PALMER - No, my office was not consulted prior to that decision being made.

Ms WEBB - And the department wasn't either?

Ms PALMER - I would need to ask the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, no.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for confirming that.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - I'll go for round two. I wanted to inquire, the Safer Student Bathrooms Program has been going on. I'm not sure if that is a continuing project or not. I may have missed it in the wording through here, but has that ceased or has it completed its process? Is there any further schools that need work in that regard? If you could give me an update on that?

Ms PALMER - This has been a fantastic program and, as times change and as we become more and more aware of what we can do to keep children safe in schools, we've certainly been good to be able to invest in toilets. It's quite interesting when you go to schools because we know that the hotspots where we see inappropriate behaviour, certainly bullying, it always does appear to be in toilets, toilet blocks or locker areas. So yes, it's good to see that this is continuing. I will hand to the secretary for some details on that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the Supporting Safer Schools Program was a 2021 election commitment by the government to deliver student bathroom upgrades to high school and district schools across the state. Upgraded student bathrooms incorporate anti-bullying features and are of a contemporary standard, so hand basins within compartments, modern door locks, fully enclosed walls and doors.

Asset condition data, toilet vandalism rates and student behaviour has been used to determine the priority order for the rollout of the program and the trenches of schools to receive student bathroom upgrades. To date, 17 sites have received student bathroom upgrades. An additional 10 sites are in various stages of planning and design. It is anticipated that completion of all these projects will occur in 2026.

Mr HISCUTT - 2026. So that's 27 sites. Has it been determined that the other schools do not require this, or is there an intention to progress the changes across all schools in the state sector?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, we'd be still working through that priority list and we'd prioritise that as part of our infrastructure program.

Mr HISCUTT - Is there continued funding for that?

Ms WEBSTER - We can get that advice, minister.

Ms PALMER - It's probably also important to note that with the list of schools, there's been redevelopments in many of our schools. There's been a massive infrastructure spend across our schools. We have new schools. Not all school sites would be requiring new toilet facilities. It would be based on schools that may not have had that capital investment in toilet areas, which as I say, isn't all schools.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, that will be continuing in the budget to 2027-28. Yes, that upgrade.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for the answer to that. I should ask the question out of a little bit of ignorance. Curriculum focus. I know young kids in school myself, and the introduction of more things in early education, grades 3, 4, 5 and 6, I think. I wanted to see if I could have an update on how that - it was introduced this year and an introduction of how this year has

gone and whether there has been improvements in educational learnings or how that will be measured.

Ms PALMER - Yes, we would love to give you an update on that. I call to the table Jodee Wilson, the Deputy Secretary for Development and Support. Thank you, Jodee.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. Yes, through the introduction of a structured approach to instruction for literacy, a number of programs have been introduced, including Word Origins and a program called UFLI. Teacher feedback has been really positive in relation to the support it provides for their instruction. In relation to improvements in student outcomes, it's a little bit early to see a dramatic increase, but the progressive indicators would give us confidence that holding the course on the introduction of those materials for teachers to use in their instruction will be beneficial.

Mr HISCUTT - The parent feedback is also quite good as well. Will it be measured through regular - how we would normally measure outcomes, or is there any particular way to make sure that that is the thing that is causing improvement? Is there any way to measure it, their success?

Ms WILSON - As part of the program of delivery, there is a review cycle inherent in the materials so that teachers are teaching the materials each week and then reviewing as they go forward. Then, periodically, there are other forms of screening and assessments used to make sure that students are making the gains that we would expect them to be making commensurate with the instructional materials.

Mr HISCUTT - Beautiful. Thank you for the answer.

CHAIR - I have a follow on with that question with regard to the one hour a day of structured numeracy in schools and how that is looking to be delivered and measured outcomes as well.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that. Of course, that was an announcement that was at the last election that we would be requiring all government schools to allocate at least one hour a day to the structured teaching of numeracy, and it's really about ensuring that every child in every school is getting that same instructional numeracy lesson.

Our government is strengthening numeracy initiative is part of our broader commitment to improving educational outcomes for students, and, as you say, it's certainly aligned with lifting literacy priority, and it's been informed also by findings of the Independent Education Review. What we do know is that explicit, systematic and evidence-based teaching works, and we've certainly seen that with the success that we've seen across the literacy space, and now we wanna see those gains mirrored in the numeracy space.

We recognise that a number of our schools are already doing really great work in this space, and this initiative is about really supporting that consistency right across our education system. That includes resourcing as well, making our schools have what they need and have access to the best resources. Planning's now already begun on how to best support schools, including communicating, obviously, with our key stakeholders, and our approach to strengthening numeracy will mirror our supercharging literacy resources action.

Schools will be provided with high-quality instructional materials that are specifically designed for mathematics, and these materials will give teachers that really clear guidance on what to teach, when to teach it, and establishing a well-structured learning pathway for all of our students, and this does ensure that that mathematical skills are introduced in the right order with each new concept and skill building on prior learning and, of course, strengthening the foundations students need for ongoing success in mathematics.

Implementation of mathematics HQIMs will be deliberate and staged beginning of term 1, 2026. There are some schools that are already well positioned that already had those strong systems and practices in place that's sort of been formed, I guess, through the work that we've done with the lifting literacy approach, and other schools will be able to follow on, and we want to work with our schools so that by the time we get to the beginning of 2027, we know that this will be mirrored through all of our schools and through all of our classrooms.

Under this approach, it's our students from prep through to year 6 who will be receiving a minimum of five hours of high-quality tier 1 mathematics instruction each week, and our teachers, as I say, will be really supported with really high-quality resources that the department will arrange.

Importantly, about this initiative is that this is for every learner. Mathematics instruction will be inclusive of students with disability, students from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds, and it will reflect culturally appropriate practices for Tasmanian Aboriginal students.

A total of \$2.7 million has been allocated to engage educational experts to create materials that are evidence-based, and this daily dedicated hour of numeracy represents a system-wide shift towards a more structured, explicit, and equitable approach to mathematics teaching, and it's really about making sure that our teachers have the tools that they need, that they have the resources that are classroom ready, and that students are receiving the instruction that they deserve so, we're supporting that stronger numeracy outcomes for students right across Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you. You did mention - just a follow-up - that the teachers would be supported. How are we looking? Professional support staff, how are our numbers going? Are we putting more professional support staff into our schools to support our teachers?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we can certainly get that information, and, also, I can say that when we implemented the supercharging of literacy, it was all about making sure that schools had the resources that they needed at their fingertips. We had book sets going into schools. We had decodable readers for - I think it was prep to grade 2. We made sure that we were resourcing schools so that they could have their school staff attend professional learning days, and so we would help them to cover the cost of relief teachers. We actually went out to schools, and we went out to teachers and asked what do you need from the department to enable you to absolutely smash out the work that we're doing in lifting literacy? We'll have the same approach through what we want to do in numeracy, making sure that they're supported.

With professional support staff, we know how important speech and language pathologists, how important our social workers are, and our school psychologists. They play such a vital role right across the wellbeing and the resilience of students.

CHAIR - There's such a wait list for many children in these areas.

Ms PALMER - Yes, there are. Over the last decade, we've actually employed a record number of staff across the education workforce. I'm advised that this includes increasing the overall number of professional support staff by 107.1 FTE, and that was at 31 March, those numbers, and, of course, to provide that direct support into our schools, and we're continuing to support this workforce. We want to bolster this workforce.

We funded 20 scholarships for the next generation of speech and language pathologists and for psychologists in Tasmania. This funding was in addition to nine scholarships that had already been made available for speech pathology in 2024. Pleasingly, 10 speech and language pathology scholarships have been awarded. We have six recipients who have already commenced work this year. We have four more commencing, I think it is, in term 1.

I'm also advised that we have eight school psychology scholarships that have been awarded with five recipients who will be commencing work in our schools this year, and a further three commencing in term 1 2026. I've had the opportunity, when I've been visiting schools, to meet some of the recipients of these scholarships. I met a young woman who has come from Western Australia and is working in our schools now. It was great to see that she was really engaged in her school community. She was loving working in Tasmania. That was another person on the ground working in our schools in this space. We know how important our professional support staff are.

CHAIR - Really appreciate it.

Mr GAFFNEY - Just a follow on to that. Could you give me a regional base of where those support staff, psychologists, social workers, are going to be? I would prefer north, north-west and south. I know the secretary gave numbers before from north and south, but on a regional basis, I'd rather the three regions, please.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms PEARCE - We have by regions. Do you want me to go through them all?

Mr GAFFNEY - You can table it, or give us an indication of the three regions. I know in some areas we struggle.

Ms PEARCE - In speech and language pathologists in the northern region, it is in the northern region. I would need to break it down to north-west and the Launceston-based - but I have northern and southern.

Mr GAFFNEY - That would help, yes. Give us that, but I'd like to know where the northern reps are. If they're all in Launceston it's not going to help us if we need one in Smithton.

Ms PEARCE - Great.

Ms PALMER - I think if we start with that, and while the deputy secretary's reading that in, I'll see if we can get another update.

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Mr GAFFNEY - That would be good, thank you.

Ms PEARCE - In the northern region we have an FTE of 27.63 speech and language pathologists, and in the southern region we have an FTE of 24.40. Social workers, we have an FTE of 43.40 in the northern region and in the southern region we have 47.11 FTE. School psychologists, we have an FTE in the northern region of 40.67, and in the southern region an FTE of 39 - picking up that the FTE is often more - there's a head count which is bigger, with a number of them working fractional loads.

Ms PEARCE - That was at March 2025.

CHAIR - Lovely, thank you.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, if it's appropriate now, I've got some questions about speech pathologists. They might have to take it on notice, but I want to know how many students are on the waiting list to see a speech pathologist, what the maximum wait time is, and what the average wait time is.

CHAIR - By region.

Mr EDMUNDS - You can come back later if you need to.

Ms PALMER - We have that information for you. Through you, Chair, I'll hand it to the secretary.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the school psychology, the average wait time is 280 days for assessment, and 176 days for intervention. The social work is 7.9 days for - or 7.9 days is the waiting list. Speech and language pathology, 156 days, which is a 13 per cent decrease statewide. We don't have that detail broken down into region.

Ms WEBB - Regions. The numbers?

Mr EDMUNDS - For the actual -

Ms WEBSTER - Numbers of students? The numbers of students on the waiting list - through you, minister - school psychology is 2099, which is down from 2217 at the same, March 2024. Social work number of students, 250, which is down from 380 in March 2024. Speech and language pathology is 537, which is a 10 per cent decrease from 598 in March 2024.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask a follow-up on that for you, Luke?

Mr EDMUNDS - Please.

Ms WEBB - I might quickly clarify. You mentioned, I think, the speech wait time was improved by 13 per cent from the year before. What about the psychologist wait time? How does that compare to the year before?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the school psychology assessment, it was 250 days for assessment in 2024, where it's 280 in 2025.

Ms WEBB - So it's gone up.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, but it's gone down for waiting list for intervention. It was 198 days for intervention. It's 176 days in 2025.

Ms WEBB - It's overall still longer though across the two.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, I'm interested in this. You might take this on notice, minister. There seems to be quite a lot of north versus south now, or north and south discussion, debate, and not only in Tourism; in Education and other areas.

I'm wondering, is that government policy now that the north-west and west coast is now not spoken about? All our stats are from the north and the south. Before it was clearly three regions in the state: north-west and west, north, and south. It's happening now in Tourism; it's happening in Sport. I'm wondering, is that a direction the Education department is going, that we just get north and south statistics now?

Ms PALMER - I will have to hand to the secretary to speak on behalf of the Education department, but I am certainly not aware that that's a deliberate decision from a policy position. I will get the secretary to address it.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, and the deputy secretary might have some specifics around the schools data, but it's not a deliberate position from the department. It's more of a case-by-case basis, Mr Gaffney. Ms Pearce -

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister, our structure for our learning services, which supports all our schools, is to have a southern region and a northern region. However, there are local - there are bases in the north-west and in the north.

Our model is more a state-wide approach. We work collectively to ensure that we are providing consistency across the state, but picking up the nuances around specific areas such as the west coast, north-west. We approach each region or specific location with the appropriate nuancing, recognising there are specific challenges around some areas.

It's certainly an approach that's consistent, however takes into - areas of locality. There is no - yes, and the northern region has people based right across from the west coast all the way along the north-west, right through to St Helens. It's a large region and we all work collaboratively to support the northern region as we do in the south for the southern region. So yes, no deliberate approach to pull it together, it's just that's our structure. There are people based in the north-west with north-west responsibilities.

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Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - Did you want to go to -

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, I might go to the other end of the scale, the years 11 and 12. Now that we've had the initiative or the experiment to have years 11 and 12 in a lot of the high schools, and every high school is going - and I want to find out how that's going. I've got four or five questions, and you can take that on notice if somebody's got to find the answers so that we can move through it.

What are the median enrolment numbers of both year 11 and year 12 in our extended high schools? Second question, as -

Ms PALMER - Would you want me to answer questions as you go, Mr Gaffney?

Mr GAFFNEY - It's probably easier if I - there are only four or five - put them in a block and then - yes.

Ms PALMER - Okay, because we have a great team that wants to answer questions for you today.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, I'm happy for them -

Ms PALMER - We won't be taking questions on notice if we can get those answers for you today, so yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. I'll give you the four or five questions.

As of today, how many high schools have five or fewer year 11 and 12 students, and how many have none at all? What is the TCE attainment rate for year 11 and 12 students enrolled in high schools?

What is the cost of maintaining year 11 and 12 programs in high schools that are within 40 kilometres of a college in terms of salary cost, year 11 and 12 allocated staff in high schools, the cost of maintaining classroom space for year 11 and 12 students in those high schools, and the costs to the colleges of supporting some of those programs out of their own budgets?

My final question would be, will the government's Efficiency and Productivity Unit be tasked with examining the high school extension programs and cutting those that fail to match or exceed what the nearest college can achieve with similar students? So that's the gambit of the questions.

CHAIR - Good questions.

Ms PALMER - Got it. You're not going to be able to read any of that. Thank you very much for those questions. While we're gathering that information, we know attendance in year 11 and 12 is a constant challenge. This is a critical transition stage from school through to further education, through to training, through to employment. All Tasmanian secondary and district schools offering years 11 and 12 - so with that, students will have the opportunity to attend close to home or in their communities or where they feel known. When at schools,

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students already have access to a diversity of learning options, so flexible learning, whether that might be VET courses, it could be applied learning or co-designing career pathway, as well as having access to social workers and psychologists as well. I'll hand to the secretary to answer some of those questions.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, it would be really good if we could have that list, because they're quite a long list of questions. We can provide the answer, but it would be great if we had the detail so that we can get you the right answers.

Mr GAFFNEY - All right, I will get you that.

Ms WEBSTER - I can start with some of them, through you, minister.

Ms PALMER - Yes, sure.

Ms WEBSTER - So the TCE, I think you asked about attainment rate for year 12 students?

Mr GAFFNEY - Year 11 and year 12 in extended schools and the median enrolment numbers.

Ms WEBSTER - Right. We will have to get -

Mr GAFFNEY - What if I give a photocopy of this and then give it to you and you can come back within this session?

Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely, that would be really helpful.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, that would be more time-effective.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you, yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb?

Ms WEBB - Thank you. A couple of quick questions about the lunch program and the breakfast program, if I could. Are you going to go there?

Mr GAFFNEY - No, I am interested in your questions.

Ms WEBB - The key deliverables table indicates school lunch program receives funding in the 2026-27 financial year and then doesn't feature in the forward Estimates. I note the program is to be delivered until the end of the 2026 school year. The question is really, what's intended after that point in terms of our school lunch program? Are we expecting the May Budget to have funding across those forward Estimates; we're just leaving it out now so it looks better on the bottom line? What are the schools having to do in terms of planning around any uncertainty if that's also not a certain outcome?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I should acknowledge Julie Dunbabin who's just -

Ms WEBB - Yes, indeedly. What a champion, the Senior Tasmanian Australian of the Year.

Ms PALMER - Was it Senior Tasmanian? Yes. Lovely for all of us to put on the record.

Ms WEBB - For reference, it was her Churchill Fellowship on school lunches that brought that program back to the state, and your government, minister, to its credit, picked up on the work she'd done in that groundwork under the Churchill Fellowship and began the program.

Ms PALMER - Yes, she did. Brilliant to see that it's now being rolled out to 60 schools. We've just announced the next 15, which is really great.

To get to your question around the Budget. What's happened with Healthy School Lunches is that it has grown, and as it's grown, it's required further investment. With that further investment, it's gone beyond the stage of where that money can be allocated through a grant. Now we're at the point, and we've sought some advice, which has said that program actually has to go out through a tender process because of the amount of investment in that space.

So it's always hard that our budgets are over financial years. That's not how schools work. They work over the calendar year. We made sure that the funding was allocated through to the end of 2026 so there wouldn't be any potential thought that there could be a disruption during the school year to the provision of school lunches, but we now have to go through that process of putting that tender out. We've been engaging with all stakeholders across this space so that there is an understanding of this.

We've seen in a number of our schools and areas where the food insecurity can be such a barrier to education. We know anecdotally, certainly, from teachers and principals, that there can be links between when a hot lunch is provided or work with breakfast club and children actually attending school. We are really committed to ensuring that children that we need to be supporting in that space are really supported. But it's just the size of the program, and so now we have to take that out and do evaluation.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that explanation. I appreciate it. That would mean we're anticipating that for the 2027 calendar school year we will be under the new arrangement once the tender process has played out during 2026, and we'll be funding it in that way from 2027 onwards?

Ms PALMER - Yes, that would be my expectation. There needs to be an evaluation, which I think is actually under way, isn't it? Yes, and then, yes, it's grown, and so we need to have proper process in that space.

Ms WEBB - Is that an internal evaluation or an externally conducted evaluation?

Ms PALMER - It's through the Menzies Institute, I'm advised.

Ms WEBB - Right. When will that be completed, and will you make it public once it's completed?

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Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice. There's two evaluations that are under way. One is being done through Menzies, and that is the evaluation that Healthy School Lunches do, and then there's an internal evaluation that the department does as part of normal process.

Ms WEBB - Which of those - or are both of those feeding into, then, the design of the tendering process for the ultimate new funding model for it?

Ms PALMER - I would assume that both of those would be feeding into that. There's also a previous report that I've seen that came from Menzies as well, which was a previous evaluation body of work that Healthy School Lunches has certainly shown to me in past years, particularly when I was Community Services minister, but all those pieces of information will feed into the next stage.

Ms WEBB - Finally on that, we have been adding schools each year to the program, I think, since the original pilot. Is it your expectation, or can you confirm that we'll continue to add schools each year to expand the program?

Ms PALMER - I would be pre-empting what a good model would be if I was to go down that space. We need to get the evidence from the internal evaluation that the department's doing and the work that Healthy School Lunches are doing. They've been quite open that they would like to see this growing. For me, personally, as the minister responsible in this place, my key focus is where are the children who really need this? We must make sure that the children who really need this actually have access to food because we want to give them every opportunity and every encouragement and help their families wherever we can to make sure that they are at school and that they are learning and they are thriving.

The model moving forward is something that we have to look at the evidence and the evaluation. It may be the same. It may be different. But we have to make sure that we are using the work that will come back from Menzies, the work that will come back through Healthy School Lunches, and our own internal evaluation of the program.

Ms WEBB - Yes, of course, children who may benefit from this program don't exist all clustered in the same schools. We can point to schools that might have a higher proportion of those students clustered, but every school might have them. So we can't rule out that it's beneficial across the board. Can you guarantee that there won't be a reduction in the schools being serviced in some way by this program once the new model is in place?

Ms PALMER - I'm going to be waiting until I see the internal evaluation, till I see the outcomes, till I see the work that's provided to us, the evaluation from Menzies, and then we'll take that information and move forward.

Ms WEBB - It's a little bit concerning that you can't confirm that there won't be a reduction in the schools. If we're expanding this year, we might be giving them one year's worth and then taking it away, potentially.

Ms PALMER - Ms Webb, I am not confirming anything or not confirming anything. I am saying that this is proper process. This is good governance. You do evaluations.

Ms WEBB - Yes. I don't take issue with that.

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Ms PALMER - You take the information that comes through, and then, because of the size of the program now, we have to put that out to tender, and that's the process that we'll be following, and I feel comfortable with that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. We're just a bit concerned.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I was going to ask about the - I think it's the Working Together, or EL3, Early Learning for Three Year Olds program, an overview of how that is. Does that sit within -

CHAIR - It's probably in the next one, early learning.

Mr HISCUTT - I wasn't sure whether that - yes, happy to hold the question until early learning.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney.

Mr HISCUTT - Well, now you've all flicked over your folders, but that's all right. We're going to move to another.

Ms PALMER - I'm sure we'll flick them a lot during -

CHAIR - Did you have something else in school education?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. I've got a range of different ones here. So people jump in, but I've also given heads-up copies of this to your staff so that they should be able to have those questions.

Ms PALMER - They've got that now. Okay. Thank you.

Mr GAFFNEY - They've got them. All right. One of them is, can the minister clarify in clear dollar terms how much new funding will actually flow directly to government schools through the school schooling resource package as Tasmania transitioned to 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard? If there is no monetary increase to schools from reaching full SRS, can the minister detail what additional investments in real dollar terms are being made to improve educational support and staffing?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. It was fantastic to be able to enter into that agreement with the Australian Government last year, which will see millions of dollars in new funding start to flow, and it started at the beginning of this year, and it will see our public schools, of course, reach 100 per cent of the school resource standard by January of 2026.

The agreement also included a no-worse-off clause, which was fantastic and covered Tasmania in ensuring that we would be in a very strong position when we signed this agreement. We've accepted the offer which will see Tasmanian schools better off by approximately \$83 million over the next 10 years. This amount is in addition to the funding that we secured last year through our initial agreement with the Australian Government. Under

this revised offer, Tasmania will reach 100 per cent funding SRS next year, and we're certainly excited about what that will mean for our learners, and, of course, for our educators as well.

Under the new agreement in 2025 school year, we're seeing \$16 million in additional funding flow from the Commonwealth, and that's on top of the existing funding we were due to receive under the Commonwealth's previous 20 per cent funding commitment. We have been really mindful about how this funding will be delivered as it is tied to reforms to improve educational outcomes. Considering the findings of the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania alongside the BFSAs reforms. As a department, we directed a significant portion of the increased funding for the 2025 school year towards the supercharging of our Lifting Literacy initiative.

That was a \$12 million commitment that I spoke to earlier to ensure we had more school resources in our schools to ensure that we had money flowing into schools to help cover the cost of relief teaching, which previously they had done.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, thank you.

Ms PALMER - That was a \$12 million investment -

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, minister. With all due respect, we are not going to get through this line item if we - thank you for that information.

Ms PALMER - Did you want the breakdown of where the money's being spent? I think that was the question.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, if you can get to that.

Ms PALMER - Yes. \$12 million went to the supercharging of our Lifting Literacy. We also had money that went into the establishment of a new school staff wellbeing response team. I believe that was a \$1 million commitment. We also had money that was assigned to the preparation to commence the multi-school organisation trial in 2026, and that was \$600,000.

I can confirm the new school staff wellbeing model was \$1 million per year. Following on from the election, there's the rollout of the breakfast program. That money is also coming from the BFSAs, and that's over four years, in partnership with Variety.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, thank you. You mentioned the independent education review. Budget paper number 2 says that it's a critical priority for 2025-26, yet there is no visible line item on this funding. I'm trying to find out if the minister can clarify which recommendations of the independent education review are being funded in this Budget, what dedicated resources have been allocated for implementation, and how parliament will be able to monitor progress when there are no reporting indicators included that I could find? If you're saying it's a critical priority for 2025-26, I want to know a bit more fact.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. With the independent review in particular, we made some announcements straight up, and that funding has already been rolling out. That was across the multi-school organisations and the seed funding that will be used there. The wellbeing team that was set up, that funding was in response to a recommendation from the review, and that's certainly already rolling out as well.

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As an immediate recommendation, we began working on a memorandum of understanding with the University of Tasmania around initial teacher education. There's already been four actions that have been an immediate response to some of the recommendations and the findings from the independent review. We have now got the implementation plan for the independent review of education in Tasmania, and I believe this was released yesterday. This will hold us to account across each of those recommendations.

Mr GAFFNEY - There are reporting indicators in that?

Ms PALMER - There are reporting indicators in that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. That's fine.

Ms PALMER - That was released yesterday.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask a follow-up just on that?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, go for it.

Ms WEBB - How will that be reported on? The implementation plan is there on the website, as put in the media release this morning. Will there be a progress update on a quarterly basis or something similar to that?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. I'll hand over to Jenny Burgess.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you, minister. This is a major priority within the department, and so the executive board has a key governance role in that. The first quarterly report will be released in term 4, and then it would be quarterly after that around how we're making progress against those recommendations.

Ms WEBB - Term 4 this year or next year?

Ms BURGESS - Term 4 this year.

Ms WEBB - This year. Okay, great. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney, if you have a question, then we'll go to Mr Hiscutt and come back to Ms Webb.

Mr GAFFNEY - Given the government's admission of a compressed timeframe for preparing this Budget, how many 2025 election commitments relating to education were not funded, deferred or only partially funded, and what rationale was used to determine which commitments were excluded?

Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice on that one.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, they have the questions. We can go onto the next one.

Ms PALMER - They're working on that. We'll have an answer for you.

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Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, thanks.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. The Chair assures me that this one can be asked here. I'm hoping that's the case. There were a lot of reports in the media last year with the years 11 and 12 exams that had a number of errors in them. I note that the years 11 and 12 exams conclude today. Has there been any feedback on this year to see if it's been rectified or if there's been any issues this year?

Ms PALMER - It is a different output, but I had the answer.

CHAIR - There you go. That's my fault.

Ms PALMER - I'm happy to answer.

Mr HISCUTT - I can blame the Chair. That's good. It's not my fault.

Mr EDMUNDS - Just to be clear, are we going to deal with - because I've got questions on that as well.

Mr HISCUTT - We can come back to that.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Can we come back to that on education regulation?

Mr EDMUNDS - We can do it all now. I don't care. I'm not the Chair, though, or the minister.

Ms WEBB - Can we come back to it in education regulation?

Mr EDMUNDS - I did have it here for that.

CHAIR - All right. We'll come back to it.

Mr GAFFNEY - Two more. This one, I think it's in the right spot, even though it mentions the word 'disability', but it says, 'In relation to educational adjustments disability model funding, the Budget calls for the repurposing of \$5 million of DECYP funding to fund educational adjustments.'

What programs or services were reduced or reprioritised, and will those reductions impact students with additional needs? What modelling shows that the total funding of \$10 million will meet actual needs, given rising diagnoses, waitlists, and reports of inconsistent access to adjustments? How many students currently rely on part-time timetables due to unmet need, and how will this Budget address that? I've given that question as well to your staff. It might take a while to go through that, Jo.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I'll seek some advice. We might need to take some of that question -

CHAIR - A little time?

Mr GAFFNEY - And my last one in this -

CHAIR - You might as well give it to them, yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - It's a little bit Latrobe specific. I've been exploring the policy around student transport for the last six years or more. I understand it's an ongoing issue, especially in my area of Latrobe, for those families with limited incomes that don't qualify for a student bus pass. Getting students to school and home again is an essential part of attendance and, I assume, a key part of the Every School Day Matters attendance campaign.

My questions would be what has been the change in attendance rates as a result of the first phase of the campaign, and what is the anticipated outcome of the second phase launched in September? What has been the total cost of the campaign to date? Has student transport been considered as part of the campaign and, if not, why not?

Many high schools and colleges are spending thousands of dollars on bus tickets to give to students so they can get home safely, and that's only to the ones that ask. What's the total expenditure by Tasmanian schools on these tickets? I'm fully aware that student transport comes within the minister for Transport's funding envelope; however, schools, students and their families are the service users. In this arrangement, who has the final call? Is it you, as the minister for Education, or minister Abetz?

Only two more. Student bus fares are only charged when the route crosses an urban boundary. Do you think it's fair that some families have to pay hundreds of dollars a year in a bus fare and others pay nothing in what is really a postcode lottery that is more of a historical nature? I understand the essence on fair income on student transport varies between \$1.2 million and \$4.2 million on a roughly \$100 million scheme. Given the cost of the Every School Day Matters program, particularly in administering student bus passes, would it make sense to simply allow students to use their school ID card as a free bus pass so that every student can get to school and back?

At the moment, it would cost \$1.2 million to \$3 million for students to have their own ID pass on a \$100 million scheme. It seems to me it would make more sense to just give a kid a bus pass so they can get on and off the bus without being out of area or crossing a boundary. They are my questions, but it's quite long.

CHAIR - They're quite lengthy, and you have given them on notice. If they can't be answered today, perhaps you actually could -

Ms PALMER - We do have this information. I don't want to be taking questions on notice. I would like to be able to provide the committee. We are working through quite a number of extensive lists, but I believe we have some answers to some questions.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, if I can just work backwards from your last question around the consideration of the ticketing. We'd always consider ways that we could look at getting children to school easier. There is a number of things in there that we could consider. I could provide you a bit of an update on our attendance program.

We know that there's a nationwide declining rate of attendance and we've got strong plans on how we can address that. It's a community issue and we need to work with the community

around how we can improve attendance rates and make school a valuable place for parents and families and carers to send their children. I think we have a work plan, an attendance work plan for 2025, which outlines a number of actions to improve attendance. The work relies on a coordinated response from our whole system to provide support through a range of measures.

In addition to the number of measures that we have as part of the attendance work plan, you mentioned the Every School Day Matters campaign, which has been in operation since 2023. That promotes the benefits of regular attendance, targeting students, families and the community to show that school is the best place for learners to be. Stage 2 of the campaign was launched in September and highlights the key moments that can occur in a school day, big and small, and have an impact on their lives. It also builds excitement around school and demonstrates the different opportunities that schools provide.

The department has also undertaken research to understand the barriers and enablers to attendance at a national and international level. This research has been compared with an analysis of departmental data and trends and insights from work undertaken in schools. The department, to enhance the department's understanding of barriers and enablers to attendance specific to Tasmania, engaged in an external consultant. 3P Advisory was engaged to undertake broad consultation during Term 2, 2024. Through online surveys and discussion boards and forums with students, staff and their families across the department schools, this consultation aimed to determine the drivers for non-attendance and what works for students and their families. We released that executive summary publicly.

We are also drafting a series of public-facing and young person-friendly reports that highlight learnings from all these streams of work. These reports are expected to be available during Term 4 and will inform future work.

Every school is required to prioritise student attendance in their school improvement plan and is supported through access to professional learning and resources developed by the Student Engagement and Attendance Team. That team is a student support project team within schools and early years that leads the school improvement priority of attendance in addition to working with schools through the intensive support model.

The Student Engagement and Attendance Team work with schools at the shoulder who require intensive support to undertake a needs analysis, which includes listening to student voice about the barriers and enablers, developing and implementing a structured plan to improve attendance and reduce absenteeism, to use data as part of a multitiered support system to identify student need, to streamline admin services and processes to track, monitor and respond to attendance and non-attendance, and to deliver professional learning and provision of scripts to support phone calls home, which help build family connection and understand the root causes of non-attendance.

Mr GAFFNEY - My question there is, because this is Budget Estimates, what is the total cost of the campaign to date on a Budget line?

Ms WEBSTER - I believe it's \$200,000. Is that correct, Ms Burgess? Not quite. Sorry.

Ms BURGESS - For the 2023-24 year it was \$75,000 and the 2024-25 year it is \$245,000.

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Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. The evaluation of the attendance improvement because of that campaign, was that - I know you have other external across the nation attendance is difficult, but were you able to measure and evaluate student attendance over those years?

Ms BURGESS - It's probably too early to determine the impact of that campaign directly on attendance rates.

Mr GAFFNEY - But because you're going into phase 2, you must be quite confident that it's been a positive experience.

Ms BURGESS - Anecdotally, the information is that it is visible, it's well placed for the audience that it's intended, which is families and young people.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - I'd like to follow that up if I might, Chair. Anecdotally is one thing, but we're spending public money and we're trying to address a really serious issue. So phase 1 of that Every School Day Matters campaign, was there actually a formal measurement or evaluation of its impact that then informed phase 2?

Ms BURGESS - We have data - which I don't actually have to hand - around the utilisation and usage of the materials and information, but we don't have specific data about the direct impact of that strategy. As you'd be aware, there are a number of strategies that will impact attendance across the entirety of the supports that the department puts in place, so isolating one individually will be very difficult for us to do. It's more about how the package of supports come together to increase attendance rates across schools.

Ms WEBB - Yes, indeed. It is a package of supports, but we're choosing to spend public money on this particular one. It's one of the most visible aspects of it. Presumably there is a clear rationale and justification for why we're doing that. There's no measurement of its impact in the first instance to inform this second iteration. Why would we choose to spend \$245,000 on that one and not something else, for example, if we hadn't actually assessed whether it was impactful or effective?

Ms PALMER - It's important to note that it's a piece of the puzzle. Our schools do extraordinary work within their schools around attendance. The work that's been done at Exeter Primary School, for example, that they are doing in attendance with attendance walls and incentives and they absolutely celebrate on that really baseline level great attendance results. It's really beautiful how they do it. We see schools doing this on the ground.

Then there also has to be a piece of that which is in the campaign that Ms Burgess has been talking about that really backs and supports the work that our teachers and our principals and our school leaders are doing on the ground. That is bigger picture and it is holistic and as I say, it is part of a piece of a puzzle. I think the secretary had more to add to that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the attendance rate has moved in the last 12 months and it moved in the 12 months before that. So that's early signs that the broad picture, the broad program of work that we are doing is changing, it is increasing. So there is an increase in our attendance rate.

Ms WEBB - But we can't break that out into this advertising campaign aspect of it.

Ms WEBSTER - I think it's also about the reach of the campaign, which is also very important.

Ms WEBB - The campaign doesn't target the things that 3P pointed to as most fundamental, because what 3P's executive summary seems to say - and I haven't seen the full report so I can't speak to the detail - but it seems to say the assumption has been people don't value education enough so they're not sending their kids. This is debunking that and saying, actually it's a whole range of factors in people's lives, complex lives, and challenges that they face that make it difficult for children to attend school and families to support children to attend school.

So \$245,000 on a 'Yay, school is great' campaign, which is nice - it's not that it's not nice, but maybe \$245,000 spent on another one-and-a-half school psychologists, given the 200-plus day wait lists for those, would have been a better investment. I'm wondering how we weigh the investment.

Ms PALMER - To be clear, I'm going to push back a little on your line of questioning. We don't have people to fill - when you make an analogy like perhaps that money would be better spent on a school psychologist, we are trying to get school psychologists. It's not a matter of resourcing. We are trying to find those people. We are recruiting across Australia and even further afield to bring those people to Tasmania. That's a really unfair analogy.

Ms WEBB - How many unfilled positions do we have in that space?

Ms PALMER - The other thing that I will say is that I think we need to be really clear. You can't just have one of a strategy around attendance. We have a number of different ways that we are managing attendance. You referenced the 3P report and that also talked about food insecurity, which is why when we look at the breakfast program and we look at the school lunch program, yes, that is about feeding children and then that is about the wonderful social opportunities that come with sharing a meal. But that's also about getting children to school as well. That's another piece of the puzzle. We need to be investing in different areas, including on the ground in our schools.

This is, as I say, a part of the puzzle which was, I think, a great campaign and it had children talking and it had parents talking and it's become a bit of a catchphrase. We know that we have to have a number of different ways that we are really strengthening the attendance rates that we have with our children in schools.

Ms WEBB - I accept that, minister. In terms of the comments about the school psychologists, how many unfilled positions do we currently have that are funded but unfilled? Just for clarity now that you've mentioned it.

Ms PALMER - We'll get that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. You had one last question in this output before we move to 1.2?

Ms WEBB - Yes, I wanted to ask about the - which one of these? I've got two, actually. I'm trying to think which one I'm going to ask.

CHAIR - Your most urgent question.

Ms WEBB - Well, teacher loss. Minister, the DECYP annual report for 2024-25 indicates loss of teachers in their first five years of employment with the department is 28 per cent, so north of one in four teachers. What work is being done to ascertain why the high loss rate? What are the drivers of that, and what mitigation programs have you proactively put in place?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that question. Caring and developing our workforce is terribly important and it's something that was very much a focus of the finding and recommendations that we saw in the Independent Education Review. We really do have a strong plan as to the work that we want to do with our workforce, which is including allocating \$3.5 million over four years to attract and retain teachers in schools that have historically faced staffing challenges.

We've certainly worked to have incentives in place around some of our schools that are really hard to staff, or some of our schools that we have in really remote areas, to incentivise teachers to work there but also to stay there, because we know that when there's continuity of the adults in the lives of children, we know that we can have better outcomes, which is fantastic.

We also have a number of additional supports, including investing \$1.257 million in Teach for Australia to support more teachers in our schools. We certainly recognise the importance of not just attracting our staff, but also of keeping them. We have a collaborative partnership with the University of Tasmania.

Certainly we recognise that we need to ensure that students that have been trained today have the skills and they have the knowledge and the capacity to teach for what the reality of school is today and into the future. That was one of the key recommendations and findings from the independent review, about how important it was to work with the university to make sure that our early career teachers are absolutely classroom-ready. We have already commenced that work with the university to ensure when our first year, early year teachers come out, they are going into classrooms, they are ready to teach, they understand the complexities of classrooms today.

We also are very aware of how difficult it can be for teachers. I made a comment the other day that things that happen in society and in community don't just leave students when they walk through the gates of the school. Our teachers are quite often bearing the weight of - whether it be trauma, whether it be whatever the incident may have been, what's happening in a child's life, and that comes into the classroom. We've seen a real focus on ensuring the wellbeing of our teachers and of our leaders in schools, that when they are having those difficult times, that we have supports in place, they know where to go, not just in that moment but ongoing as well.

One of the other things that we've done, certainly with our early career teachers - now, I may not get the words right so I might need someone to help me with this. But we are having them have the opportunity to have a wellbeing - is it counselling session? A wellbeing session. Sue, perhaps could you speak to that? I think it's really important for early career teachers to

know that they are supported. They get a wellbeing session, and then we touch base with them again, I believe, in six months' time to see how they are travelling and how perhaps we can be better supporting them. But I will ask the deputy secretary to speak to that.

Ms McKERRACHER - Thank you minister. Through you, minister, teachers commencing for the first time with DECYP, including our beginning teachers, attend a four-day specialised development program before they commence in Term 1. This program was launched in January 2024. It's held annually across the state. It consists of three days of professional learning and one day of onsite school induction, as well as that initial induction piece. It's called the First Year Specialised Learning Program. In 2025, 198 teachers attended the First Year Specialised Learning Program. We say it's a unique and immersive opportunity for teachers commencing work to learn about us at DECYP.

I'd also say that across DECYP - we do a census in March of our early career teachers and others. There were 1673 early career teachers in their first five years in 2024-25, which was up from 1104 in 2023-24. We're very keen to support our early career teachers and really make sure that they have the best start that does keep them with us.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I just follow up on a couple of things then, minister? Is the three-day program and the one-day in-school program what you were describing in terms of a counselling session for new teachers and then a further check-in later? Or is that a different thing being described there?

Ms PALMER - Deputy secretary?

Ms McKERRACHER - Thank you. We run quite a series of programs for early career teachers. We do early career teacher development workshops. So that means within their first two years - not just the first year - they can attend development workshops, and we've had 274 teachers participate in that.

We've got mentoring workshops, so where early career teachers can go along, not only learn from professionals in the field but also peer-to-peer support, and we've had 82 early career teachers participate in that. We also do, as I say, that specialised learning program. I think throughout the agency we have very much an eye on those early career teachers and also other people who have joined us to make sure that they enjoy working with us and they stay working with us.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that. It is good to have the description of those efforts, and I acknowledge them as being helpful. Yet we've got 28 per cent, according to your annual report, who are leaving in their first five years. So back to the original question I put which was: what work has been done to ascertain the drivers of that? Presumably you have a really clear way that you collect data from people leaving in their first five years why they're leaving. What has been identified as the drivers of people leaving?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we certainly can address that, and the secretary will address that. I want to clarify when I was talking to you about the a wellbeing check-in. On top of what the deputy secretary has spoken about, we also have a new Wellbeing Connect service that offers a range of wellbeing supports for individuals, for teams and schools. That includes individual counselling, traumatic incidents response and recovery, as well as proactive workplace mental health and wellbeing programs.

This service includes providing new employees with, as I mentioned, the wellbeing check-ins and that is within their first six months, and that's along with access to an additional counselling session. This is really designed to smooth the transition into the Education workforce and to reduce the barriers to help-seeking, certainly early on in employment where you may not know where to go and who to talk to. I'll pass to the secretary for further information.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, and to address a couple of those things, each department has an exit survey that we do for all of our staff, and I'm sure you're aware of that, Ms Webb. What we are looking at doing is how we can strengthen that survey to identify specifically those early career teachers who may leave. Obviously, that's a voluntary survey. When people leave an organisation, they leave for different reasons. When we've looked at our reasons for leaving in terms of the survey respondents that we had in 2025, 37 per cent leave for retirement; leaving to progress careers outside the State Service is 22 per cent, and then just resignation is 14 per cent.

Admittedly that doesn't capture all those early career teachers. The minister has asked us to look at ways that we can specifically identify and address some of those issues. I've spoken with the Vice Chancellor of UTAS about the initial teacher training program. As the minister said, it's one of the key priorities from the Independent Education Review. I think we need to make sure that our teachers are classroom-ready and our deputy -

Ms WEBB - Can I pick up on that, if I may, minister? Thank you for those details. That data obviously doesn't just relate to early years.

Ms WEBSTER - Correct.

Ms WEBB - Are you able to break it out at all, in terms of early years, in people who have done the exit survey as they've left?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, not at the moment. But that's the work that we -

Ms WEBB - That's a shame. Okay, and then on the interactions with UTAS that you're having, which sound like a good idea, is a key part of that a concern that the department might have - and you might have, minister - around the fact that education training is now done all online at UTAS, or largely online, and that that might be leaving those education students coming out as teachers who have less direct support and involvement during their training at uni for a classroom environment and for what they might need to be on top of to go into working in the space?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I think there have been lots of conversations around that and also looking at the amount of time that early career teachers, when they're studying, actually spend in a classroom. That's very much part of the discussion that we're having with the university at the moment in response to the recommendation from the independent review, to look at, 'Is what's being delivered fit for purpose?'

One of my priorities from the Independent Education Review, was to have this agreement with UTAS. I have to say, we've been working collaboratively with the university. They are keen and they have been very engaged in this process. It's looking at exactly what you've put forward, 'Is that the only way? Is that the best way? What does this need to look like?' That's

certainly part of the conversations that we've been having and, as I say, working collaboratively with the university.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. If we could now move on to some -

Ms PALMER - Excuse me, Chair, if you would indulge me, please. I have some answers.

CHAIR - Are they lengthy answers? We are happy to -

Ms PALMER - Well, they were a very lengthy list of questions.

CHAIR - They were, and I'm wondering -

Ms PALMER - My answers can only relate to the questions.

CHAIR - I appreciate that.

Ms WEBB - We still have an hour and a quarter.

Ms PALMER - These are about key deliverables, and I have those answers here.

CHAIR - Okay, but if we run late at the end - okay, minister, if they're not too lengthy. We probably just need the answers without too much preamble.

Ms PALMER - That's fine, but there have been a huge number of questions.

CHAIR - I appreciate that.

Ms WEBB - Very important ones.

Ms PALMER - We are getting those answers because we want them on the record for Mr Gaffney.

CHAIR - Yes, thank you.

Ms PALMER - Mr Gaffney asked about the key deliverables. I understand all Education-related election commitments with funding requirements are included within the 2025-26 interim Budget and/or the forward Estimates.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

1.2 Early Learning

CHAIR - If we could move to 1.2 and Early Learning, and Mr Edmunds?

Mr EDMUNDS - I understand where we're at in the time, so I'll try to be quick. What role does the Education and Care Unit of DECYP have in supporting childcare centres to

implement new child safety requirements under the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care? How much funding has been allocated specifically to monitoring if these requirements are adhered to?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. Of course, there's nothing more important than the safety of our children and young people. I understand where your question is coming from with the recent *Four Corners* report and the ABC reporting some very distressing stories that have come out regarding the safety of children. I certainly want to acknowledge the impact that that has had on families.

I also want to acknowledge the impact that that has had on workers across our early childhood educators. This is a wonderful group of people, and I've had the opportunity to spend some time with them, and they found it incredibly distressing, the reports that were coming out.

I can talk to what we are doing in Tasmania. We have a number of safeguard measures in place to protect children in our early childhood education and care settings. These measures include the requirement for all educators to hold a current Working with Vulnerable People registration; the strong regulatory role fulfilled through the department's Education and Care Unit, known as ECU; and the implementation of the Tasmanian Child and Youth Safe Organisation Frameworks.

Of course I acknowledge that further action needs to be taken to ensure that we are absolutely strengthening child safety measures. On 22 August this year I met with Education ministers from right around Australia, including the Commonwealth Education minister, where we were discussing urgent and necessary actions that needed to be taken to ensure the safety of our children who are attending our early childhood education and care centres.

Our ministers were united - and the secretary was with me at this meeting as well - and came forward with some really clear actions for the sector, including mandatory child safety training to be introduced for all ECEC staff, volunteers and students, and that training to be available nationally from early 2026. My understanding is, with reference to your comment about the cost of that, that wage costs will be supported by targeted Commonwealth subsidies.

A National Educator Register, really super important to make sure that we had visibility over who is working in the sector and where they are working, and with testing planned for December 25, and the mandatory use will be required from February 2026. You may have heard of the national CCTV assessment. That's going to see 300 services nationally that will be part of that pilot, I guess, and that will be looking at building on the evidence base for safe and ethical use of surveillance of ECEC settings. You can understand that's quite a complex space. CCTV is not in the preventative space; it's in the, 'If something happens we need to be able to see it.' But then there's also that complexity of children being recorded and who has responsibility for what is captured on CCTV.

Already from September 2025 mobile phones and devices that are capable of capturing images have been banned, or at least restricted, during direct work with children. We have unannounced spot checks that will be expanded, with joint compliance visits between Commonwealth and state and territory regulators, and that's commenced in November of this year.

We're also going to see families having greater access to compliance information. That will be via startingblocks.gov.au, with services also required to physically display breaches and conditions, which I think will be really great for families to be able to see that.

We'll see penalties under the national law tripled to strengthen deterrence and accountability. The safety rights and best interests of children will be made the paramount consideration under the national law, reinforcing child-centred decision-making. There will also be the limitation period for prosecuting offences under the national law. We're going to see that extended. That will enable regulators to pursue enforcement action where serious noncompliance is identified but beyond current timeframes.

Work is under way across jurisdictions to identify and share current approaches to the frequency of regular visits. Work is progressing to provide advice on fee increases under the national law, including options for differentiation by provider size and type, and how additional funds can be used to support regulatory activity. We are certainly continuing to work hand-in-hand with the Commonwealth and with all other states and territories to ensure that we have explored every lever that we can to keep our children safe.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. The dollars for that comes primarily from federal government. Is that correct?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll ask our deputy secretary just to speak to that. Thank you.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. As part of the joint Compliance and Monitoring program, which is the national initiative, we're working closely with the Australian Government. As part of that, there will be further funding coming to the state regulator. In the 2025-26 year, that's \$620,000. That resource will be predominantly used for those assessment and reporting and compliance checks to make sure that we've got the team on the ground, out and about to make sure that safety is a priority.

Mr EDMUNDS - I guess that comes from the fact it's being nationally led. Is that right?

Ms BURGESS - That's correct.

Mr EDMUNDS - Great. Thank you. One more on this line item for me and I know that Mr Hiscutt has questions. I'm interested in the progress of the child and family learning centres that were - I'm not sure if they were announced in February - but where progress is at for the two that are expected to be completed next year? Was that Huonville and Dorset?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. We're certainly committed to providing children with the best possible start in life, including providing access to quality early learning and support services in our community and that certainly is why we've committed to building three more CFLCs in Scottsdale, Smithton and Longford which will add to Tasmania's 18 CFLCs that really are nation-leading and internationally recognised for their excellence in providing welcoming and safe spaces.

You talked about the particulars of those ones, so community engagement stages 1 and 2 for Scottsdale has now wrapped up. The initial consultation is expected to commence in Smithton and Longford in 2025 with the wider community and stakeholder consultation getting underway in 2026. The preferred site for Dorset is at the Scottsdale Primary School and sites

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for Smithton and Longford will be determined through that community consultation. Obviously we're encouraging families and communities to get involved in that.

Mr EDMUNDS - Sorry, just with the Scottsdale, did you say the site is not selected for Scottsdale? Or it is selected?

Ms PALMER - No, it has been selected. Scottsdale Primary School.

Mr EDMUNDS - I thought maybe I didn't hear you properly, sorry.

Ms PALMER - So that has been determined, and then the site selection for Smithton and Longford will be determined through that community consultation process. Sorry, was there more to your question?

Mr EDMUNDS - It was more about - that's really helpful, but the construction timelines that were spoke about, are they still on track?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, construction of the new CFLC is scheduled to commence in 2026 for Dorset, 2028 for Smithton and 2029 for Longford, and all three sites will be due for completion by 2030.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt?

Mr HISCUTT - I think you already know the question, it's regarding the Working Together or the early learning for three-year-olds scheme. I wanted an update on how that is going and if I could also have a breakdown of how many childcare centres per region north, north-west and south are involved in that scheme.

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice.

Thank you very much for the question. The government has made a commitment that all children in Tasmania should have access to early learning in the year before kindergarten and we certainly continue to support that initiative through a number of ways. So EL3 initiative is just one of those tools that the Tasmanian government has which aims to increase access for early learning for our little ones. EL3 complements the Working Together, which is supporting early learning program, and then that supports children and families who may experience additional barriers access and participation in early childhood education and care services.

We know that ECEC services are best placed to provide quality early learning and DECYP is working closely with the ECEC sector to build capacity and availability of services. I will see if we can get some information on the numbers that you asked. I'm not sure if we have that at the table but we'll try to get that. Our government plays a vital role as the regulator of early childhood education and care in Tasmania and also works on the ground with the ECEC sector and communities to co-design initiatives and help families overcome barriers to access and participation in early learning.

Talking about the early learning trial sites and implementation, the initiative aims to increase access to early learning for three-year-olds, as I say, in partnership with the ECEC

sector. Our EL3 advisory group has a membership from independent and Catholic sector representatives and that was formed in 2023 to provide advice and guidance on co-design with stakeholders and the selection of the trial site communities. This included broad community engagement and a criteria for assessment of suitability.

The trial sites are being established in areas where there is low or no capacity of existing ECEC services, using a place-based approach where ECEC services, as the preferred provider, families and communities are working together. We've been working to establish some trial sites at East Devonport, Flinders Island and Cape Barren Island, Bruny Island, Break O'Day and at Coles Bay region, and also the west coast of Tasmania as well.

We have what we call LEGs. You'll be familiar with those through the work that we've done with our CFLC, so local enabling groups. They've been established in each of the trial site communities, where we have ECEC services, families and community representatives working together on the design of place-based models of early learning to test that out in their communities. The four trial sites that commenced in 2025 are East Devonport, Bruny Island, I'm advised Fingal and Cape Barren Island. And a fifth trial site will commence on the Zeehan Primary School site in 2026. My understanding is that that will be following some capital upgrades and some procurement processes.

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry, through you, minister, in terms of the numbers, there are 46 services across the north-west, northern Midlands, east coast and south, but we don't have a further breakdown of those, the actual numbers that you wanted.

Mr HISCUTT - So there's the 46 total across Tasmania?

Ms WEBSTER - Across Tasmania.

Mr HISCUTT - We don't have a breakdown of what the other -

Ms WEBSTER - Of the numbers in each site.

Mr HISCUTT - Can we get a breakdown of that on notice, if required?

Ms PALMER - You've got it in the early learning for three-year-olds.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Have you got that, Chair? Yes. I think if we go through them site by site, East Devonport. Is that the question?

Mr HISCUTT - Question? Sorry, no.

CHAIR - Working Together.

Ms WEBSTER - Early learning or Working Together?

Mr HISCUTT - Working Together, sorry.

Ms WEBSTER - So now we've moved to Working Together.

Ms BURGESS - Yes. That was the numbers I gave you through the minister for Working Together.

Mr HISCUTT - Which is the three-year-old in -

Ms BURGESS - Yes, for 46 services across Tasmania.

Mr HISCUTT - If I could get a breakdown of that on notice or later through the day. After lunch, that's fine, or after the break. The commitment was for all children eventually to be - and this is obviously trials and things like that. At the moment it's, and rightly so, provided to disadvantaged or people who currently aren't accessing care. What would you expect the timeline would be if this was to move to all children entering that at three-years-old? Is that how I've understood it or have I misunderstood?

Ms PALMER - Well, we want to see all children engaged in learning before they get to kindergarten in an ideal world. That's exactly what we would want to see. But, obviously we don't mandate that. It's about parent engagement as well. That's where our CFLCs have played such an intricate part because they're not just about children. They're about wrapping services around families and making sure families are engaged in the benefits of early learning opportunities for their children.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, as I understand it, there are prerequisites to enable you to go through this, that, again as I said, rightly so at the moment are - that you don't currently attend childcare or you don't - or that preference is given to. I wanted to see whether the timeline of that might progress to everyone who does want to being involved.

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms BURGESS - Yes. Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - If that question makes sense, sorry.

Ms BURGESS - It does. Just for clarity, early learning for three-year-olds is the broad overarching approach and that is where we have the trial sites at the moment. Working Together is the complementary approach which sees those criteria where families may need to have a healthcare card or be identified. That's a very targeted piece under early learning for three-year-olds, and then we've got the access that we have through long daycare in our childcare centres across the state.

As we move to - so one of the reasons that we've undertaken the early learning for three-year-olds, we've also commissioned some work by Ernst Young to work out how now we scale this up to include all three-year-olds in early learning. It will be a combination of things. We're waiting until we get the feedback around the trial for the early learning for three-year-olds, which is due in the latter half of next year. From there we're going to model what the scaling-up might look like both in urban and more regional areas.

Mr HISCUTT - So it's very much a long-term goal and commitment.

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Ms BURGESS - Yes, exactly. The other input into that is the Australian Government is moving in this space as well, and through the Preschool Reform Agreement there will be additional energy and effort into how all three-year-olds can get access to early learning.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you very much for the answer. I appreciate that.

Ms BURGESS - No worries.

Ms PALMER - Chair, if I could add to an answer to a question from Mr Edmunds?

CHAIR - Of course.

Ms PALMER - We were talking about the three CFLCs. The commitment that the government made was to four new CFLCs, so I just wanted to offer an explanation around that. Our decision to invest in a new childcare centre alongside a permanent CFLC outreach service - so we went to the community and got some real feedback that the model of a CFLC, as we were presenting in the other regions, was perhaps not what the community felt was the best model for them. They really felt that there would be more benefit from - rather having one place that people come to for those services, that it would be far better for them to actually take the service out to the community.

There is a number of reasons that made that model a bit more tricky for that community. There were some issues around transport or financial constraints. There were also some geographical isolations. It's very much a bespoke model. It's really an outreach service that will go beyond, perhaps, the structure in other communities that we see of a beautiful building where families and parents can come.

So still absolutely committed to and investing in a CFLC model in the Huonville community to support that community. It's just that in our conversations with the community, and also with the council and with stakeholders, it was felt that the outreach model was going to be far more effective for that community.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thanks.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. That's probably a good time now to take a 15-minute break. If we can return at 11.19 a.m. If we could stop the broadcast, please.

The Committee suspended from 11.04 a.m. to 11.19 a.m.

CHAIR - Thank you. We've now finished in early learning, and we'll be moving to 2.1 Libraries, but I believe you have some answers to questions before we move on.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I do. Thank you very much for that, Chair. A couple of answers. First was to Mr Edmunds around CFLC update on completion times for the Dorset CFLC completion in 2027, Smithton expected completion is 2028, and for Longford, expected completion is 2029.

Also some questions to be answered for Mr Gaffney. This was in the number of questions that you asked beginning with bus ticket costs and the total expenditure by Tas schools on these tickets. We're not able to quantify this, as the data is not captured centrally. Schools use their

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discretionary funds as required to support their students' needs. Then you had a question about who has the final call on who uses the bus tickets to students.

CHAIR - Excuse me, Jo, maybe the microphone needs to come down a little bit closer. Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - I'll leave that there, and I'll pick this up. How about if I do this? Sorry, Gaye. Who has the final call?

This is administered through State Growth, not through DCEYP. The minister for Transport has final responsibility.

CHAIR - Sorry. It's still not quite -

Ms PALMER - Is that better? Lower, like that? Okay.

This is administered through State Growth, not DECYP. The minister for Transport has final responsibility for student transport.

There was another question - I'm summarising the questions for use of time - about families paying for buses when route crosses urban boundaries. Is this fair? Again, this is administered through State Growth, not through DECYP. The minister for Transport has responsibility there.

You asked about fair income variations between \$1.2 million and \$4.2 million on a \$100 million scheme. Should students use their school ID cards as a free bus pass? Again, this is administered through State Growth, not DECYP. That question would need to go to the minister responsible for transport. The other group of questions that you had was around attendance.

Mr GAFFNEY - On the bus one, my concern would be if schools are using the funding to help kids get home and to school out of their resource package, or if the Education department could go to the State Growth and say, 'Our schools collectively are paying out \$1.8 million a year to help students get home', you should take that into consideration with - do you see what I mean - with their determination of whether that would be a good idea or not. I don't think it would be a difficult exercise. Schools might be able to say, 'We spend \$50 a year or \$500 a year helping kids get home', but if you had that as a total price, you could actually feed that into State Growth and say, 'The schools are paying \$2 million a year or \$800,000 a year. You should factor that into your decision-making'.

Ms PALMER - Yes, that's a fair point. I just mentioned to the secretary, that's certainly something we could have raised with State Growth and talked to them about.

Your other question was around attendance. I won't read in the questions. I'll just read in the answers, if that's all right.

Ms WEBB - I would prefer - excuse me, minister. Sorry. Through you, Chair, I think it's really important for purposes of following up, potentially, that we hear the question and we hear the answer provided.

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Ms PALMER - I'm very happy to do that. I've been directed by you, Chair, to try to speed up. I'm very happy to read in the questions, if it's what you want, Chair.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney, is it a long question?

Mr GAFFNEY - No, I don't think so. Just short.

Ms PALMER - There are three. The questions were, 'What has been the change in attendance rates as a result of the first phase of the campaign, and what is the anticipated outcome of the second phase launched in September? What has been the total cost of the campaign to date, and has student transport been considered as part of the campaign?'

The answer is the Every School Day Matters campaign ran across terms 1, 2 and 3 in 2023 before school commenced in 2024 and in term 1. The current phase of the campaign commenced in September this year, and the statewide attendance rate in 2022 was 83.6; in 2023, was 84.7; in 2024, was 84.6; and in 2025, year to date, at the end of term 2 was 86.2 per cent.

We will have answers to some of your other questions. They're coming.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you very much, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms WEBB - Does that answer all the questions?

CHAIR - There are other answers to come.

Ms WEBB - No, the ones that were just read out. I'd rather have the question and then an answer.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, that's all.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - There was a cost - that have been -

Ms WEBB - I thought there was a cost one somewhere.

Mr HISCUTT - How much had been spent was -

Mr GAFFNEY - That was answered.

Ms PALMER - It's already been answered in the session.

Mr GAFFNEY - That was answered before with the -

Ms WEBB - Okay. If we're getting answers, can we have the question and the answer to the question?

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. I'd appreciate if we could move to 2.1, Libraries Tasmania, and it is Mr Gaffney.

OUTPUT GROUP 2

Libraries Tasmania

2.1 Libraries Tasmania

Mr GAFFNEY - Regarding the budget, the budget looks pretty sound, it's going up gradually for the libraries. We all know an important role, but I would like to ask you, minister, I understand the open library access out of our scheme has proven to be a popular initiative in both Penguin and Devonport libraries, and I attended the opening of the Devonport one. That was great. How's it going from your perspective, and are there plans to roll this out in other places in Tasmania?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. We're very fortunate that we have Patrick in the room from Libraries Tasmania to answer any questions in this space. I will certainly say it has been a good response from what I'm advised with the opening hours across those sites at Penguin and Devonport Libraries. Of course, that's part of a pilot that will run until mid-2026, and it'll be great to see the outcomes of that pilot and how much it's being used and if it's increasing activity at the library.

As was mentioned at the opening, this is about recognising that not everybody's life is between 9 and 5, Monday to Friday, and libraries play such a significant role. Around the assessment and the rollout of the pilot -

Mr GAFFNEY - Possibly the cost, if you could tell us the cost because it wouldn't be that much, I wouldn't think.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Through you, secretary. It's Patrick, sorry. Patrick Gregory, and his title is -

Mr GREGORY - Executive Director, Libraries Tasmania.

Ms PALMER - My apologies, Patrick.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you. Through you, minister, yes, the program has been really successful so far. Through to 30 June 2025, we had 88 members at Penguin and 85 at Devonport. Devonport had only kicked off in May. Penguin was back in January. There's well over 100 members for both of those sites now, and I think at the end of the financial year, we had nearly 700 visits to those two libraries.

The feedback has been really positive. There was a terrific ABC News article about the Devonport open library a couple of months ago, and that's really got the word out more broadly. I heard someone on the radio the other day, a shift worker in Devonport, talking about how great it was for her to be able to finish a shift early in the morning and come straight into the library at 7 o'clock rather than having to -

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Mr GAFFNEY - For those people listening, you might like to do a one-minute how that works, the card.

Mr GREGORY - Yes. So if you're a member of Libraries Tasmania at those sites and you want to join the Open Library Access program, you can get an induction session, and we'll walk you through what's involved in using the library out of hours. Those libraries are open between 7 am and 9 pm, seven days a week. There's an induction process, but once you've been inducted and had to use the library, then you simply use your library card and tap in on the access card on the door, and that'll let you in between those hours of the day.

Mr GAFFNEY - What budget costs would that be? Do you know for those two libraries to be -

Mr GREGORY - I don't have the exact figures. As you say, it's relatively modest. I mean, for a smaller library, we're looking at around \$50,000, we've worked out, ongoing. It's likely to be in that sort of quantum. Devonport was higher than that because of the nature of the Paraple Building and some of the security systems around that. That's why we wanted to test it out in two different libraries - a smaller community library at Penguin and a much larger library at Devonport.

Mr GAFFNEY - Through you, minister, at the end of the pilot program, what's the intention? If it's successful, is it to roll it out in other communities on a request issue basis or have you had that discussion yet with Libraries Tasmania?

Ms PALMER - I think that will be part of the ongoing work to see how the pilot rolls out, what the impact is on the community. It's brilliant to get those anecdotal stories coming back to us about how it's really working in with other people's lives. Then we would need to look at the cost, the benefits, and where there may be other communities that could really benefit from this.

Mr GAFFNEY - Final question, through you, minister. I suppose the cost is mainly the initial setting up. Once it's set up, then it's the more the merrier. It wouldn't be an ongoing cost.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. Yes, the cost is primarily around the security access systems. It's important to those libraries as well, though, that we have the self-service for book lines. In some of the smaller libraries where that might not exist at the moment, there might be a small cost for a self-service checkout unit for collections. We had to put one of those in Penguin, for example.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. A couple of questions on libraries. We see in the key deliverables we've got the Library of Tasmania 26Ten community program there with a one-off \$125,000 indicated in this financial year, I believe it is, and then nothing across the forward Estimates indicated there. I'm looking for an explanation about that program. Is that an additional boost just for this year? Then there's continuing on-core funding elsewhere in the budget. Or is that program not expected to continue past the current financial year?

Ms PALMER - Chair, through you, thank you very much for the question. The funding of 26Ten programs targeting adult literacy is certainly helping us to achieve our lifting literacy goals. Lifting literacy is a priority of this government, as you'll see the work that we're doing through adult literacy, but also the work that we're doing in our classrooms.

The next iteration of the adult literacy strategy is currently being finalised, and we look forward to that work coming. Meanwhile, the interim 2025-26 budget provides funding for the continuation of the current 26Ten Tasmania strategy for adult literacy and numeracy. We'll wait for the next iteration of the adult literacy strategy, and that will need to be considered in future budgets.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask Ben on those two questions. One is when is that review or that next strategy to be delivered, when will that arrive? In regard to the 26Ten communities program, has that been evaluated and assessed as part of the review, and looking ahead, as to whether it will continue or be potentially a different sort of iteration?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to Patrick for the details of that. It is important to note that the 26Ten funding is ongoing. Where there is an end to funding, it's through that community program, which I believe was funded for four years, five years. I'll hand to you, Patrick, for those details.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you, minister. The 26Ten communities program was originally set up in 2020-21 with \$3 million through the adult learning strategy. There's been further investment in that, so it's over \$4 million, and as you noted, the \$125,000 in this year's budget papers are just the top-up for that.

Ms WEBB - Thanks for clarifying.

Mr GREGORY - There are five communities. They're all fully funded through until the end of this financial year. Two of them are likely to continue a bit beyond that. Circular Head community started later than the others, so that will continue a bit later, but all those communities are funded for either four or four-and-a-half years.

Ms WEBB - My question about the new strategy that's being developed, when will that be delivered? Has a review of the communities program under 26Ten been done, an evaluation been done, to see whether it might be included in that?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you, Patrick.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. Part of the process for the development of the new adult literacy strategy, the whole of the 26Ten program was reviewed, and there was an independent report done earlier this year getting feedback from various stakeholders throughout the sector. In part, we've got some review data from the 26Ten communities program, but a full evaluation still needs to take place. It's unlikely that that program would continue in its current form. It was a pilot program to test place-based adult literacy intervention in five particular communities. The learnings from that have all been picked up through the new adult literacy strategy. I think place-based approaches to adult literacy is something that will continue in the new strategy. It might be in a different format and not necessarily through that particular grant program.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. May I have another question in this area.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - As you'd be aware, minister, the 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index was released on 5 November. It confirmed Tasmania as the worst performing state or territory in the country, sadly, in relation to digital skills and ability. Earlier this year, Libraries Tasmania released its review of digital inclusion in Tasmania, and that was completed at the end, I believe, of last year, 2024. Has the government released a response to this report? I'm interested if it hasn't, will it be doing so? Will it be releasing a response? Or indicating whether the recommendations in that report are accepted or are to be implemented, and if so, when?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I'll ask the executive director.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. The Digital Inclusion Review made a number of recommendations. There's not an intent to formally respond to those recommendations, but rather to act on them. Particularly in the online access centre space, the review identified two key challenges for online access centres. One was around sustainability, particularly with the volunteer model of management committees and service delivery. How do you ensure sustainability of those centres going forward? The other was really how do you keep the skills of volunteers and online access centres up to date, noting that there's a lot of changes in devices and e-safety and AI and things like that.

What we've been doing is having really targeted conversations with each of the 15 online access centres, looking at what the most sustainable model going forward is. The review recommended trying to merge online access centres with either libraries or neighbourhood houses or other social infrastructure communities where possible. We're looking at that, and we're proposing for four of those online access centres to bring them together in the library service. The other 11 will continue to be funded in some shape or form, but whether that's through neighbourhood houses or with the support of local government or directly, we're still working through those details.

Ms WEBB - Okay. That picks up on the questions I had about online access centres and whether they're expected to continue. You've clarified that it's unlikely in their current form, but we maintain a commitment to having some form of community-based access, digital access, for people located in and accessible in a way that will work for them. Minister?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I might add to what Mr Gregory was saying. It's been fantastic to see that Libraries Tasmania is continuing to strengthen its own digital inclusion services, including its digital volunteers program, and it's been really active and really engaged with our online access centres. Libraries Tas has significantly strengthened its own digital inclusion services over the last year. That's as well as providing free Wi-Fi and computers, low-cost printing and scanning options and support with online services from all staff.

It provides bookable one-on-one sessions with staff and volunteers. It also does group training with a range of partners such as Be Connected and NBN Co and referrals to other local community services. All services are delivered within Library Tasmania's digital inclusion guidelines, which do prevent staff from providing some direct support, and that would include things like logging on to someone's device and having access to banking transactions and things like that, which I think is quite understandable.

PUBLIC

Yes, it's wonderful to see how Libraries Tasmania is delivering equivalent or stronger digital inclusion services right across Tasmania. Was there anything you wanted to add to Ms Webb's question?

Mr GREGORY - No, I think you covered our services very well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I was more looking for your commitment that that remains an ongoing thing that won't be diminished in a new iteration that sounds like it's coming down the pipeline in terms of online access centres. They're going to be changing, but we're not going to diminish that sort of community-based digital support.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. All the 15 communities that have online access centres will continue to have digital inclusion support, absolutely. We're just looking at the best way of delivering that.

Ms PALMER - Of delivering that, yes, in the most effective way.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I have been passed a note that Jenny Burgess, our deputy secretary, just needs to correct the record on something she said earlier.

CHAIR - That's fine.

Ms BURGESS - When I was talking about the reporting for the Independent Education Review, the quarterly reporting is to the minister and not a public report. The public reporting will be annual.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for that. I have one last question on libraries. Do school libraries, minister, comes under this area? Yes, schools and libraries. If you could advise, has there been any changes, or what's actually happening in the area of school libraries? We all know it's really important for our schools.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it's certainly playing a big role in that Lifting Literacy initiative that I've talked about a number of times throughout this session. We are expanding the support that is available to school libraries and building on the longstanding assistance provided to government schools in maintaining their catalogues through a library management system.

We have established a new school libraries team within Libraries Tas, which has already worked with 88 public school libraries. That's helping them to improve things like their print collections, offer library professional advice on selection of books that they might make. It's also making sure that we're connecting our library staff with high-quality professional development opportunities and also improve library design and layout so that those spaces are really vibrant and engaging and literacy rich environments for our students.

Of course, we have our two new school libraries through Legana Primary School and also the Brighton High School, and they are beautiful libraries, and children and families are absolutely loving engaging in those spaces.

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Since June this year, every Tasmanian primary school has also enjoyed free access to StoryBox Library. That's a wonderful, engaging online platform where Australian and New Zealand storytellers bring children's books to life. Previously, that's only been available to Library Tasmanian members. This new resource is now helping schools to nurture a lifelong love of reading, while, of course, at the same time, it's boosting literacy outcomes and language skills as well.

We're also investing in the personal growth of school library staff. Recent professional development opportunities included a curated webinar series featuring experts in library design, children's literature and school library academic research. We subsidised places for 25 school library staff to obtain professional qualifications through a two-year part-time Diploma of Library and Information Services. Libraries Tasmania also supports students with free online homework help through - I think it's called - is it Studio City?

Mr GREGORY - Studiosity.

Ms PALMER - My apologies. Of course, Studiosity, which is really fantastic. Looking ahead, we're also exploring the potential of a mobile library service to ensure that students in smaller schools or those who might have limited facilities can still enjoy access to excellent library facilities.

Our school libraries are certainly cherished, and they're a really important part of our community spaces. Whenever I visit schools, I am always taken to have a look at the library, and so it's wonderful that we're able to be supporting and strengthening our libraries. We know it plays a huge role in those - wanting to turn around the outcomes of literacy for children across Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Any last questions?

Ms WEBB - I had one on libraries, if I could.

CHAIR - Yes, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I'm interested in the current staffing of our libraries across the state. Are you able to provide an FTE breakdown of that across different roles, both trained librarians and other staffers? I'm interested in the last couple of years' data to be able to have a comparison, if that's possible. I'm also interested in volunteer numbers across the last couple of years.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I believe we have that information.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. The current FTE profile for Libraries Tasmania is 285.45 FTE. That's actually grown slightly since I've got data from March 2024 when it was 280.72 FTE. I suspect a lot of that relates to the school libraries team that the minister's just talked about.

I don't have a breakdown of professionally-qualified staff versus other staff. We employ a whole range of professionals across different disciplines, and a lot of the front of house staff are either trained in customer service, or library technicians, or might be library professionals. I'm not sure if we can get that data.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - I'm quite interested to understand how we track, particularly in terms of trained librarians in staffing numbers across years so I can see whether that's something that stays consistent, or something that we're moving away from or moving more towards.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, we would have the number of library technicians in the award numbers. We could certainly provide that before the end of the session.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, appreciate that. And the volunteer numbers?

Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice. Would we have that at the table? Thank you. Chair, while we're seeking that information for Ms Webb, with your permission, I have some additional answers to the questions, if we've got that time.

CHAIR - That would be good. Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - There was a question that came through about school psychology numbers that may be unfilled. I can advise all permanent school psychology approved establishment is allocated. Some of these staff may be on leave or work variations. In terms of current on-the-ground staffing, overall current fixed-term vacancy is approximately 2.45 FTE, broken down as LSSR. So southern -

Ms WEBB - I might clarify, too, because I thought you said they're all filled, but then you said there's a vacancy of 2 point something.

Ms PALMER - Okay. So all permanent school psychology approved establishment is allocated. Some of these staff are on leave, or workload variations. In current terms of on-the-ground staffing, overall current fixed term vacancy is approximately 2.45 FTE, and then the breakdown is here.

Ms PEARCE - In the southern region, it's 0.15, and in the northern region, and we talked about the regions before, which encompasses all of the north and north-west, 2.3, and we'll be able to break that down into the north-west. I can advise that all fixed term - so we have some that are permanently and some that are on fixed term vacancies to backfill people who are on permanent who are adjusting their workload, or who are taking leave. That's where the difference around all our permanent positions are filled, but because of adjustments or work adjustments, we have some temporary vacancies, but we have another three school sites commencing in the north-west in early 2026, and so we have no vacancies in the north-west currently.

Ms WEBB - So we're not actively recruiting for psychologists at the moment to fill positions?

Ms PEARCE - We're always actively recruiting. We're always actively recruiting to ensure we hold those numbers.

Ms WEBB - To fill the leave cover positions and things like that.

Ms PEARCE - Yes, always actively recruiting.

Ms WEBB - But not in terms of a permanent position. That's a space at the moment.

PUBLIC

Ms PEARCE - We do have a permanent relief pool, and so we are always actively recruiting to ensure that we have that ongoing as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - There were other questions from Mr Gaffney which were around educational adjustments. I believe the question was in relation to educational adjustments disability funding model. The budget calls for the repurposing of \$5 million of DECYP funding of fund educational adjustments.

Mr Gaffney asked what programs or services were reduced or reprioritised, and will those reductions impact students with additional needs. Then he also asked what modelling shows that the total funding of \$10 million will meet actual need, given rising diagnosis, wait lists and reports of inconsistent access to adjustments, and how many students rely on part-time timetables due to unmet need, and how will this budget address that.

The answer is no programs or services will be reduced to meet the additional \$5 million allocation for educational adjustments. The department will continue to fund students with disability. The additional \$10 million is required to meet the increased needs of students with disability, and there's been an additional \$27.5 million allocated this year. The model has increased from under \$50 million to now \$153 million in 2025. I believe that was under \$50 million in 2009 and increased to \$153.3 million - sorry, 2019, and the increased amount is what we have now in 2025.

In regard to part-time attendance for students with disability, as of first-term census 2025, there were 421 students with disability who were attending part-time, and that's equating to 253.7 FTE students.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - We have answers to Ms Webb's questions as well. I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Volunteer hours and number of volunteers for 2024-25 are the volunteer hours total is 31,119, and the number of volunteers averaged over the four quarters was 549. Libraries by job qualification, we're not able to provide that because they're all employed under the Tasmanian State Service Award. We don't break that down in our system, but I can tell you that school library technicians in 2024, we had 55.88, and in 2025, we had 63.14.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I had been looking for a couple of years' worth of data on each of those data points, but you're not able to break down the -

Ms WEBSTER - Did you want the volunteer data as well? I have that over a period.

Ms WEBB - I'm probably more interested in the staffing data for libraries, and you're not able to break that down for me in terms of trained librarians and other staff.

Ms WEBSTER - No.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - That's probably not going to be as much use to me when trying to track what I'm trying to track.

Ms WEBSTER - No. I can't do that with our - because they're employed under the same - all those employees are employed under the Tasmanian State Service Award. We can't break those down like we can with, for example -

Ms WEBB - That's unfortunate, isn't it, because you can understand why we might want to understand, over a period of time, are we having fewer trained librarians in our library system or not, or are we keeping it consistent? Is there any way that data can be put together for future reference?

Ms WEBSTER - We can't break the data down by employment group. It would have to be anecdotally. I don't know if Mr Gregory's able to answer anecdotally from whether or not we're seeing more trained librarians versus not.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. It is a difficult one to say, because the statement of duties themselves for some positions require a professional qualification for either a librarian or an archivist, and for other positions of a librarian technician, and for others none at all. You may well, for example, have librarians who are working in the library services officer role where the statement of duties wouldn't require the professional qualification. You wouldn't actually necessarily know the number of librarians working there or not.

Ms WEBB - That default would only work in the negative for people who have more of a qualification than is required for that role, but at the very least, you could probably provide data on the roles and the number in those roles across the system that require a library qualification. That would probably be possible to provide.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Because it's under the Tasmanian State Service Award, we don't require them to have a qualification. What we could provide is the band levels within Libraries Tasmania. We would know, for example, Band 3, Band 4, Band 5, Band 6. Because Tasmania State Service Award has no required qualifications - only there are some roles that have desirable - that's not captured in the system.

Ms WEBB - Okay. The statement of duties doesn't have it as a requirement; the statement of duties has it as a desirable, does it?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The way the Tasmania State Service Award operates is that, if you require something within the statement of duties, it's not under the general stream of the Tasmanian State Service Award. We don't capture that level of detail.

CHAIR - Thank you for that. You had another answer, minister?

Ms PALMER - Chair, I do have another answer for Mr Gaffney, which are what are the median enrolment numbers for both years 11 and 12 students in our extended high schools. Median enrolment numbers as at census 1 2025 in extended high schools is nine year 11 students and five year 12 students.

Then there was a question: as of today, how many high schools have five or fewer year 11 and 12 students, and how many have none at all? The most recent census, which is census 2

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2025, there were seven schools that had no students and eight schools that had between one and five students in years 11 and 12.

Mr GAFFNEY - Following on from that, are those other answers to those questions going to come, minister, for the year 11 and 12s?

Ms PALMER - Yes. They will be coming. Our team's working on them.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. You had a follow-up through the minister?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. In addition to that information regarding the Tasmanian State Service Award, we do have archivists and curators and librarians under the professional stream, but we would have to manually count that. We don't have it to hand. It would be something we consider providing as part of reporting in the future against Libraries Tasmania.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for considering that. Appreciate it.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. If we have no further questions on library -

Ms WEBB - Can I check on the answer that was provided just a moment ago to one of Mr Gaffney's questions: the data you gave about the numbers in year 11 and year 12, did I hear you say that was census data rather than end-of-year data?

Ms PALMER - Census 2 2025.

Ms WEBB - That's later in the year. Okay, thank you. It's not the early-in-the-year census when it might not be accurate by the time -

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - I believe it's August.

Ms WEBB - August. Thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 3

Education Regulation

3.1 Education Regulation

CHAIR - Thank you. If we now move on to Education Regulation. Mr Hiscutt, you can now ask your question.

Mr HISCUTT - I've got a few questions. Leading off with home school numbers, which falls into the previous bits, but then it moves into a regulations question: what are the training numbers for home schools, and how are the outcomes measured?

CHAIR - Minister, if you could introduce the new people at the table.

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Ms PALMER - We just had a bit of a swap-over with our team. I welcome to the table Katharine O'Donnell, who is the director of Education Regulation.

In reference to your question around home schooling, as of 12 September 2025, I'm advised there were 1552 students registered from across 970 families.

Mr HISCUTT - No worries.

Ms PALMER - What was the other part of the question?

Mr HISCUTT - And educational outcomes?

Ms PALMER - For the home school children? I'll hand over to the director for Education Regulation.

Mr HISCUTT - Just in broad terms is fine.

Ms O'DONNELL - Thank you. Through you, minister. The way that home education works is we actually register the parent. When we review the programs, we're reviewing the parent's capacity to deliver the program. We don't actually assess the children.

While there is a number of home-educated children whose parents elect for them to sit NAPLAN, and they get NAPLAN results as a result of that, we don't have any consistent testing of whether students are meeting benchmarks. What we can say is that, if they remain registered, then the parents are meeting their delivery requirements of delivering to the children is the way that registration is run.

Mr HISCUTT - It's not necessarily that the children are learning but just that the parents are qualified to teach?

Ms O'DONNELL - The reality is that, if they continue to remain registered, it's because we can see evidence of improvement from year to year, which is one of the areas they're assessed under. They have to demonstrate how they're assessing that the program is working and that the children are actually improving and developing and continuing to move forward each year. It's definitely part of the process, absolutely, but it's not assessed in the same way children in school are.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for the answer to that. I wanted to know how the risks of institutionalism nonconformists - perhaps as an example, sovereign citizens and things like that, people who may keep children out of the school system because they don't trust it or believe in it - how we manage risks of that furthering in these children's lives into the future. Is there a strategy for that?

Ms O'DONNELL - Through you, minister. It's actually an area that we're working on at the moment. The *Education Act* regulations, which control the standards for home education, are being reviewed soon. They're coming up for their 10-year review. It's within an area that we are working on along with child safety generally. The parents are required, as part of the standards that they have to comply with in teaching their children and report on, to show how the children are being integrated into society, how they're getting a well-rounded view of society. They're required to demonstrate the range of learning areas that they're learning

through, and there's also a wellbeing standard, which broadly mirrors the Australian curriculum wellbeing.

They're also required to show age-appropriate development in areas like civics, in areas like health, sexual education, that kind of thing. But it is a tricky area, because we are working in that nexus, between what's family and what's education. It's certainly something that's at the forefront of our work going forward, to make sure that we're taking the steps that we can, to ensure that children are safeguarded in the area.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for that. Following on again, how is child safety in home education managed? I know, in a school situation, all the teachers would need working with vulnerable people cards and things like that. Is that an element that's being discussed in home schools, or how is that managed?

Ms O'DONNELL - Thank you, minister. All the officers who go out to assess the children always have working with vulnerable people cards, but we don't require the parents teaching their own children to have them. We do take into account wellbeing and child safety.

We work really closely with the Safe Families Safe Kids network, and we share information between us, where our officers have some level of training in being able to identify where children might be at risk, or even parents, in different situations, and we do share that information between us in those, to protect our officers going out, but also to provide information about children.

Again, it's that intersection between what's home, and what's family, and what's school. When school is in the home, then those things cross over a lot. But we try to take the steps that we can, by providing our officers with that training, to hope that they are able to identify early anything that may not seem quite right, and then hand over to the appropriate agencies to follow that up from there. Does that answer the question?

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you very much. That's good. Moving on from that line of questioning, I noticed on the TASC - Tasmanian Assessment Standard Certification - website, there was a comment regarding the board, that all three regulators have the same board members. Is there a risk, with having three different boards with all the same members, of a level of groupthink, and can I ask for the rationale behind this?

Ms PALMER - I'll ask the deputy to do that. Thank you.

Ms O'DONNELL - When we created Education Regulation as a business area, we initially had three separate boards. What we found was that there was a lot of overlap between the boards and areas that the regulators actually work together and rely on information sharing. We talked about what those risks were, and we sought advice about that, in terms of being separate or together. It was determined that, actually, having the same board members on each board would enable them to work more holistically between the regulators, with a move to perhaps eventually bring the regulators more aligned together, so that we could work better to protect children, and each understanding what the other one needed. And that the board, with a general oversight, would be less siloed and less likely to say, 'We're going to keep this just for TASC, even though TRB might need it, but we - just TASC'.

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This way, if TRB needs it, they're in a position to say, 'Okay, we can see that is needed more there, or there's a different focus that's needed here'. So it gives them more agility to move in a way that's more equitable and allows us to present a better outcome for students.

We have found that it's working very well. The boards are still legally separate boards, and we manage the meetings very carefully, to ensure that they understand who they are at the time they're making decisions, and record those and keep those very separate at this stage.

Mr HISCUTT - Would that be a change required in the act, to -

Ms O'DONNELL - It would require that, yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Is that coming under that 10-year review, or is that a different act?

Ms O'DONNELL - It's a consideration. We'll review how this is going and then report back to the minister, and we'll consider if that's the way we want to move forward.

Mr HISCUTT - Through you, minister, the advice you sought on that was from - where was that advice sought from?

Ms O'DONNELL - That was from the Solicitor-General.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. We have a follow-up. Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm interested in this topic as well. What consultation occurred ahead of this merge?

Ms O'DONNELL - Through you, minister. There was a review into Education Regulation a couple of years ago. One of the concepts that came out of that review was considering bringing the regulators more closely together, and having them working more closely together, with a view to working towards perhaps ultimately having one overarching regulator. A lot of the feedback that was given to that review at the time was, 'There should only be one board, or there should only be two boards. We don't need three boards'. That was the feedback that we relied upon when we made the consideration to bring them together.

Mr EDMUNDS - So the consultation was done through that process a couple of years ago, rather than ahead of the actual occurrence?

Ms O'DONNELL - Through that review.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Was that led by the department or the minister's office?

Ms O'DONNELL - That was led by the department, or through Education Regulation, yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Specifically, from the education regulator, what's the position? Director, Education Regulation. You led that?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - How did the board members find out, and from whom?

Ms O'DONNELL - For that one?

Mr EDMUNDS - The previous board members.

Ms O'DONNELL - The board members found out through discussion with me, and formally, through correspondence from the minister, as is required.

Mr EDMUNDS - But that was after the fact. So there wasn't consultation leading up to it; they just found out that it happened, because of the review a couple of years earlier?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes. I'm trying to think back now. We did have discussions. It was sort of at around the same time. So I was having conversations with them at the same time that the decision was being made, but they were not expressly asked what they thought about it immediately prior to it happening.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - A final comment. And this is a comment, not a question. When looking through the three regulator websites, I did notice that the non-government school website appears not to have been updated since 2023, so just feedback. Thank you.

I have another question, but I'm happy for others to -

CHAIR - No. We'll go back to Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - It was the one that I was asking before, which I'm sure will have follow-ups as well. I started this question previously, but there were obviously issues mentioned in the media last year, regarding the number of issues with the exams. I just wanted to see how that was running for this year, given that the exams, I think, finished today. For the record, I'm sure all those people out there watching, which is none - year 12 students - good luck to them on their exams.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much for that. Yes, we did see some issues that came out of the exam process last year. No process is fail-proof, and our absolute collective focus this year has been to minimise the risk of exam paper errors.

Following on from last year, the Investigation and Exam Process Independent Review report was done by Deloitte, and that was finalised in August. We've started prioritising, actioning, the recommendations that have come from that, obviously starting with the highest priority. Process improvements and additional checks have been made in developing the 25 exams. We would always prefer that there were no errors or issues with exams, and there's certainly been a clear improvement with some of the actions that have been taken since last year. We're absolutely committed, of course, to further enhancing exam development.

Some of the proactive actions that were taken were establishing a quality assurance partnership with the University of Tasmania for additional exam checks; employing a copy

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editor for structural formatting and enhanced proofreading; and strengthening workflow documentation, with clear accountability at every stage. I've also been advised that the department now has three FTE who have gone over to work in this space as well, to offer extra support.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I have some more answers to Mr Gaffney's question.

CHAIR - Thank you. If you'd like to read the question and the answer.

Ms PALMER - Mr Gaffney asked, 'What is the TCE attainment rate for year 11 and 12 students enrolled in high schools'? In 2024, across all government schools, excluding colleges, 57 per cent of year 12 students attained TCE, and that was up from 47 per cent in 2023.

There was also an answer to a budget question, and I'll ask the secretary -

Ms WEBSTER - Just bear with me. It's just disappeared.

Ms PALMER - So we'll locate that and bring it back.

We do have an answer to the lab tech one. Mr Gaffney had a question regarding the cost of year 11 and 12 in high schools. Total funding provided to support the delivery of year 11 and 12 in 2025 calendar year in Tasmanian government high schools is \$20.5 million for teacher staffing and \$2.6 million for discrete funding. Discrete funding is provided to schools through Student Resource Package and is used by schools to fund additional staffing resources and other resources required for the delivery of years 11 and 12. Schools may also use other funds from their SRP to support this cost, but it is not possible to quantify this.

Our system has gone again.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, minister. I just want to check my figures here. Do we have 54 government high schools? If we have 15 schools that have five or fewer, on 54 high schools, that makes it 28 per cent of our schools that are not offering it.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I believe we can get that information.

Mr GAFFNEY - I just want to make certain with my figures, that's all. Thank you.

CHAIR - No, that's fine. If we come back to that information.

Mr HISCUTT - I'll just follow up from my previous question.

CHAIR - Yes. If you follow up on your question.

Ms PALMER - We also have an answer to Ms Webb's question as well.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Ms Webb, I think you asked how many lab technicians had been recruited over the last five years, correct?

Ms WEBB - Yes. In each of the last five years.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. In 2021, it was 10; 2022, it was 15; 2023, it was eight; 2024 it was eight; and 2025 it was eight.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. We'll be in trouble in 2027.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt had a follow-on question, and then we have Mr Edmunds with a follow-on question from your previous question.

Mr HISCUTT - One of my parts of the question was how this year's exams are taking place. I note some recent media on that. Could you advise on the correctness or the government response to that?

Ms PALMER - I certainly can. The 40 written exams over a nine-day exam period finished on Thursday 20 November with more than 6400 Tasmanian senior secondary students sitting one or more external exams. I'm advised there were two errors that were found. One was in the legal studies exam. TASC is working with the 2025 exam setters and critics to determine the impact of a discrepancy identified in the legal studies written exam. That was held on Monday the 17th. Some of the students questioned the accuracy of the term 'community service orders', which was in Question 9, as the Tasmanian sentencing order has changed to be referred to as a 'community corrections order'. The question is one of two short answer questions where students could choose.

I also believe that there was error in some supporting material regarding a biology information sheet. I understand that a replacement information sheet was distributed at the start of the biology written exam that was also held on Monday. Students received extra exam time if this was not completed prior to the exam starting at their exam centre. I'm advised that the information sheet contained reference information on scientific concepts that students can refer to during their exam. There was no inaccuracy in the information sheet. It was from a previous course and, therefore, had not been specifically tailored to match the current course.

I'm advised there were those two errors, and strategies are always put in place to ensure it doesn't impact end of year results.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for answering the question.

CHAIR - Thank you. We have Mr Edmunds with a further question on that area.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thanks. I've got a couple of follow-ups on it as well. I'm interested, post-review, you mentioned the UTAS partnership, but I was wondering what other changes were in place for this year's exams?

Ms PALMER - I'll probably refer that to my previous answer where I talked through -

Mr EDMUNDS - It was a bit unclear which ones were this year and which ones were potentially into the future. What specifically was different in the preparations for this year's exams?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass onto the director. Thank you.

Ms O'DONNELL -Through you, minister. There were 34 recommendations all over, and around 16 of them were started for this year's exams. That's on the basis that this report was received quite a long way into planning for exams, which starts pretty much in December for the following year. We had to be careful that we didn't inadvertently cause problems by introducing too much.

There was the quality assurance partnership with UTAS, and that involved them actually checking and sitting exams for us and giving feedback, employing a copy editor for structural formatting and enhanced proofreading and strengthening workflow documentation with clear accountability at every stage.

There are quite a number of recommendations from Deloitte which were around how changes are recorded and how we ensure that they're being picked up at each level, and that somebody is accountable for ensuring that they have been made as the exams go through and that there's a clear through line so that if there is an error we can go back and see exactly at what point that it came to.

A number of the recommendations were about those administrative processes and getting them clearer, which were picked up for this year.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. So just tell me if this is right. There are 34 recommendations. Have they all been accepted?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes. They've all been accepted. Some of them are coined in the fashion of that TASC 'consider' something. So they've been accepted insofar as, yes, we'll consider them, see if they work.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. So 34 recommendations and 16 started, but three implemented, is that correct?

Ms O'DONNELL - That's correct.

Mr EDMUNDS - So out of the 34 recommendations, three are in place for this year's exam period?

Ms O'DONNELL - No, not quite. Three have been completely implemented, and they've completely been done. The UTAS one, for example, we selected the most high-risk subjects and the subjects that had problems last year, because to try to put it over the 40 papers was going to run the risk we wouldn't meet the timelines.

Mr EDMUNDS - So of those three, they're still only ongoing as well, so they're not fully implemented?

Ms O'DONNELL - No. The three have been implemented. The UTAS one's not one of the three. The UTAS one is of the 16.

Mr EDMUNDS - Right. What are the three then, sorry?

Ms O'DONNELL - The three are the -

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Mr EDMUNDS - It was the copy editor.

Ms O'DONNELL - The copy editor.

Mr EDMUNDS - The workflow documentation and -

Ms O'DONNELL - The copy editor at two different junctures. That was two recommendations - ran across two recommendations.

The last one was in relation to the information flow and making sure that we could see it from end-to-end.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. You talked about the lateness of some of the recommendations in planning. My understanding is there were delays in kicking off the review. Is that correct? Between the review being announced and the actual work being done, there was quite a gap, I understand. Is that correct?

Ms O'DONNELL - The review is announced at the end of the year, just after exams, and it began early the following year. It might have been February rather than January, but it started work pretty much as soon as Deloitte was back on board and everybody was back on board for the year. Then it was finalised between about May and August to get a final printable copy. Deloitte needed to do some extra work on that.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. One last one, if that's all right.

CHAIR - That's fine.

Mr EDMUNDS - I understand that the Friday before exams beginning, we were still 40 examiners short. Is that correct?

Ms O'DONNELL - I think that was supervisors.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, sorry, supervisors.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes. We had a number who had committed, but then were unwell or couldn't continue the commitment. We did seek some back-up staff to replace them.

Mr EDMUNDS - That was done over the weekend before the first exam, was it?

Ms O'DONNELL - I know it was done towards the end of that week. I can't be certain whether it went over the weekend as well.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I have some more answers for Mr Gaffney. He asked about the number of secondary schools. We have 29 secondary schools and 25 combined primary and secondary schools, so 54.

Mr GAFFNEY - Fifty-four. Terrific. Thank you.

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CHAIR - Thank you, minister. We will now move on to grants and subsidies.

Mr EDMUNDS - I've got one more on 3.1.

CHAIR - You do? No, that's fine.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. It was around TASC, the TRB and the Non-Government Schools Registration Board and the move to Letitia House. I was just interested what consultation occurred with the workforce ahead of that consideration.

Ms O'DONNELL - Thank you. This move has been discussed for around 12 months, and we've had a number of staff meetings. We've had consultation through staff meetings. I've run staff meetings with each of the work areas separately and also all together, as well as ongoing emails. The individual deputy directors that run each of the areas have also had regular staff meetings with staff, giving them updates as and when we could about what was going to be happening with the move.

We ran a staff survey. We've got about 70 staff, and we had about 46 or 48 responses to the survey. From that, we managed to group suggestions, ideas and concerns, and we ran through those in the staff meetings. We've also had a Teams site set up which had a question section in it so staff could put questions in about what might happen with the move. We could then provide the answers so that everybody could see them. So that's been the consultation.

Ms PALMER - Just to add to that, I understand that this was a recommendation from the Review of Education Regulation to have all the functions located together. It stemmed from that body of work as well.

Mr EDMUNDS - Appreciate it. Thank you.

CHAIR - Any further questions? No? If we have no further questions in that area, and we do have, I understand, some questions in grants and subsidies and capital investment. We won't be going into services for children and families just yet.

We will have a few more questions to do with the other outputs so we will extend. We will go into children and families. I think the list you had was that we would start with children and youth at 12.15pm, but obviously we have some more questions here, so just to advise.

Ms PALMER - Okay.

Grants and Subsidies

CHAIR - Okay. So we are now in grants and subsidies, and members. Any questions?

Mr EDMUNDS - Not in this one. Definitely capital.

CHAIR - No. Well, there you go.

Capital Investment Program

CHAIR - Capital investment program. Mr Edmunds.

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Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, I've certainly got capital. Meg may have had.

CHAIR - We can always still ask it. Minister, you're going to bring people to the table? It won't be a great extension, but just to advise you that we've run across.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I introduce Mr Todd Williams at the table. Mr Williams is the Acting Deputy Secretary of Business Operations and Support Services.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, Chair. I know others have probably got some questions. I ask about the funding profile in some of the capital investment programs. A couple have come forward a bit and a couple have gone back. Specifically, I'm interested in what's happened with Lindisfarne North Primary School where it appears to have, from last year's Budget, gone from the first money going in in 2026-27, to now it looks like the first money is going in 2028-29. I assume that's correct, and I'm interested in why.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. That's correct. It has moved out. A lot of those changes that you mentioned reflect some internal capacity issues around when we're able to deliver, but also the market forces and our capacity to deliver some of those.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Do others have - I've got others, but perhaps -

CHAIR - If you'd like to ask another, then we'll move down the table.

Mr EDMUNDS - Is this where we can talk about the North West Support School, the hydrotherapy?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm interested in what impact the announcement about that being open for use by the public has had on the trajectory of delivering it.

Mr WILLIAMS - No, it hasn't changed. It's part of - through you, minister, sorry.

Ms PALMER - Yes, of course.

Mr WILLIAMS - The hydrotherapy pool was always part of the commitment that was made and the project. So it was always being considered, and when that commitment was made, we were already in that phase of designing. There have been some minor considerations around access to make sure it's located correctly, and importantly, from an operational perspective, that there is no impact on the school, that it's managed outside of school activity, and that's through discussions with Department of Health and other providers. That's ongoing. So minor adjustment in terms of the design process, more around consideration of operational impact and making sure that it doesn't impact on the school day-to-day operations.

Mr EDMUNDS - So that change hasn't affected design or timelines?

Mr WILLIAMS - No.

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Ms PALMER - Not that I'm aware of.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Minister, the Budget papers suggest several capital infrastructure upgrades to school facilities have been delayed for two years due to, 'Emerging industry capacity constraints'. I'm wondering which schools are priority one schools most in need of urgent maintenance and repairs. Can you provide a breakdown of those priority one schools for maintenance and the expected timeframe for urgent maintenance and repairs, and indicating whether they are ones affected by that deferral that was referred to?

Ms PALMER - Certainly. I'll seek some advice on that.

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes, the projects that are approved in the capital program were all previously priority one schools and selected off that priority one list. There are adjustments to the capital program, and some have been pushed out in years. That's around the renewal of the asset, being asset-specific, rather than the day-to-day maintenance of the school. If there are urgent maintenance requirements we work with schools every day on urgent maintenance requirements compared to the renewal of an asset.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. The emerging industry capacity constraints, can you provide more explanation around that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Really, that was based on the building arrangements as a global industry are able to deliver, but also on what we previously delivered within that timeframe as well, looking back at how we delivered infrastructure over a period of time.

Ms WEBB - As in, we aren't delivering as much or - what's the point you're making about that?

Ms WEBSTER - No, I'm making that we were actually trying to be realistic about what we could deliver when, within the capacity of the industry.

Ms WEBB - Right. Thank you.

CHAIR - Any more questions?

Ms PALMER - Chair, if I could have the opportunity, just on a previous output.

CHAIR - Absolutely. Yes.

Ms PALMER - I want to be clear regarding this year's exams and the answer that I gave. This year, there have been two discrepancies in setting of exams. One in each of economics and legal studies. Then there was that one administrative error - mistake, sorry - in the Biology exam. I just wanted to be clear on that. Thank you.

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CHAIR - Thank you very much. If members have no further questions, and we've just run 15 minutes late, which is not too bad. If we could now change minister to services for children and families. We'll stop the broadcast, please.

The committee suspended from 12.31 p.m. to 12.36 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you, and thank you, minister. If you could introduce your team at the table now for Services for Children and Families, Output Group 4.1.

Minister for Children and Youth

OUTPUT GROUP 4

Children's Services

4.1 Services for Children and Families

Ms PALMER - Thank you, Chair. I have our secretary, Ginna Webster. Also to my direct left we have Peter Whitcombe, deputy secretary, and next to him, Tiffany Black, Executive Director Services for Children, Youth and Families, and then we have Jason Sowell to the right, Director of Business Planning and Improvement.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney has some questions he'd like to lead off with.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, thank you.

CHAIR - Is there an opportunity for an opening statement?

Mr GAFFNEY - I'm sorry, minister, of course.

Ms PALMER - Thank you.

CHAIR - Absolutely. How remiss of me.

Ms PALMER - No problem at all. Thank you very much, Chair. As the recently appointed Minister for Children and Youth, I'm honoured to lead this vital work for the communities across the state that I value so deeply.

At the heart of this work are Tasmania's children, young people and their families. It's also important to acknowledge the incredibly dedicated staff who support them every day, those in Child Safety, out-of-home care, and Youth Justice services. Their professionalism, commitment, and the positive outcomes they facilitate are truly valued.

Implementing the recommendations of the commission of inquiry remains a key priority. This is critical work and is essential to rebuilding trust and ensuring that every child and young person in Tasmania is safe. We are in a strong position to continue the reform of our Child Safety and Youth Justice systems. There is more work ahead, and our task is greater than simply completing the commission of inquiry's recommendations.

My commitment is clear: to deliver the reforms needed so that children and young people are safe from harm and are able to receive the right supports when they need them. Over the past 12 months, we've achieved a great deal. The recent Child Safety and Youth Justice operations portfolio changes within the Department for Education, Children and Young People have positioned us firmly to deliver through care reforms, ensuring children and young people and families remain at the centre of all we do.

The government continues to act on its commitment to ensure that every child and young person is known, safe, well and learning by providing \$41.556 million for key deliverables in children and youth in this budget. We've also provided an additional \$105.3 million to deliver new fit-for-purpose Youth Justice facility, bringing the total project to \$155.3 million. The new facility is a key component of our wider Youth Justice reform. The Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-34, which was delivered in December 2023, sets the strategic direction for the next decade, establishing contemporary child rights, therapeutic and integrated approach to youth offending.

Early investment is being directed towards supporting families and strengthening their capacity to keep children safe with additional out-of-home care funding of \$15 million over two years, ensuring alignment with the commission of inquiry's recommendations.

Chair, we acknowledge the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people across Child Safety, Youth Justice, and out-of-home care services. Ongoing work is focused on further developing partnership and funding agreements with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver culturally appropriate place-based services.

I am also firmly committed to collaboration with our community sector partners across Tasmania to provide targeted supports for vulnerable children and young people with a strong commitment to building sector capacity where it is most needed.

This budget reflects our unwavering commitment to protecting children and supporting families right across Tasmania. Together, we will continue to build a safer, stronger future for every child and young person. I look forward to answering the committee's questions. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Gaffney has some questions.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. A question, minister, and a bit of background information. When young people are accommodated in youth emergency shelters, the current funding model allows for only one worker overnight. Shelter Tas members have raised concerns that a one-worker model creates an environment that can be unsafe for both clients and workers, and this model is not in line the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework. The level of risk associated with accommodating children and young people deserves extra attention after the commission of inquiry, as noted in the Crawford Review, as an ongoing issue to be addressed. My question would be, what plans and funding are in place to enable youth services to comply with the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework and the new legislative requirements?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question, Mr Gaffney. I got this question yesterday, and part of it does sit in the area for the minister for Housing. I will ask the secretary to answer with reference to what sits in the children and youth space.

Ms WEBSTER - In relation to youth accommodation, we have a number of varied options for out-of-home carers and accommodation options for young people who are at risk or vulnerable. The Child Safety Service, Community Youth Justice, Homes Tasmania and other government and non-government services work hard to identify suitable accommodation and wraparound supports for children and young people in Tasmania. We know that it can be really challenging to provide and find those accommodation options, particularly if young people have complex needs, and it can be an additional challenge that presents when we are seeking potential carers for those young people.

In terms of the accommodation services that we provide, the policies and approaches enable young people to stay voluntarily, provided that the young people are respectful to others and respectful of the accommodation guidelines.

In 2024, DECYP and Homes Tas signed a service level agreement to improve housing outcomes for young people in out-of-home care and Youth Justice, and that agreement outlines the respective roles for each agency, priority access to accommodation and support for young people in care, and for those who are transitioning out of care or detention and describes escalation pathways to address any unmet needs of our young people.

In terms of the key worker model and what's required, it's on a risk-assessed basis. We work with the organisation to determine what we need to provide for that young person at the time, and that is a variable measure. We do expect that organisations that we provide funding to comply with the Child Safe Organisations framework and, obviously, a part of the reportable conduct scheme is they have the necessary checks around registration to work with vulnerable people. I'm not sure if the deputy secretary is able to provide anything specific to the way that we work with those organisations.

Mr GAFFNEY - I suppose the crux of my question was about the funding - the current funding model - where it's one worker. It's the increase in funding so that they can have two workers in that place overnight. It's not so much to do with the housing. I haven't gone there. I was talking about the one funding model.

Ms PALMER - I'm advised that that funding sits with Homes Tasmania.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay.

CHAIR - Would you like to have a follow up from-

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. I'd like to follow up on that.

CHAIR - Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - It does sit with Homes Tasmania. That's correct, but we described you've got a service level agreement with Homes Tas around this. Currently, and for the last, let's say, three years, how many children in state care have been accommodated in crisis accommodation services as an accommodation option that's been available because others might not have been?

Ms PALMER - We'll have a look to see if we can get that information for you before -

Ms WEBB - Thank you. In the sense that there is regularly at any time young people and children in state care being accommodated in crisis accommodation as a standard, regular place to put them - like, it's not a home environment. It's got the one-worker model. Children could be as young as 13, presumably, in some of those accommodations. You described requiring organisations you fund to deliver services to this cohort in other ways as having to have wraparound care.

One worker can't be described as wraparound care. What plans do you have to work more with Homes Tasmania about that service model to ensure that your responsibilities as the state in the parental role for these children in state care is actually met properly and we're not neglecting them?

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, I'll hand to the deputy secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, thank you for the question. I believe, as you do, that we would want every child ultimately not to be in care. We would want them to be safe and supported within their families and within their communities. We need to do everything on that front. When we cannot, when we're not able to achieve safety with that, we would want them in some sort of family-based care, usually with kin or non-kin carers. Then we have children who have significant complex needs which require high levels of care, which the secretary spoke about in terms of the risk-based assessment to what that wraparound care looks like.

Your question specifically was about some of our young people accessing shelter-based accommodation for young people, and I agree, that is not where we want our young people to be, and to that end, the reform program, which is called Bright Lives Uplifting Care, is currently undertaking an exercise to understand across the continuum of care responses required, do we have the right care options in place and what are the gaps within that service spectrum?

I would say our staff every day do so much to keep children and young people out of those sorts of places of accommodation, and there are some situations, as you'll be aware, where - in family violence matters - where they are with their parents and other situations where for some young people they have opted not to be in a particular care option that we have provided and have opted to go and be in a shelter as well.

It is our role to have the relationship and to build safety around young people and sometimes around young people in ways where they are self-determining in their care as well, and we have work to do ahead of us.

Ms WEBB - I'd definitely like to follow up on self-selecting sorts of issues in a little while. In this though, we currently have children who are living in shelters, where they've been put there, and they're in the care of the state. We've taken them away from their families. I personally know that children in that situation can be unsupervised all day, not directly supported to get to school, not provided with food necessarily throughout the day, therefore more likely to be driven to crime, committing crime through the day, and we are their parent, essentially, as a state. On that basis, from those direct stories I've heard, for example, we are neglectful parents of those children.

Clearly, minister, I'm sure you agree that's an unacceptable situation. At least addressing the staffing model of crisis accommodation, the one-worker model, would at least provide for more availability of supervision and support to get to school and those sorts of things.

I'd like you to respond to the fact that we're currently being neglectful parents in putting children into that situation, and then describe how you're going to be working with Homes Tasmania through your agreement to look at that model of care.

Ms PALMER - I'll just make a few comments. We want the best outcomes for these children and if you have examples like you're putting on the table here about children not having access to food, that's not the advice that I am being given about what is happening in some of these accommodation facilities. You know, that's -

Ms WEBB - No, no, sorry. Just to clarify: they're being fed in the accommodation facilities but when they're out the door and have to be out the door all day, they don't necessarily have access to food.

Ms PALMER - The other part of your question, I'll ask the secretary to speak to, around what we're doing with Homes Tasmania.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I'll answer the question around Homes Tas and what we're doing under that service level agreement. I'm always happy to look at what else we need to provide under that agreement and work with any organisation to improve the level of care that we provide. There is a work plan that has been developed under the service level agreement and there are some priorities that include providing additional Homes Tasmania properties for out-of-home care.

There were an additional nine under that work plan, noting that seven of those nine have already been provided. Additional supports for young people subject to orders in supported accommodation and improved access to existing accommodations supported by pathway planning for young people. We do know that at times young people require that crisis accommodation. Any information that you have where you've got examples of young people walking out the door where they haven't -

Ms WEBB - I'll certainly bring them to you.

Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely. I think you know that anytime you do those things I respond to those questions. I would say that we can't respond unless we know. I'm very happy to take any of those at any time, and I have done from a range of stakeholders.

Ms WEBB - Yes. That's why I'm keen to get the data on how many children are in those crisis accommodation-style services that are under the care of the state, and also interested from a data perspective how many Homes Tas properties in total are utilised for out-of-home care placements.

Ms PALMER - We'll be able to get that information before the end of the session.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could ask a question, minister, about the Intensive Family Engagement Service. Basically, you could provide some more details about it, but also how does the service connect with existing family support services?

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. This program provides intensive support to families that have been assessed by the child safety service as experiencing complex issues that directly impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who are at risk of entering the statutory system. The Intensive Family Engagement Service aims to build a family's capacity to provide their children with a safe, stable and nurturing home environment. In the 2025-26 state Budget, there's provision for a continuation of funding totalling \$8 million over two years, \$4 million in 2025-26 and \$4 million in 2026-27.

The goal of the service is to, wherever possible, avoid the need for statutory intervention, to support families to build parenting capacity and to increase safety, preventing entry into the child safety system or into out-of-home care. All referrals for intensive family engagement are reviewed by a panel and are assessed for suitability. That's based on individual needs of the family and the type of support that's available.

Non-government organisations, Key Assets, 54 Reasons and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre are collectively funded to deliver 88 packages to families in Tasmania annually. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are prioritised for support through the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, with decisions made according to each family's preference. Intensive Family Engagement Service is critical for appropriately supporting and preserving Aboriginal families and reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. IFES is recognised as a critical and highly effective service. There is no intention to vary or reduce the services available as the outcomes being achieved are quite significant. Thank you very much.

Ms WEBB - Do you have a follow-up comment.

CHAIR - No, thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. To follow up on that, thank you for specifying the agencies that are the organisations that are funded. That was one of my questions about it. To clarify, it's here in a key deliverable, which is where we normally put extra additional things that have come up, but it sounds like this is funding the same number of packages as have been funded under the program. Is that correct, minister?

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

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Yes, that's correct. It had been, as I understand it, funded year-on-year and this is now in the budget as an ongoing basis.

Ms WEBB - It's in the budget for two years and then the forward Estimates are blank, of course, because we wanted to make this look like a very good budget. I presume then we can understand that it is likely to continue. We'll just have to wait until May to see the out-years amounts in terms of this program.

Ms PALMER - Yes, they'll be considered in future budgets.

Ms WEBB - Okay. How is the funding allocated across the regions?

Ms PALMER - I think we have that information. I'll ask the deputy secretary. Thank you.

PUBLIC

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I suppose the best way to answer this is to talk to where the referrals have gone in each of the regions. We've had 23 referrals to the Intensive Family Engagement Service in the south of the state; we've had 25 in the north; and 24 in the north-west.

Ms WEBB - It's nice and even, isn't it - probably a little bit less in the south than we might have expected, potentially. It is the case that we maintain - and I'm just trying to do my maths, but I don't think that adds up to 88 packages.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes. You are correct. There are 72 packages. We want to make sure that that service is fully utilised. Sometimes that's to do with the referrals going through; sometimes that's to do with the service itself, its capacity to be able to respond in terms of whatever staffing needs they might have. I want to acknowledge all the service providers in this space. We've seen almost 92 per cent of families successfully work within those services, achieve their goals, not have children into out-of-home care or state-care style responses. I think that's a fantastic outcome for children and young people.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So 72 is significantly less than 88. I'm wondering about that empty capacity there that's not being utilised. Are the organisations receiving funding for 88 packages in an ongoing way, but delivering 72?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, and my colleagues have given me a slight correction. In addition to the 72, there's been seven package extensions. So that takes the number to 79 fund packages.

Ms WEBB - So that's where there's extra need. So two packages are, essentially, put together or -

Mr WHITCOMBE - It would be to do with a continuation of a package which goes for a set period of time, and it's to ensure that that continues on for the length of the need of that family.

Ms WEBB - At any given time, though, we should be expecting to be funding 88 packages under this program, minister. I'm still trying to clarify because it still only brings us to 79 which seems -

Ms PALMER - My understanding is that that's the capacity of the program, that number of packages.

Ms WEBB - So we're paying for 88, but we're getting 79, right?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, yes, that's correct. As I've said, that could be a mixture. I don't want to cast aspersions on where fog around that sits. That could be to do with our own service not pushing through the referrals that fit within the criteria of that particular service and, obviously, it's a service that has to be consented to with families, and there has to be motivation around those families to engage and be involved. Or there could have been, alongside that, some capacity issues with particular providers.

Ms WEBB - And in that is staffing issues.

Mr WHITCOMBE - It could be staffing issues, yes.

Ms WEBB - So to track the referral pathway, the first port of call is the ARL. So there are calls made to the ARL. The family's identified as potentially benefiting from support through IFES. What's the duration of the referral pathway? What's the average time between first notification through the ARL and an IFES package starting? Are we able to specify what that looks like?

Ms PALMER - No, I don't think we have data on that. I think from the first point of a notification or a call through to ARL, that's going to trigger a process that will be laid out, and it is so important that we continue to be supporting this. When you look at the outcomes of this program, 91.67 per cent of families who are participating in the program meet their goals, which is fantastic. But I don't believe we have data here from the first time a call is made through the ARL through to -

Ms WEBB - Perhaps I can ask it another way. I agree, I think this is a good program, and I think those organisations delivering it are excellent organisations. My questions are not in relation to being critical of the program or the model. I'm just trying to understand our utilisation of it. Do we currently - is there a waiting list? Do we currently have active referrals for this program that aren't being progressed into it to fill up the rest of that capacity?

Ms PALMER - I'm advised we're not aware of a wait list. I do know that Mr Sowell, our finance director, Business Improvement and Planning, did want to add some detail to the answer.

Mr SOWELL - Thank you. Through you, minister, where a program is underutilised, the plan is to fully utilise that program, but equally with the arrangements around a contract, we do have an acquittal process at the end that looks at how much is utilised against the program total. So not in every circumstance, but along the way, if that was to do with understaffing, for example, there would be an amount there still available to contribute to the next period. The aim is still to try to utilise the full capacity in any period because there's significant need there.

Ms WEBB - I'm pretty sure there's plenty of Tasmanian families who could benefit from it.

Mr SOWELL - Absolutely, yes, but, equally, we do have the process around it to look at that with the providers to ensure, if there's excess capacity, we can look at how that's utilised into the future.

Ms WEBB - I'm surprised that there's not a wait list. I'm surprised that we don't have ready families to go into this given what we know. The ARL's getting calls in huge, escalated numbers over the years. To me, that indicates there might be some pathway issue into this program that we've got in the administrative end of things.

CHAIR - So a question would be -

Ms WEBB - Can I ask you to take a look at that, minister, ask your staff to turn attention to it to see whether that is something that is holding us back from fully utilising it? Even if we can carry the money over, it meant we didn't deliver services we could have this year.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, my deputy secretary would like to add to that, please.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I agree. I think you raised some good points around the program and the accessibility of it for families. One of the things that I have become aware of in the time that I've been in the role has been around some of the tightness of the referral criteria that sit around these particular packages. One of the things I would like to be looking at is how we can have a more flexible approach to intensive family support-style services that, for example, don't disengage when Child Safety is involved if it needs to be involved for a period of time, or isn't necessarily about the motivation right at the start.

There's so many things that practitioners and organisations can do to reach out and create and build that trust. I think it is a worthwhile exercise to look at the criteria that sits around and make sure we're not too limiting and how we support families.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that. I appreciate that answer.

CHAIR - Do you have any further questions?

Ms WEBB - I could go as long as you like, but if others want to jump in, I know I'm taking up a lot of time. We could do all day.

CHAIR - That's fine.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Move on?

CHAIR - Yes, if you'd like to move on, and we'll go to 1.15, and then we'll break for lunch.

Ms WEBB - Sure. This one is relating to the out-of-home care system and working with vulnerable people checks not just for the our carers in that system, our foster carers, but also for other adult occupants of the homes where we're placing children. I'm wondering around that, whether we are rock solid on ensuring that all relevant people in households have their working with vulnerable people checks. Here's a series of questions that I'll put on that, and then you have some information you can share.

How many placements for children in out-of-home care have incomplete working with vulnerable people checks for household members and people temporarily staying or frequently visiting the home? It's my first question. How many of these placements have household members without that, working with vulnerable people check and have been there for more than one month? How many carers of any type do not have up-to-date working with vulnerable people checks currently in the system? What system do we have in place to monitor placements with incomplete working with vulnerable people checks?

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, there's quite a bit of detail in those questions. Can I ask if Ms Webb is able to provide us with a copy of those questions? We believe that we will be able to address them. We've madly tried to jot them down, but it would be good if we could have a copy of those questions. We'll work through that and we'll come back to you.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, if I could answer one of those questions. Ms Webb, you asked about Homes Tasmania properties. We have a head lease with 43 properties from Homes Tasmania.

Ms WEBB - That had increased in this year - I think you mentioned that number earlier - by nine, was it?

Ms WEBSTER - The work plan included an extra nine, and seven of those nine have been delivered.

Ms WEBB - So that's now part of the 43 that we're talking about?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, that's right.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - If you have another question -

Ms WEBB - Yes. I will move on. Shall I pass these across to somebody?

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you very much, and I do have an answer. Sorry.

Ms WEBB - Actually, can I just have a look at the bottom of that for a second? I'm taking all my notes off it.

Ms PALMER - Yes. We do have another answer to a question, Chair.

CHAIR - Yes, certainly. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - I'm advised that there were 19 children under care and protection orders who have been recorded as being in crisis accommodation at some point across the last three financial years.

Ms WEBB - Nine in each year?

Ms WEBSTER - Nineteen.

Ms WEBB - Nineteen.

Ms WEBSTER - No, across the three financial years.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Are you able to give me a breakdown across those years, please.

Ms WEBSTER - I can ask that question. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate the promptness with which you're getting the answers. Can I be cheeky and add to that? As well as the yearly figure, can you indicate which region they're in? That would be helpful if you're able to do that.

Ms PALMER - We'll do our best to get that.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - I'll leave that with you.

Ms PALMER - Thank you. We'll just add that to that list of questions. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. The Bringing Baby Home program, which is here in the key deliverables, is an important program. It is funded across the forward Estimates, pleasingly in the line item, which is good to see. I'm asking some specific questions about that program. I don't need a description of the program necessarily to go along with it, but I know we might need to get one.

The thing about that program that I'm interested to know about is, how many children are currently receiving services from that program? Can I have the breakdown by region? How many children under interim care and protection orders are currently receiving those services through that program? How many children have been referred but are awaiting services for that program?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. It is an amazing program, that's for sure. I advise that over the last four years we've had 56 families that have been supported, and 46 of those infants have been kept with their families, which is such a wonderful outcome. We certainly know the success that this program has.

In answer to your first question, Ms Webb, I'm advised there were 20 children, and I think we're trying to get the breakdown for you across regions.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - There was one other: care and protection orders, was it?

Ms WEBB - Yes, how many under interim care and protection orders are currently receiving services?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll seek some advice.

Ms WEBB - Then how many have been referred but are awaiting?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we'll do our best to bring answers to those questions back.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I've got more questions on that and I think so does Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - I'll just do a quick follow-up, just to make sure I've understood. To clarify the answer, with the Bringing Baby Home initiative, you said there were 56 people utilised that.

Ms PALMER - Over the past four years, 56 families have been supported through that program.

Mr HISCUTT - Right. It's funded at \$2.58 million per year. Is that what it was funded at previously as well?

Ms PALMER - My understanding is it's been consistent funding at that two points.

PUBLIC

Mr HISCUTT - Does that make - my maths, that \$185,000 per child?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to secretary.

Mr HISCUTT - In case I'm missing something, I just wanted to confirm.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I think we are more flexible with our funding than that. Different families might have different needs.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, just wondering if that's for - yes, obviously there's no value as well, but I wanted to clarify that we're using public money correctly, that that's the number.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - I'm sure there's more to it than that, so I'd appreciate it.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, that's right. Through you, minister. The complex needs of the family dictate what funding might be required. I'm not sure if - through you, minister, Mr Sowell.

Mr SOWELL - Through you, minister. At one point, the program was not at the same level of funding as what it is now, so it did ramp up through that period. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but we're now at a level that was the same as last year and that is the funding that we've been provided for the next four years. There will be some nuance in the costing along that period because of that lower level where it started and then built up.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - To clarify, it's not additional there as a key deliverable; that's core funding for that program? Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Through you, minister. That's right, and I did get confused about IFES and Bringing Baby Home. That's inbuilt into the structural program. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm mindful of time. The other things I'm interested in, in relation to the Bringing Baby Home program, is how long, what the average waiting time is for children who are referred to the program from the point of referral to the time they're allocated support. I'm particularly interested in whether there's any regional differences in that referral timeframe. I'm keen to know what's the earliest point in a pregnancy that a referral can be made into that program. We're about to have a lunch break, so I'm going to put a bunch of these questions on the record now and then we'll probably follow up with them once we come back.

Ms PALMER - We can answer the questions.

CHAIR - No, that's fine.

Ms WEBB - Great. If you can answer them as we go, that's fine.

Ms PALMER - I think your question you just had around the earliest referral opportunity through pregnancy.

Ms WEBB - Yes, that'd be great.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. We receive referrals through the ARL, as you'll be aware, for unborn children. Typically, we'll often start to work with children - well, with their families, with their mothers, following 20 weeks of gestation. In terms of the referral approach around Bringing Baby Home, and there's a bit of nuance in this, legally we can't send a referral for an unborn child, and so we wait until that child is born, but it's not to say that those matters aren't flagged and there's conversations about the potential for that between practitioners and our service and Bringing Baby Home providers.

Ms WEBB - Just to be clear, referrals can be made during the pregnancy for support in the program, but you can't pick that up? Can you just clarify that a little bit more? Sorry.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes, to clarify that, assessment work can often happen through our child safety service, knowing that a baby is going to be born, and typically we'll pick up those situations after 20 weeks of gestation. In terms of the referral to a Bringing Baby Home service, legally we can't make that referral until after the baby is born, but that's not to say we don't open up lines of communication and conversation about the potential entry earlier than that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that. Is support provided to the pregnant mother who's been identified potentially through our systems, prior to the birth, to obviously assist through into that space? If so, what program is that funded under or how do we approach that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. That is the role of our practitioners within our service in building a relationship with the parents, understanding what their needs are. If there are things that can be put in place prior to a child being born, then it is their role from that case management function to work with the family and with what might be needed to be put in place ahead of that baby being born.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. A child safety officer is assigned to them and has a case management role officially in that sense, with the pregnant mother in relation to the unborn baby?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes, that's correct.

Ms WEBB - Okay. How many - no, I won't ask that.

CHAIR - If you have more questions -

Ms WEBB - No, we can come back to it after lunch.

CHAIR - The time now being 1.15pm, we could break for lunch. Stop the broadcast, please.

The Committee suspended from 1.15 p.m. to 2.17 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Same team at the table. If I could start by asking you about this same output that we're on, how are you tracking with regards to staff retention rates across the various services for children and families?

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice.

CHAIR - If I could have a number, it would be really good.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Mr Whitcombe's got the answer, but I can say that across the board in the department, the turnover rate is about 7 per cent, and that's consistent from last year. That's across the entire department.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Thank you. Within our Child Safety Service, our turnover rate or our retention rate is at 14.5 per cent. In terms of total numbers, in the 2023-24 year, there were 50 staff members that left, and in the 2024-25 year, there was a reduction down to 42 in terms of our retention rates.

CHAIR - When you do your exit strategy, when you're actually speaking to them when they're leaving, the reason they're leaving, are they going to other services, or is it just exhaustion/burnout, that they need a break from such a high-intensive job? Any idea of the reason that the staff leave?

Ms PALMER - I'll probably refer that question to the deputy secretary. Understandably, it's a very difficult job.

CHAIR - It's a stressful job.

Ms PALMER - I've certainly had the opportunity to meet with a number of these staff across the north, the south and the north-west, and they are exceptional people. They do a brilliant job. I'll ask the deputy secretary to talk to the numbers.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister. In terms of exit survey data, that has been in place since early this year. We've received 95 survey responses as at 10 November this year: 69 per cent of survey respondents would recommend working at DECYP to other people, and 48 per cent of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they had felt valued during their time at DECYP.

The top three reasons for leaving DECYP that were identified by survey respondents are: retirement was 37 per cent; leaving to progress their career outside of the Tasmanian State Service at 22 per cent; or resigning from the Tasmanian State Service, 14 per cent.

When asked to rate a range of statements and regards to how important they were in their decision to leave DECYP, the top three were: lack of manager support at just over 37 per cent; not feeling psychologically safe in their role at just over 35 per cent; and excessive workload, almost 35 per cent. I want to acknowledge that these figures relate to the whole of DECYP and are not Child Safety Service-specific.

CHAIR - No, no. That's good. Thank you.

Ms PALMER - We do have some other numbers here that we can add. Thank you, secretary.

Ms WEBB - Yes, we'd definitely like a breakdown.

CHAIR - We're getting some breakdown, yes.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. In terms of Child Safety and Youth Justice staff, there are 554 FTE. That's broken down into the advice and referral line, 48 FTE; Child Safety Service, 248 FTE; and the others are services to youth, 3 FTE. There's some community and custodial Youth Justice figures in there. I'm not sure if you want those at the same time.

CHAIR - That'd be good if you've got them. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Community Youth Justice, 26 FTE; custodial Youth Justice, 100 FTE; services to youth, 3 FTE; Youth Justice and reform, 22 FTE. I think that's the figure. What we can say is that there are 36.5 FTE more staff in Child Safety from the last year and 8.4 FTE more in Youth Justice from the last year.

Ms WEBB - How many more in Youth Justice was that, sorry?

Ms WEBSTER - It was 8.4 FTE more.

CHAIR - Thank you. You mentioned the ARL workforce. I wondered, can you update us on the government's commitment? How are you attracting and retaining staff, particularly across the Child Safety and the ARL workforce? Just interesting to know what you're doing to attract and to retain them.

Ms PALMER - As we've already identified, they play a critical role responding to families who need help and to children who are at risk. Certainly, it's complex and challenging work, so we do have a real focus on recruiting and retaining qualified staff to support children and young people. Workforce vacancies are impacted by a range of factors, including the significant market demand across sectors for allied health professionals. We see that both in Tasmania and nationally.

In July last year, we announced a \$4.5 million workforce package followed by nationwide recruitment campaigns for frontline positions, and we were specifically targeting the north-west region. This was followed by two national recruitment campaigns that saw an increase to staff statewide. We are continuing with that recruitment process to ensure that we have the people we need in these critical roles.

Our workforce package includes an incentive payment for all eligible allied health professional employees and managers statewide; a 15 per cent market allowance for frontline employees in the north-west, and that commenced on 1 July 2024; reallocation incentives for employees moving and remaining in the north-west region; impact days for non-allied health professional front-facing staff.

We're also progressing short to longer term strategies to make sure that we keep building that pipeline of workforce in Child Safety, and that's looking at scholarships and fee-free places in both the university and TasTAFE and delivering a Children and Families workforce strategy, and that's in response to recommendation 9.10 of the commission of inquiry.

Our workforce package has had a positive impact on staffing, with a 77 per cent increase in child safety officers in the north-west from October 2024 to November 25, which has

obviously been quite a significant achievement. As of 8 October, the vacancy rate for child safety officers statewide was zero. 5.2 FTE over establishment is what I'm advised.

In 2025, we established a Child and Youth Workforce Roundtable, and that's bringing together leaders from across government and also from across our community sector partners as well, where we have the opportunity to hear from them and for them to be able to provide that really valuable advice on actions that can be taken to address both immediate and long-term workforce shortages. We certainly continue to do all that we can to keep that workforce strong and keep growing it.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Ms Webb, did you have further questions?

Ms WEBB - I can keep going with that. Following on from that, is the current allocation of staffing to the ARL sufficient? I believe there's been something like - if we look back to when it was put in place in 2018, I think that year, there were about 8000 calls that came in. We're now up to about 25,000 in the year that are coming in. Are we having to review and reconsider the staffing profile and how we manage that escalation in activity?

Ms PALMER - Thank you for the question. I'll ask the deputy secretary to address that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. The last figures that I saw in terms of staffing for the ARL had a shortfall of 3.6 FTE.

Ms WEBB - From a total complement of?

Mr WHITCOMBE - From a total complement of around 97. I'd have to confirm the exact figures, but it's there or thereabouts. Obviously, that moves around over time. That 3.6 was for Education, Children and Young People in terms of our direct employees. You will know that Mission and Baptcare co-locate and are part of the ARL response team as well. Both those organisations have zero vacancies currency.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, but my question was more about are we staffing the ARL service sufficiently, not about whether there's vacancies. Is it sufficient to deal with the activity that it's needing to get through without significant delays and non-attending to matters that might be coming through the system.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I'm going to talk a bit about the ARL as a service because over the last year, during 2024, we commenced a review as a service. The ARL had been going, as you will be well aware, for six or seven years now, and numbers, as you allude to, in terms of people reaching out for help and support and advice have grown from 8000 approximately in the first year through to over 24,000 in the last year. So a threefold increase. Alongside that, at times, there have been increases to staff within the ARL. That FTE complement sits at about 97.

We've seen some quite staggering shifts in terms of timeframes for responsiveness during the course of this year as we've started to implement some of those review recommendations. As you will be aware, there was a period of time where we had a lot of outstanding conversations and, for me personally and others at this table, that was incredibly worrying to know that we hadn't responded in a timely way. However, that backlog of conversations was

brought all the way back to zero, and we are currently fluctuating between about 100 and 150 outstanding conversations at any one time.

We've also seen call wait times and call drop-offs diminish significantly. At one point there were situations, unfortunately, where people were waiting as long as 55 minutes. We had a day where the average call wait time was 19 seconds. That's been a result of how we think about our staff and what times we're rostering them on in terms of their responses to those calls that are coming in, alongside what we know to be higher caller volume times.

We are improving our practice support and guidance in terms of decision-making so that people are making quicker and clearer decisions about what needs to go through to child safety to be assessed in the community, within homes, within families, as opposed to those situations being held for support at ARL.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate the answer. It sounds like a significant improvement as a result of the review, so effective. Has that resulted in different outcomes from the decisions made by the ARL staff? If we were to look at the way it was previously done, and say the proportion that were referred to as the CSS or the proportion that had got other responses, are we seeing different proportions now? I'm wondering if that change in decision-making models has actually resulted in different outcomes for the calls that come in.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, that's an appropriate question. The answer is yes. In terms of referrals through the Child Safety Service, we have seen an increased volume and that's leveling out now.

In matters of child protection, you want to be making quite quick and straightforward decisions about what does need to be assessed within communities and, alongside the ARL's other role, what needs support as opposed to a child safety response. We don't want families exposed to child safety responses that don't need a child safety response.

Certainly, we have seen a volume increase go through to our Child Safety Service and we're managing that. For example, both Tiffany and I were on the road around the state over the last couple of weeks, fronting up with staff and talking them through the changes that we'd been both making in the Advice and Referral Line and within the Child Safety Service, what's set behind those changes, which is about the right assessment and safety planning happening within homes in more timely ways and recognising that we needed to shift and change some of the practices.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Following on from that probably is it worth then talking about as a natural progression from that question, average caseloads per child safety officer and where they're sitting and whether there have been changes if we looked at what's tracking over the last couple of years through to this year. If there's regional differences that you could highlight, if that's relevant to highlight here that there are differences.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Thank you. I've seen different datasets set around caseloads and so I'm being very transparent with you. It depends on whether or not we count all those staff who are employed with us but may not be at work for various reasons -

Ms WEBB - Can I put some thoughts around it for you?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Sure.

Ms WEBB - When I've had these conversations I'm aware too that you can count things differently and that can change numbers quite significantly.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right.

Ms WEBB - So I'm talking about caseloads that would include cases flagged as requiring reallocation, as they're currently allocated to a child safety officer, fulltime equivalent. Include cases allocated to workers on sick leave, annual recreation leave and other types of leave where the worker ordinarily remains allocated the case while they're absent. Include cases allocated for team-based case management, if any, distributing it as a mean by the child safety officer FTE currently employed in the team.

Exclude workers suspended in relation to code of conduct schemes. Exclude workers that have normal capacity to hold cases but have zero allocated to them, and exclude cases allocated to practice leaders.

Does that make sense as parameters? Which I think basically means the actual people who are doing the work and the actual caseload they have now but including ones who might be on leave temporarily.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, and I'm going to stay consistent with the way that I'm going to answer the question. The largest number on average, in terms of stripping away all those things that you've talked about, that I've seen is 14.5. Other numbers have shown to be between 12 and 13 children per worker. It does depend on, as you have rightly pointed out, the range of parameters that sit with us. Now, it is right to also acknowledge that there is a proportion of children who are not allocated. I'm talking about children who are allocated to workers -

Ms WEBB - Yes, so what is the proportion of children unallocated?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I do have some numbers, through you, minister, and I have them by region as well. In the north, we currently have 191. Bear in mind, these are averages. So I'm going to say 0.1 allocated to a child safety officer and 48.6 not allocated. So that's the north region. North-west, we have 129.3 allocated and not allocated in the northwest, 108.4. In the south, 329.7 allocated and 264.7 not allocated. I'm also aware that these numbers go through the average numbers during June 2025. I'm aware operationally that we've seen improvement since that time in the numbers as we've grown our workforce.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Even accepting that there's been an improvement probably since June, as you've just described, the north didn't sound too bad in terms of - I think you said 191 versus 46, it was, unallocated. Is that right? Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, 48.

Ms WEBB - Forty-eight. But the other two regions: the north-west, 129 allocated; 108 unallocated. I'm leaving out the points. They're very similar numbers. Then 329 to 264. These are really large numbers of unallocated cases, I would have thought. What's the average time that they're unallocated?

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Mr WHITCOMBE - I don't have the average time that they are unallocated. However, I want to provide reassurance to everyone that while those children may not have an allocated key worker, and I absolutely believe it's the right thing for them to have a key worker. We do have a team-based approach to their care. So almost all children have a care plan in place.

Almost all children, as a result of that care plan, have a team around them who are part of their support, and where they are not allocated a key worker, there are points of contact with our service that are responsive, that pick up those things that children need on an as-needs basis.

I wanted to give a bit more clarity to the current numbers as well, which in the course of this year, I know that we've gone - if we were to look back to September last year, we've seen 198 more children have an allocated worker than where we were in September last year. That's improvement. It's progress. It's something we need to continue to grow, but it is something that I'm really proud of across our service.

Ms WEBB - I acknowledge improvement is good. Obviously, we were in a pretty dire state last year at this time, but it's still pretty alarming. In terms of care plans because it leads to a question about care plans, if I may, Chair.

CHAIR - Yes, that's fine.

Ms WEBB - You mentioned it so let's dig down into the data on that one. Currently, what are the stats on how many children have care plans? Let's be really clear, too, before we get to the data, actually, because there's different types of plans that kids have, I think, in the system.

Perhaps it's easiest to say in the context of ROGS, when they count these things, what are we referring to when we talk about, for ROGS purposes, current documented case plans? Is that the same thing as care plans in Tasmania? If so, I'm wondering, then, where are we at? Our ROGS data looks pretty dire on that front, too, compared to other states.

Ms PALMER - We'll just seek some advice, Chair.

CHAIR - Yes, thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the percentage of children with approved case and care plans as at 30 June in 2024-25 was 98.5, and the percentage of children with approved case and care plans within the last 12 months, also at 30 June which is the ROGS data set, was 47.4. Mr Whitcombe's going to add to that.

Ms WEBB - Explaining - because obviously case and care plans are different things, and presumably ROGS is only counting one of them.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. Through you, minister, my understanding that the ROGS data requires the original plan to have been updated and re-approved by a supervisor rather than the global figure, if you like.

Ms WEBB - Okay. So when we count them and we get to 98.5 per cent, we're counting plans that might be considered under ROGS out of date, essentially, because they haven't been

updated and re-approved. They've just been ongoing. So if you could give us figures on that, I'd like to know a bit more explanation around that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. So firstly, to confirm the case versus care plans questions that you had, yes, one and the same.

Ms WEBB - They're the same.

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's the advice that I've had. In terms of the numbers, again, it is a story of improvement this year. So that number of 47.4 per cent, while it's not high enough, I want it to continue to grow, and we've had a particular focus on that from a practice perspective this year. It's a significant percentage higher than where we were at the same time last year. The impact of the workforce package, bringing staff on board, we know that we can't just load them up straight away with caseloads. We have to take a measured approach to that, but it is having a parallel impact on us seeing our performance and care and responsiveness improve.

I want to also say the other areas of focus have been around safety planning and have been around visits to children in care, and, equally, we've seen improvements in rates of timely visits for children in care.

Ms WEBB - You must have my list of question topics in front of you, and I'd like to get to visits, but first, if I may, I wanted to acknowledge there that I believe that is an improvement on the ROGS. I think we went from, in the previous year, something like 32 per cent?

Ms WEBSTER - 31.9, yes.

Ms WEBB - 31 per cent, yes, now up to 47 percent. So there's definitely improvement there. It does take time, I understand, to fix something that had been thoroughly behind. I've definitely acknowledged that, and I'm still going to be scrupulous about digging into it. What I'm going to ask now, minister, is where do we expect to be this time next year? Because then I can hold you to account for that to some extent this time next year. Not in an unpleasant way, but just in a - if we're on track because we have been tracking upwards, obviously, in a very positive way, where can we realistically expect to be this time next year?

Ms PALMER - I will ask the deputy secretary to answer that question.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I think everybody would want that number to be 100 per cent. That has to remain our goal, and the commission of inquiry rightly talked about that. I am walking, as a leader of a service, as is Tiffany, a balance between how we support staff in the right way, make sure staff have appropriate workloads, and it is a balance between appropriate workloads and allocation of children. We are committed to continuing to grow our workforce, and we need to look within our agency around ways that we can organise ourselves in the most efficient way to achieve that. Equally, we will continue to work with government around the right sizing of our workforce in order to meet the commission of inquiry recommendations.

Ms PALMER - I have an answer to a previous question from Ms Webb that I'll ask the secretary to -

PUBLIC

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. Ms Webb, I think the question was the breakdown of 19 children in crisis accommodation -

Ms WEBB - Yes, regionally.

Ms WEBSTER - Is that by individual year by region? So in 2022-23, there were seven children; 2023-24, six; and 2024-25, eight. The total distinct number was 19. Just the note there is that children will be counted in each year they're accommodated.

Ms WEBB - Sure, yes. I understand.

Ms WEBSTER - So you understand that, of course.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - By region, 14 of those were in the south, and five were in the north and north-west.

Ms WEBB - Of the 19?

Ms WEBB - Of the 19, sorry. We can't disaggregate the five any further because we don't go beyond five because of risk of identifying.

Ms WEBB - Yes, sure thing. I understand.

Ms WEBSTER - That's why we wouldn't give that per region, per year.

Ms WEBB - Per region because you couldn't break down the years. Yes, I understand. I appreciate that. Thank you.

CHAIR - Do you have many more questions?

Ms WEBB - No. I wouldn't mind just following up the one that came up naturally in the answer to the previous question, which is around visits. It completes that suite of work in a way for Child Safety officers. So interested in what percentage of children and young people in our out-of-home care system were visited within expected timeframes during the most recent year that we have data for. If we can get a regional picture of that as well, and, perhaps, in answering it, you could explain what constitutes a 'visit' when you're counting these things and giving data about it. Explain what that might include.

Ms PALMER - We will be able to get that answer for you at the table. If you'd like to move on with other questions, and we'll come back to that. Thank you, Chair. We are going to get that information for Ms Webb, and we'll get that back here at the table as soon as we can.

CHAIR - Thank you. I have one final question in this area. I don't think it's been asked, but it might have been asked before lunch. I'll just check. What turnover do you find with foster carers? Is the government going to prioritise foster and kinship carers? Obviously, they're very important. How are they supported in helping children in state care on an ongoing basis?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. It's a great question. What extraordinary people we have in this state and our foster carers and our kinship carers as well. They're certainly an absolutely vital and valuable part of our out-of-home care system. We do absolutely acknowledge them for their commitment.

As a government, we are committed to improving the lives of children and young people, especially those who are in child support safety system who spend time in out-of-home care. Out-of-home care provides a vital service for children and young people who are assessed as being unable to live safely at home. Ensuring that children and young people under the guardianship of the secretary are safe and that they receive high quality care that effectively meets their ongoing needs is an enduring priority, the department currently partners with community sector organisations to deliver care for approximately 1000 children and young people statewide.

Between all providers, there are approximately 850 carers in Tasmania, and that's providing both foster care and kinship care. We've invested an additional funding amount of \$15 million over two years in 2025-26 to support the continued delivery of quality out-of-home care delivered by the Child Safety Service, and this funding builds on the \$120 million allocated in 2024-25 over four years to meet increasing costs of out-of-home care in relation to foster and kinship care, respite and salaried care and special care packages.

As part of the 2025 state election, the government committed to provide a 15 per cent increase to the base rate of support payments for all foster and formal kinship carers. We've delivered on our commitment by allocating just over \$2 million over 12 months in 2025-26.

A national review of financial models and support for family-based carers across Australian jurisdictions is currently under way and we're anticipating we'll get recommendations from that before the end of the year. This one-year commitment reflects our acknowledgement that reform work is being progressed through the Bright Lives Uplifting Care initiative. As this work progresses, we will gain a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving needs of children in out-of-home care and of their carers.

This temporary uplift provides immediate support while ensuring that future investment is guided by genuine consultation, also by lived experience and the outcomes of the broader reform agenda. In recognition of the pivotal role that kinship and foster carers play in caring for our children and young people, work to develop a carer recruitment, support and retention strategy is being prioritised. The strategy is being developed in partnership with family based carers. The non-government sector and with child safety and out-of-home care staff.

Development of this strategy will include identifying immediate actions that can be taken to improve support for carers alongside development of the longer-term strategy. Establishing a carer recruitment, support and retention strategy was a recommendation from the commission of inquiry sub-recommendation 9.8 and its development is being considered in the context of other relevant commission of inquiry recommendations, and that's inclusive of 9.2, which is outsourcing of care to the non-government sector, and also development of professional conduct standards which is 9.19, and recommendation 9.11, which is mandatory core knowledge for carers.

The strategy will aim to improve recruitment of carers, increase the availability and accessibility of support for carers, that's including training, support networks and financial

support, and to improve retention of carers to avoid potential future shortages. Discussions to inform the development of the strategy have commenced with Tasmanian government out-of-home care employees as well as the Foster and Kinship Carer Advisory Group and the independent expert panel and that was established to inform the Uplifting Care work program.

Our service provider partners have also been invited to participate in discussions to inform the development of the strategy over the coming months. We know that family-based care leads to better outcomes and that's why we're investing in the carers who open their homes and their hearts and they welcome vulnerable children and young people into their families.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, minister. Can I follow up on that one briefly, on that same topic?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - There is a raft of recommendations from the commission of inquiry relating to that. The ones that you listed there, are they all actively under way? Because they're in phase two, due by 30 June 2026, or are some of those ones phase three? I'm trying to remember off the top of my head too, just so we can understand which ones to expect are going to be actively emerging in this budget year.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The couple that the minister mentioned there, particularly the outsourcing of care to the non-government sector, that was due July 2026. Work has commenced, but that is one of the ones that we've pushed out to 2027 under the new dates.

The development of professional conduct standards had two phases. One was around staff, and the second was around carers and contractors. The first phase of that will be complete and the second phase again has been moved out a little bit under that new document that was released last week. And mandatory core knowledge, I just don't know off the top of my head, which is 9.11.

Ms WEBB - Seems like an important one, doesn't it? I feel like there were some of those ones that related to the out-of-home care, the foster carers cohorts, that seemed strangely out of sequence in the way it was originally presented by the commission of inquiry in their recommendations.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, I think the way we've resequenced is a bit more logical around things that we have to get in place first.

Ms WEBB - I appreciate I have the opportunity to talk about these things with you, minister, in other committee of inquiry situations, so it's fine.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

CHAIR - We were waiting on some answers?

Ms WEBB - We probably are, but we're -

CHAIR - So if we move on, or unless you've got the answers now.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - We do have the answers to Ms Webb's question.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I think the answer that you're referring to is just in terms of child visit data.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Going back in time, during 2022-23, the number of visits to children on care and protection orders within the required timeframe was 32.1 percent. The following year, 2023-24, it was 33.5 percent, so a slight increase; and in 2024-25 it was 39.4 percent. I note that that is currently tracking right now at 50 per cent as at October this year.

Ms WEBB - How are we defining visits?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, thank you for the reminder. Through you, minister. A visit is in person and it is through a child safety officer typically, and can often be also conducted through a youth worker, but typically a child safety officer.

Ms WEBB - A youth worker employed in what capacity within the agency?

Mr WHITCOMBE - A youth worker within our agency, and they will be a youth worker as part of the child's plan, and it may be the person that they feel really connected to.

Ms WEBB - So they're part of the care team meetings and things like that that sit around the young person?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Yes, that's right.

Ms WEBB - So it could be a child safety officer, could be a youth worker. Could it be anybody else other than those two categories of staff?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. No.

Ms WEBB - No, just one of those two categories of staff. Does the meeting they have have to be designated as a visit? I'm just thinking of other times that they might encounter the child or young person for other purposes, but would then get called a visit for the purposes of these stats? Are there particular criteria that will have to be in play for it to be counted that way?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Not typically. Typically these would be organised visits as part of the child's plan. The visits are determined through that care planning and care team exercise in terms of their frequency, and that's the intent and purpose of it.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, I have some more answers to questions.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - I believe they're for Ms Webb. Thank you, secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Ms Webb, these were related to working with vulnerable people checks and out-of-home care placements.

Your question regarding how many placements for children in out-of-home care have incomplete Working With Vulnerable People checks for household members and people temporarily staying or frequently visiting. Statewide, currently 79 visitors or household members within out-of-home care placements have incomplete cards, but this data is not tested to ensure households are active or have children within placements.

This means that not all foster carers currently have children in placement, as there is normal day-to-day movement. Sometimes they're temporarily placed with those foster carers. How many of these placements have household members without RWVP for one month, more than one month. We don't collect that data in such a way that allows us to filter that particular data set.

How many carers of any type do not have an up-to-date working with vulnerable people check? Data on this topic fluctuates on a day-to-day basis. Foster care, seven household with incomplete cards, two active households with incomplete cards and five households without current children in placement.

Kinship care, 30 households without incomplete cards, 21 active households with incomplete cards. Vast majority of these households are interim approved under assessment and new placements with carers obtaining cards, and nine households without a current child in a placement.

How many carers do not have up-to-date RWVP checks but no current placement? There are 14 care households without children placed in them currently where a member of that household does not have a current RWVP. What system is in place to monitor placements with incomplete RWVP checks? All carers and household members over the age of 16 must have a current RWVP registration.

The department's out-of-home care team utilised a report to monitor the currency of RWVP. Procedures are in place for issuing a series of prompts to carers, leading up to the expiry of a registration for themselves or a household member. Carers are supported to resolve barriers to accessing cards, for example, IT literacy or literacy.

All current carers are required to update out-of-home care if any changes to their household membership or frequent visitors. This triggers a request for RWVP registration, which must be provided to out-of-home care. Home visits to carers and annual reviews are used to monitor household membership. An out-of-home care team share data with the registrar in relation to the status of registrations.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that. It's good to have the description of the policy approach. Naturally, from the numbers you gave me at the beginning there, clearly it sounds like - because you're not able to confirm otherwise by the sounds of it - that there are likely to be situations where we've got foster care households with children currently in them with household members who don't have a current working with a vulnerable people card. It sounds like we can't rule that out right now.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, that may include interim approvals as well.

Ms WEBB - Yes. We're not able to rule out, are we, that there might be currently households with children placed in them, in the care of the state, who are potentially being exposed to people who haven't gone through that very basic screening?

Ms WEBSTER - So - sorry.

Ms PALMER - We have a little bit more to add to that as well.

Ms WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. In some ways you are right. However, the working with vulnerable people check is not the only check that we're doing as part of an interim approval process. It involves meeting with the caregivers. There's an interview process as part of what they do. There's a home check and it's couched with a variety of other safeguards. You will appreciate that sometimes situations for children and families happen quickly and particularly we want to do what we can for children to remain safely within their wider family care arrangements.

There are times when we do need to have an interim approval process. That interim approval process is signed off by one of our practice leaders, so it's not done in isolation in terms of decision-making. We just have a little bit more to add to that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the numbers that we gave are predominantly kinship carers. I want to be really clear that they're family members of that child or young person.

Ms WEBB - Yes, I appreciate that. However, we know families aren't always a safe place either. The questions I was asking relate not necessarily to the primary caregivers in the household, but other adults in the household who we also require to have those checks done, which is often potentially more of a source of concern or a safety issue for young people and children in a household. If you've got these interim orders in place, is there an absolute timeline by which these things must be in place?

Ms PALMER - We'll need to seek some advice on the specific timeline. That might be one we can come back to, Chair.

4.2 Services for Youth Justice

CHAIR - Yes, thank you. If we move on now, while we're waiting for the answers, to 4.2, Services for Youth Justice. Do you need to bring anyone else to the table? You're right, minister.

Ms PALMER - If we need to, we'll bring them forward.

CHAIR - That's fine. Our first question is from Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I'm mindful of taking up a lot of space. I don't mind if anybody else wants to go first to get clear air.

CHAIR - No, that's fine.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Minister, the first thing I wanted to ask you about was relating to the fact that other members of your Cabinet and your government regularly promote a tough-on-crime type of narrative in the community, through media, through social media. Even though that's an entirely discredited by evidence approach, and antithetical to our nation leading Youth Justice blueprint, it is still put out there by members of your government.

The things I wanted to ask you in relation to that are, what have you done and what will you be doing, not in the Cabinet room, but as a public advocate for your own evidence-based, comprehensively developed policy, our Youth Justice blueprint, what will you do to be a public advocate for that? What actions will you take to educate the public and bring them along as we implement our Youth Justice blueprint to counteract the very negative and damaging tough-on-crime approach that's put out by other parts of your government?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I guess the narrative that I consistently come back to is that I am absolutely committed, as is the team here at the table and behind me, to be tough on the causes of crime. We know that the best outcomes happen when there's early intervention, when there's that therapeutic model of care. We do have the Youth Justice blueprint, and for us as a team, that is our roadmap for where we want to head, where we need to go.

I understand and I'm totally respectful of the impacts of crime on families and on our community, but it's also important - I believe we had a figure yesterday around it's only a small percentage of that crime that is actually with youth offenders. So we have to be careful around that narrative that it is young people that are causing a lot of what we see in the media. Peter might talk to that in a moment. I know he's got that statistic.

We have the Youth Justice blueprint. We also have the commission of inquiry recommendations that our government committed to wholeheartedly. For me, as a new minister in this space, I feel that I have a very clear roadmap of where I need to take this portfolio alongside the team here with me.

Ms WEBB - I accept what you're saying. You do have a clear roadmap and the government is committed to rolling it out and has been rolling it out, which is all very positive.

My question to you was, because that's the public narrative from your government coming from other sources, and it gets a very big response out there through the media, through social media, you are the leader and the spearhead of this approach in this portfolio area on this matter. What will you do in the public domain to be an advocate for this and help educate the public to bring them along as we implement the great roadmap we've got?

Ms PALMER - One of the things that I did quite quickly was talk to the department about what stories are there in this space that we can be sharing in the public arena. Obviously, it's my background. That's a natural position that I go to. I do believe in the power of the word, and I do believe in the power of stories.

We have to be very, very careful in this space. We've had a lot of discussions about how do we tell some of the amazing stories about these young people and where there is an intervention and the therapeutic model of care and what the outcome of that is. Obviously, around privacy, not wanting to identify young people. I asked the department to come back to me with a narrative that I can use in the public - whether that be in the media, whether that be

in parliament in committee sessions like this - so that I can be sharing some of those stories about some of the amazing outcomes that we do see.

I'm very conscious of the words that I use and the opportunity in the platforms that do get presented to me as a minister with the opportunity to speak publicly in this space. I have sought advice from the department about how can they provide me with some really great examples of some amazing outcomes that we've seen for young people here in Tasmania. I am absolutely an advocate for the implementation of our Youth Justice blueprint and do not shy away from that.

Ms WEBB - I hope not, but that will mean making public statements from time to time that counter things that other members of your government will be saying. It's going to require that, because at the moment we get incredibly poisonous commentary on media and social media in response to matters relating to children in our youth justice system here.

You only have to look at the *Mercury* site right this minute and social media for the *Mercury* right this minute, where reports of yesterday's hearing, discussion of youth justice, discussion of complaints made by children in AYDC about use of force are being reported, and the commentary under it from the community is absolutely damaging and poisonous about these children and how much they deserve that.

It's only going to be through active advocacy from you as the leader in this space now - and I'm pleased that you are - that helps counteract and help to educate the community away from that, because the tough-on-crime narrative from your government pushes people towards it. That was a statement. I apologise there was no question attached to it, but I'm encouraging you in your position that it will need public narrative change.

Ms PALMER - Yes, and I appreciate your statement. There are two things I'll say. Right across this space, right across how we speak about children, how we speak about staff that work in this space, the public narrative around that, we have to be very, very careful. I spoke yesterday about some of the vulnerabilities that I am now hearing about with regard to some children are quite overwhelming at times. I'm also hearing some of the extraordinary people who work across Youth Justice and how they at times feel so victimised in the public narrative, where we have kids that, often through no fault of their own, are a product of what they've been born into, or what they've been exposed to, and we have amazing staff who are sometimes tagged and branded quite unfairly.

I've sat with them and heard amazing stories of their passion for these young people and their conviction in the role that they might play when they have those opportunities to intersect with these young people. We do have to be really careful around that language.

The only other thing I would say is I very much appreciate your comments about the obligations that I have and the responsibility that I have as the minister in this space. It sits heavy upon my shoulders. But I will also say we have some amazing people in our bureaucracy working in this space, and you are here with some of them today.

They are so committed. They are driven, and they are extraordinary supports to me. We have an amazing secretary who has incredible history in this space as well. We are all committed to implementing and seeing real reform across the opportunity we have with the

commission of inquiry, and we are absolutely committed to the implementation of our Youth Justice Blueprint.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that. I have no doubt about our ability to implement these reforms. It's just none of these people who are incredibly knowledgeable about it can be out in the public domain speaking about it, but you can, and I'm sure you will be.

Ms PALMER - They back me up all the way.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask about two things which came up in sessions we had yesterday with Tas Police that tick-tack through into your space as well. It's around the use of diversion, where police can divert young people who have been committing an offence away from going into the court system. They identified that there's legislative reform required, because under the current law, apparently they've said they can't use diversion unless the young person admits to the crime. They would like to be able to use it regardless of that when they know the young person has, although the young person is staunchly not admitting to it, and they still see the value of using diversion in many cases.

They pointed to legislative reform required. Is that legislative reform something that you are considering incorporating as part of the various tranches that we're bringing through for commission of inquiry recommendations so that Tas Police can, in all good faith, use that in the course of their work more effectively?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. I'll ask my secretary to speak to that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. Ms Webb, commission of inquiry recommendation 12.13(c) states that the government should review current diversion processes, including introducing legislation to create a presumption in favour of pre-court diversion for children and young people.

In line with that recommendation, we're doing that as part of the whole reform of the *Youth Justice Act*, which is currently under way. We're looking at legislative barriers to diversion, options to increase the availability of that. Obviously, we've got to have programs to divert to. That's a really important point, as you would be well aware.

One of the options we are considering is removing the requirement, as you've indicated, where a young person admits to the commission of an offence. We're exploring thresholds that are used in other jurisdictions such as New Zealand, where the threshold is non-denial of committing an offence. It's a lesser threshold than admission of guilt, which is obviously that higher bar, especially with those who've had a negative experience with authorities. It's still important to consider having a threshold because diversion options such as restorative justice conferencing require a level of responsibility or accountability, engagement.

The recommendation that I just mentioned is due for implementation by 2029, but we've committed to expediting the review of the *Youth Justice Act* in its entirety with a bill to be tabled in 2027, including legislative reform in favour of pre-court diversion.

Ms WEBB - Great. Thank you for that. I appreciate the information. It's good to hear that's acted on. We heard about a very positive secondment that occurred from Tas Police across into Children and Youth Services, and it sounded very productive.

One of the other matters which came up as part of that discussion was that analysis that has been done of children and young people who have been offending in our state and the fact that there's about 57 children who've been identified for a large proportion of the offending. The question I put to Tas Police, which they've redirected into this space because you're more well placed to answer it, I wondered of the 57 children who have been identified through that process, what proportion of them are young people in state care?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The police commissioner may have mentioned yesterday that she came to speak to our executive team about that. I reciprocated and provided a bit of information to the police executive team about the causes of youth crime. Obviously, they're dealing with the end of that, but we are dealing with the beginning of it. You mentioned the secondment. That's extremely successful, and the police deputy commissioner actually went to Ashley on many, many occasions.

Ms WEBB - He mentioned.

Ms WEBSTER - It was quite enlightening for him, I think, too.

Ms WEBB - Sounds like it.

Ms WEBSTER - We have done a very deep dive on the highest 10 of the 57, and noting that was in 2024, that list was presented. There is a bit of delay. I know that the deputy secretary has a lot more information than me, but there were some key themes that came out of that. It was early childhood adversity, family violence, bereavement, abuse, disengagement from education by year 7 or earlier in many occasions, lack of stable housing and role models, involvement with the entire system but without coordination across the system, and a strong correlation between the response to those sorts of disadvantages and de-escalating behaviour.

What we do know is that of those 10, there were a high number that had had - or most of them had contact with the ARL in some way, shape or form. A number of them had had care and protection orders. I think it was around seven of the 10. So I think if you extrapolated that, that would give you some indication. It wouldn't be as high as that top 10. But it was really an opportunity for us to look deeply into that, those causes.

I think the Youth Justice blueprint and the model of care, and the fact that we can leverage off the education system as well, now we're one department, provides us with an opportunity to do some of those things and address some of those things that we know are the causes of people ending up in the youth justice system and, often, youth ending up there again and again. We have done that work and we continue to work with those young people, noting that some of them would have aged out of our system. But yes, I'm happy to pass to the -

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. The question was, out of those 57, how many had been in state care or are in state care? The answer to that is seven out of the 57 were in state care.

Ms WEBB - Currently or ever?

Mr WHITCOMBE - No, currently. In terms of the breakdown of involvement the secretary has spoken to, when you look back at the traumatic events in children's lives, you do see involvement at varying levels with both the ARL and the Child Safety Service. I want to

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be clear that the subset of children that we work with in youth justice is a much smaller subset of our child safety and out-of-home care population. I would never want anybody to think that there is any sort of pipeline through the child safety system into youth justice matters. The data does not bear that out. But when you look at a smaller population and look back at the intersectionality of all the things that children face, you do see a picture of trauma that sits behind matters for young people.

Ms WEBB - Yes, Dr Katherine Robinson's work from 2017, *Too Hard*, through the Social Action Research Centre mapped it out perfectly.

CHAIR - Further questions, Ms Webb?

Ms WEBB - I do, but please go to others.

CHAIR - All right. Mr Gaffney, did you wish to still -

Mr GAFFNEY - No, keep going with the AYDC.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Others, I'm sure, have AYDC questions as well.

CHAIR - Well, yes, but let me have a - yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - I'll give you a break for a minute. Something a little bit different.

Ms PALMER - Giving you a break.

Mr GAFFNEY - This comes from a totally different perspective. I've been asked to ask these questions, so I will. It wasn't that long ago there was a major fire in the kitchen at Ashley. The person would like to know, what was the cost of that fire? Has that been assessed? Secondly, they'd also like to know, have there been any other serious events involving fire damage and assaults on staff since that time?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that question. Obviously the safety, security and wellbeing of children, young people and our staff at AYDC is a priority for me. I again acknowledge the hard work of the AYDC staff and their continued commitment to children and young people at the centre.

During October 2025 there were three incidents that occurred at AYDC, with the incident on 5 October resulting in significant damage at AYDC that you referenced, the damage to the kitchen. I'll see if we're able to ascertain where we're at with predicted costs around that. Assessment of the damage is ongoing, and the safety and the security of everyone at the centre is obviously the focus here.

Then there was another incident where there were two young people involved. That was a disturbance in one of the units. There was another incident, which was the Ashley School kitchen incident, but I don't believe that there was a fire involved in that incident. So they are the three. I am advised that the cost hasn't been finally assessed, and the assessment of that damage is ongoing.

Mr GAFFNEY - I did also ask if there have been any assaults on staff in recent times?

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Ms PALMER - I'll see if I can get that information for you. Yes, I am advised there have been assaults on staff, but I don't have those numbers with me at the table.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Are those numbers able to be procured?

Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice. Yes, we'll track that down, and we'll try to get that back to you in-session if we can.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, thank you. My last question is one of, I suppose, understanding. If you have a couple of young people who've done the wrong thing with the fire and whatever, and that's in our Ashley Youth Detention Centre, what happens to be able to help those young people - support them, but also ensure that another fire is not committed? Where do you go from there, especially when we're looking at a different situation in Pontville in a few years -

Ms WEBB - Different model, yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - I just want to know what happens with those young people.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I'll just hand to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, I'd just make a couple of overarching comments. I think the key for me, as the secretary of the organisation, is to find out some of the causes of those three incidents. It was unusual that we had three incidents during that time.

I think we have to make sure that we've got the right programs in place, we've got the right staffing model, that staff are trained properly. We're undertaking work at the moment to review some of the causes of the 'why' those incidents occurred. Obviously we've gone to the 'how', but it's actually about the 'why' the incidents occurred.

To answer your question, what we really have to do, and we continue to do at Ashley, is to have programs and policies and systems in place that provide young people with sufficient activities. You know, programs that address their offending behaviour, but also programs that allow them to undertake activities that people that aren't at Ashley would also be able to do within the confines of that space. The other point that I mentioned was staffing. The deputy secretary will be able to talk to the numbers.

We have recently had a really high number of applications for vacancies at Ashley, and we're about to engage and appoint a number of staff who will commence in December, and then more staff that will commence early next year.

I think it is about the number, but it's also about the training of staff to ensure that they're able to de-escalate when things happen. I've been up to Ashley recently. I went up after those incidents. I'm going up again in a couple of weeks. It's really about making sure that staff feel equipped and safe to deal with those sorts of things. But they've got the communication skills to talk to those young people, and they've got the experience.

We have a relatively inexperienced workforce in some of our areas of Ashley, and we've got to make sure that we've got the right makeup of staff as well as the right numbers. So that's some of the work that we're currently doing. Then the model of care for the new facility, we will continue that work but also pick up a different model because we'll have newer buildings

and a bigger opportunity. One of the things that we know is that we have to involve the community in what we're doing inside any facility.

I visited a couple of facilities in Ireland and the UK, and the message was very clear that you have to engage the community, you've got to engage the business sector, you've got to engage the not-for-profit sector. One of the facilities that I visited in Ireland had a coffee cart. Children had taken part in a community garden expo similar to the Chelsea Flower Show, the Irish equivalent of the Chelsea Flower Show. The education space was more like a traditional school. Those are the things which we are aiming to replicate as we move forward with our model of care. Those are the things that will make the change that we need to make.

Mr GAFFNEY - You mentioned training of staff. Do you have to look outside the state to other facilities for young people to get that training brought in, or is that done in-house? What training programs are there?

Ms WEBSTER - I might let Mr Whitcombe talk to that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. In terms of the training, we work with the Australian Childhood Foundation, which is a national organisation, and they provide some of the staff training and on-the-ground supervision and support for staff. They come into the facility as well, and they've got a strong presence here in Tasmania.

Some of our induction training is conducted through our learning and development team, and we're currently working through a review process around that training. In terms of some of the improved staffing levels, the secretary spoke briefly about that, but we've recently brought a new cohort of nine youth workers, have gone into practice or onto the floor this week for the first time, and that's bolstering our staffing numbers.

The recruitment approach to going more broadly and, again, using social media in a bit of a different way, we had 246 applications in the last round for Ashley Youth Detention Centre. We've gone through all that work, and we've narrowed that down to 26 people who are suitable to be appointed, and we're working with them around offers.

You also asked a question about what about the other young people who are in the facility and the wellbeing supports for staff. It's really important that our facility has people that young people can reach out to and have support from. That includes ACF. It includes other organisations that come into the facility, and it includes our own staff. We've got a case management team there who are working with the children there every day.

For our staff and for our workforce, we know that we don't want to just maintain what happens at Ashley over the next two or three years. We want to keep growing the quality of care. We have aspiration for it to be excellent care, and that starts with having enough staff and us having a strong and confident and capable workforce.

It also means that we have to be looking at our safety procedures, and there's been some really great work this year in terms of implementing some stronger safety procedures, and it goes to our staff's wellbeing, and so there's a set of work that's under way under the banner of what we're calling an Ashley Youth Detention Centre Stabilisation Task Force that has a stream of work to it that is all about the wellbeing of our staff and supporting our leadership at Ashley as well.

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CHAIR - Thank you. I have a follow-up from the question that the honourable member for Mersey had about damage to Ashley. Are you able to give me the cost of repairs to damage for the last financial year, 2024-25? What was the cost of repairing damage at Ashley over the last financial year?

Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice.

CHAIR - Thank you. It's not necessarily maintenance. It's actual damage that's been caused to Ashley. I tend to think of maintenance as more upkeep. This is actual damage that's been purposefully caused to Ashley.

Ms PALMER - We could try to get that data from what we've got. The initial response to that is that I don't know that we have a breakdown between maintenance and actual damage because I'm not - you know, someone could accidentally break something, which is quite different.

CHAIR - My understanding is that there's been substantial damage over the last 12 months.

Ms PALMER - We'll see what information we can get before the end of the session. I don't know if we can break it down.

CHAIR - I'm happy to take it on notice.

Ms PALMER - No. We'll try to get it for you before -

CHAIR - Thank you, but I do wish to have it.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, we do have a budget around some of the things that would address what you're talking about. We've got around about a million dollars of our budget, \$1,048,789, around repairs and upgrades to painting, electrical and security systems. So that's that.

CHAIR - Is that counting damage, or is that just maintenance?

Ms WEBSTER - I'm not sure that we'd be able to provide that breakdown because we just have a global budget for that.

CHAIR - Could I ask if you have gone over budget?

Mr SOWELL - Through you, minister, just to explain. There are two elements to the costs of that nature. There would be some costs we incur in our budget, but, equally, with damage, we may need to access the insurance fund, the Tasmanian Risk Management Fund. So we would need to build up that info. We don't have it to hand.

CHAIR - As I said, I'm happy to take it on notice, but I would like the information.

Ms PALMER - I think I will have to take that on notice.

CHAIR - That's fine.

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Ms PALMER - That is the one rule I had, that I wanted to answer all questions at the table, but my concern is that it would take some time to try to -

CHAIR - Happy to have it on notice. My understanding is the figure is substantial, and it would be interesting to have it. Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Sorry, Jason just wants to add to that.

CHAIR - That's fine.

Mr SOWELL - We do have an initial insurance assessor estimate which is \$1.5 million.

CHAIR - On top of the \$1,048,000 for maintenance.

Mr SOWELL - That's right. This is a separate element. That is subject to change as works are completed and finalised.

CHAIR - That's separate to the fire? My understanding -

Mr SOWELL - That is for the fire.

Ms PALMER - That's for the fire. That's for the one incident.

CHAIR - So that's the one - so the previous financial year, because I think the fire - when did that occur? That was -

Mr SOWELL - Recent.

CHAIR - Recent. I'm talking about the last financial year. I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms PALMER - I think we'll take this on notice.

CHAIR - Happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms PALMER - That is a figure which is an estimation. We're still going through the process of assessing that. I think we'll take it on notice, and we'll do our very best to have it when we need to come back to the House and pass the budget.

CHAIR - Certainly happy with that. Thank you. The member for Nelson had a supplementary as well.

Ms WEBB - Yes. I wanted to follow up on the fire questions that had been asked by the member for Mersey and the responses given. Thank you for the detail provided. I understand that you're investigating that, not just what happened, but why. I want to drill into that a tiny bit.

Is that going to involve - through you, minister. I'm looking at your secretary, but of course it's directed to you. I'm interested to know in terms of the investigation, is that really going to drill down into a very granular timeline of events leading up to that event and a check

on all the different sorts of incidences or reportable matters that occurred in the centre leading up to it and look at compliance with protocol on all those matters leading up to it and then during the event itself? For example, I'm thinking about even, say, when the code black was called as part of the event, and was that the appropriate time for that to be called?

For example, in terms of granularity, will you be investigating through all those matters leading up to and then post-event as part of the investigation to get a full picture of that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister - I've got to be a bit careful because those matters are going to be before the court, and there would be a police investigation around that. So we're not doing any of that work. We might find information, it might be useful, of course. In terms of a timeline, the answer is yes.

In terms of compliance with policy, for example, yes. And in terms of what we were doing before and during and subsequently, absolutely, because I think what I'm looking at as the secretary is there are two elements to the role that I have. Obviously, it is around keeping young people safe as the guardian while they're at the detention centre, but also keeping staff safe under the *Work Health and Safety Act*. I'll be definitely looking at those two elements.

I have discussed that review with the Commissioner for Children. The deputy secretary and I have discussed that review, and she is involved in that process for that, not that she's undertaking the review, but she's involved in the establishment of the terms of reference for that review that will inform that process, and it is comprehensive around those causal events. So it's not just a linear what happened. Most of those issues that you discussed will be addressed as part of the review.

Ms WEBB - Minister, is that something that the custodial inspector would also, perhaps, be involved in informing or at least being aware of?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. To add to the piece around the review, it's not just about what happened in that moment on that day. There are always important things to learn in terms of compliance with policy, but it does lift up above that and think about that the systems and support for staff and takes a broader look. There was another question in terms of the - was it the custodial inspector?

Ms WEBB - I wondered whether the custodial inspector - in the way that you're obviously connecting in with the Commissioner for Children.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. What we have been doing in recent months and has been set up during the year is the opportunity for me as a deputy secretary, as a person accountable for what happens, meeting with the Ombudsman, with the custodial inspectors, with the -

Ms WEBB - The oversight network.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, the whole of the oversight network. I spoke very briefly before as well about the stabilisation taskforce.

Ms WEBB - I do have questions to ask about that.

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Mr WHITCOMBE - Alongside that, we have been briefing the oversight network and are very open to their reflections and responses in terms of the taskforce as well. In a nutshell, we work very closely with the oversight network, and we're appreciative of the growing relationship that sits there.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I ask some detail about that stabilisation taskforce, minister, in terms of who's on it? What is its primary task, I suppose, and how long is it expected to be in place for?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I will pass that to the deputy secretary. For you, Chair, I do have another answer for a question from Mr Gaffney, once we've answered this question about the stabilisation taskforce.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, so the Ashley Youth Detention Centre stabilisation taskforce has been established to drive immediate and practical actions that reduce risk and stabilise operations. Many of the broader reform efforts being implemented to increase the safety and wellbeing of young people in detention are outlined in our keeping kids safe in detention action plan. We continue to drive efforts and better outcomes for children and young people.

In terms of the makeup of the taskforce, in terms of governance, me as the deputy secretary alongside Deputy Secretary Amanda Russell from DPAC and Sue McKerracher as Deputy Secretary for People and Culture within DECYP make up the core governance. We're accountable to the Secretary for Education, Children and Young People in that space.

We get advice and support, as I mentioned before, through the oversight network. There's a team, the taskforce itself, that are meeting and progressing the work with it, which is within the plan sitting underneath the stabilisation taskforce. I am happy to talk in more detail about that particular plan, should that be helpful.

Ms WEBB - I'm more interested in the taskforce, in terms of its practicalities at the moment. The taskforce that sits under that governance structure you described is how many people and who are they? Not names, but just roles or areas that they're drawn from.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. It's a small team. There's three or four FTE that are involved in that and that includes project management and specific expertise and policy and obviously in terms of the people and culture of that work that's required. It draws on a range of functions through our organisation, but there's about three or four FTE allocated to that work.

Ms WEBB - The penny has just dropped for me. So this isn't you've drawn people together who are in existing roles and they're doing this in an addition. This is specific roles in a taskforce that you've put in place to undertake the action plan that you're putting in place. Sorry, it took me a minute to understand that. Is that correct?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's correct.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

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CHAIR - Do you have further questions?

Ms WEBB - I have further questions, but I'm also happy for others -

CHAIR - I don't believe -

Ms PALMER - Would you just like me to address, Chair, the question that we've been able to -

CHAIR - Yes, if you would, please, for Mr Gaffney. Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - With questions that you had, Mr Gaffney, around assault data, we think we're almost there.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, I think we're - yes. We've got some data around particularly workers' compensation data that might assist with your question. In terms of some of our claims around the key reason for stress claims, for example, being assaulted by client or resident is one category and the year ending 31 March 2025, there was one claim for that.

Obviously, there are different key reasons, and the employee picks the key reason. There may be other associated reasons for that, which may explain my next comment. In terms of the youth justice total number of claims received, we had 46 claims received for the year ending 31 March. Youth workers accounted for 10 of the psychological claims for 2024-25. The top reason for 14 psychological claims was being assaulted by clients or residents, seven. So that gives you an indication of that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. One question from the dep sec, you raised about the training that you're doing with the staff, upskilling, and it's really good to see a high number of people wanting to work in that field. Three years down the track, if we're looking at a new centre, if you've put a lot of time and effort into the people that you're training up to upskill them so that they are good or are capable and doing really well, do you give those people indication that would they be willing to relocate if the centre moves, I suppose?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, and I'm sure Peter would like to add, one of the programs of work that we have in place at the moment is the transition model from the current facility to our new facility across a range of factors. Obviously, staff who are currently working there will want to know what their options are for applying for the roles in that centre. We're currently doing that work, but yes, they will be given an opportunity to apply for those roles.

Ms GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - This is a question perhaps of ignorance and newness. Education within Ashley, how does that function? Obviously, these are youth that on a regular basis would be five days a week in school for six hours or so. How is that handled in this institution?

Ms PALMER - We have an amazing school in AYDC with an amazing principal, and I think you would simply have to describe the teachers there as inspirational. I had the opportunity to visit on a couple of occasions, including attending an art class that was being

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held, which was absolutely brilliant. It is set up like a school. We know this is sort of crossing a little bit into education space. I think that's okay. We know that engagement in school and for them to continue with some of the things that we want them to become part of normal part of life are really important. So yes, there is a school that is set up, it is formal education, there are opportunities to look at career progression, there's art classes, there's woodwork and machinery classes as well as obviously, your basic educational literacy, numeracy as well.

We're always wanting to ensure that the young people who come in are part of that regular and normal routine that we would want them to be in whether they were in Ashley, or they weren't. That's actually inclusive of start times, finishing at 3 o'clock, having a lunch hour, school holidays, so it really is quite reflective of what you would see outside of that detention facility. I don't know if you'd like to add anything to that.

Ms HISCUTT - Nice to hear.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes, thank you. Through you, minister. One, and the minister is absolutely right. The school has really done an amazing job in recent years. I was up there recently as well and met with some of the staff. The opportunity of the new facility gives us more space and more opportunity to be able to replicate more of what happens in the community around education.

Education is such an important part of what we need to provide to these young people, and it has often been missing from their life for various reasons. The structure that we will provide is one benefit, really, of being able to ensure that they attend regularly. Anecdotally, we know that young people at Ashley enjoy attending the school.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you so much for the answer.

CHAIR - Do you have any more questions, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I have plenty more. I'm mindful we've got - Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People is another line item after this.

CHAIR - Yes, which is a similar area in some ways.

Ms WEBB - Yes. We don't have the commissioner here though to inform our scrutiny, do we? That's a shame. On this, I'm going to note something from her report and then ask you questions about it in relation to your portfolio. Clearly, the annual report from the Commissioner for Children and Young People came out and it details -

CHAIR - Do you want to wait till we get to that next area?

Ms WEBB - Not really, because my questions are going to be coming off what's in here. The questions are for the minister related to what the commissioner's reporting.

CHAIR - But with regard to - still 4.2 rather than 5.1.

Ms WEBB - It is, yes.

CHAIR - Okay.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm noting the pages in the annual report which relate to the advocacy interactions that the minister's advocate in AYDC has had with young people and children in there, and the nature of all the requests, 640 or so, I think, interactions and seeking of support. The ones that are particularly concerning are the ones relating to use of force - 91 requests relating to use of force - and there's some other concerning ones too.

I want to ask questions about the use of force then given that the questions relating to the commissioner will be how many of those translated into complaints, given only 30 complaints were put forward on all of the matters. But I'm interested in data on use of force at AYDC, where that's publicly reported and how is it audited for accuracy? That's a starting point.

Ms PALMER - Yes, and I will pass to the secretary for some more detail. I can say that the use of force is prohibited under our youth justice legislation, except in specific circumstances, to ensure the safety of young people and staff in the detention setting. The awareness de-escalation and protection approach, it's known as ADP, has a greater focus on de-escalation replacing pre-existing behaviour support approaches.

Training in the lawful and safe use of force is an important part of the Ashley Youth Detention Centre Youth Worker Induction program. In March 2025, the new awareness de-escalation and protection training course was introduced into the AYDC training schedule. It's specifically tailored for Tasmanian youth justice requirements. It's a four-day course and it teaches situational awareness, de-escalation and safe teamwork skills to maximise the safety of young people and to maximise the safety of our staff. An ADP train the trainer package has been developed to enable in-house training of ADP to other AYDC staff, and provide a refresher training from early 2026. This will support continued upskilling of our AYDC workforce and the best support for young people in detention.

I'll ask the secretary how she would like to manage the question around the number of incidents in the use of force.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I'm aware that the deputy secretary has a response to that question. I just wanted to comment on the reporting aspect.

In terms of who it's reported to, I receive - and others, including the Commissioner for Children - receive a daily report on all activities at AYDC, and that includes any use of force activity. We also have an independent review committee that meets weekly at the centre to review all documented incidents involving the use of force. All incidents are required to be documented, and the independent review committee assesses whether the practise used by those involved in the incident was compliant with centre policies, procedures and training techniques as well as legislation, whether it's trauma-informed and justified.

You mentioned the secondment of the Deputy Commissioner of Police. In April this year, the Deputy Commissioner of Police commenced a three-month secondment to the department as principal adviser in my office, and he reviewed the independent review committee and assisted more broadly with organisational alignment of complaints management. As part of that review, an interim assessment panel provided support to assess matters relating to the use of force, isolation, searches and other complaints from young people in detention, and recommendations from the review are focused on strengthening the framework and assessment processes, particularly in relation to how use of force incidents are referred and managed and

are being actively assessed for implementation by the department, and of course, any unlawful use of force must be referred to the office of the independent regulator as well.

I wanted to add that all complaints from anywhere in the organisation - serious complaints - now come through my office. There's a complaint management oversight unit that was initially set up to respond to the independent regulator and reportable conduct and my obligations under that legislation. One of the reasons why we've brought that in and the director of my office oversees that unit and reports to me and I see all those serious complaints, is that I can then determine if there's any pattern throughout the whole organisation. The deputy commissioner assisted with the development of the process, particularly at AYDC, for that.

The final thing I'd say before I hand to the deputy secretary is, young people report to advocates, to the custodial inspector and others, and to me directly. I do receive complaints from young people directly and I do respond to them and investigate those complaints. It is a really positive outcome, because that wasn't always occurring.

Ms WEBB - Yes, a hundred per cent.

Ms WEBSTER - Whilst we would like no use of force activity, it is sometimes required, but every time it is used, we investigate why and if it was compliant.

Ms WEBB - I've got a few more questions relating to that. I understand that what you've described is, on paper, what's supposed to happen. I understand that you end up with complaints. The complaints ultimately do come to you, into your awareness. However, I'm worried about things that never make it to the level of complaint and where things might go awry between something happening and something becoming a complaint which you see. I'm wondering about the data, and also how that's audited and checked against other forms of documentation and evidence in the facility, for example.

I'm also interested in who has discretion as to something being documented as a use of force. I'm aware, anecdotally, that a staff member who might have been wondering, 'I think that needs to be reported as use of force,' has been - and there are numerous examples I've heard of - discouraged from documenting it as a use of force, because there's a person somewhere in the hierarchy, and I don't know where that sits, who can utilise discretion in advising, 'Yes, put that through the system', or 'No, you don't need to put that through the system.'

Can you describe where that point might be in the process and how we would then know what's not being put forward through as a use of force incident that then would come to the committee? I'm interested to talk about the incident review committee as well.

Ms PALMER - We can certainly answer that - not us - the deputy secretary to address those comments, please.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. Firstly, as the secretary has said, we take any harm against children and young people incredibly seriously. That's the whole purpose of our agency: to protect children. I would really respectfully ask that if there are any specific incidents that you refer to, that they be referred to us.

I have been many times to visit the facility. I know, just in terms of the openness and visibility that exists within that facility, in terms of staff wearing body-worn cameras, in terms

of the cameras that exist throughout the facility, in terms of the openness with the children's commissioner and the child advocate within her office being at the facility, other organisations and professionals being in the facility, it is a very open and transparent place in terms of practice. I would not want any characterisation that is unfair, and that is why I would ask you to respectfully come to us around any specific allegations.

As the secretary spoke about, she spoke about the incident review panel that reviews all the use of force matters. They can range from some quite low-level matters, where a young person is needed to be guided into a different room, right through to some really quite difficult situations to manage.

One of the things that we have, while we've had daily reporting around use of force of incidents, and we have the incident review committee, one of the things that we have established through the task force is a monthly dashboard which shows a range of data metrics and one of those metrics is the frequency of use of force.

We're in a much better position as an organisation where through the last couple of years we've gone from having three different paper-based and electronic case management systems to having one cohesive data management system called YJ Plus, which we've successfully implemented in August this year.

Again, it's another one of those things I'm really proud of the progress that we're making. What that gives is much greater consistency and visibility to what is happening at the site and what we need to respond to and manage as leaders, understanding those trends and issues as they emerge.

Ms WEBB - Public reporting of these matters and public accountability around the data on these of matters, where does that sit?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, we don't publicly report that data but, as I said, it is reported through to the Commissioner for Children and the custodial inspector on a daily basis. That accountability sits with those oversight authorities.

Your question around could someone divert a level of complaint, I want to stress Mr Whitcombe's point around anything that anyone has that they would like to raise with the Deputy Secretary or me, and you know, across the agency people do come directly to me. I would say that all staff are required to mandatory report and can and do submit concern notices about fellow workers across the organisation. It isn't just reliant on leadership to record and notify. Those concern notices can be submitted to the department outside of that process. It isn't reliant on coming through any hierarchy at all.

Ms WEBB - So the reporting of an incident - let's say a staff member wanted to make a report of a use of force incident. Does that have to go through a particular gatekeeper in the hierarchy in order to then go into the system?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, yes, the minister's right; there is a number of pathways, but with the concern notice, it goes directly to our complaint -

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Ms WEBB - I don't know if a concern notice is what I'm talking about. I'm just saying if someone has observed something that they believe was a use of force incident and they want to report that into the system to be noted, so they have to go through -

Ms PALMER - There is a number of pathways.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. They can go through that pathway, but there is also the concern notice pathway, which is a separate pathway that they can do if they're not -

Ms WEBB - There might be other consequences to raising a concern notice though, are there? Will they be drawn into something different, a different process in that case? I'm wondering if they might be deterred from doing that for other reasons.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, no, not to my knowledge.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask about the Incident Review Committee? Who's on it? I know it's theoretically supposed to meet weekly. Is that audited? Is it documented that it has met weekly, say, across the last six months?

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much. I would like to ask to come to the table Shane Murdoch, who is - thank you very much - Director of Custodial Youth Justice. I'll ask the Deputy Secretary to lead the conversation.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister, in terms of your questions around the Independent Review Committee, as the secretary spoke about, this comment from police was really useful in reviewing that approach. There are some recommendations that we are in the process of implementing around the Incident Review Committee. It meets weekly. Its membership is currently chaired by an ex-senior police officer. It reports back through to the Director of Custodial Youth Services on a monthly basis with a formalised report that contains a mixture of data and themes that have flowed through from what the committee has observed. Those are opening remarks. Through you, minister, I might pass to -

Ms WEBB - For clarity, I was particularly interested to know, is it audited and is there oversight of whether it has, in fact, met with the regularity it's supposed to meet? Can it be demonstrated that that's occurred, for example, over the last six months?

Mr MURDOCH - Through you, minister, all meetings are minuted and also the meetings are open. The custodial inspector or the Children's Commissioner can come and attend any time, particularly when they're on site, and attend the meeting itself and to be able to be part of that process. Primarily, senior staff of Ashley are involved, along with its independent chair and, as I say, any of the oversight monitors or oversight bodies that also want to attend.

I've been involved with the organisation for five months and I would say the level of vigilance and scrutiny on the use of force at Ashley is beyond anything I've seen in my 30-year career. What I would say is that there is a considered process in regard to what is identified as this is a practice development issue. There was an error made during a use of force, but not necessarily an intention to harm, and differentiating that towards a potential intention to harm, and this is possibly a misconduct issue. So there are discussions through that. So all those meetings are minuted and then they are made available.

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From there, there's a further process where there is potential misconduct that occurs. There is a second committee that reviews those situations again. That is a committee that's chaired by the current Deputy Commissioner of Police. Through that, we are able to ascertain not only the best ways of keeping young people safe but also identifying those development issues in those highly complex situations and quite chaotic situations where a use of force has had to be used at the time.

Ms WEBB - Perhaps. So you'll be able to give me the dates over the last six months of the times that that committee has met and confirm for me those dates?

Mr MURDOCH - They meet regularly on a Wednesday. It's a regular meeting that occurs once a week. We can provide those dates to you.

Ms WEBB - I'd like to understand that we've confirmed that it has met weekly for the last six months.

Ms PALMER - I don't think you could get any further confirmation -

Ms WEBB - I'd like the dates confirmed.

Ms PALMER - It's every Wednesday of every week. I'm happy to get the dates of every Wednesday of every week from my diary.

Ms WEBB - No, I don't want you to give me a set of dates out of your diary. I'd like it to be checked and confirmed that there's a set of minutes associated with a weekly meeting to do with that review committee for the last six months.

Mr MURDOCH - There is a set of minutes done every week. Yes.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Shane.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Do you have many more questions before we move on to the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People? We have been on this for a considerable - but I do accept that it's an important matter.

Ms WEBB - It is indeed. I am able to follow up through other scrutiny opportunities further on. There are other matters I haven't got to yet, so thank you for your indulgence on that. I'm happy for us to move on.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, I want to clarify with the member. You would like us to get you the dates of each of those meetings?

Ms WEBB - Yes. I would like it confirmed that there are a set of minutes that accurately reflect that a meeting was held on a weekly basis over the last six months.

5.1 The Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. If we could move on to 5.1, the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. I ask Mr Edmunds if he would like to lead the questioning. I'm not sure you need to bring anyone else to the table, minister, or you are right to go?

Ms PALMER - No, we're good to go.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. I can just go?

Ms PALMER - So no, the commissioner's not here. My understanding is that they're not invited to this process.

CHAIR - No, that's fine.

Mr EDMUNDS - Are we okay to go?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Under the new model we'll get to talk to them presumably separately next time.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. Minister, the commission of inquiry found that inadequate resourcing was a key driver of systematic failures. Given DECYP is required to deliver efficiency dividends in the 2025-26 Budget and the forward Estimates, what actions have you taken to prevent the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People being compromised by efficiency dividends or budget constraints?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. Through you, Chair, I'll pass it to the secretary to address that.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you, minister, through you. Obviously, as we've been working through our processes to identify the budget efficiencies, the Commissioner for Children - it's a transitional arrangement at the moment because that commission, as Ms Webb indicated, is moving to a larger office. That will go, and the head of that entity will be, as I understand it, effectively a head of agency. There have been no efficiencies in terms of staffing placed on the commissioner.

There are commissioner reports on the activities of the department. From my perspective, I've been very careful to make sure that she continues to maintain the ability to do that, because I didn't want any conflict of interest. That's been a long-standing arrangement. I am aware that there have been no recruitment freezes.

In terms of things like the general efficiency dividend around things like marketing and travel, the commissioner manages herself around her budget, and there are no issues at all with her maintaining that. In fact, we have provided additional transitional support to the

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Commissioner for Children from the department to make sure that she can get through until the establishment of the new commission.

Mr EDMUNDS - Is that to do extra things or to cover along the period?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. It's to cover a slightly longer period because the commission was originally intended to be established, but it's quite a complex process, bringing all those statutory functions together. We've provided some additional funding to make sure that she can do that. I understand that - and someone from Budget will correct me if I'm wrong - the Department of Premier and Cabinet has also supplemented that, because they were managing the project to stand up the commission. Is there nodding?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, there's a lot of nodding. Great. In terms of timeline, is everything on target? When are we expecting this to move through?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. That's under the Department of Justice. They're now managing the oversight because of the independent nature they're used to establishing. I know the legislation's now been tabled. I'm not sure which place it's in.

Ms WEBB - It's in the upper House. It's partway through the upper House.

CHAIR - Do you have any further questions, Mr Edmunds? Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I presume, even though it is moving, that's happening in the future. It still, in terms of the annual report from the Commissioner for Children and Young People, sits in the purview of this portfolio. I had some questions around the annual report. It mentions here that across the 640-odd actual interactions with the advocate at AYDC on behalf of the commissioner, it resulted in 30 actual complaints being made and that the commissioner's advocate there assisted with them.

I would like a breakdown of the agencies that those complaints were to, or the areas that those complaints went to, given that there's a list here of 15 different areas that people have come to the advocate about, in terms of the 30 complaints that resulted.

Ms PALMER - I'll seek some advice on that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The complaints that come through from the advocate from the Children's Commissioner that relate to our agency, they may be at a level where they can be resolved in the centre. They may not come through that 30 that you've mentioned. The ones that come toward the agency - so me - they would be resolved in maybe me liaising with the deputy secretary or another area of the department to be resolved. We wouldn't keep commissioner's data, though, and we wouldn't have information around the specifics, nor should we, of those 30 complaints.

Ms WEBB - No, I'm not looking for specifics necessarily, but trying to get categories so we can understand.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. I think we would not hold that data.

Ms WEBB - There might be external agencies that those complaints have gone to.

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Ms WEBSTER - It could be department of Health, for example, or Police, or it could be other areas.

Ms WEBB - It could be Police. It could be anything.

Ms WEBSTER - But we wouldn't necessarily hold that data.

Ms WEBB - It's awkward, isn't it, because this is a line item in your portfolio area and I can't scrutinise the work of the agency because you don't have the information and you haven't brought the commissioner to speak to it. Perhaps there are more general things that you can answer for me in terms of the questions that I had.

CHAIR - I'm just thinking, member, would you like to have a think about that if we take a 15-minute break and then come back with your questions?

Ms WEBB - I might have one that can be dealt with by these folk on that because it's a more specific question. If a child in AYDC brought a matter to the commissioner's staff member there, didn't want to make a formal complaint but had raised something that was reportable conduct, the commissioner's advocate is still required to put that through the system. Correct?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms WEBB - So there'd be data available potentially about the number of reports made by the advocate in terms of reportable conduct, or do we not keep that sort of data?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The advocate may make that directly to the independent regulator.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Then they'll hold that, and they don't necessarily report it.

Ms WEBSTER - And also might tell me, as secretary, about that as well.

Ms WEBB - Right. If it relates someone under your -

Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely, yes.

Ms WEBB - Okay, but we still have that function operating as planned. How are requests for advocacy support to the commissioner's advocate there in any way cross-checked with internal AYDC reporting systems?

For example, when we have 91 requests for support around use of physical force, for example, we have to assume that, given that only 30 complaints resulted from the whole lot of 640 matters here, most of these matters that are spoken about by the children to the advocate about use of force didn't result in a complaint being made. How are there cross-checks made against AYDC internal reporting systems about use of force to see whether there's correlation there or you can use it as reinforcing information?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I understand what you're asking, Ms Webb. The complaint may be made by the advocate of the - sorry, by the young person -

Ms WEBB - No, no. There is no complaint. There's just a contact from the young person to the commissioner's advocate, one of the 91 that related to use of force. It's one that didn't result in a complaint formally being made, because most of them obviously haven't, 30 complaints out of 640 matters raised. How, then, can that information that's held by the commissioner's advocate - the 91 things raised about use of force - how can that be cross-checked? Or is that cross-checked with the other internal record-keeping systems about use of force to see if there's corroborating information to be drawn on from that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. I think the question that you're wanting a 'yes' or 'no' to is, 'Is the data - those 91 - corroborated with our incident reporting?'

Ms WEBB - Or just cross-checked against, yes.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Not to my knowledge is the answer that I would give to you. I would also say that the independent child advocate is onsite typically three days a week and is consistently talking with our leadership and raising concerns. The Children's Commissioner herself, if there's ever any worries about something untoward happening, is really quick to pick up the phone or send an email to make sure that there is visibility around any concerns. Communication happens in a really natural way, and I think that's important.

Ms WEBB - Minister, I accept that's true and there's value in that. I also accept that we're in a different space now than we were five years ago. But five years ago, when we went to the commission of inquiry, what the commission of inquiry found when it was investigating was that we had all these oversight bodies and all these protocols within AYDC, and kids and reports about behaviour slipped through every crack because they weren't connected up properly.

That's why I'm asking about how we cross-check if someone's gone to the independent advocate for the commissioner in AYDC and spoken about use of force, and there's no way we cross-check that in a documented, accountable way other than just having a conversation or picking up the phone.

I don't want us to be 10 years down the track from now and having another investigation that tells us the same sort of thing happened with the systems we put in place, that these things were actually spoken about, were told about that source, but it all fell through the cracks. That's where I'm coming from with the question. Does that help to interpret what I'm looking for from you in terms of assurance about that?

Ms PALMER - I understand what you're looking for, but, as you say, it's very different to what we were talking about five years ago. The fact is that the children's advocate, my understanding is, is actually onsite with the children a number of days a week. I know that the children's commissioner goes to Ashley, she is on site.

We have these people who take direction from the young people and are engaging directly with the young people. They are there regularly. I've visited, I've seen their offices where they have a really strong presence, and they are there for the children.

I'll check in with this bit of information. In the last year alone, the children's commission, I'm advised, has visited the site 18 times. It's a very different setup. This is not people, young

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people having to make a complaint via a number of processes. They have people there on the ground that they can talk to who they know are there as their advocates.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, I think the other part of that question is, and I don't want to speak for the Commissioner for Children. I'm very aware that I can't do that, but I am aware that there would be record keeping, obviously, from her end to make sure that all those matters were followed up, very strong record keeping and following through the complaints.

In terms of cross-checking, all the complaints, as I mentioned, regarding any complaint through the complaint management oversight unit, that sits within my office, there is a better, and I think you said yourself, there was no joining up of some of those things. So you would be able to perhaps move through the system and have a complaint here and a complaint there, and no one joining that up. I can say that from our perspective, when they come through our system, when they go to the Children's Commissioner, the Custodial Inspector, and the Integrity Commission, there is joining up of all those things now.

CHAIR - Thank you. On that note, we will take a break. If you could, please, stop the broadcast.

The Committee suspended from 4.20 p.m. to 4.41 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. I believe you have an answer to a question for the honourable member for Nelson.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I certainly do. This is in regard to the weekly meetings that you were asking about. We have information for you. Since 2 June, there were four occasions when they did not meet. One was on 28 July when there was no quorum. There were three, 13 October, 20 October, and 27 October. That was immediately after the fire, where they were all required to be involved in the response to the fire, and there was also significant damage at the facility.

I'm advised that they are now meeting twice a week to ensure that they catch up following, especially those three weeks where they weren't able to meet. Sorry, the week commencing, sorry, my apologies. The week commencing 28 July, that Wednesday, there was no quorum. The week commencing the 13th, 20th and 27 October, Wednesdays, which were the three weeks after the fire. As I said, they're now meeting twice a week in order to catch up.

Ms WEBB - I wonder if there was any difference in frequency of reports after the fire, just speculating.

Ms PALMER - I also have another answer which is in regard to a question that you asked, Ms Armitage, around the damage and the cost of damage.

CHAIR - Yes, damage. Yes, thank you.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much.

Mr SOWELL - Thank you. Through you, minister. For the 2024-25 financial year, repairs and maintenance at Ashley Youth Detention Centre was \$198,960. There was also one

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claim on top of that through the property protection scheme that the department operates of \$14,500.

I'll highlight that these costs are separate to the refurbishment works that were happening at Ashley through that period, which happened over a two-year period, to the value of \$5 million, which the secretary talked to earlier.

In relation to the insurance assessment, I'll make a correction there. It's still being actively assessed, and the latest assessed estimate is actually \$1.71 million, not \$1.5 million that I indicated earlier.

CHAIR - This is not the fire, though. This is the previous -

Mr SOWELL - Yes.

CHAIR - This is the fire.

Mr SOWELL - Yes, yes. There's two separate pieces of information I have provided there, and just clarifying, \$198,960 for the repairs and maintenance.

CHAIR - Right. So \$1.7 million, yes. Thank you very much.

Ms PALMER - I have one final question, which is for Mr Hiscutt which was around some regional information.

CHAIR - Yes, that's fine.

Ms WEBSTER - It was the Working Together Early Learning Partners within the state, Southern Tasmania Berriedale. Did you want the names of the -

Mr HISCUTT - Sorry, just how many per region.

Ms WEBSTER - Per region. So southern Tasmania, there's 16. Midlands Tasmania, there's three. Northern Tasmania, there are 13. Northwest Tasmania, there are 12.

Mr HISCUTT - Twelve. I'll forgive if they don't -

Ms WEBSTER - Sorry, north-western Tasmania, I beg your pardon, there are seven. Eastern Tasmania, there are five.

Mr HISCUTT - Right. Thank you very much. I'll forgive you if it misses by one or two, but that's okay. I'm not worried.

Ms PALMER - Yes, that's why we've got the financial person here.

Mr HISCUTT - Thanks for the answer.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. If I could ask a question while your education people are still at the table, even though it cuts across disability, might be a nice segue into the disability and then we'll change the table.

Ms PALMER - Yes, sure.

CHAIR - Minister, if you could update the committee on what the government is doing to support children and young people living with a disability in out-of-home care?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question, Chair. We know many children and young people supported by out-of-home care experience multiple complex needs. \$1.28 million over three years in 2025-26 is provided for three FTE disability liaison officers and their role is to support children and young people living with a disability in both out-of-home care and youth justice. These roles ensure that children and young people have access to regular and holistic assessments across the seven wellbeing domains, including advice from multidisciplinary teams.

Establishing these disability liaison specialist roles for children and young people in out-of-home care and youth justice ensures that services actively nurture and support these specialist needs and fosters children and young people to reach their aspirations and full potential in life. Each child entering out-of-home care receives a holistic assessment through the out-of-home care paediatrics clinic being expanded across the community as kids' care clinics.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for the team that you've had with us earlier this morning and today. It's been really good. If we could stop the broadcast while we change the table for Disability Services.

The Committee suspended from 4.47 p.m. to 4.52 p.m.

DIVISION 10

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Minister for Disability Services

OUTPUT GROUP 1

Policy Reform and Government Priorities

1.7 Disability Services

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. If you could introduce your team at the table and then, perhaps, do a short overview in disability services.

Ms PALMER - I certainly can. Thank you very much, Chair. Immediately to my left, I have my deputy secretary, Mellissa Gray, and to Mellissa's left, we have Ingrid Ganley, who is the director, Disability Reform. I would just like to note, if you could move your hair, Ingrid, you will see a pin that Ingrid is wearing. She has just been awarded the Public Service Medal for her services to disability services.

CHAIR - That's wonderful. Congratulations.

Ms WEBB - Well, deserved.

CHAIR - She'll note your congratulations on Hansard.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I knew this particular committee would appreciate that. Thank you very much, Chair, for the opportunity to make some opening remarks.

I would like to start by acknowledging that following last year's Estimates in the Legislative Council seeking clarity on the NDIS contribution, we have, as requested, looked at the disability output and split the reporting into two output groups.

Output 1.7, Disability Services, has been established, formerly a portion of Output 7.1. This includes the newly formed Office of the Tasmanian Disability Commissioner, which will be listed under a separate output in future budgets. Output 1.8, National Disability Insurance Scheme, has been established, formerly a portion of output 7.1.

What a year it has been. One of nation-leading and historic reform in the disability services portfolio. I take the opportunity to thank my Legislative Council colleagues for the role that you all played in helping to pass the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act* in the upper House last year. The contributions of some of you here today and others will forever stay with me, and I want you to know that your contributions meant so much to our disability community.

This year has seen some major measures of the act come into effect. The act officially commenced on 1 July. Prior to this, in mid-May, our inaugural commissioner, Catherine Whittington, began her appointment. I'm pleased to say the commissioner's accessible new office will be officially opened before the end of the month. I'm advised the recruitment process for the new Disability Inclusion Advisory Council will also soon be under way.

Our new senior practitioner, Marita O'Connell, also began in May of this year. The senior practitioner is a new safeguarding role that was established by the act. This role is critical to protecting and promoting the human rights of Tasmanians with disability. The senior practitioner authorises, oversees and reports on the use of restrictive practices by Tasmanian disability service providers in accordance with the act, and our work implementing measures of this act and navigating other areas of disability reform continues.

This week, we have released our discussion paper for Tasmania's Disability Inclusion Plan, a key initiative under the act setting out that the plan must be whole of government, inclusive of defined entities and must also set out policies and measures for achieving and advancing the principles of the act. Consultation will run until early March of 2026.

Of course, our government remains committed to supporting Tasmanians in the National Disability Insurance Scheme, with our commitment this financial year totalling just over \$289 million. Of this, our cash contribution is \$276.6 million, with the gap accounting for our in-kind contribution to the scheme.

We are in a period of significant reform as recommendations of the NDIS review continue to progress. Of course, one of these key measures is foundational supports. I know foundational supports and the subsequent proposal of Thriving Kids by the federal government has led to some unease within our disability community. As Disability Services minister, I assure you that I am keeping the interests of Tasmanians with disability at the forefront of these discussions. I welcome questions from the committee.

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CHAIR - Thank you, minister. If I could lead questioning. With the key measure of the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act* will see the establishment of the Disability Inclusion Advisory Council, replacing the premier's Disability Advisory Council and the minister's Disability Consultative Group. With the act commencing a few months ago, are we closer to seeing the establishment of the council?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair, for that question. Over the past few years, our government has worked closely with members of Tasmania's disability community, and they've been such a valuable source of information through their lived experiences and the advice and the expertise in relation to quite a wide range of issues that do impact our disability community. This engagement has occurred through the minister's Disability Consultative Group, known as MDCG, and the Premier's Disability Advisory Council, known as PDAC.

Both have contributed greatly to matters such as work related to the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS review and the development of our recent bill. PDAC in particular has had an active role in monitoring the implementation of Tasmania's whole-of-government disability strategy, Accessible Island, Tasmania's Disability Framework For Action 2018-21, and have also participated in the drafting of the new Tasmanian disability strategy 2025 to 2027.

As you mentioned, the act provides for the establishment of a Disability Inclusion Advisory Council, or DIAC, as it will be commonly known. This council will provide independent advice framed by lived experience of disability to the minister for Disability Services and the Tasmanian Disability Commissioner on matters relating to disability inclusion and assisting planning and monitoring of progress against the implementation of the Tasmanian Disability Inclusion Plan.

The Advisory Council will also provide independent advice on barriers to access and inclusion and on matters related to violence, abuse, neglect, coercion and the exploitation of people with disability.

With appointments to be made by the minister on recommendation of the commissioner, DIAC will consist of nine to 11 members with the majority of members to be people with disability, although members may include family members of people with disability, carer of people with disability and/or representatives of peak bodies and disability representative organisations. Members of the council are to have the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience and represent the diversity of backgrounds. I should add that this may include what region they are from and experiences of people with disability.

It's important to note that both the chair and the deputy chair will be persons with disability, and all members will be remunerated for their contribution to the council. I'm advised the Office of the Disability Commissioner Tasmania is progressing the recruitment process for council members, and I'm further advised that the council is expected to commence in early 2026.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That's two of my questions gone. One got covered in your overview, thank you, about the timeline and on the inclusion plan and consultations around

that. Then my other one was - just like the Chair's - about the DIAC. You even answered my question which was about will they be remunerated, which is excellent to hear.

Ms PALMER - Yes, they will.

Ms WEBB - Is that as per a policy that is applied across government for those sorts of advisory groups?

Ms PALMER - I believe it varies across different groups.

Ms WEBB - They all have different roles anyway, I suppose, and different requirements of the people who are sitting on them. I'll move on to another one, then.

Minister, I want to ask you about the National Disability Advocacy Framework, which may or may not be called the NDAF. I don't know.

Some in the sector have voiced concern over the fact that there was no proactive mention of disability or people with disability in the Budget speech or in a more detailed sense in the budget papers, particularly in light of the state's obligation under the National Disability Advocacy Framework. The current framework states this, 'In agreeing to this framework, the Australian state and territory governments are committing to sharing the responsibility for disability advocacy in their jurisdictions'.

So noting the framework is currently under review, it's of concern that despite slight increase in the 2025-26 Budget and the forward Estimates, the forward Estimates on this line item C are funding decrease, I believe, in the out years. Given the need for systemic advocacy funding as recognised by the current NDAF, how will this be addressed in the current budget and across the forward Estimates?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I will go to the deputy secretary for some of the detail of that, but what I can advise is, with regard to where you may see a drop-off in funding that could be in relation to the fact that we obviously had a number of upfront costs in establishing the disability commissioner role and also in setting up that office, which has every accessible feature that you could imagine, as the disability commissioner's office should, and it also would be inclusive of the fact that we have investment at the moment around some bodies of reform work that is being undertaken at the moment. I'll ask the deputy secretary to address that.

Ms GRAY - Thank you. Through you, minister. Thanks so much for asking the question about advocacy, because it is so important. Just to provide a bit of context, in the policy and reform group in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, we have a disability reform steering committee, and that steering committee has deputy secretaries from every single government agency represented on that group. We oversee the implementation in Tasmania of our act, of the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and also of the Disability Royal Commission. It involves taking a whole-of-government approach to any national advocacy that needs to happen, with all agencies, and through the minister, then through to the Australian Government.

The framework that Ms Webb's referring to, we would deal with through that group. I'm also advised through Ingrid, and I'll see if Ingrid's got anything to add, but some jurisdictions actually don't fund advocacy, but in Tasmania we do. The three organisations are:

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- the Association for Children with Disability Tasmania. In 2025-26, there's an allocation of \$441,270 for information and advocacy services for people with disability, their families, carers and related professionals.
- Advocacy Tasmania, to deliver services that enable people with disability to increase the control they have over their lives through the representation of their rights, interests and views, and that's \$412,973 in 2025-26.
- Speak Out - the great work of Speak Out Association of Tasmania, and in fact, the great work of all three of those organisations, again for advocacy services and for funding towards the Speak Out Advocacy Conference, and that's \$395,161.

In all that we try to do in this portfolio, having the rights of people with disability, and that human rights framework at the centre of all that we do is just so very, very important.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Music to my ears, minister. I have a lot of fondness for those organisations, particularly Advocacy Tasmania, as a previous board member and chair. Following up on that, I was going to ask a little bit more. This is probably more in NDIS, to be honest, but it follows on from that quite nicely, I think, in terms of advocacy. The way things are split up, states are potentially responsible for funding the advocacy that may be required around that space, and as the deputy secretary mentioned, not all states are doing that effectively. You've outlined the funding here for the advocacy organisations, which is helpful. I'm also just wondering too, do you mind if we touch into the NDIS space and sort of cross line items a little bit? Is that all right?

CHAIR - Do you need someone different at the table?

Ms PALMER - No, this is our team.

CHAIR - No, great. So if you're happy with that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm wondering about - and again, it touches into some of your other areas as well, minister, but about NDIS - students in our schools who are NDIS recipients, and the supports and programs in place to assist students with disability eligible for NDIS supports to actually access those supports. Are we doing anything in that space, either through our Department of Education or through our NDIS requirements or advocacy funding to help with access into the NDIS space, particularly for students?

Ms PALMER - The question's kind of going across a number of portfolios, and I think you would be very aware of the incredible funding that we've got around educational adjustments in our schools. But I don't know that that's -

Ms WEBB - That's not what I'm asking about. No.

Ms PALMER - I might just refer to Ms Ganley.

Ms WEBB - Do you want me to try to articulate it better, or did you get the gist of it?

Ms GANLEY - I think we provide - through the minister - a response. Under the NDIS, it funds sort of reasonable and necessary support. For children in the education space, it's the personal care, and in fact, that's one of the things where we - it's in our in-kind bucket, but it's the personal care in schools that sits in the NDIS space, but the educational learnings and adjustments to learn sit in the state space.

Then the other support packages that individuals would get, well, then, they can use in terms of what they do outside of school. Then the NDIS does have some specific transition programs they fund to assist students with disabilities move from the education system into adult life, but that's firmly in the NDIS space.

Ms WEBB - So it's not in the state space at all. That would be like the school leavers employment supports - those sorts of ones.

Ms GANLEY - Yes, yes.

Ms WEBB - So that's not something to ask here about, because that sits with NDIS.

Ms GANLEY - Yes, that's funded.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for clarifying that. So under the NDIS supports that can be accessed by students in our schools - so not the responsibility of our Education department - do we have any ways that we support students to be able to access those when they might be eligible?

Ms GANLEY - Through the minister. The way the personal care works in schools is, because it's an in-kind arrangement, it's actually continuing to be funded by the state. We fund it through our education systems. The students access it through the student support services and various other elements in the school system, and then we acquit it back to the Commonwealth to say we've spent this money doing this work to support the students in their disability need.

Ms WEBB - So it's embedded in, and so access isn't an issue?

Ms GANLEY - Not that's been brought to our attention.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

Ms GANLEY - See in my opening statement, when I was talking about the cash component of our payment into the NDIS and then the in-kind - that sits in that part of that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I ask about the Office of the Disability Commissioner? Would we expect in future budget papers for there to be a separate line item for that commission role, such as we would see for other statutory commissioners and commissions, and so that we can actually see allocated funding specifically into that space?

Ms PALMER - Yes, that's something that we would be wanting to consider moving forward into future budgets. I'm advised that that is a decision for Treasury, so that's where I'll need to go with my request for that.

Ms WEBB - Sure. Certainly, I'm encouraging you to put it through to Treasury that that would be useful. Then, in terms of scrutinising, it's useful to have the commissioner, or someone who can speak to the budget allocation for the commission, at scrutiny in future times as well, because that would be helpful.

Ms PALMER - We can probably provide some information and the amounts that you might be asking for in that space.

Ms WEBB - I'm speaking about it as anticipating a future interest in scrutinising as time goes on. So just whether there'll be sufficient availability of that scrutiny when we come here, say after next May's Budget or onwards. Is it anticipated, in terms of the Office of the Disability Commissioner and the funding you described - funding for setting up the office and all those establishment costs, and that's understandable.

But then, in terms of as the commissioner begins to just go into business-as-usual role, are we anticipating an increased resource potentially being needed across time as there's maybe increased activity around disability inclusion plans to be developed and potentially an increased need for advocacy via that office, or are we anticipating that there's going to be a set, consistent investment required as the role ramps up?

Ms PALMER - What I would say is that, in the 2024-25 Budget, there was \$1.159 million in allocation. In the 2025-26 and 2026-27 and 2027-28 Budgets, there's \$1.840 million that has been allocated. This is a new position. We are still learning about what Tasmanians with disability will want from their commissioner and still really shaping that role.

I think this would need to be considered as the commissioner became more established. At the moment, we have anticipated expenses across the forwards, but obviously if there's a different conversation to be had, then that will obviously be had through other budget processes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

1.8 National Disability Insurance Scheme

CHAIR - Any further questions? No further questions in 1.7. We move now officially to 1.8, National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is again Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I did mine already merged in with the other one. Sorry about that.

Ms PALMER - Yes, she did.

CHAIR - So no further questions?

Ms WEBB - Not from me.

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CHAIR - No. Mr Edmunds?

Mr EDMUNDS - No, thanks.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt?

Mr HISCUTT - No.

CHAIR - Very well. On that note, minister, it looks like we have actually finished our hearings for today, and we thank you very much. You have an early minute.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for you and, as I said, your team all day and your advisers everyone else that's been here in the back of the room today, helping out.

Ms PALMER - Thank you. I thank the members of the committee.

CHAIR - I thank my team as well for all the work they've done.

Mr EDMUNDS - It speaks to the tone of your intro and the support from our Chamber for what you're doing.

Mr HISCUTT - I think the lack of questions should be taken as things are going very well.

Ms PALMER - Yes, they are. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. I also thank Gaye from Hansard for all her work and, of course, Julie and James for their support over the week. It's been a big week.

Ms WEBB - Hear, hear.

Mr EDMUNDS - Hear, hear.

CHAIR - We're very grateful for everyone that's been here. Thank you very much, minister, and I hope you have a bit of nice weekend now coming up.

The Committee adjourned at 5.15 p.m.