

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Tuesday 5 March 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SKILLS, TAFE AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15 am.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg

The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Tania Mihailuk

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

The Hon. Peter Primrose

The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Steve Whan, *Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Welcome to the second hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education's additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today, or anyone who may be watching on the webcast. My name is Abigail Boyd and I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Whan and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants, and I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Welcome to our witnesses and thank you for making the time to give evidence. Minister Whan, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Witnesses who did not appear before this Committee at the earlier budget estimates hearings or who appeared in a different capacity will need to be sworn. Ms Schorer and Ms Coutts, you will need to be sworn prior to providing evidence before the Committee. I remind all other witnesses present that you do not need to be sworn, as you have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee.

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Mr MURAT DIZDAR, Secretary, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms CHLOE READ, Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms SALLY BLACKADDER, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Priorities, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr DAVID COLLINS, Executive Director, Training Services NSW, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms JANET SCHORER, Acting Managing Director, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined

Dr MARGOT McNEILL, Chief Product and Quality Officer, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

Ms JULIE TICKLE, Chief People and Culture Officer, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

Ms FIONA RANKIN, Chief Information Officer, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

Ms LOUISE COUTTS, Chief Financial Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session only, which runs from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon, we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, but 15 minutes will be allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will commence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Good morning and welcome. Minister, you are aware of the announcement by your colleague, Minister Ryan Park, of the location of the new Bankstown hospital, back in December. No-one believes more in the new Bankstown hospital than the New South Wales Coalition; we were the ones who put the \$1.3 billion on the table for it. The Government has walked away from the commitment of the former Government to build the hospital across the road from the existing site at the college, which I note is in close proximity to Bankstown TAFE. Obviously, this will have a massive and detrimental impact on Bankstown TAFE. Minister, what will be the consequences for teachers, staff, together with current and future students, of the announced temporary relocation of Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thanks. Yes, it's a big project and I think it's one which is going to provide some really significant long-term benefits for TAFE, with a new building and the opportunity to link many of our courses and programs, particularly in that health area, with the new hospitals. So I think, in the long term, it's a terrific initiative, a terrific facility and we will get a brand-new TAFE facility out of it—something which can provide all the services plus boost those health-related services for the Bankstown area. Obviously, while the project is under construction, there is going to be disruption to the existing TAFE facility.

It is early planning stages at the moment, but we are working through alternative accommodation for the TAFE courses in the local area, in the vicinity of the current TAFE, so that students don't have to travel too far and, ideally, they should all be able to access courses within the Bankstown CBD area. It's very early days in that process, though, but one of the key agreements that we have as part of this process is to enable students to continue to access courses and for teachers to deliver those courses with the least disruption possible, obviously recognising that in anything like this there's going to be some disruption along the way. TAFE could probably add to that if you wanted more information on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. I am happy to examine this afternoon on that. Minister, I note that at the last estimates it was confirmed that there are 4,700 enrolments at the Bankstown TAFE. I also note at the last estimates it was reported that there were 450 students enrolled at the Bankstown Senior College, that being the site identified by the former Government for the new hospital. Do you agree with these enrolment figures?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd need to get current enrolment figures confirmed. Obviously, we're in a new semester, new year. So the current enrolment figures at Bankstown TAFE—perhaps the TAFE can confirm those.

JANET SCHORER: Yes. The approximately 4,700 enrolments at Bankstown TAFE is still correct. I couldn't speak for the school campus, though.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just given the choice of the site as announced by your Minister, your Government, we're looking at relocating 4,700 students, as opposed to the site identified by the former Government. It would be relevant to 450 students.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously, the choice of site is one that—Health has gone through a process of selecting the site that they feel is most appropriate for the new hospital. So those questions would be better directed at the Minister for Health.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, were you consulted at all? You're the Minister responsible for TAFE. Clearly, there's going to be a lot of disruption to that TAFE campus. Were you part of those discussions or conversations?

Mr STEVE WHAN: A number of the discussions had happened before I became the Minister. After becoming the Minister, obviously, I was consulted about the relocation and the commitments that have been made, to ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible. But I have to say the response from TAFE is a very enthusiastic response for the future facility and having a brand-new facility and one which can really work in closely and link very closely with the health campus that's going to be on the site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the proposed cost of the new facility?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Of the overall health facility?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. You're going to have to relocate the TAFE. Actually, let's go back a step. Where are you going to move the TAFE campus to?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Those decisions have yet to be made. I'll ask TAFE to talk some more about the planning process. But we are still at early days of the planning process. Ms Schorer could—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Ms Schorer, we might come back. We've got all afternoon with the officials, but I'd like to know as Minister what you know.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In the context of the people listening and watching, I suspect that answering the rest of that question would be useful. But, if you want to keep going—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Minister, this is our session with you. I'd like to know what you foresee as being potential sites for the new TAFE. What's your role in that? And what have you identified, as Minister, where the TAFE could be relocated?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said, we're in fairly early planning stages of the process. So the departments that are involved—Health and also TAFE—have been looking at accommodation and working out the capacity for accommodation within the Bankstown CBD. The final decisions on those haven't been made yet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any idea in terms of cost of a new TAFE facility there at Bankstown?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said, planning is still early days, so, no. There is from Health, I'm sure, an overall cost of the project, which you'd need to talk to them about. From our perspective, we're still in early days of planning for the new TAFE which will go on site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Who's going to pay for the new TAFE? Is it Health? Or is it your agency? Who's going to front up for the construction costs?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It'll be a new policy proposal that's taken to the Cabinet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you can't tell me if it'll be \$10 million or \$100 million or \$300 million? You have no scope in terms of what funding.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd be very surprised if it was \$10 million.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So would I, Minister, but I guess my point is, as a Government, you've made a major decision to move, as my colleague said, a TAFE campus for thousands of students.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The overall project—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you don't know where it will move to, and you don't know how much it's going to cost.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We do know it will be in—we are looking at the accommodation in the Bankstown CBD. It's very hard to go out and sign contracts for accommodation in the CBD before you've actually announced

CORRECTED

the project. So we're in the planning stages of the project. We're having close discussions with Health. They are running the overall project and the budget. So they're questions for the health Minister.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, the relocation of the new Bankstown hospital will also involve significant infrastructure costs—just talking to the community, in terms of widening roads, in terms of access. What do we know about what these costs are likely to be?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Department of Health—the health capital projects—will be managing the overall project. So, as I said, it's early days in planning, particularly for TAFE but the health department will be managing the overall project. I expect that they've made a very careful assessment of the alternative sites and they believe that this site that's been selected on the existing TAFE campus site is the best location for a number of reasons.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, you expect that, Minister, but you weren't told by Health that this is the best site? You didn't have those discussions with your colleagues?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have been told that it is the best site, yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, just to confirm—we don't know the infrastructure costs and we don't know who's paying for them—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, those are questions that the Minister for Health needs to answer.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes, but I'm just saying that we don't know them. We don't know who's paying for them. Can you rule out today that the infrastructure costs and the relocation costs will not be taken from the \$1.3 billion allocated for the new hospital?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You need to ask the Minister for Health the questions about a health construction project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But this is the TAFE component and you're the Minister responsible for TAFE, so how do you not know who's going to be paying for the new facility? That doesn't make any sense.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There'll be a policy proposal that's brought to Cabinet for the overall cost of the project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Separate from the hospital? Is that what you're saying? Or not? Or you're not sure?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it's part of the overall project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So from that budget allocation of the \$1.3 billion? Or in addition to that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You'll need to ask the Minister for Health the questions about the project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I'm asking you. It's the TAFE component, with respect, Minister. I'm not asking about the hospital; I'm asking about the TAFE.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The new TAFE project is a part of the overall project for the site and the Department of Health is managing that project. We will obviously be involved in the design and the requirements for what's within the TAFE. I could certainly ask TAFE to talk some more about the requirements for what we expect to see in that TAFE facility. Perhaps Ms Schorer would like to add to that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We can do that this afternoon. This is our chance to know what you're—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Okay, I've offered the opportunity to answer that question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I appreciate that but we have the afternoon with your officials and only the morning with you. I guess what we're trying to understand is that, while I appreciate what you're saying in terms of the hospital being a Health-led project—that's fine—the TAFE being moved, where it's going to and who's paying for it, surely as Minister for TAFE you have some oversight and responsibility for that project.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will have absolute oversight and responsibility for what is delivered within the TAFE on the site. We're at early days of planning so I don't have costings yet.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of engaging with the local community—with students, with the mums and dads and future students—they're up in the air. They've heard nothing. The Minister today can't answer the questions. What happens to the future students of the south-west?

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will be catering for all the students and all the courses that we currently have at the Bankstown TAFE and we will be finding alternative accommodation for those. There will be a consultation and an information process it goes through. We're still some way away from that happening but perhaps Ms Schorer could add to that.

JANET SCHORER: We're very mindful that the campus at Bankstown with the 4,700 students. We've got about 181 teaching staff and 122 non-teaching staff on that campus. We're very mindful that the campus being in the centre of Bankstown has proximity for the community and access, as well as for the kinds of learners that we have in the area who need proximity to the centre of Bankstown so when we—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I guess that question about the proximity to the centre of Bankstown is why people are asking, "What's the relocation plan? Where am I going to be studying for the next five years?"—or whatever the anticipated temporary closure or relocation is of Bankstown TAFE.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's right.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: They're in the dark. They know nothing.

JANET SCHORER: That is because the time frame for the build is still being worked through, as the Minister has outlined—we've had some early consultation with the community but until we have a firm time line for when things might start to happen, we can't give that assurance. But certainly what we're looking for is a temporary location in the Bankstown CBD that will be able to accommodate our learners and enable them to continue their studies with minimal disruption that we can manage for them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I just make reference to a question on notice that was put by my colleague, the Hon. Tania Mihailuk. It was concerning consultation between the Department of Health and the department of skills, TAFE and tertiary education on the issues of Bankstown hospital and its impact on Bankstown TAFE. The response came back and it stated that following the 2023 budget, senior staff at both departments were in discussions to query the nature of the hospital budget announcement to ensure coordination relevant to the TAFE. This confirms discussions have been in place at a senior government level between two departments following the 2023 budget. I think that was September. We sit here today and we can't find out anything further on this.

Mr STEVE WHAN: What I can tell you is that of course discussions are taking place, because we are in the early days of planning. We have tested the market to make sure there is space available in Bankstown for a relocation, but we haven't made final decisions on where that might be yet. We are still waiting for time frames and a range of other information about this. The reason we have had the early discussions is to ensure that we can, as far as possible, ensure that we are locating all courses into appropriate facilities within the CBD.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, you were a part of those discussions that have been confirmed in terms of the departments talking and senior officials talking. Were you a part of those discussions?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have been informed about the discussions. The discussions have been happening at a departmental level at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you been given any indication in terms of a time frame from Health?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I haven't been given a firm time frame at this stage. I am waiting to hear when we might have to actually undertake the relocation. We are still in discussions about that. I will ask TAFE if they can add to the time frame.

JANET SCHORER: No, we're not aware of any fixed time frame at this stage.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of community consultation, picking up on something that you said before, Ms Schorer, that you started to speak to the community, how has that been occurring? What sort of discussions are you having, given that you don't know how long it will take and where you're moving to? What is there to consult on without that kind of key information from Health?

JANET SCHORER: Thank you for the question. The first pass in the conversation was really when the announcement was made. We spoke to the community, particularly in conversation with our learners and others who were involved at a local community level, to be able to speak to the announcement and give assurance that we knew what impact this would have for our learners and that we would make plans for them. Until we have firmer time frames and details, we can't consult on anything further.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was there any consultation at all, Minister, prior to the announcement?

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: We weren't able to undertake any public consultation, obviously, prior to the announcement and prior to the decision being taken formally. What we've done so far, as Ms Schorer said, is we have essentially let people know what's going on but given assurances about the delivery of courses in the area.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can appreciate, then, why the community was quite blindsided when you didn't have a chance, in your words, to publicly consult beforehand, to then be told—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't think that's unusual for a government decision on a significant project—for it to be announced and then to undertake consultation. It's not an unusual process in my experience of 20-odd years.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, during the 2023 election campaign, not once did NSW Labor say it would be relocating Bankstown hospital. Labor was silent on the issue. They said nothing and they did nothing.

Mr STEVE WHAN: You would have to ask the health Minister, who was then the shadow Minister, about commitments that were made on the Bankstown hospital. I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm just saying it was the absence. There was nothing. There was no policy to the community. There was no discussion. Then, all of a sudden, on 11 December, we get the big headline to tell them what is happening: that the Government has elected the site. There has been no discussion, no disclosure and no transparency.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As the Minister responsible for TAFE, I am very excited about the prospect of getting a new TAFE facility there and for the linkages that we're going to get with the health department and the hospital. I think it's a really exciting opportunity for TAFE and for the local community. As the Minister responsible for TAFE, which is the only portion of this that I can comment on, I think it's a fantastic project. I'm very excited about it on behalf of the people of Bankstown and the TAFE learners and teachers.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It presents that on the same day that the announcement was made about the New South Wales Government announcing the relocation site—I think it was another big, flashy webpage announcement, and the Minister for Health comes in with the same one—the Community and Public Sector Union announces in a media release the relocation, encouraging members to inform the community of the Government's relocation plans for the Bankstown TAFE. Why was the union consulted on the relocation and the community not?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You would need to ask the health Minister about the process of a health project.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, you've confirmed that you were involved in discussions with Health on this.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have made it very clear to you that I think this is an exciting project for the people of Bankstown. It's very clear that when you are making a government announcement—and it was exactly the same under the previous Government as well—that major infrastructure announcements are not floated around in public and discussed before they are actually announced, because that doesn't work very well. You've got to wait for Cabinet's decisions. You've got to wait for the commitments to be made. The process that has been undertaken here leaves us plenty of time to go through a process of informing—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could redirect, the issue was that the union was informed. The union was taking on the responsibility of saying, "Go and let your members know. Relocation site identified by the New South Wales Government." The community—nothing. It was in the dark. The secrecy—they're saying.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not surprised that the unions involved are welcoming a new facility. I would, too, if I was in that situation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it's a new facility where you don't know how far away until it's built. You don't know where it will be, and you don't how much it will cost the taxpayer.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We know exactly where it's going to be.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You've just said that you're still canvassing sites.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Relocation sites.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We know exactly where the new hospital and the new TAFE are going to be.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: To the 4,700 students enrolled today at Bankstown TAFE, you will be relocated.

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Mr STEVE WHAN: At the temporary location.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: As to where—don't know.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't think that's an unusual situation when you're going through a planning process.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: A young person is in the peak of their study, wanting to give their all to their training. All of a sudden there is an announcement: "I'm going to be relocated." Questions—what will the transport access be? What does this mean to us? What does it mean to future students?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've made it very clear and TAFE is making it very clear to learners that we are looking to relocate to an area which has the same access as the current Bankstown facility. We're going to get an excellent facility out of this in the long term. TAFE might wish to add on aspects of accessibility and the courses that we're delivering. We have a full range of courses. We expect to continue to deliver a full range of courses. I don't believe that any learner would be particularly concerned about being temporarily relocated to a facility, as long as it has all the equipment that they require and all the teaching staff they require. Let's face it: This Government is about putting people in the buildings to deliver the courses and getting more of our fantastic TAFE teachers in there to deliver for our students. And that's where we differ from the previous Government. It isn't just about building buildings; it's about putting people in them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you actually visited the TAFE and spoken to any of the students since the announcement?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have not visited the Bankstown TAFE, no.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just said that you're assuming none will have an issue with moving, but you've not actually been there to talk to any of them.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have not, myself, visited the Bankstown TAFE at this stage.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, the Bankstown TAFE is one of the key TAFE facilities in New South Wales, if not the largest. It promotes itself as having state-of-the-art facilities and all the course offerings it has. In terms of the relocation, all these key facilities will be relocated. The cost is unknown. Where are they going—not sure. How long will they be relocated? Maybe five years. Then, after that five years, we reinstate the facility to the old campus. Are we going to totally dismantle the temporary TAFE after five years? What do we say to the taxpayer on this?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are very few projects where you're undertaking a major build where you don't have some sort of disruption, particularly when you're updating facilities. When you were in government, you closed five operating TAFEs. You sold a big range of locations for TAFE. I really think it's a bit hypocritical to hear from the Opposition about dislocation of students. We will be building a new, state-of-the-art facility, which will offer fantastic opportunities for people to undertake their studies. It will offer us the opportunity to really focus on some of those areas where we have the biggest workforce needs in health, and health-related and human-related services. We will have the full range of facilities at the new TAFE and, most importantly, we'll have the staff there to deliver the courses for the students who are attending. This will play a part in us rebuilding TAFE after 12 years of Coalition neglect, which saw a number of apprentices and traineeships fall off dramatically. I'm very excited about the project. Yes, there will be questions that we have to answer as we go forward in the planning process. I'm confident that we'll answer all those to the satisfaction of the people concerned.

The CHAIR: Order! It's now time for crossbench. I'll ask some questions and then I'll hand over to Ms Mihailuk. For the benefit of members, the clock up the back is not working. We are using the clock on the table here. If at any point you'd like to know how much time, flag it to me and I will turn it around to you. Minister, what is Labor's plan at the moment for the new TAFE campus at Gosford?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's a project which is still to be considered in the context of the 2024-25 budget. It hasn't been considered by the Government yet. I'm very well aware of the project itself, and the potential for the project, but it's still at the stage of having—I believe the business case is complete, but I might ask Ms Schorer to add to that.

JANET SCHORER: Thank you for the question. We're excited about the opportunity at Gosford. But at the moment, as the Minister has indicated, we're in the midst of a budget and a Cabinet process, so I can't comment any further on that.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you got the business case already sitting on your desk?

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Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, we've been through several stages of the process. My understanding is the business case is complete. We are in the process of preparation for submission for consideration in future budgets.

The CHAIR: This is a project that was announced at the end of 2021 by the previous Government. As a Central Coast resident myself, I know that the TAFE that we have in Gosford is over 50 years old. We are desperately crying out in that region for more educational facilities to upskill workers. Does the Labor Government view the Gosford TAFE campus as a priority?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You are like our Central Coast MPs, who've been fairly constantly talking to me about this since I took on this portfolio, and they are also telling me that this is a very important project. Obviously we have a difficult budget situation that we inherited from the previous Government. We are working our way through what can be afforded in this year's budget at the moment. I recognise the desire from Central Coast communities to get this campus, and we have to go through the budget processes on it.

The CHAIR: It's not unique to you, Minister, but there does seem to be a reluctance for Labor to tell us their plans because they're always waiting for the next budget. Will you be able to give the people of Central Coast certainty at the next budget? If it's not put through—if it's not approved through that process—will you put us out of our misery and just tell us that it's not going to happen, or will we be dragged through another year or two of uncertainty of waiting for it to happen?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would certainly expect to be able to give some certainty on the project. Obviously I can't pre-empt Cabinet budget consideration, though.

The CHAIR: The Central Coast is one of the regions that is impacted by the ongoing transition away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy and other things. Obviously we have the power stations at Lake Macquarie, and there are a bunch of other industries that are transitioning out in the area. We've had quite high unemployment for some time. Given that, will you and the department be working with Labor's announced transition authorities—I forget what they're calling them—on a plan for transitioning workers out of coal and into other industries? Is that something that you are involved in?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. Some core components of this in the training space are obviously our manufacturing centres of excellence that we committed to at the election, and one of those will be in the Hunter. I expect that will have a very strong component of renewables as part of it—electrotechnology and a range of other related courses that'll be a part of that project. TAFE and the department are also working with the Minister for Energy on how funding that's available for the REZs might also be able to come into working through the transition and skills development in particular areas. The Hunter is one, but also the Central West and the other REZ areas.

The Federal Government has been considering a number of these things as well, so I am expecting that we'll be able to bring together a range of different parts of the transition to focus on training, reskilling and attempting to deliver that workforce need. Obviously, some of the estimates for the workforce need in this area are quite substantial. We've got workforce shortages, particularly in the areas of electricians and electrotechnology. There's a very big challenge in that.

The CHAIR: There are students on the coast who are crying out for the opportunity to learn those skills.

Mr STEVE WHAN: One of the things which we will be doing with the manufacturing centres of excellence is—it's not about building a flash building; it's about developing the type of courses that we'll be able to offer. There will be things like higher apprenticeships—on top of our normal apprenticeships—engaging with a tertiary institution, microskills and other sort of stackable credentials that people can do. It will focus on, firstly, the skills development for traditional apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships and then also upskilling people who are already in industry with some of those micro and smaller skill options.

The CHAIR: We need both though, don't we?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: When you look at Gosford—and it's a really old and not very attractive facility—I'm not surprised that people are not desperate to go there at the moment. But also, as we are training people up in these new industries, we need state-of-the-art facilities to do that. So I agree with you: We also need to actually have the courses and all the rest of it. Just on that, then, what is the status of the proposed BlueScope Steel super TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: At the moment, that is the subject of a working group between TAFE and BlueScope. That is very early stages. We are also going to have a manufacturing centre of excellence in Wollongong. That's certain. We will do that.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Is that more for training up for the local manufacture of buses and ferries and things rather than—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We are going to have a transport element in one of the manufacturing centres of excellence, and I suspect it might end up focusing on the replacement trains in Newcastle. I don't want to pre-empt, though, what decisions are made, but we will have a manufacturing centre of excellence in Wollongong, which will cover a range of things. It will also include renewables. Whether or not that ends up being with BlueScope at the proposed super TAFE there is not something that's decided.

The CHAIR: Has a memorandum of understanding been signed?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. We signed a memorandum of understanding in November last year with BlueScope essentially to explore the potential for the use of their site, and if you have ever been to their site there, they have some very impressive buildings which are unused at the moment and which you could certainly imagine would have the space which would make them fantastic facilities for some of our training, particularly in engineering and construction and in conjunction as well with co-location of tertiary facilities. It's exciting, but it's early days and there are no commitments made to it yet.

The CHAIR: Minister, you have—there is no doubt—inherited a situation where, as you say, the budget is stretched. We have had underfunding in TAFE and tertiary skills for quite some time in this State now, and we are, of course, playing catch-up. I'm concerned when I hear the statements made around the budget—and we have to wait to see through the budget process, yada yada—but also the idea of these companies coming in and offering partnerships. Will you rule out the privatisation of TAFE and TAFE services?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. Absolutely. There'll be no privatisation of TAFE services and TAFE.

The CHAIR: Not even by stealth?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No.

The CHAIR: Not a situation where we're—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will be certainly looking to work in partnership with industry; that's really important for us to do that. We will be looking—particularly in these manufacturing centres of excellence—to develop relationships with tertiary institutions and with industry. For example, in some areas where you're utilising particularly expensive, modern pieces of equipment, it would be good to be able to take students and access those on the facilities of a partner. Those sorts of collaborations are certainly something we're looking at.

The CHAIR: But there's collaboration—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Collaboration is very different to privatisation or selling.

The CHAIR: One of the concerning things that happened under the last Government was an idea that you could have these sorts of privately owned blocks of land or precincts where then the Government was quite reliant on that ongoing relationship to continue to have a public facility on there. I want to make sure that we are alert to that and we're not thinking of going into that sort of territory.

Mr STEVE WHAN: With those manufacturing centres of excellence, any physical location of those will be on TAFE-owned land. The BlueScope one is still very early days. I'm not sure, if that actually eventuated, whether we would be owning or leasing or what in that case. That's still very early days, but I can absolutely assure you that we are looking at the use of existing TAFE facilities and we are looking at whether we can better utilise TAFE facilities to try to help overcome skill shortages as we go forward as well. We've got 156 campuses out there, so there is quite a lot of space.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I have a couple of questions about Bankstown TAFE. You have confirmed that Bankstown TAFE, after the temporary relocation, will definitely be built on the current site. Is that what you're saying?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Okay—so, back onto public land. What you're essentially telling budget estimates today is that in the interim there will have to be a process of a temporary relocation, we're not sure quite what that time frame will be, but that is to leased properties within the Bankstown CBD—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, I would expect it to be—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —or to purchased properties within the Bankstown CBD?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I expect it to be to leased facilities for the temporary period.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And that process has already begun—or not yet?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Schorer to elaborate on this, but I am aware that we tested the market to make sure that there were going to be properties available before the decisions were made. But in terms of actual negotiations, Ms Schorer might be able to—

JANET SCHORER: No, that's correct, Minister. We've done some initial work to look at what opportunities there will be in the local area, to locate the footprint that we need to cover Bankstown TAFE delivery.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What is the footprint that you need? Minister, do you know?

JANET SCHORER: I'd have to take on notice the exact land area that we require. But, as I said before, we want to be able to maintain the delivery that we have in Bankstown, in the CBD.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you gone to local Bankstown real estate agents?

JANET SCHORER: These are more commercial—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Commercial?

JANET SCHORER: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Well, there are plenty of commercial ones in Bankstown too.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm just conscious of the fact that the Premier announced that it would be a major transport hub and a redevelopment and rezoning of Bankstown will take place. There will be lots of different construction, and I can only imagine that some of these facilities are going to want to redevelop their sites in the same time that you're looking for property for TAFE.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would expect that we would be able to lock in a lease. We've been ensuring that there was the capacity to do that and I'm confident there is.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's within Bankstown CBD?

JANET SCHORER: Correct, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But you haven't locked that in? You're just still in discussions?

JANET SCHORER: That's correct, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When do you expect to lock that in?

JANET SCHORER: I'm not sure of the time frame. We're still not sure of the time frame for the build, so we don't want to disrupt delivery in the current campus unnecessarily.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you expect this year they'll be staying put in the current campus and there will be no move?

JANET SCHORER: As far as I'm aware, at this point in time, we will continue delivery as we currently do on Bankstown campus.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I won't be doing something—I won't be approving something which says, "Okay, in three weeks' time you have to be out." We will give plenty of lead time on that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, have you approached Bankstown council for any of their facilities? They have facilities within Bankstown CBD that might be more affordable.

Mr STEVE WHAN: My understanding of the process we've gone through is through the Government's agencies to determine availability of space. Ms Schorer might be able to add?

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's correct, and then if there are other commercial premises that are of the scale that we need, there certainly are facilities that are available with council, but it's just getting the right space, the right footprint, that we need for the size of the learning and delivery spaces that we need.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But realistically, are you confident that you can find all of this in the CBD of Bankstown?

JANET SCHORER: We expect that we'll be able to find the majority of it, yes.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Okay. I'll leave that. Minister, in terms of the net zero targets that your Government announced and essentially passed in legislation last year, how's that going to impact all of this TAFE construction? You have a document that's come out which provides some sort of technical guidance for a "climate-resilient campus". I don't know what that means. Can you tell me what a "climate-resilient campus" means to you?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously, we've got a whole-of-government approach to achieving net zero, and our departments and our capital in our capital projects will be adhering to processes which seek to reduce the carbon emissions as we go through sites. Part of the government policy is also focused on, for instance, not unnecessarily demolishing and rebuilding, ensuring that we re-use as far as possible. In terms of direct application of net zero to our projects—our capital projects, you're talking about particularly?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It must be. It's your document. I'm just looking at "climate resilience of campus and people". I don't know what that means.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Schorer to add to that or to elaborate.

JANET SCHORER: I don't think I've got anything.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Are you aware of your sustainable design document that you issued in June '23?

JANET SCHORER: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, you weren't Minister at the time. But you might've been provided with that document since.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would certainly hope we have sustainable design principles.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It's a lot of information about how to be climate-resilient campuses and people, but it doesn't say much about the costings of what this will mean.

JANET SCHORER: Thank you for the question. We do have the sustainability framework, and we're doing a lot of work within our campuses, both working towards net zero—programs around LED lighting upgrades, solar installations and how we manage energy—as well as our purchasing—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But this is specifically about it as you're rebuilding new sites. Minister, will that add cost, then, to how you're planning on building Bankstown TAFE? I can only imagine these net zero targets will—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would expect Bankstown TAFE's new facility to be at the cutting edge of environmental effectiveness in terms of its ongoing energy use but also its construction. I'd expect nothing less of that. And Government is moving to ensure that our construction projects do adhere to that. There's a range of other guidelines we have in place—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But there must be already some assessment of what this document that you've now—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We don't have, in terms of specifically Bankstown TAFE's new building—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It's not Bankstown TAFE; it's any TAFE.

Mr STEVE WHAN: But the overall—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've got a document that says you have to have climate-resilient campuses and people. That's one of the subject areas.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. I would be expecting all—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And you're saying now that you're going to be—this won't be the first TAFE, I imagine, that you're rebuilding. And you're going to then look at all of your TAFE campuses to meet these net zero targets. There must be some assessment of what that extra cost is.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I expect all our construction projects to be being built at a standard which makes them as environmentally efficient as possible. I'd expect no less from any of them. We know that construction costs have exploded in the last few years, not just because we're building lower costs—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: They will further. You must accept they will as a result of your net zero targets that were passed in this Parliament in November. You must accept that.

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would expect that any responsible government trying to deal with a climate challenge of the scale that we have would be building its buildings to be as energy efficient in their operation but also in their construction—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Wouldn't the cost be the first priority, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The efficient use of money is, obviously, a priority.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: There's nothing about money in this document. Have a read of it. There's nothing about cost.

Mr STEVE WHAN: But achieving our climate goals is something that I think the population has made very clear that they want us to do and which is the responsible thing to do for any government.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The population's made that clear? Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Now I've got lots of questions. Let me find a short one. It's been eight years since we had a VET inquiry. Do you support a parliamentary inquiry into TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We have just had the VET review, and I believe that, when that comes out, it'll be very well received. I think it's been very thoroughly—

The CHAIR: When will it come out?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm currently going to Cabinet to get it released, and we will see, but I expect that not to be far away. When that comes out that's certainly something which, I think, will be very welcomed by all those who are involved in VET. I think it'll be a really constructive document that helps us to build a sustainable future for TAFE and to rebuild TAFE, provide some foundations for that. I wouldn't be opposed to an upper House inquiry if there are some things out of that that the Legislative Council felt were as important. You've probably got a few on your plate already.

The CHAIR: We love inquiries.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As a former member of the Legislative Council I know how important they are.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Hear, hear! Tell your colleagues; some of them need to listen.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Let's wait and see what comes out of the VET inquiry and what people feel needs to be followed up out of it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could take you back to the Bankstown TAFE and the existing site as it stands today, have there been any concerns relating to soil contamination at that site, the site being the one identified by your Government for the new hospital—concerns relating to soil contamination?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. I'm not aware of any. Nothing has been raised with me.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: No testing has been undertaken at that site?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Schorer to answer whether there's been testing undertaken but, as I said, there's been no concern with the soil raised with me.

JANET SCHORER: We're not aware of any soil contamination in that location, or related to the broader question of asbestos. We're not aware of any soil or mulch contamination across our campuses. I expect that, as the work is done on that site, there will be further testing but we haven't done any preliminary testing on soil in that location.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of due diligence on identifying and announcing a site for a hospital such as this, would that not be part of the process or the consideration?

JANET SCHORER: I expect that that's a question for Health in doing its due diligence to make the selection of that particular location.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But on the grounds to relocate the entire TAFE campus, this hasn't been considered?

JANET SCHORER: The relocation to the TAFE campus—we would want the assurance to provide services there today that we weren't offering learning on a contaminated site. We're confident that that's the case but I expect that Health will do its own process of assessing that when it comes to developing the project further.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of consultation, and picking up the reference from the Hon. Tania Mihailuk relating to Bankstown Canterbury hospital, were they involved in discussions relating to the identification of the site?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's a question the health Minister and Health Infrastructure would need to answer.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So, Minister, in terms of the TAFE site and the plans about the temporary relocation, have you had discussions with the Bankstown council relating to your plans to TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have not. Health Infrastructure is the lead agency on this, so they are managing the overall project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I just want to ask you a couple of questions about your diary disclosure from the last couple of months. I appreciate you were only sworn in at the end of September. From October to December you only had 22 meetings. Why have you got so few disclosed meetings in your diary disclosures?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I expect because there were 22 meetings that were required to be disclosed. I had a lot of internal briefings from the department and from various agencies. I also went out visiting a number of TAFEs and making a number of regional visits and those sort of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You also haven't visited a single university in that three-month period since you were the Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have visited a number of universities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not listed there. Which universities have you visited and when?

Mr STEVE WHAN: University of Wollongong, most recently.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When was that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Just a few weeks ago.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm talking about your disclosures between 1 October to the end of December—obviously the first three months in the role. There was one meeting with the Vice-Chancellors' Committee but not a single university visit in the first three months of the portfolio. Are you doing the work required for the role?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I believe I am, yes. I've had meetings with the vice-chancellors, of course. I've met with a number of people. I've had a number of meetings around the Universities Accord, which is a really important process that the Federal Government has been undertaking, which we're involved in.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, but just not in the first three months of being the Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd have to look back at whether I physically visited a university campus in that time but I visited a number of TAFE campuses.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking about your role as tertiary education Minister and I think it's a bit concerning that in the first three months you didn't visit a single university.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think that I visited Country Universities Centres, you might find—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They're great.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —which are terrific facilities—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, that's not what I'm asking about.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —and had a number of discussions with vice-chancellors from different universities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Your diary disclosures show one meeting with the Vice-Chancellors' Committee. I looked at your predecessor's. He visited a number of universities in his first three months. I think it's curious, given the work, particularly, of the accord, which you have just mentioned, that in the first three months of taking office—it's a major part of your portfolio—you didn't visit a single university campus according to your disclosures. Are you taking the wage but not doing the work, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think that's a ridiculous comment. It's typical. I expect you got asked the same question when you were the Minister.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wasn't responsible for universities, Minister. My concern is that you are and you're not going there. You're not engaging with that part of your portfolio.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have spent quite a bit of time in regional New South Wales visiting a variety of things, including country universities centres, TAFEs and a variety of things. I reject your—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you visited any regional university campuses?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm going to Charles Sturt tomorrow.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Hopefully your next diary disclosures will show an abundance of visits to universities and we will be able to move on from that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: What it will show is a balance of things across the portfolio so that I'm doing the job as Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you explain to me why there was nearly three weeks in November where you didn't have a single disclosed stakeholder meeting in your diary?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would have to go back and have a look at those. I expect that I was doing a range of other things during that period.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What, other than being a Minister, would you have been doing?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are a lot of other meetings, briefings, visits and things which are not required to be disclosed. They're not stakeholder meetings. I would have to go back and have a look at—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. But, surely, stakeholder engagement—

Mr STEVE WHAN: —my diary to see what else I was doing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —is a big part of what you need to do—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, it is. Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —particularly in a new portfolio and within your first couple of months. It's very light on compared to some of your colleagues. We can maybe come back to that in the next estimates hearing. I want to ask you about the manufacturing centres of excellence, which I know Ms Boyd also asked about. Can you explain the difference between what you're proposing with the manufacturing centres of excellence model and the IAT campus—the one that most recently opened at Kingswood? What's the difference?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There's a couple differences. I will acknowledge that there's a number of things that we're learning from the IATs that we will take across to the manufacturing centres of excellence. There's a number of really positive things about those. The IATs involve a collaboration between industry, tertiary institutions and TAFE. One of the core differences between those and what we're proposing with the manufacturing centres of excellence is that the manufacturing centres of excellence will serve a slightly different purpose. The IATs have a shared governance model between TAFE NSW, the universities and industry. The centres of excellence are going to be TAFE-led. TAFE will actually undertake the management and they will contract in services from partners.

There's a bit of a difference in the way that we're proposing to structure the model. The IATs are in a pilot phase at the moment. Obviously, we will learn from those, and we will certainly take positives out of those for the manufacturing centres of excellence. I did visit Kingswood recently, and there is some excellent work happening there, which I think is terrific. That importance of building the partnerships is something that we'd all agree is vital. I'm confident that we will be able to carry that across into the manufacturing centres of excellence, but with a different management model.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how many enrolments there are so far at the Kingswood campus?

Mr STEVE WHAN: A number of the courses that we're offering at the Kingswood campus are the traditional apprenticeship courses, as well as microskills and things. I will ask TAFE to give specifics on that, but I just recognise that the specific IAT courses, the things that have been developed by industry—those microskills and things that you would be well aware of—a number of those are new and continuing to develop. There's quite a few new offerings that are coming out there, and they have been very well received. I'm aware that we've just announced today a course in AI.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I saw that, Minister. I'd love to know how much you can tell us about AI. Have you got some tips for us?

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: My intelligence is not artificial.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wasn't implying that. I saw your press release talking about tips and tricks, so I thought maybe you could enlighten us today about how we can use AI more effectively.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. Maybe I should do the course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Maybe I should, too, Minister. We're on a unity ticket there.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I ask Ms Schorer to give you figures on the enrolments at Kingswood?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. That would be great.

JANET SCHORER: Just to add, in terms of the centres of advanced manufacturing, what we heard very clearly from industry in consultation was the desire for the centres to also focus on what we deliver in terms of foundation trades, because the importance of the pipeline for skilled workforce into those sectors is really critical, as well as the overlay of microskills and micro-credentials to allow workers to continue to build their skills in those more niche areas that are required for those emerging areas. We've heard that loud and clear. The IATs offer microskills and micro-credentials in the digital and the construction area. They focus more so on people who are already within those sectors and provide them with the opportunity to upskill. We've had 58,000 or thereabouts enrolments in both the IATs to date. I'm happy to provide on notice the specifics for construction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Do you have a breakdown of the enrolments by area or demographic as well? Whatever you can provide on notice would be great.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, we can absolutely provide that data. The construction delivery commenced online in about October last year. Obviously we've now launched the physical facility. The enrolments continue to be quite strong in both digital and construction IATs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There might be two more for the AI class after today, when the Minister and I sign up. Minister, the consultation process for the MCEs—my understanding is there was a round table held in November last year. Is that correct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've had three round tables.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Who has been in attendance at those round tables?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We have had a round table in each of the locations—Wollongong, Western Sydney and Newcastle. We've had industry representatives, tertiary institutions, unions and people from TAFE, broadly speaking. We've also, since then, done some more targeted consultations to follow up, particularly with industry and with the universities, discussing the sorts of models and the courses to narrow down what it is that might be offered in those centres. That has all come together in a proposal which is currently being considered to take to the next stage.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the locations, you've got Hunter, Illawarra and Western Sydney.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Whereabouts in Western Sydney?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We haven't settled at this stage on the physical locations. As I mentioned before, we're not focusing particularly on building a new building for these. We're looking at trying to utilise the money to develop the course offerings. We're also trying to link this in with the Federal Centres of Excellence funding. We would like to access some of that, as you'd expect we would. To do that, we need to be developing course offerings that can essentially be offered anywhere. So there will be a focus on some physical learning but also on some of those offerings that are available without a physical location. Perhaps Ms Schorer could add to that, just on the concept side of it.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's right. What we're focused on is how we can provide flexible and agile delivery. We heard from the consultation sessions that this will be an evolving workforce over time. So rather than us getting fixed with a piece of infrastructure, we're able to utilise industry expertise and industry resources, in partnership, as well as what we do, which is provide the learning, teaching and delivery. We are trying to be as agile as we can to adapt.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I add on that, one of the things that's important is that we're very keen to get Federal approval to trial self-accreditation for courses by TAFE at these centres, because at the moment TAFE is very limited in being able to respond quickly to industry need by the time taken to get accreditation of courses by

CORRECTED

the Federal authorities. If we can use the centres to short-circuit that, it means we'll be able to respond very quickly to industry need with qualifications.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: One of the concerns—and I think you may have just answered this—particularly in terms of south-western Sydney and the Campbelltown area, is access to those courses. But is what you're saying that you envisage that the physical footprint would be in Western Sydney, somewhere, but you would hope that you've got a bigger scope?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for clarifying that. I'll go to a new topic—the announcement of the 1,000 apprenticeships commitment by your Government last year. Can you tell me how many applications you've received so far for those apprenticeships?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can give you that figure. We have more applications than we have places, you won't be surprised to know. There's been a really excellent response to it so far. Applications from the agencies closed 30 November 2023, and 499 applications were received from 33 agencies. That's for the agencies to take people on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does that come out of the thousand as well, or is that in addition?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, that's actually the agencies saying we want some, so that was a really positive response. Obviously we had agencies who traditionally take on trainees, and we've actually done some baseline work to make sure that this is a genuine 1,000 extra. We've done some baseline work on what the agencies previously were taking on as apprentices and trainees and, shockingly, that was less than a thousand right across the New South Wales government sector.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you just come back to how many applications you've received? You said you've had more than places available, and I would just like that figure. You can come back after the break if you can't find it now.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In the first three days that we had them open, we had 500 people who registered their interest. Obviously, it's 1,000 over the term. Can somebody tell me what the current figure is? Mr Collins has got the current figure for applications. Mr Collins?

DAVID COLLINS: We currently have 250 positions that are being recruited for at this stage. I don't have the figure in front of me, but I can get that for you this afternoon.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

DAVID COLLINS: There has been a very significant expression of interest, and we're working through that now and supporting agencies with that recruitment. I can provide that to you as the morning goes on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you, Mr Collins. So it's 250 this year. Will it be 1,000 in this term of Government, or is it 250 per year over the next four years? Are you going to get 750 by the next election?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it'll be 1,000 over the term. Obviously some of the training will go over—it depends whether someone is, obviously, doing an apprenticeship or a traineeship as to how long their training goes for.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you're doing 250 this year as an intake—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll have more next year, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you provide—and I'm happy for it to be on notice—the breakdown of how many each year you expect over the next three years?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Mr Collins can do that.

DAVID COLLINS: The way we'd planned for it to occur is 200 commencements in the first year and 400 commencements each year for the next two years. Because of the level of interest from agencies and the high level of applications from agencies to be engaged, we're looking at filling 250 this time and we will work the others out over the next two years.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have any of these apprentices or trainees actually started? Have they been onboarded and begun yet?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't believe so, not yet.

CORRECTED

DAVID COLLINS: The recruitment process is occurring now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would you expect them to begin?

DAVID COLLINS: I would expect over the next month that we'll start to see apprentices and trainees commencing with agencies.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is their employment guaranteed at the completion of their apprenticeship?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it is not, but we certainly would expect that—most agencies are crying out for people, so we would certainly be hoping that they would be keeping them on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So they'll get supported to do their apprenticeship or traineeship, but there's no guarantee of ongoing government employment?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's my understanding.

DAVID COLLINS: If I could comment, please—and sorry to keep jumping in over you—we're working with agencies over looking at this as a means of attracting and recruiting people to ongoing roles. While an apprenticeship or traineeship is a time-based contract of employment and training, we're encouraging the agencies to look at that as a way of identifying talent who can then go on to fill roles. Those agencies that are currently using apprenticeships and traineeships are doing that: They're using that as a means of recruitment into skills-based roles that they have.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So that's the career pathway that you envisage for these people. In terms of KPIs to monitor the success of this program, Minister, what are you putting in place to measure its efficacy?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I guess the most basic one is that we have established what the baseline is that we're working from, so that we can ensure that these are additional and they're not just replacing traineeships or apprenticeships which departments might have already had in place. We've got a measurement to ensure that's in place. In terms of feedback from the trainees and so on, perhaps I could ask the department to give you an elaboration on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate what you're saying in terms of your baseline, but is it your goal that these thousand individuals will remain working in the public service? Are you going to track who stays and what that retention is like through their courses? How are you going to measure it?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will certainly be tracking who finishes and who completes, and we will be going back—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you be making that public?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't see why not.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good.

CHLOE READ: We also have some aims on the composition of the cohort—equity considerations, gender, people's disability, Aboriginal learners—just to make sure that, in filling the thousand, we've got a broad representation of the community in that cohort as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for it to be on notice, Ms Read, but can we get some information about those cohorts and what sort of targets you're looking at?

DAVID COLLINS: Certainly. Why don't we do that this afternoon?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Perfect. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Can I ask about one of my favourite topics—consultants? I'm looking at the last annual report for TAFE for the 2022-23 year, and I see that the consultant spend has gone down, which is great. I'll come back to a question on that, but I do note that the contractor spend continues to increase. In the context of TAFE, what are most of those contractors doing?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will ask TAFE to give you some more detail. Obviously, there are a number of areas where we use contractors. Some of those are in course development because our teachers don't have enough time to do it all. But there are a number of specific areas. I'll ask Ms Schorer to—

JANET SCHORER: Thank you. I'll ask Ms Tickle to speak to the contractors. As you acknowledge, we are spending less on consultants, and that's in response to the Government requirement of us. Our contractors are

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predominantly around the areas of our information technology projects and our ability to get workers with the right skills to stay. We find, frequently, that the contractors with the kind of expertise that we need are in hot demand in the current market. So, whilst we have major infrastructure projects afoot—which, as you know, we do—we continue to have to require those sorts of workforce. But we can provide some more detail on contractors.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. I think we've heard that in a lot of departments, around IT contractors in particular. Because they are in such high demand, it's hard to attract them into the public sector with public sector wages. Is that what's happening here as well? Are they demanding a much higher rate?

JANET SCHORER: Yes, and even if we've had the experience where someone wants to come and work for us but the next day they'll be offered a role elsewhere that's paying four times what we can offer. We want to be able to have people with the right expertise doing work with us, so it's important that we have that capacity in the organisation.

The CHAIR: Did you want to add something, Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: Notwithstanding that, we are reducing the contingent labour. For example, in March last year we had 544 people. This year—same time frame—334. We are encouraging people onto temporary TAFE contracts or permanent employment because we are committed to stable employment. So we are reducing the contingent labour notwithstanding the rate issues that we've just talked about.

The CHAIR: Thank you. What steps, Minister, is the Labor Government taking to bring down the casualisation of TAFE teachers? I know we've done quite a lot on the schoolteacher side. What's happening with TAFE teachers?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The estimate I've had is that around 65 per cent of our teaching workforce is not permanent, which I think is unacceptable. We have been in discussion with the Teachers Federation as part of our negotiations recently about setting some firmer targets. The managing director of TAFE did put a written commitment to the Teachers Federation to work through—we're getting more teachers onto either permanent full-time or permanent part-time positions. It is a strong objective of ours. I'm also very conscious that the Federal Government has recently passed legislation which may affect TAFE teachers, but we'd like to be ahead of that if we can. We are very committed to try to increase the numbers. Obviously, for some people, casual rates and casual hours will still suit them, but we'll be looking, where possible, to bring people who've been long-term employees with fairly regular hours onto permanent contracts. It might be for Ms Tickle to add to that?

JULIE TICKLE: Certainly, yes. Some information that might be useful—we've advertised approximately 550-odd permanent teaching roles since the end of March 2023, comparable to 278 in the same period over 2022. We've also increased our teaching workforce in the same time. We're increasing people into permanent and permanent part-time roles as well as temporary roles, so we're converting a lot of our teachers that were temporary into permanent roles. We've also, as the Minister said, been working with the federation to put more of our existing part-time casual teachers into permanent roles through a streamlined recruitment process. That's very well underway as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just before we leave contractors, in that last financial year, which I acknowledge was not all under your watch, Minister, because we had the change of government in the middle there, there was \$242,000 paid to the Nous Group in relation to developing an approach to building a commercial fee-for-service model for TAFE. Can you tell me what that is and what the results of that work were?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will ask Ms Schorer to respond to that.

JANET SCHORER: Thank you. This was for a piece of work that was tied to our Training Portfolio Strategy, so the forward projection and forecast of where industry demand is, where skills demand is, and to understand where TAFE NSW is best to put its effort to meet industry demand, acknowledging that we also have a role in those more bespoke learning areas that are offered in very small locations or for bespoke industries. The commercial strategy was a piece of work that was done at that time—I think it commenced in 2022—to explore what a commercial approach would look like for TAFE and, if we were to go down that road, what it would look like. It also incorporated what we do. We do have quite a lot of work that's done already in business development and those sorts of things—so, how would we look at our business development partnerships work to have a more coherent approach to that in our partnership with industry?

The CHAIR: So "fee-for-service model" in that context is, effectively, TAFE charging businesses for providing courses. Is that right?

JANET SCHORER: Correct, yes.

The CHAIR: Is that something that occurs at the moment, in some form, in TAFE?.

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JANET SCHORER: In some form, yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: And the result of that work that was done by Nous, did that make it's way into some sort of policy document? Or is it just informing—

JANET SCHORER: It's really informing how we've implemented the Training Portfolio Strategy and thinking about where we best put our effort and where there are opportunities. There might be opportunities for commercial revenue, but it's certainly not the focus of what we do in TAFE NSW.

The CHAIR: Would it be fair to say then that the quarter of a million that was spent by the last Government is not something that we're going to necessarily use under the policy settings of the new Government? How does that work? Minister, is that something that you're aware of?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't think I'd rule out a fee for service for businesses, at all, so I suspect it won't be wasted, but our focus is certainly on being a government provider of educational services.

The CHAIR: There is always the worry when we start doing fee for service that we end up focusing on—

Mr STEVE WHAN: On where we can make the most money.

The CHAIR: On making the most money, that's right. It's almost like a form of—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, our focus will be, very strongly, on being a government service provider and recognising that TAFE plays a different role to non-government providers in the training space, in that we have a number of community service obligations, we have obligations for helping learners in remote and rural areas, and from disadvantaged backgrounds, and more difficult. So that's very strongly my focus.

The CHAIR: Okay. Just coming to the mandatory placements that happen through TAFE, I know, for example, recently there was a government agreement with Charles Sturt University to pay police trainees \$30,000 while they were doing their traineeships, but there are still a significant number of nurses, teachers and other essential workers who are, effectively, according to Unions NSW, giving up around \$21,000 in income while doing that mandatory unpaid placement. Have you thought about extending that? Are there any plans to extend that to apply to other types of workers?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Universities Accord report, which came out in the last week or so, makes some fairly strong recommendations about those unpaid placements, talking about how they are a disincentive for people and they are a barrier to people from lower socio-economic groups particularly in taking on those courses. As a parent of a high school teacher who did that, I'm aware of that, and she was lucky enough to have a fairly comfortable family. But it is a disincentive for people. I would certainly agree with the Universities Accord recommendations, but I'd be in full agreement with the Deputy Premier, who, I think, recently said that we think it's the Commonwealth's responsibility to take action on that front.

The CHAIR: Have you made a formal request to the Minister for Fair Work in relation to pressing that claim?

Mr STEVE WHAN: In terms of the Federal Government?

The CHAIR: Yes. Ensuring that they—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've only at this stage had an early response to the Universities Accord. We haven't made a formal response to the accord document yet, but I expect that, in our discussions on that, we will be making that point.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I previously asked you about the culling of brumbies. Have you had any update from the Minister for the Environment or indeed from the department on how that's travelling?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As local member, obviously, the Minister for the Environment keeps me informed about it. I'm aware that there is an area of the southern portion of Kosciuszko park which will be closed over the next few weeks for aerial shooting for all pest species, which is consistent with the way that aerial shooting's been conducted in the past for deer and pigs. To date, there hasn't been extensive shooting, but the reports that I've had from the Minister are that what's been undertaken so far has been successful. I'm certainly—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What numbers, Minister, are they thinking that they've culled already?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You'd need to get that information from the Minister for the Environment. I don't have a figure on that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: She hasn't provided that information to you?

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Mr STEVE WHAN: She's certainly told me about some of the preliminary work. But I haven't had an up-to-date figure in the last couple of weeks about—they did some trial work, and then they're about to commence the program proper, really.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When are they expecting to finish the program?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The Minister might know.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: We're here to examine the Minister in terms of the portfolios that he represents. We've had this raised consistently at a number of estimates. As valuable and as interesting as this topic is—and a number of us are on the relevant inquiries—it doesn't come within the ambit of these budget hearings. Therefore I'd ask that we move on to another topic.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: To the point of order: Chair, on the last occasion, the Minister was more than happy to provide some answers in relation to an area of interest to him as a member of Parliament, and he has happily been answering the questions now. So, unless there's some sort of ESP between the Minister and the member, I thought the Minister was quite happy to answer these questions.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Further to the point of order: I'm sure the Minister's very capable of answering a whole range of topics, and I know he has great interest and expertise in a number of areas. It's just not appropriate for budget estimates.

The CHAIR: In relation to the point of order, I do agree that, although we give wide latitude, it does need to at least be related to the policy areas of the particular Minister. That said, when we are asking a Minister a question—who is a person who is relatively knowledgeable and completely capable of responding to questions—I would allow the Minister to decide whether or not to defer or to say no to the question or whether he would like to answer it. We will proceed on that basis.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Thank you. Minister, you have answered the questions. Thank you for that. I only wanted to ask a couple of further questions in relation to that. Have there been any more approaches to you from any of the stakeholders in the area, relating concerns in relation to the culling of the brumbies? Or have the community accepted the decision?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. I would say that there is still, as you would expect, a lot of controversy about the decision. I've certainly had a number of groups who are opposed to the cull, who come to see me as local member and who make their points to me. I've also had many people who care about the natural values of Kosciuszko Park, who talk to me, as well. It is a controversial thing. One of the things in government, and as a local member, is that you can take two options. You can take the easy way of trying to avoid or sit on the fence on this, as some previous people have done, or you can tough it out. I'm supporting a course of action which will protect the natural value of Kosciuszko park but recognising that's controversial and that some people will be critical of that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, have any of the operators of Thredbo or Perisher come to see you in relation to this whatsoever?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, not about—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I don't know what their position is on this. I'm just asking.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, the operators of Thredbo and Perisher have a lot of issues with various aspects of government but not this one.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So they're supporting the culling as well? Is that right?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've never spoken specifically to Perisher and Thredbo but they're not affected at all—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, it's a different part of the park.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —because the areas of park closure don't affect the resort areas at all.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I just have to confirm again in relation to Bankstown TAFE. All the courses that will be relocated to different parts of the CBD, will they be returned, as they are today, to the new Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will ask specifically Ms Schorer to answer that.

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The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: My concern is there should be a guarantee about these courses, that they're not just removed to another campus.

Mr STEVE WHAN: With one proviso. Obviously demand for courses is something that we measure. We're in the process of doing a statewide assessment of all the TAFE campuses and trying to match that with the demand for skills in those areas so we can make sure that we're filling in any gaps. We will continue to do that. We'll continue to respond to market demand. That may mean that sometime in the future we might add a course to Bankstown or we might have low enrolments for something or low demand for something. Within that extent, I can ask Ms Schorer to—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'll just say this: The premise of my question is that earlier you said that it may be more health-related courses now at this site.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, I'd hope there will be.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I presume the TAFE site will be now smaller than what's currently available, although I don't know what the height of this building will be. Therefore I'm just asking, will some of these courses not resume in this location?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, if there's demand in Bankstown for courses, they'll be provided there. Ms Schorer could perhaps add to that.

JANET SCHORER: That's right. What we'd want to do in the first instance is make sure that the students who are currently learning in that location, they're able to continue and finish their learning. That's a priority. As the Minister said, we want to be able to offer what is needed in that community.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What are the predominant courses now at Bankstown TAFE?

JANET SCHORER: A lot of what we offer is through our migrant English program so a lot of courses that stem from that individual support. There are some animal studies.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Any trades?

JANET SCHORER: I'm walking my way round the building. I can't remember.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can't remember?

JANET SCHORER: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you take on notice—I'd like to know what exact courses are now available at the Bankstown campus, which courses you will then provide within the CBD of Bankstown in your temporary location and what you expect on the return of the new site. Also, when will those leasing arrangements—I am still concerned about the leasing arrangements. When do you intend to make that type of information public? Is there any kind of time frame that we can get on that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll take on notice whether or not we've been provided by Health any further time frame but we'll provide that information as soon as we can to the learners.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's correct. We don't have a time frame yet. It's certainly not this calendar year.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you also take on notice—I want to know about this sustainable design document that you provided in June last year, whether you are going to revisit that document now that there's new net zero targets that have been passed by this Parliament. It says in that document that you're required to update that document as a result of any legislative framework changes. I also want to know whether that's going to add any additional costs to this specific build at Bankstown TAFE. The net zero targets, will that add any additional cost to building Bankstown TAFE, because you must have a ballpark figure of what you're expecting Bankstown TAFE to cost already?

JANET SCHORER: No, we don't have a figure in mind at all.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So Health are entirely running this?

JANET SCHORER: No, we're working in partnership with them but it's still, as the Minister said, very early days.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It feels like the partnership is 99 per cent Health and 1 per cent TAFE. That's what it sounds like. I can't understand how we don't have a ballpark figure or rough costings of what this is going to be.

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Mr STEVE WHAN: No, we'll be making very strong demands about what we want in our TAFE facility, of course. I'd expect there will be a whole-of-government approach to the net zero targets and building and construction. We'll be going with that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: As I said, it seems like you're handing over the entire pricing and all of the parameters around this TAFE to Health. I'm surprised that we don't have a rough idea of what it's going to cost. Is it going to be within the \$1.3 billion?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It was actually only announced late last year and there is a lot of planning to do, so I'm not surprised by where we're at at the moment.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You're not surprised that no-one knows anything yet?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can assure you that we will be making very certain that we are getting the facility that fits the future needs for the TAFE.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How much was that sustainability design document? Were there consultants hired to complete that document?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's well before me, I think, so I'll ask Ms Schorer.

JANET SCHORER: That's before me as well. I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Could you please take on notice what it cost TAFE NSW to complete that 53-page sustainability design document, which consultants you relied on to prepare that document and what you paid those consultants?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I want to ask you about fee-free course structures. I've got a specific example that we might speak to you about offline but, effectively, it's a mother of three children who is doing her school-based education support, which is great. She is wanting to go and work in a classroom. She tried to move from a day class to an evening class but was told that if she did that, she wouldn't be able to have the fee-free course because she only got one fee-free enrolment. Does that make sense to you?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Are you saying that she had already utilised a fee-free place but was moving? For the same course?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: She's moving from the same course, from the morning to the evening, because she is now working at a school.

Mr STEVE WHAN: And she was only part way through it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I don't think she'd even begun, to be honest. She wanted to move.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That doesn't sound logical to me. I'll ask Ms Schorer to—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I don't want to identify, but it might be something that—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll certainly ask Ms Schorer to respond. We'll take that and get an answer for you.

JANET SCHORER: Without knowing the detail of the example—and maybe Ms Read or Mr Collins can speak to some of the broader architecture of fee free—if the place is utilised and there has been an enrolment occur for a fee-free place, sometimes that means that a second placement can't be offered. But we're happy to look into that particular situation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In theory, if you're moving from the morning to an afternoon—

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's a transfer is what you're saying, essentially.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —of the same course, you shouldn't be then told—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll find out about that for you.

JANET SCHORER: I'm happy to look into that for you.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm happy to get the details offline of the person—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's from the southern part of the State. The wonderful local member, and your shadow, just happens to be here, so he might want to speak to you about that particular one. I think the concern was that you've got a mother of three wanting to do the right thing and getting a bit tangled up, with all respect, in the process. If that's something that you could look at, that would be fantastic. We will chat to you

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about that one. There was an announcement in November last year to have 900 fee-free vocational training placements across the State to help with skilled water operators. Are you aware of that announcement, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm certainly aware that we have a serious shortage of water operators. On the specifics of the 900, I might ask—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Anything in terms of how many people have enrolled to date and where they're based?

JANET SCHORER: We can take that on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can take those details on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also, on notice, provide how many people, where those students are based and also what courses specifically they are undertaking?

The CHAIR: Ms Mihailuk, do you have any short questions?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: No, I'll come back.

The CHAIR: I'll cede my time back to you, Sarah, for another two minutes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The "short" part is part of the challenge, Minister. Most of our stuff is a little bit—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Short questions and, hopefully, short answers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —more of an issue. I'll just quickly go back to the issue around paid practicums for teaching and nursing. You said that you support the education Minister's push for the Federal Government to pay. Following on from what Ms Boyd had said earlier, what will you be doing proactively in terms of engaging the Federal Government on that issue?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Along with the education and health Ministers, we would certainly be putting our position. We'll be engaged in ministerial councils in terms of the consideration of responses to the universities accord. It's got a broad range of things, some of which are directly relevant to us, particularly when it comes to better integration of VET skills and tertiary, and recognition of VET qualification. There are a number of things like that which I could go into. But in terms of the paid-for places, we will be advocating for the Federal Government to allocate funding for that in their response to the accord. We'll make representations and engage at ministerial councils on that basis.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If they're not open to that process or wanting to pay—and in my experience Federal Governments don't often want to pay—what will you do? What will be the New South Wales Government's response to those issues?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will want to pursue the Federal Government at first instance. It would be a question for the Treasurer and the Premier about what happened if they refused. But I'm hopeful that the Federal Government might come up with some good options.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What sort of time frame do you think in terms of a decision about that particular process?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Ms Read might be able to add to this on time frames for a Federal Government response. I'm aware that they are considering some aspects of the Accord in their next budget consideration.

CHLOE READ: Yes, the advice we have is most of their response will be as part of their budget in May. But they have flagged that they won't be doing everything at once and that there'll be successive pieces of the Accord recommendations that they'll want to consider and act upon over a period of time. But their May budget is the big vehicle for it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're really going to have to wait and see what May delivers or doesn't and then reassess that situation.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will see what comes out of May but, also, we will have the opportunity over coming weeks to get more detailed responses. The Federal Government hasn't actually released its response to the accord report yet. We'll need to see what they come out with in their response to the Accord report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. We might come back to that later.

The CHAIR: Are there any questions from Government members? No. Excellent. We get a bit of an early mark. We'll be back after morning tea at 11.15 a.m.

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(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We will commence again with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, could I touch on the Housing Accord targets relevant to New South Wales? Under the Housing Accord target, New South Wales has committed to 75,000 homes a year. As the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, are you committed to meeting these targets?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm committed to doing whatever we can to address the skills shortages that we know exist in the construction sector, and that is critical, obviously, to the delivery of those targets. Yes, we are. I guess there are a couple of things that we have to address. The first is that we've had a shortage of teachers available. We have been attempting to address that with some initiatives like Paid to Learn, which has been successful in bringing people who are working in industry across to undertake TAFE teaching qualifications. We are obviously continuing to focus on those skills shortage areas, like construction-related industries, with the Smart and Skilled funding and encouraging people to—and continuation, as well, of a program, the Women in Construction program, which started prior to us coming into government. So there are a number of avenues that we are taking to try to address some of those skills shortages, in conjunction with industry. But there's a lot of work to do still on it, and we'll continue to work on it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, is there a plan to meet these targets in terms of milestones and outcomes? How do we know we're on track?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We continually update the skills shortage lists, and we do work with the Federal skills councils on identifying those skills shortage key areas and whether or not there is more that we can do. The success or otherwise of what we do will be reflected—and the department may wish to elaborate on this a bit—in the work that we see out of the skills councils to benchmark how we're going with those skills shortage areas, and particularly the construction-related council. We're working closely with those and also developing a New South Wales Skills Plan for later this year. The department might wish to add to that.

CHLOE READ: Yes. I guess the other initiatives to note that relate to the delivery of skills that would support the housing industry would be the Fee-Free TAFE initiative that we have and also our continuing support for apprenticeships and traineeships—so really critical skills in those areas.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sure, boosting skills overall, but specific to meeting these housing targets, as the skills Minister, is there anything specific we're doing for construction?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, and I've mentioned a number of the things already. But obviously one of the key things—probably the most important thing we can do apart from, of course, promoting people coming into construction—is making sure we've got the teachers there. That's a strong focus.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of RTOs and GTOs in this space, I would consider that that would be a pretty instrumental avenue or route to consider to look at skills. Could you just outline what we are doing to support the RTOs outside the Smart and Skilled money apprenticeship program certificate III to respond to the accord and to these housing targets?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We're primarily responding through the Smart and Skilled funding and through TAFE as the primary provider—in other words, working to ensure that we are getting those basic skills through trade qualifications. I'll ask the department to—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The question was outside the Smart and Skilled money; that's all. How are we boosting enrolments and completions, hooking into the RTOs and the GTOs?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Read might want to add more, Ms Merton. But in the electrical trade area and in other construction trades, which goes directly to having the trades for housing, we do have the fee-free apprenticeships and traineeships scheme. That continues and has continued to be funded.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I was looking for something new—a stimulus, a boost. We've got to meet these targets; can we do more than what we are?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's on a range of fronts. That's one of them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Anything new, Mr Secretary?

MURAT DIZDAR: Not all of it's new, but when it works and it's effective, you want to make it ongoing.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We do need to build the base with the traditional apprenticeships, and that's really got to be the focus. We look at upskilling in industry as well, with additional qualifications. Some of those are

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new. As I mentioned before, we really have to have, in the construction area, the focus on getting people qualified; getting them through an apprenticeship into their trade. From there we can look at upskilling and shorter courses and those sorts of things.

CHLOE READ: The other piece is, obviously, school students who might be interested in a career in the trades. Some of our initiatives—the Regional Industry Education Partnerships, making sure that students understand what it's like to work in particular industries, things like Try a Trade and the Educational Pathways Program—all contribute to make sure we have that really strong pipeline of students interested in that field.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Following on from that, in terms of data on trade apprenticeship commencements, do you have any updated data, Minister, on how many people, for instance, last year, began these trade apprenticeships? You are saying that you've got a start. I agree, but what kind of numbers do you have of people commencing those courses?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Anecdotally, this year has seen a significant increase in the number of people coming in. But I will ask—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you got any data?

Mr STEVE WHAN: —for the specific data.

CHLOE READ: I wouldn't have it broken down by particular types of apprenticeships.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think we're still fairly early in the year to be getting this year's.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The most up-to-date we could find was June quarter last year, but has there been any data made publicly available? I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The department might be able to provide a bit more or take the detail on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think you're right, Ms Mitchell. The most publicly reported is 30 June, and there were 46,145 apprentices and trainees that commenced in the prior 12 months.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the point is, obviously, with the focus on housing, you need more tradies. What's happened in the last nine months? That's what we want to know.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said, anecdotally, we have seen a strong growth in interest in some of our trades, but we haven't got full—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, anecdotal data is not full data.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, absolutely. We're not at the stage yet of having the data on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you not expect that until June this year, or what kind of time frame?

JANET SCHORER: We can provide that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, as part of wanting to address the skills and training in the construction centre, what priority did you give, as the Minister, to engaging and consulting with the New South Wales industry associations relevant to your portfolio of Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's certainly a high priority for us to be working with industry. Something which I've certainly emphasised in my discussions with TAFE is to build those industry links. We also have the national skills councils that are working in this sector. I've had discussions with a number of those, and that's important for us to actually be linking in. We recognise there is often a national market for these skills, so we all need to be pulling our weight. New South Wales more than pulls its weight in training, but we want to elevate that if we can.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: On the industry associations in New South Wales, Minister, when did you last meet face to face with the Master Plumbers Association of NSW, and who attended?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I haven't met the masters plumbers yet. I have met the industry training council, I believe, but I would just have to check that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, when did you last meet face to face with the National Electrical and Communications Association, a significant industry partner to government?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. I have met with them just a few weeks ago, discussing, in particular, their plans for expanding their course offerings. They're looking to do more on the South Coast, and they would also like to

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do something in Queanbeyan, which of course appeals to me because it's in the Monaro electorate. Yes, I met with them a few weeks ago. I am scheduled to have another meeting with them in conjunction with the Electrical Trades Union as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: When did you last meet face to face with the Master Builders Association of NSW, thinking they're pretty critical to housing construction agreed targets?

Mr STEVE WHAN: They are. I have met with the builders, with the leadership of the skills council which takes them in, but at this stage—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: This would be the Master Builders Association of NSW—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. I understand who the Master Builders are and—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —eight thousand members in New South Wales.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —I've had a long association with them in the ACT region, but I don't know that I've had a specific meeting with them face to face yet. But I have met with people who are involved with them through the skills councils.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of the industry associations wanting to meet the need for skills and training, particularly in the construction industry, together with government, is there any budget commitment or support given to these associations at this point, or partnerships?

Mr STEVE WHAN: A number of them are RTOs, so they obviously get funding through the Smart and Skilled system, as is appropriate. But the specifics of that, the department—

CHLOE READ: If I might, Minister, we also have some grants for industry-led initiatives that are about women in construction, specific to women's participation, attracting more women into the trades and into construction—two rounds of funding of industry-led pilots, essentially, to increase the numbers of women in construction.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Would there be any plan in terms of industry consultation and the priority to meet with these associations?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, absolutely, and I have met with the Housing Industry Association recently. So, yes, I'm keen to meet with all of those associations.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, are you aware of some of the completion rates for the training that some of the RTOs and the GTOs are providing?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. We get reasonably regular reporting around completion rates and, in fact, I think a report might have been released this morning. Is that on that one?

CHLOE READ: I don't think it—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Uncanny timing—so much gets released on the day of an estimates hearing.

CHLOE READ: That's a National Council for Vocational Education Research—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's interesting that you say that, Minister, because I did read today 74 per cent completion rates relevant to the GTOs.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There is a range of different courses, but still the core of construction education is provided by TAFE. MBA and HIA still utilise TAFE for a lot of their courses. So it is a partnership in a lot of ways and, yes, there are different reasons for differences in completion rates between RTOs and TAFE, and that comes down often to the different reasons why people go to the different institutions, the different characteristics of the student population. There is a whole range of reasons behind it. Our TAFE in New South Wales, I think, is leading in Australia in terms of completion rates and we'll be continuing to work with them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What are those completion rates for TAFE NSW?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Schorer to answer that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I just cite that today, as you stated, the GTOs have said 74 per cent completed. They're their completion rates. What do we know about TAFE NSW?

JANET SCHORER: Overall, our completion rates sit at around 48 per cent.

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So less than one in two students complete?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are a number of reasons for that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes, I appreciate that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll come back to those, if you wouldn't mind.

JANET SCHORER: Firstly, for us in TAFE NSW, we have to understand the context of our learners. They might start a course but their learning outcome is to finish a particular unit within that course. For example, to be able to get their white card and then go to work, that's their learning outcome but that might then indicate that they're not completing. There are other nuances in the data around completions that Dr McNeill can speak to, we can do that this afternoon if you prefer—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes, thank you, we would appreciate that this afternoon.

JANET SCHORER: —that clarify what those completions actually mean for our learners and why they differ from the private RTOs. Dr McNeill?

MARGOT McNEILL: Yes, certainly. Thank you, Ms Schorer. If you think about that NCVER data that you're mentioning, that's a very specific subset of our TAFE NSW courses. It's only related to the nationally recognised training courses. As Ms Schorer said, that's less than a quarter of our whole portfolio of courses. And the other major factor is that they're also within a time frame of four years, so many of our learners, because we have so many people that come to us from disadvantaged backgrounds, they come from regional or remote areas—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. I'm conscious of your time and the Minister's, so absolutely let's pick that up this afternoon. That would be good. Minister, could I just touch on the new TAFE teachers award?

Is the award due to expire on 31 January 2024?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The award has expired. We're currently in negotiation with the Teachers Federation.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Has agreement been met with the union?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Not at this stage.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Do we know what they're asking for, what's on the table?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can ask Ms Tickle to elaborate on this a little bit. But, obviously, we're having ongoing discussions with the federation. It wouldn't be appropriate for us to talk about what each side has been putting on the table. Obviously, our objective is to ensure that we get an award which helps us to retain and encourage TAFE teachers. One part of it, which I flagged earlier on, was the transfer of the large number of casuals and trying to achieve a few more people going to permanency. I'm quite happy to publicly acknowledge that that's part of it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We recognise the work on that. Will they receive the same pay rise as school teachers?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's quite a different occupation, and that's not my expectation that they would.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, the federation in their press release have said they're pursuing salary parity the school colleagues. That's the ask from the union, is it not?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not going to go into what's been asked by the union and responded to.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it's public, Minister. I can give you the press release. They're talking about it. Why won't you?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That is because I don't think it's appropriate to talk publicly about private negotiations between the union and us.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, what's been budgeted in terms of trying to meet the pay rise in terms of what's agreed, whether it's on par with the teachers or something separate? What is the budget provision for this?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We're subject to the Government's overall budget and wage policy, which has been well discussed.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I will just move to Milperra High School. Minister, as you may be aware, NSW Labor's pre-election commitment relating to the Western Sydney University campus at Milperra

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must include a new high school. What is the latest on the announcement of a new high school on the Western Sydney University campus at Milperra?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've got a number of notes about Milperra High School in terms of the relationship with Western Sydney. And I'm aware that there has been significant discussion with the Department of Education and, presumably, the education Minister about the high school and education facilities in the area. So I might ask the secretary to address that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, Minister. Ms Merton, this was a line of questioning in the education portfolio, you may recall. And, with our School Infrastructure colleague there with us, we indicated that we were looking at alternative options by way of existing primary and high school provisions in the area. And we're of the view that we can meet demand with those existing facilities.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just put again parents are reporting the schools are full, and I appreciate this is the school-related one and that demountables are not the answer. And I guess, given that the site was at the university campus, the Western Sydney University campus, Minister, I'm asking you what you know about this commitment. Will it be met?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to, Ms Merton, outside of the Committee or on notice, come to you with the surrounding schools and whether they're at capacity or not.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It was to the Minister, just with the portfolio responsibility here.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't know that I concur with your characterisation that they're at capacity. That's not the advice I've had from Infrastructure. But it was in the Education committee. I'm happy to come back if you like and tell you the surrounding schools and what their population is.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, have you been involved in any of this, given that I'm informed it was the Western Sydney University campus which is the discussion point here, given your portfolio responsibility?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. Our involvement is that, if a university wishes to sell or long-term-lease any land which they've obtained from the State at less than market value, they have to seek permission of the Minister. They sought permission of a former Minister. Can someone tell me what date that was, approximately?

MURAT DIZDAR: We may have to take that on notice, Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: But it certainly wasn't while I was the Minister. It may have been under the previous Government. I'm not sure about that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Does that commitment still stand today?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Once the permission has been granted, you can't reverse it. Once the permission's been granted for them to lease or sell that site, from the point of view of the Minister for TAFE and tertiary education, that's the end of the story.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then why was there a pre-election commitment from Labor to say that that site must include a new high school? Your candidate, and now the local member, is on the record.

Mr STEVE WHAN: If there was a pre-election discussion about that, that implies to me that permission for that land to be sold was undertaken by your government, so perhaps you can answer the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I want to ask why your candidate, and now local member, advocated for a new high school that now is up in the ether. What's happened?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You'd need to ask the education Minister about that and, as the secretary of the department has indicated, there were questions asked of the education Minister during her estimates.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could just quote that—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's our time, I think.

The CHAIR: We'll come back to you shortly.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I actually have not seen any confirmation of that commitment being made, I have to say, so I'd—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I've got the quote right here, Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm sure the education Minister will be more aware of that than me.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I've got the quote right here. There have been multiple—

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, we're seeing universities take action to address sexual assault on campus. How many vocational providers currently have a taskforce in place to respond to sexual assault on campus?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Vocational? You're right in that the Universities Accord particularly has made it a high priority for universities to take further action on this. One of the positive things out of the accord—and I was in a ministerial council meeting on Friday on this—is that we will also be extending those obligations to accommodation providers, which are a really important part of campuses. From the TAFE perspective, we have a strong sexual assault and harassment policy, and I can ask TAFE to talk some more about that. Some of the discussion with the accord is to what extent some of the accord recommendations should end up applying to the vocational sector. That's not explicitly set out but it's something for future consideration. Perhaps first of all we could talk about the TAFE part of it with Ms Schorer and then maybe very briefly with the department about the rest of the vocational training sector.

JANET SCHORER: You might be aware that in May last year the Public Service Commission directed all government agencies to develop a sexual harassment and sexual assault policy and for that to be implemented by March this year. We utilise the model sexual harassment prevention policy that was provided by the Public Service Commission as a template. We've now released that policy. Ms Tickle might be able to talk about some of the detail and how we're monitoring that, but we have the policy.

The CHAIR: Is that for the department or for—

Mr STEVE WHAN: For TAFE.

JANET SCHORER: For TAFE NSW, yes.

The CHAIR: So it would apply to each TAFE campus as well.

JANET SCHORER: Correct, yes.

The CHAIR: So there's a policy out there. Has there been a taskforce or anything else put in place yet to really address this issue?

JANET SCHORER: I'll direct that to Ms Tickle.

JULIE TICKLE: Thanks, Ms Schorer. We have a policy but we also have a number of guides. The policy covers students and employees at TAFE NSW. There's not a taskforce as such but, of course, we do monitor through our channels the incidents and reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment on TAFE campuses. There are guides that are very consistent with the PSC guidelines around how managers can support employees and teachers can support students if they're experiencing sexual harassment in their personal life or on TAFE campuses. We also have an online module in our staff Moodle coming out later in the year as well.

The CHAIR: Is there currently information readily available for students to know how to make complaints and how to get support? What does that look like on campus? Is there flyers around? What's out there for people to know how to get help?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes. The students, when they join TAFE, have an orientation and that covers where they can get information around a range of policies and procedures, this one included. We also have, for employees, a work health and safety hotline where they can report incidents, staff-related or student-related, to a hotline. We encourage people to do that within half an hour of the incident. We've got a number of ways that people can find out and access the information and guidance.

The CHAIR: Is counselling provided as part of that? How many of the TAFE campuses would have on-campus counselling?

JULIE TICKLE: I would have to take on notice how many campuses have on-site counsellors. However, our counsellor network is available across the State through online channels, so digitally. Also, we offer EAP, employee assistance provision, to all of our employees 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as well as a manager assist, which includes things like this for managers in particular.

The CHAIR: Has there been any consultation between TAFE and Our Watch, who I know have been doing a really good job of providing guidelines and things for this? Has there been any direct communication between Our Watch and TAFE?

JULIE TICKLE: I would have to take that on notice, Ms Boyd. We did have a lot of consultation with the PSC. We also commissioned an external review to our SASH policy to make sure that it met both the guidelines

CORRECTED

that the Public Service Commissioner directed us to do but also the positive duty obligations that we released late last year.

The CHAIR: Is there anything you wanted to add?

CHLOE READ: I was just going to note the changes at the Australian Skills Qualification Authority level to the Standards for Registered Training Organisations. Some early changes have already gone through which relate to what's called the fit and proper persons requirement. That's who is allowed to run a registered training organisation. Some of those are directly relevant to this matter. Then the standards themselves are currently in draft and being consulted on, I think, for revision. They include things like how you support and inform learners and things like managing complaints and appeals. There's some work there in the national space on that too.

The CHAIR: This might be for you as well, Ms Tickle. In relation to the inclusion of people with disability, I understand the targets in the latest annual report in relation to people with disability and those requiring work-related adjustment had not been met. Although they are close, there has been a bit of a decrease since the year before. What are you doing to meet those targets?

JULIE TICKLE: It's interesting. I think we need to understand that there's two ways that we record people with disability. One way is the Workforce Profile report, which includes a percentage of people who complete the diversity and inclusion survey. About 4.7 per cent of people said that they had a disability in that survey. But we also look at it through SAP, and I think that's 2.4. Let me check my note. The reason I bring that up is because, along with a lot of other organisations, we think that there's an under-representation of people reporting that they have a disability. That's because they don't feel safe to do so. One thing that we've done about that that is working really well is, through our diversity and inclusion council, we have a number of staff networks. Each of the executive sponsors one of these networks. Ms Schorer sponsors the ability network, and it has grown in membership extremely well and added some allies in there. That's one way we are trying to make sure that people feel comfortable to disclose disability.

The CHAIR: I'm glad that you record both. I've had this discussion in other estimates as well but, obviously, the numbers of people requiring work-related adjustment is quite an interesting number. We have a lot of people who might identify as people with disability but wouldn't necessarily request a particular work adjustment. But those numbers are still stubbornly not moving. What are we doing to move that number in particular?

JULIE TICKLE: As well as the staff network, which, as I said, is going really well, we also have the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which has a number of targets around accessibility and making sure that employees can access support when and if they need to.

The CHAIR: Just on that, I've seen the 2020-2022 disability inclusion plan for TAFE. Has there been a new one?

JULIE TICKLE: There's a new one in development at the moment. We're currently consulting with, in particular, that disability staff network that I just talked about.

The CHAIR: Why is that delayed?

JULIE TICKLE: We're doing consultation with people with lived experience, which is really important to us. We're taking our time to make sure that we are not just making targets to tick them off, Ms Boyd, but actually making improvements that will make a difference to those people. And may I correct what I just said around the percentage recorded in SAP? At 30 June 2023, it was 2.3 per cent. I believe I said 2.4 per cent.

Mr STEVE WHAN: One of the important changes that we've made since coming to government is that there have always been needs-based loadings for our students with a disability, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the long-term unemployed. In the past, you've only been able to get one. We've now allowed those to be loaded on top of each other. So if you have multiple factors, you can get additional loadings in Smart and Skilled. That has been an important part of trying to make sure that there is more funding available for people who face particular challenges.

The CHAIR: Obviously, the position of rural and remote students puts them at a disadvantage in terms of accessing quality tertiary education. Do you support the idea of establishing what they call country universities in Hay and Deniliquin?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Country universities centres?

The CHAIR: Yes.

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd certainly be hoping that those, amongst others, are able to access some of the Federal funding that is out there. The Federal Government did announce funding for some additional country universities centres. I think they call them country access centres. One of the things I found a little frustrating in their announcement was they said they couldn't be co-located with TAFE, which we think they should be able to be. In any case, we will be advocating for the Federal Government to play a bigger role in ongoing support for country universities centres and for more to be rolled out. In fact, it was a really positive report on them in the accord report, which suggested that they were well worth supporting. I'm very pleased, particularly because the first of those was started by the Cooma community with no government help.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Hear, hear!

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think it ran on its own without any government funding for four years or so. It was a great effort by the local business community.

The CHAIR: I'm going to give away that I'm asking a question on behalf of another member, but do you plan on reinvigorating TAFE campuses in the seat of Murray?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've got some great TAFE campuses in Murray. I visited the Griffith TAFE quite early on, and they're doing some really terrific work there in a range of skills. Griffith, of course, is a really strong manufacturing centre in the region, so there's a lot of important training that's undertaken there. We are looking at doing a number of things that will reinvigorate TAFEs in country areas. I think it's fair to say that for a lot of country communities, once upon a time, TAFE used to be seen as a bit of a heart of town. Under some of the changes that were made under the previous Government, there has been a bit of a loss of confidence and a loss of profile in those communities. So we're very keen and I'm very keen to boost their engagement back up in the community, boost their links with local businesses and ensure that the local TAFEs in country New South Wales are seen as the place where, if you're a business, you go to first to talk about your skills need, to have people who are working with those. I'm confident that we'll be able to do that.

We've also got \$300 million, which is being spent on upgrades, addressing some pretty significant areas of neglect in TAFE campuses across New South Wales. I was a bit shocked to get an email, fairly early on in the piece, from the Albury branch of the Labor Party telling me that students at the Albury TAFE campus were using their own phones for internet access because the wi-fi was so poor. A lot of the wi-fi systems in our TAFE campuses were put in in 2009. They are completely inadequate for today's teaching and learning. We have a program in place to upgrade those and also to fix a number of older TAFE campuses to restore classrooms to working standards. It's basic maintenance work that should have been done, but we're doing a catch-up job on that with a \$300 million capital allocation, which was confirmed after the half-yearly budget review late last year.

The CHAIR: If that capital—that maintenance program—is ongoing, has Gosford been included within that, or is the idea that—

Mr STEVE WHAN: That would be a separate capital bid, essentially.

The CHAIR: Is Gosford being excluded from upgrades in the hope that it then becomes a new facility, or is it still being upgraded?

Mr STEVE WHAN: TAFE could probably elaborate more on whether there's any work being done on maintenance at Gosford particularly, but I'd certainly like to resolve that longer term question before we spend a lot on the existing campus. But TAFE maybe could add to that.

JANET SCHORER: I'd have to take on notice whether we're doing anything particular around minor works at Gosford. I'm happy to provide that; I'd be astonished if we weren't. Some of our minor works programs go to issues like, for example, 30 per cent of our over a thousand learning spaces don't have air conditioning. When we're talking minor works, we're talking things that just make learning and teaching a whole lot easier, and then there are other, larger works programs that go to campus upgrades, dealing with heritage issues and dealing with the age of infrastructure. We can provide that on notice.

The CHAIR: I understand that students enrol in TVET courses for year 11 and, when they want to change, they're not permitted to. What we end up with is a lot of places being vacant. Minister, would you agree that allowing students to change their TVET course or allow a longer time for course enrolment cut-off would benefit both students and the education department?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm happy to talk a bit more about the crossover between high schools and TAFE, which I think has been a bit cumbersome in the past and there have been some disincentives, but the specifics of that question I might ask the secretary to answer.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: TVET, Ms Boyd, is a really important provision in high schools and central schools, as you know, predominantly in years 10, 11 and 12, with the larger numbers in years 11 and 12. We acknowledge that when a young person makes subject selection choices in year 10 and commences in year 11, normally there is a period in our schools—about five weeks, the first five weeks—to make any adjustments to their subjects. That could be maths at the school or a TVET course as well. One of the things, Chair, that you may or may not know that we're proud that we improved—when a student undertook TVET, we used to take some staffing off the school. It almost became a disincentive, because they were enrolled outside the school. We've removed that barrier so we don't take staffing away from the school. That's been really welcome in our schools by way of encouraging students, alongside maybe an academic path, alongside the vocational path as well.

But normally, about that first five weeks of year 11, we provide a cut-off for all their subjects. You don't want to consistently be making changes, and that subject selection process in year 10, in the vast majority of schools, is very thorough. It's not just hand out a form and pick your subjects. Normally you're sitting down with the careers advisor, transition advisor, year advisor—even, in cases, with parents there—to look at your areas of interest and former results and make good, concerted decisions. I'd be worried, as secretary, if we can't nail it down in those first five weeks and we're still chopping and changing, because that preliminary course, as you know, is only for three terms.

CHLOE READ: I was just going to add, for some of the vocational courses, in particular, there'll be a volume-of-learning problem if students change too late to a different course. They won't be able to fit it in, so that may be one of the reasons for the cut-off.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, sorry, to add one other point, the Minister just reminded me of a very good point. From 2025, with a change from NESAA—the NSW Education Standards Authority—our HSC students can count any number of vocational education subjects for their HSC. Previously it was only limited to two, and now it's become unlimited, from 2025. I know that that's a really welcome development across the sectors.

Mr STEVE WHAN: One other bit of good news from this morning was that the Federal Minister announced approval to make it easier for secondary schoolteachers to deliver VET training in TAFEs, because previously they've had to go through the whole qualification process for a TAFE teacher. New South Wales advocacy has meant the Federal Government has now recognised that if you have got a teaching degree you shouldn't have to go through that whole process again. That's going to really smooth out that ability to cross over and do things in both forums, I think.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask about what you just mentioned about the Federal Minister? I haven't seen the release.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. It was this—no, 1 March. That's Friday.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would that also apply to someone who might have a primary teaching degree who might help with, say, literacy and numeracy courses in a TAFE, or is it just for secondary students?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Minister's release says it's people qualified to register as a secondary teacher. Maybe the Department of Education could clarify whether that's what the release has said. I think that's what we were particularly pushing for, those people.

MURAT DIZDAR: My understanding, Ms Mitchell, is it goes directly to secondary high schoolteachers. You will know that is an area of staffing shortage. This removes their formal qualification requirement, for example, for a social science teacher to teach VET retail or a PE teacher—qualified—to teach VET sports. I will get that title wrong.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm aware of at least one example of someone who has their bachelor in primary but is engaged not to teach a trade but to teach that literacy and numeracy component, and they then were told that they needed to go through that full TAFE teacher qualification.

MURAT DIZDAR: You may recall, again, in your time, we do have a growth in primary teachers being employed in secondary schools—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I guess I'm—

MURAT DIZDAR: —to deliver literacy and numeracy.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I understand the point you're making. My understanding of this is that's not included. But we'll come back to you.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you take that on notice, only because it's something that has been raised with me that, to your point, someone has a bachelor degree but it's less enticing to then go and do another qualification when they have already got that skill.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Sure. Exactly.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could take that on notice, that would be useful. To segue into the next part, I want to pick up on something you said earlier, Minister, that a strong focus for you in terms of the trade shortage issues is making sure that you've got skilled teachers there to be able to teach it. I appreciate this announcement will help that, but, by your own admission, that's from the Federal Government. What else are you doing in terms of—

Mr STEVE WHAN: On our advocacy, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My point is, that's a decision that they've made, not you.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Only because they control those national bodies, as you know.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that, but when you say you have a strong focus on getting the teachers there, can you tell me, in your time as Minister, what you have been doing that's new, that's different, to get those teachers, particularly in those areas where we know there are still shortages in terms of trade?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I did mention one before, in the Paid to Learn program, which was running before I became Minister, but that's something which is producing really good results. In fact, I think I saw a figure yesterday of the numbers that we got in the most recent round of that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you want to provide that.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, 68. They actually started yesterday, and out of that 68 we have 10 teachers starting in carpentry, 10 in electrotechnology, seven in plumbing and seven in heavy vehicle, as well as two in Aboriginal health. It's spread across the board, but certainly those skill shortage areas are where the concentration is. They range across the State as well. We've got some teachers going to Broken Hill, some into Wollongbar in the north and, of course, some in Western Sydney, in particular, for carpentry and electro. Paid to Learn is actually—139 scholars have graduated. We've got a 96.5 completion rate of this program. I could talk about this all day. It's very important.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back this afternoon, because we will have plenty of time. When did that program begin? You said you've already had 139 scholars, so how long has it been in operation?

JULIE TICKLE: From memory, we did a pilot late 2022 and then we continued cohorts all through last year. Our most recent cohort started, as I said, yesterday. An estimated—just over 27,000 teaching hours have been added from the teachers so far. It is very successful. We fast-track the teachers through the TAE. The concept of the program is we actually pay them to complete the qualification, which takes away the issue we had with attracting them from highly paid trades like plumbing and construction and those sorts of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, that is a trial and the impetus of that program started before your Government. What else have you been doing that's new, if this is a strong focus for you?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Firstly, can I say that I'm not one of those people who believes that you need to come in and ditch all the previous ideas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would agree with that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: If there are good things there, let's keep doing them and boost them up. That's important that we continue to boost that up. But the other important thing is one of the focuses that we talked about before which is that conversion from casuals to permanent. That is a strong focus for this Government. We have seen that in the teaching space, in high schools and primary schools. It will take us a bit longer, because it's a bit more complicated with TAFE, but that's one way of trying to ensure that we retain teachers and provide an attractive option for them to come into TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What kinds of numbers are you trying to target? You might have said it before. I might have missed it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I didn't give you a specific target. That actually is, currently, the subject of some of our discussions with the Teachers Federation in terms of a target. But we have, as I said before, a very large number of teachers who are on casual—we've got a figure for that—and you can assume that we would be seeking

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to offer a number of those who have been in those positions for some time—and over time, because it is more costly. We will have to do this over a period of time. But our casual teachers at the moment—

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, so, June 2023, FTE we had 2,514 part-time casual teachers, as we call them. But we are, as the Minister has said, steadily decreasing that number by moving more of those people into permanent roles. Actually, quite a lot of our advertised roles, which I talked to you about before, have been taken by current casual teachers, so a lot of our internal employees are getting these new roles. I think, in terms of targets, what I might point out, as a former casual teacher myself for 10 years, it is interesting because you can have four teachers teaching across a full-time load. As you'll appreciate, we're going skills area by skills area determining how many teachers we actually need and then running a streamline recruitment process so it's fair for all four of those teachers, Ms Mitchell, to get the roles in the permanent workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Thank you for that. Minister, you said before in an answer to Ms Mihailuk that you're doing a statewide assessment of TAFE campuses now, the courses that are being delivered and potentially where you need additional courses and maybe where some are superfluous. Can you tell us what that process is? What's involved in that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Essentially, we're trying to match—we're trying to do a regional assessment of skills demands and match that to what we have available in the TAFEs for each area. We'll look at all of our 156 campuses, trying to ensure that we are working out which of those campuses can be utilised to a greater extent. You'd be well aware, I think, that there are a number of campuses that have vacant space, vacant land, so we need to just work through whether there are opportunities for other like-minded groups, organisations, perhaps community training and so on, to actually come in and share—or country universities centres and things like that. Perhaps—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just not the federally funded ones, because they don't want them on TAFE—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I know. We're hoping they'll change their mind on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You've got to deal with that issue.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's a silly rule, I would have thought.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the time frame? I just want to be clear. The assessment is obviously being done internally by TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, and I'll ask Ms Schorer to give you the time frame on that.

JANET SCHORER: We're doing a piece—we're campus master planning, effectively. The master planning sits alongside the Training Portfolio Strategy that I mentioned earlier which tells us where the forecast skills needs are across the State over the next three to five years, because we want to be able to plan for campus utilisation and campus infrastructure that meets those skills needs. Alongside that, it's important for us to think about what's actually happening in our local community because, firstly, we want to be able to be responsive to what the community wants and needs, what their aspiration is for TAFE NSW in their community, and what specific skills demands might be relevant to that local community—is there inland rail, is there a hospital being built, that sort of thing, that we want to factor in? When we're looking at our campuses we're thinking about how do we plan delivery? How do we plan learning and teaching over the next three to five years that will make best use of the infrastructure we've got? Where do we need new investment?

Are we aligned with where that demand will be? And how do we make sure that we're in step with where community need is, as well?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What kind of consultation will you do with local communities as part of that process?

JANET SCHORER: This sits well with the piece of work that we've done most recently and is continuing: TAFE Connect. We put a public survey out through the government channels to ask anyone in the community to tell us what they wanted from TAFE, what we were doing well, what we weren't, how we could change. The next step of that is to go and talk to local communities across the State about how they feel about TAFE, what we could do differently, as well as all of the local intelligence we get from teachers—teachers are well connected into their local industry, their local community—and how we connect that with other sources of information that we have from our customer and stakeholder relations teams, our business development, and bringing that all together so that we're looking at the big picture of where training needs are, skills needs are across the State, but we're also connecting that closely with what community needs from us and how they want us to use the infrastructure well to serve them.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will that consultation happen in every one of those 156 communities where you've got a TAFE campus? I know that's a big ask.

JANET SCHORER: We mightn't go to every—but we're certainly trying to get progressively to every location, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would there be engagement—I appreciate what you're saying in terms of teachers being connected, and I agree with that—also with local council, local business and employees? That's part of the plan?

JANET SCHORER: That is absolutely what it's about because what we've heard is that over time we've lost that connection as TAFE NSW. For what we do in serving communities, particularly serving disadvantaged students, that connection is so critical for us to understand and be part of, and so we really want to invest our time and effort in making that connection again.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I might come back to some of this in a little bit, but I just want to turn back to you, Minister, and the National Skills Agreement that was signed end of last year, I believe. I'm keen for some more detail. Obviously, I know that you've announced your coordination with the Federal Government—more than \$1 billion of additional funding—and your media release talks about investing in TAFE centres of excellence, boosting foundational skills in language, literacy and numeracy and digital literacy, and closing the gap in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Can you tell us in a bit more detail how exactly this will be rolled out and what it will mean in practice for New South Wales?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There is \$3.81 billion over five years. And \$2.8 billion of that is in guaranteed funding, essentially, equivalent to the existing funding arrangement as a baseline, and that's giving us some longer-term certainty over that. Then there's around \$1 billion over the five years in additional funding. So we'll get a component of this at existing base funding levels as long as we meet threshold conditions, which include giving 70 per cent or more of funding to TAFE or via TAFE, continuing support for no- or low-fee access to foundation skills and commitment to a stewardship model. The additional funding, we will be accessing by meeting a number of the target areas, working through some of the target areas in the commitment. That's things like our Closing the Gap outcomes, the literacy and numeracy completions and that sort of thing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's what I asked about, but I want to know—that's part of the agreement to get that additional money from the Federal Government, which I understand. But what I'm interested in is what you are going to be specifically doing in order to meet those targets and agreements so that that money does flow into New South Wales. What's going to be different or new in order to achieve that under the new agreement?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There will be a number of different things. I guess one of the most obvious ones is that we'll be seeking to leverage the commitment on the centres of excellence, to leverage the component the Commonwealth has on centres of excellence. So we'll be looking at specific programs which help us to either match funding with the Commonwealth or leverage back, and I might ask—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What kind of programs? I'm happy if Ms Read can supply.

CHLOE READ: We're working with the Commonwealth and with other States and Territories on the shape and nature of those programs. Across those areas where there's specific priority reform funding, there are different conditions or expectations attached to those fundings. If we took Closing the Gap for example—that one is about \$52 million over five years. But, obviously, there's a really strong intent in the commitment to work with Aboriginal stakeholders. I think there's a roundtable in a couple of weeks' time, actually, to sit down and to talk with Aboriginal peak organisations and Aboriginal providers to understand the types of activities we want to put in place to then access that funding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll use that one as the example. What sort of time frames have you got or targets do you need to meet from the Federal Government to get that money? Is that going to be made public, and how the Government is tracking in terms of meeting that expectation?

CHLOE READ: I'm not sure if they intend to make the specifics around the individual reform areas public in terms of what have they agreed with each State but there's also the development of a performance and outcomes framework under the National Skills Agreement that will be public. That will be backed up by a national skills plan and also, as the Minister mentioned earlier, the New South Wales Skills Plan. That gives effect to the targets, performance measures and outcomes that will be in that framework and how we will report about them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When will that be public? What kind of time frame are you working on?

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CHLOE READ: It's within 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the literacy and numeracy component, what are some of the suggested programs or ways you're going to meet that?

CHLOE READ: We've been discussing with the Commonwealth how we might support that adult and community education sector that we have in New South Wales better. We've taken a range of measures. We're still in discussion with them on the parameters of funding for that but definitely good support for a sector in New South Wales that's really highly performing. Enrolments are up in that sector recently and there's also really high completion rates in New South Wales for adult and community education. So we're really wanting to seek to direct some of those funds to towards both additional delivery but also, potentially, sector development in that space.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it possible to get—and I'm happy if you need to take this on notice—a breakdown of that additional \$1.055 billion for those areas? I think you just mentioned Closing the Gap has got \$52 million? Is there a breakdown of how much potential money can be allocated for those particular areas of agreement?

CHLOE READ: I can give you that now, but it's indicative because across those priority areas it could be—say for Closing the Gap—that States with higher populations of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people might seek some additional funding and States in other areas—there might be some movement in those. About \$750 million, I think, of the \$1 billion extra is in what's called flexible funding. That's really funding that, subject to the conditions the Minister outlined for that kind of base funding, can be accessed depending on if there's a sliding scale based on the State budget and the contribution of the Commonwealth layers on top of that. That's the reform areas.

If we took a population share approach—and, as I said, that might be subject to some movement—the foundation skills would be \$22.8 million across five years. The TAFE support and the training sector—that includes Centres of Excellence, VET Workforce Blueprint and other activities—would be 152.6. Closing the Gap would be a little bit over 52. There's some money for enhanced VET data and evidence, so systems work to improve the timeliness of vocational data and reporting. That is 14½. Then there are some targeted funds on improving completions, particularly for priority groups, and that's just a bit over \$73 million.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, pulling out the \$22.8 million, roughly—and I appreciate there's contingency around that—to boost the foundation skills, does that seem like enough to you? If people don't have those core literacy and numeracy skills to complete their courses or that is part of why the retention rates could have some further improvement, is that enough money?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's in addition to work that's already being done in the sector, obviously. You would have sat there and said, "Commonwealth would always like more money for some of these things." I think the adult and community education sector has certainly been—as Ms Read mentioned—kicking some goals in their results and we're looking forward to working with them more in this space. We've also got a range of other areas where the basic skills are being delivered through TAFE, through existing programs. That's the really substantive part of that delivery. There are others, which come through specific programs for migrants that the Federal Government funds. We've had a bit of argument over where that's being delivered. So there are a number of other buckets, I suppose, where some of that basic skills funding comes out of. I'd still expect it to be a key component of the rest of the TAFE and skills programs that we deliver.

CHLOE READ: I think there's also additional funding and a restructuring of how the Commonwealth delivers their foundation skills. I forget the name of the program. But that's not contingent on New South Wales doing anything or any co-contribution from New South Wales. I'm fairly sure there's an uplift in—

Mr STEVE WHAN: There's some direct contracts.

CHLOE READ: —their contribution in there as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I also just wanted to ask—and you mentioned it before a little bit, Ms Read—in terms of the flexible funding, Minister, your media release talks about priority in terms of delivering skills for critical and emerging industries. You talk about clean energy, net zero, care and support services, advanced manufacturing and a range of others. Is there any detail in relation to how this new agreement will help with delivering in those emerging industries?

Mr STEVE WHAN: In general, yes. There's particularly a focus on renewables and net zero. That's a very strong focus for the Commonwealth's centres of excellence funding. We would be expecting to be able to assist the Commonwealth in delivering that with one of our centres—possibly in the Hunter, but it's yet to be seen. There are a number that are quite strongly tied to particular industries. Ms Read might—

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CHLOE READ: There's a set of priorities that were agreed, I think, by National Cabinet ahead of the skills agreement itself being signed—net zero, as the Minister said, care, digital skills and a few others as well. Across the initiatives, you'll see that—for example, as the Minister said, there's the centres of excellence looking to focus in on those priority skills. The Commonwealth also announced some extra pieces around the edges of the skills agreement. The Fee-Free TAFE program—the course list for that narrows in on those national priority areas while also broadly looking at areas in demand. There's also an additional commitment related to the centres of excellence to do with higher apprenticeships. Again, they're looking for those to be in those areas, particularly net zero transition and those kinds of fields.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There's another industry called out in your press release, Minister. I'm talking about food security. Obviously, that's critical. What should we expect in that space in terms of delivery?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The agricultural side of food security is not a component of our manufacturing centres of excellence, but it is an area that's very important in regional New South Wales, obviously. At this stage, I haven't got any specific things to go with the Commonwealth—

CHLOE READ: We'd need to take that one on notice, I think.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —but it's an area that, obviously, I have a fairly long-term interest in. I would be keen to see.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that. It has been called out in the media release, so it would be good to know—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, it has, because it is a focus that they have—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As it should be. You'll take that on notice and come back with some more specifics around that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Moving on to the Northern Rivers area, acknowledging that it has been just over two years since the flooding up there, can you give me an update in terms of what's happening with the restoration of the TAFE in Lismore?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. I recently visited Wollongbar TAFE and the Lismore campus—the flooded campus—with Janelle Saffin, who is, of course, always giving us a very strong view from the community there, as you'd expect. There's a strong recognition that, even though that's a potentially flood-affected site, it's important to have a TAFE presence in the Lismore community. To date, the work that has been done on the flood-affected site is restoration of the heritage buildings, which has been undertaken with insurance money that came from the Government's self-insurance, as I understand it. That is getting that older facility there to a state where it will be able to be used again. There'll be a number of buildings on that site which will be demolished and which are not practical to use. We are currently considering—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, because of the damage, they're beyond—

Mr STEVE WHAN: The damage, and also whether or not it's sensible to put expensive equipment back in potential flood-zone areas. At the moment the courses are being delivered at Wollongbar and also at Southern Cross University as a temporary consideration. We have been going through a process of trying to plan what's reasonable to be delivered on the Lismore TAFE site, that either can be quickly relocated or doesn't result in the loss of machinery and equipment in a future flood, and then what might need to go to Wollongbar. So there will be some changes in course delivery on the site. We've been discussing those with the TAFE community, users and the local member, obviously. We are currently undertaking the detailed business case for where that might go. I will ask Ms Schorer to elaborate on that.

JANET SCHORER: One of things that you see in visiting that site, myself as well, as the Minister said, is the TAFE campus is located in such a critical part, in the centre of town.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I've been there too, if it helps, so I know what you're talking about.

JANET SCHORER: We do acknowledge that having something of TAFE there is really important but, given the propensity for flooding, as the Minister has said, relocating delivery there, which includes expensive equipment, is something we need to carefully think about. But having general learning spaces there and being able to offer learning that doesn't require that specialist equipment is something we are looking at. We are also building in an Aboriginal cultural centre to acknowledge the connection of the place with the local Aboriginal community and to provide a place for community to meet, given the location. We're still working through exactly what that

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would look like. We are visiting the surrounding campuses as well. Wollongbar is a big campus, but there is a sense—and I don't know if you've spoken to anyone on those campuses up there—that restoring something in Lismore is important for healing. There is still that sense of grief of teachers and learners who've been displaced. Going through the process of having something back in Lismore that has meaning, we're very much aware of. That's something we're closely thinking about.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think I'm clear but just to make sure that I am, what you're looking at is some sort of refurbishment of the existing site to keep a presence there, but you might move some courses to Wollongbar or somewhere else where, if you did have another flooding event, you wouldn't have the same level of damage to equipment and the like.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of courses offered, is it the intention to continue to still offer the same courses that were there pre-flood but, potentially, some moved to Wollongbar TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, and that's how they're operating now. They've moved to those other campuses. Yes, we'd shift in what would be an ongoing offering in Lismore. Acknowledging that Lismore to Wollongbar mightn't seem very far for a Sydneysider, but—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not a Sydneysider. I'm a country girl.

Mr STEVE WHAN: She is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So I know what you mean. For some people, it may be well be the equivalent of a few hours away.

JANET SCHORER: So it's a big deal. There's not a bus that is easily got on—all those sorts of things. We absolutely acknowledge that. We need to think all of that through in the longer term.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the time frame? And I appreciate that these are sensitive communities.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Again, that's something that's in the current budget consideration for 2024-25, so I'd expect that we will have a firm plan in the community and resources to put it all in place this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So post-budget, there might be more information about a time frame and what you'd be looking at doing.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is going back a little bit to what we were speaking about earlier in terms of courses being offered, and I want to particularly focus on regional areas. I know you talked about different programs to help with your staffing, particularly of areas or courses where you've got higher demand, but is there anything happening in terms of regional campuses, particularly in terms of getting more staff on to be able to deliver some of those in-demand courses?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. As you heard before, our intake there of the Paid to Learn included teachers in Broken Hill and some regional campuses. I've had a number of emails from Clayton Barr about waiting lists for courses in the Hunter in important industries there. We're seeking to use the Paid to Learn and other avenues to increase the number of teachers in that area to cope with that and also working with the students on getting them into appropriate courses. I've certainly been hearing that, and TAFE is working to try to overcome some of those shortages in particular areas. We recognise that a very large part of the importance of TAFE often is in regional New South Wales, where we're the only training provider in many areas and take that responsibility very seriously. Ms Schorer, do you want to add to that at all?

JANET SCHORER: What I would acknowledge is that it's most often the case that we can't offer something in a smaller community because the enrolments are very small. Being one of only two learners in a class isn't a great experience for a learner, but it's often, as you're alluding to, because of the teacher availability. We do try to maximise where teachers have capacity to travel and provide block learning in smaller communities. We try to do that. Our construction team in western New South Wales won a Premier's Award last year because of the work that they do in taking construction teaching into some of our most remote communities. But we can't always ask teachers to be on the road for days at a time to deliver in remote communities, and so it's got to be done in partnership with their deep commitment to giving our learners the best experience they can.

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We continue to invest in more teachers and utilise some of the facilities that we have invested in over the recent years—so our connected learning centres and the option that they provide, alongside the mobile training units that can bring specific specialist equipment into a community for a teacher to utilise for a period of time to teach. So we're maximising those the best we can, but acknowledge that we still have more to do to bring on more teachers in those areas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Probably back through you, Minister, but one of the concerns that I sometimes hear, particularly from local business—and I'm in Gunnedah, so north-west—is the challenge that there's a minimum number of students for courses. I appreciate that you need to set a threshold somewhere. But you often have employees who have to send students to Tamworth or to Dubbo, when you might actually have a core number not of one or two but maybe 10, 11 or 12, which is just below the threshold of being able to offer electrical, plumbing or whatever it is. Is that just a case-by-case scenario where a TAFE campus would look at whether it is better in that instance to bring a teacher from Tamworth to Gunnedah—which I wouldn't say is a remote area—rather than sending car loads of students from Gunnedah to Tamworth? That is one local example that literally was raised with me last week. How do you manage that in terms of a policy or a process?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Just as a general point and then maybe more specific, one of the things which we've had some discussions about is whether as part of our ongoing planning we could look at areas where we don't have enough to deliver a course every year but perhaps we could guarantee that we'd deliver it every second year, or something like that, just to give some certainty for people about when courses might be delivered, rather than saying, "Look, we don't have enough, sorry; this one won't be on in your location"—trying to give a bit more predictability. That's one of the issues we've discussed. We haven't got any final decisions on that yet, but perhaps Ms Schorer could talk about how we're dealing with those things at the moment and trying to plan for those.

JANET SCHORER: As always, if there's a specific concern, I'm very happy to look into that. In general terms, we'd look at an enrolment number. As you'd appreciate, when courses don't meet a viability test, we do redirect enrolments or look at alternatives for those learners. We would prefer to be able to run even on small numbers but, in our current funding and budget environments, that's often not possible. But in circumstances like that, I'm happy to look at what the alternative might be.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Back through you, Minister, when you're looking at the broader issue of trade apprenticeships—plumbing, electrical and those sorts of areas where there's a high demand—some of the concern that I hear from regional businesses is that it's too hard to put somebody on because you've got to have them go hours away to travel. If you're a 16-year-old who hasn't got a licence, even something like Gunnedah to Tamworth is impossible. There's no public transport.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm hearing those, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate these aren't new issues. But particularly given the housing issues, the skills crisis and the shortages that we're seeing, is there anything for regional communities, specifically, that you might look at to help address some of these concerns?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I certainly acknowledge those issues, and you're right that they have been around for a while. I hear from employers and individuals about difficulties in getting time away and travelling away, and accommodation costs for block release. We are hearing about those. We will certainly look at avenues that we can use to better utilise those connected learning centres and mobile training units to deliver courses closer to home. But obviously there'll be some where they have to go to specialised facilities. Hopefully, out of our master planning process that we're doing there, we might be able to at least make sure we're matching as best as possible to the demands in particular areas. One of our key measures that we're undertaking to try and address some of those issues is to try and match the demand and supply. I would expect that, out of the VET review, we will also have some recommendations about looking at defining TAFE's purpose, for example, defining what our community service obligations are in a more explicit way, and some of that might be about remote and rural as well. Perhaps that's the future, I guess.

JANET SCHORER: The only other thing I'd add is that, in any course—for example, in a plumbing course—not everything needs to be done in a specialised training facility. There's a lot of the learning that can be done that is theory-based or that is learning WHS or learning other skills. What we're trying to do is to free those up from classroom-based to location-based—those sorts of things that free up teacher time but also give learners greater flexibility about where they do their more specialised training, partnering with local businesses to do learning in community, those sorts of things to really give a better experience for the learner. That's ultimately what we're about.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I might come back to some of this this afternoon. Moving to a slightly different issue, Minister, in terms of TAFE assets—and I think you said earlier that there are obviously

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a lot of campuses that maybe aren't being fully utilised—are there any plans, sales, leaseings or other disposals planned for this financial year for your campuses?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. You'd be aware from previously that we had a transfer of land from the old Bega TAFE campus to another government agency to develop for housing. We participated in the Government's overall asset audit of land for housing. TAFE participated in that. There's been one transfer of land in the Illawarra to the police, which was an unused TAFE campus, but we don't have plans for anything else—

JANET SCHORER: No, nothing else.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —at this stage unless something comes out of that audit for the housing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You provided, through that audit, the campuses that you have that are underutilised, or your whole portfolio? What did you need to provide?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll just ask the department to clarify exactly what that was.

MURAT DIZDAR: It was right across government. It was anything underutilised and anything vacant.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How do you determine underutilised? What's your threshold for that?

MURAT DIZDAR: It varies across different class assets, is what I understood.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Particularly for TAFE, I'm curious.

MURAT DIZDAR: I would have to take it on notice, because I do know the school side, where I was requested. Unless Ms Schorer's got it, we might take it on notice for what that meant for TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

JANET SCHORER: We can provide it on notice, but, certainly in the time since we appeared before the Committee last, we haven't had any further ask and haven't provided any further information to that audit.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the forward years—and, again, I appreciate there might be something that comes out of this audit, but I guess I'm looking for any other planned sales, disposal of those assets in the forward years. Are there any that you're aware of, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Nothing planned.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We'll see what the future years bring. In terms of expansions at existing TAFE campuses, which are undergoing capital works at the moment? What are the focus areas?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask TAFE to go through the current—there are some projects which are continuing, obviously, which TAFE might be able to run through. I've mentioned a couple already today that we're considering in the budget context.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Gosford being one, I think, that the Chair is probably interested in.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In Gosford and also, obviously, whatever works we do associated with the centres of excellence. Perhaps TAFE could be more specific about it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

JANET SCHORER: I am very happy to provide some more of the detail of the particular projects. The projects that are underway at the moment in terms of our overall asset renewal program—we've got an optimisation of Coffs Harbour campus at \$18.6 million. That's focused on a new building for our creative industries and career pathways, including the adult migrant English program. It refurbishes some of the business studies section and consolidates a number of staff areas into something more simple. That will be completed—it is estimated to be completed by the middle of next year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know when that work began?

JANET SCHORER: I couldn't tell you when it began. We can add that in for notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That'd be great.

JANET SCHORER: We've just closed tenders for that. We've got the work that's going on at Kingscliff campus. That's \$45 million, and that will provide an extensive refurbishment of the campus, a new multipurpose building for horticulture, aviation and warehousing, a new classroom building for creative industries, animal studies and electrotechnology, and then we'll refurbish the health, community services and student services and learning support across that site, as well as improving some of the accessibility and disability pick-up and drop-off

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points. If you've been to Kingscliff, it's quite a complex site and it's important for us to refurbish that in line with the hospital that's been developed in partnership across the road.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And delivered.

JANET SCHORER: That's expected to be done mid next year as well. There is the Northern Rivers education, training and research hub. There is a bit of detail here. I'm happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On notice is fine, yes, thanks.

JANET SCHORER: We're doing some upgrades to Ryde campus—\$4.9 million, that's in building A, mostly around upgrades to fire requirements, to make that more compliant. We're doing an upgrade of Wyong animal studies, at \$6 million. That will be finished later this year. Then we've got upgrades to our connected learning centres, which is the final stage of the \$57 million for the connected learning centres. We've just, as you might know, opened the Institute of Applied Technology and the multi-trades hub in Kingswood, so that's been a significant project as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, can you tell us how many new courses you've approved or endorsed since becoming the Minister? My understanding is that that falls under your remit.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are a couple of different ways—there are a number of short courses that have come in since I became the Minister, which I'd probably have to hand over for details. We've certainly announced a number.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want to know how many have been approved and started.

JANET SCHORER: I'd have to take on notice how many have been approved.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, because there are a number that are coming out of those IATs that we talked about and there are also a number that are coming out of the development of, for instance, e-vehicle short course type things and things like that. So there are a number of short courses, particularly. Those nationally accredited courses take a significant amount of time to get accredited, so I wouldn't expect that many of them would have got through any stages, particularly while I've been the Minister. That's one reason we want to speed that up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate you weren't the Minister initially, but since March 2023, how many new—I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll take that on notice, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also potentially provide on notice what those courses are and if they're available in regional New South Wales, and the delivery?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Sure. A lot of those shorter ones are actually online.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. That would be great. In terms of the asset maintenance and renewal program that you talked about before, I think you said there was a \$300 million commitment. Is that correct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Over this financial year or over the forwards as well?

Mr STEVE WHAN: This financial year, I believe, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You mentioned upgrading wi-fi at campuses. Is that statewide?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's at those campuses that require it.

JANET SCHORER: Progressively, yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Progressively, I'm not sure that we'll complete it all this year, in the wi-fi space—TAFE can elaborate on that—because there are a number of other pressing problems in some of our TAFE campuses with maintenance issues. Can you elaborate on that?

JANET SCHORER: Yes. Specifically, the digital access foundations project is \$37 million. What we've done is focused where we've identified that there is digital disadvantage, so focusing on 28 particular locations—I'm happy to provide those on notice—but acknowledging where there is a particular gap in digital access for those communities and wanting to make TAFE much more accessible for those particular learners. I'm very happy to provide that on notice.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any detail, in terms of those upgrades, around what kind of speed, capacity, delivery of IT you'll get for that \$37 million investment?

JANET SCHORER: Ms Rankin's our chief information officer. This is her—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Please.

FIONA RANKIN: They all differ, so we've identified the 28 as particularly disadvantaged regional areas, but we can provide the details around the current speed and the current state of those particular campuses.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And what you would hope to get up to with the—

FIONA RANKIN: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you very much. And then also in relation to the air conditioning—I think that was another area that maybe you mentioned, Ms Schorer—again, how much of that \$300 million is going to air conditioning upgrades, which campuses and any information on that?

JANET SCHORER: We can provide detail absolutely on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Can you provide a breakdown of the \$300 million and what it's going to across the total maintenance spend?

JANET SCHORER: Yes. We can do that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I think you just said there's a number of other issues that you're looking at as well. What other areas, outside of wi-fi and aircon, are you looking at through that asset maintenance program?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Things like walls that are falling down, roofs, ceilings that are mouldy and floors and those sort of things—a lot of really just basic maintenance issues. There is within that some slightly larger capital projects as well, but not of the scale of hundreds of millions in their own right, of course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy if you can provide on notice maybe what some of those other capital—more minor capital works, presumably.

JANET SCHORER: Yes. We can do that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That'd be great.

The CHAIR: Just before you continue, just to note the broadcast has gone down. We can keep continuing. But if you were going to say anything spicy, then—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: People won't be able to hear. The thousands of people watching will be very disappointed that they can't hear my questions about air conditioning and wi-fi. Thank you, Chair. I wanted to ask about the work that you do—again it comes back to what we've already discussed. In terms of the offerings of your courses, planning your training programs to be in demand with, say, what the top 20 occupations are nationally—areas like health care, digital technology, construction, engineering and traditional trades—how do you align those programs with those emerging industries and the demand that will no doubt be there from students and workforce?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Federal Government has created a number of new national bodies and skills boards, which are actually focusing on some of this. We are trying to align more closely with that at the State level. We've got 629 qualifications on the NSW Skills List at the moment. We review them annually. We do that on the basis of the work that comes out of the peak bodies that I've mentioned before. There's been a bit of a change in the balance between what ITABs do and where the Federal bodies now come in, because we do want to try and engage with a nationally focused approach on some of these areas. But I might ask Mr Collins to elaborate on that.

DAVID COLLINS: We have a process where we review and update the qualifications that we've got on our list for funding under Smart and Skilled. That takes into account our data in terms of demand but also our data in terms of shifts in the labour market. There's a regular process whereby, if there are new areas that require addition, we will consider that and make a recommendation to the Minister around it. Coming back to your question about whether any courses have been approved, the last time we did that was in November. There were 12 qualifications that were added to the list at that time, which were qualifications that had been proposed to us by industry or that we, through our analysis, determined were appropriate to be funded under the program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And that analysis is roughly every 12 months, is that what you said?

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DAVID COLLINS: Every 12 months. However, if there's a compelling case that's made to us, there's the opportunity to do that between times. But it's largely on a 12-month process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As part of that process, do you also evaluate the effectiveness of the current courses being delivered as well? Or is that separate?

DAVID COLLINS: We do. In terms of effectiveness, we certainly look at demand for qualifications and whether qualifications that are on the list are being utilised. We do look at student outcomes as well. That student outcome analysis tends to focus more, probably, on the provider performance and the provider use of those qualifications.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would that then determine whether particular courses continue, whether particular providers are able to continue offering those courses? Is that part of that process as well?

DAVID COLLINS: It's always very difficult to take something off the list, but there is the capacity for us. If qualifications are not being utilised or if there is a determination that they're not adding value in terms of the labour market, there is the capacity to take them off.

The CHAIR: It is now 12.45 p.m., which means that it is time for Government questions, if there are any.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I think we're totally satisfied with the answers we've received.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I very much appreciate that. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Excellent. That is too easy. Even though we're not broadcasting, I will say this bit. We are finished with your questioning for this morning, Minister. We will return at 2.00 p.m. with everybody else. Thank you.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We will recommence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could pick up with the issue from this morning relating to the Bankstown TAFE—I'm conscious that we've got a little bit more time this afternoon on that. There was some discussion about the relocation and I was wondering whether there might have been a little bit more to learn in terms of what might be the plans for the relocation—the timing, where to, communication and that kind of stuff.

JANET SCHORER: We communicated with our staff and with local stakeholders in the middle of December—I think about 11 December was the announcement—to let them know of the Government's decision and intention. We haven't got anything more formal and detailed than that as yet. As the Minister said earlier, the overall program of work is still being outlined by Health Infrastructure. We're a part of those discussions. We expect that what we'll be given access to is the ability to procure a site in that Bankstown CBD area for our learners in the interim. I don't expect that we'd be in a position to look at that until next year. The other thing to highlight is that any plans to change and to move away from that site in the interim hasn't changed what we're delivering in that location. We're not stopping things and we're not changing what we deliver. It's business as usual at Bankstown and then when we come to the transition point, it will be an interim facility for some years before we move into a new building.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of some of what are considered to be or listed as state-of-the-art facilities at Bankstown TAFE campus today, those would be part of the relocation?

JANET SCHORER: Yes. We'd want to move, where we could, the existing teaching equipment. That is necessary. Lots of what we deliver at Bankstown campus is classroom-based. There's no trades there, that sort of thing, so we're not needing to move large equipment and infrastructure. It's a relatively modest ask in terms of move but we acknowledge that that's still a significant impact for learners and our staff.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: People speak very highly about the hairdressing facilities and the speciality. I guess they're just concerned—

JANET SCHORER: That's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Beauty therapy, I've been told—apparently.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Beauty therapy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Definitely need more beauty therapists.

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JANET SCHORER: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just in terms of continuation of that service and delivery, we're expecting relocation would cater for—

JANET SCHORER: Accommodate that, yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the relocation costs, what do we know on that?

JANET SCHORER: I couldn't give you a quantum of those at this stage. Until we know what we're moving into and the time frame for that—obviously what we try to do is do any relocation out of our teaching period so that it has minimal impact for learners. But we haven't got a schedule or a cost impact for that as yet.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I guess there's concern that the committed \$1.3 billion for the new hospital won't be also covering the relocation costs that are still unknown.

JANET SCHORER: So our expectation, as we work through this with our colleagues at Health Infrastructure, is that we're able to access funds from the program overall to cover the cost of relocation, and the costs of the project, whatever that might be scoped to, includes the capacity to rebuild the facility that we need for TAFE NSW.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So possibly assuming that that \$1.3 billion is specific to the new hospital as opposed to the transition relocation?

JANET SCHORER: I'm assuming that whatever costs are needed to relocate us out of the TAFE facility at Bankstown is covered in the cost of what is being built. The question of how a new TAFE is being costed and built, that's a secondary question for Health Infrastructure to answer. I haven't seen their detailed budget proposal. If we're being displaced to make room for what will be an excellent new campus for us, then that should be covered as part of the cost of the build.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that will be led by Health. Is that what you're saying in terms of the redevelopment of the site?

JANET SCHORER: Health has got the lead in terms of the overall development program. But we're absolutely part of the conversation with them to understand what their time frame is and what they need of us. Obviously, we've got to prepare to move our learning and teaching away from there. There are other staff who work there. Our non-teaching staff work across the State. There's an impact that we have to manage in that location, so we're working with them to understand their time frame and when we have to put those preparations in place. As we outlined this morning, Health absolutely has a role in communicating with the local community, but we have a part to play in that as well. We've done that, and we'll continue to do that once we know more about what's happening for the campus.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just on that community consultation, what has taken place and when? Is there a consultation framework that is followed in events like this?

JANET SCHORER: Part of it will be that we will work with Health. They have got the lead on the project overall. At the time of the announcement last year, we spoke to the local council. We spoke to our local youth organisations that have a close relationship with the TAFE, to settlement services and to a range of community organisations to let them know of the Government's decision and to assure them, as I'm seeking to assure you, that it's business as usual until we know what's happening in further locations.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the timing of the communication, given the New South Wales Government made the announcement of the relocation site on something like 18 December—

JANET SCHORER: Somewhere around there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I have got it here. I'm just wondering what was the timing of that community consultation that you touched on in terms of the local council and the local youth?

JANET SCHORER: Perhaps I can give you that detail on notice. My executive director for that region had those conversations with his local staff because they have the relationships. I'm very happy to give you that. But I know that communication happened.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Parents are concerned about the disruption to current students and to future students.

JANET SCHORER: Quite understandably.

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is this going to be a five-year gap in learning and training for the south-west after such a tremendous record of TAFE services?

JANET SCHORER: I completely understand their concerns in relation to that. Our job is to, for the current students, make sure that they have as minimal disruption as possible for their learning. We do works across campuses all the time, as we outlined this morning, so this happens all the time. Our job is to make sure that learners understand what other options there are for them and communicate with them about, if it's not possible to learn in the place where they have, what the options are for them, and provide things like assistance with transport and a range of other supports that help people come to their learning experience well prepared.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The position of Bankstown, where it is today, is the accessibility of the transport.

JANET SCHORER: Indeed.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: For students that don't have cars, it's, "Will I be able to continue?"

JANET SCHORER: That's right. That's what we're trying to maintain.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the temporary relocation to other facilities, is there any idea of what that will cost for the period of time? Has there been any work done on that?

JANET SCHORER: Not that I'm aware of, no.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take it on notice. I appreciate that you're acting here today. My understanding is that there was some previous work done for the former Government around the potential cost of the temporary relocation, and there were some figures provided. If that's able to be provided on notice, any work that has been done, that would be useful.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, of course.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could pick up on a similar point, I also understand that work was done for the previous Government in terms of some of the infrastructure costs relating to the identified site. It was looking at what the increase in traffic would be and what would be required on the roads. Some people are speculating that it was several hundred million. Was there research or consideration done to that, previously, that might be made available?

JANET SCHORER: I'll provide what I can, acknowledging that I'm TAFE NSW and some of that information won't be available to me. In terms of road and the broader assessment of the project impact, that would sit with—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think it was managed by your CEO at that point, so I think it would be very familiar to him. Just with the absence of information, we're saying, "What do we know?" Because there doesn't seem to be much on the table today.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I add one thing as well, Ms Merton? Earlier this morning I think the school was quoted as 450 students. I think that was said. I can tell the Committee the school is 617 students. It's Bankstown Senior College, which was floated previously as a possible site. That's a very important provision that continues to grow. It is one of the State's provisions that has an intensive English centre, and I can tell the Committee it's 617 students today and growing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That figure was from the last estimates. I think that came from yourself, Mr Secretary—the 470.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, that's why—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That's fine. The question was has there been a change to that, and we're now saying there has.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. It would be good to update that figure.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think we touched earlier and your colleague—my eyes are very bad. We were talking about completion rates and there was more to learn and understand about what the TAFE structure and offering is. I think we were talking about this when I was making reference to—and I think the Minister cited earlier today—the announcement from the GTO or something about their completion of near 70 per cent. I was wondering if we could learn a little bit more about where TAFE is and what our completion rates are looking like.

JANET SCHORER: Yes. Dr McNeill.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We cut you off this morning, but we want to hear from you now.

MARGOT McNEILL: I'm always very happy to talk about completions. If I start with positioning us, there's the completions. I was talking before about the limitations of the type of reporting that only looks at less than a quarter of our actual scope of courses. We talk in TAFE NSW about student success. Ms Schorer mentioned that some of our learners, with the way our processes work, enrol in full courses even if, in some cases, they only want to undertake a specific unit.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sorry, just to confirm, you said "four" as in the number four? Four courses?

MARGOT McNEILL: No, full—complete courses. The data in reporting talks about students who have completed a full nationally recognised qualification, which is not our whole scope. The other part of the reporting is that it's around learners who complete in a specified time frame, which is four years. That's what the NCVER data reports on. We have so many learners in TAFE NSW who come to us from disadvantaged backgrounds. I mentioned earlier about remote and regional learners, for example, or students with disability. Learners might be mature age and have carer responsibilities and quite often work full-time as well. That almost guarantees that lots of those learners will not complete the course within the four years.

When we're talking about completions, at the moment, the latest data that came out in about August last year was from learners who commenced in 2018 and finished at the end of 2022. Many of those learners who started then are still completing the course. So that all influences how TAFE NSW completions might not be counting all of those additional learners who either take longer to complete the course or who, in some cases, don't really intend to complete the full nationally recognised qualification. They may just want to start and have a couple of units to begin working.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Digging into that a little deeper—two parts. I think you mentioned before—I apologise for my ignorance—someone, for instance, might enrol in a particular course; they might need their white card. Is there not a mechanism for TAFE to offer just that so that—not so your data looks better but—as a layperson, you would look and say, as I think my colleague said before, one in two don't make it. The justification that you're giving now in terms of time frames or specific qualifications does make sense. But is there a way to make that clearer, or a better comparison of data, so that we don't need a budget estimates to talk about that? Is there anything that you can do in that space?

MARGOT McNEILL: Certainly what we know from our own internal data—for example, we can ask learners questions about what their intentions are through our internal customer voice surveys. From our own data—again, looking at the 2022 completers because that's the most complete comparison, if you like—we know that 75 per cent completed the units that they intended. But that's not captured in this national dataset, if you like; that's only our internal data showing us that. That means they knew from the beginning that they wanted to enrol in individual units rather than the whole of the long course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you want to add something, Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: Yes, I was just going to back that in and say a group of States and Territories did some work last year on completions and worked with NCVER on data analysis. One of the things that came out of that work is they found students who had completed all the units that they needed to to get a certain qualification, but had never actually got the qualification. I do think there's some work, beyond just for TAFE NSW, for the system and for the way that we report on and capture that sort of data because, obviously, those people basically completed a course; they just never got the qual. There are some things to do on that. Our student satisfaction, which is sort of broader than just TAFE, says the same thing: You get a lot of students at the 90 per cent satisfaction level for Smart and Skilled or for JobTrainer, saying they've achieved the outcome that they wanted.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm far from an expert on this but, if you know that people are starting with the intention of only completing a part of the course, is there a way to then rectify or change what you're offering so that you're offering what they want and not making them enrol in a whole course they have no intention of completing?

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's right. This is where you've seen some of the emergence of micro-credentials and microskills that give people the opportunity to learn but in a more truncated way, and decide, "Yes, I might go on and do a cert III or cert IV or do more learning", or "I've got exactly what I need and I don't need to sign up for three years." The emergence of that sort of learning is absolutely filling that gap.

CHLOE READ: We might find that fee-free offerings are often at the qualification level and so we're kind of, to some degree, incentivising people to enrol in that way.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To do the whole course, yes.

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CHLOE READ: And then, of course, they're getting what they need and moving on, which to some degree is a good outcome, at least. But we're not necessarily as flexible, perhaps, as we could be in the way that we're able to structure those offerings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the data probably does you a disservice by what you're saying, in terms of what people get out of it versus those raw numbers, particularly when you look at that comparison.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: This is showing my limited background on this but, in terms of the group training organisations and TAFE, what is the interaction? How does that work?

CHLOE READ: Yes, I was going to fill in the gap there. I'm not sure about the data that you were referring to before. You said GTO or RTO. The registered training organisation is the training provider, like TAFE or an RTO. A group training organisation is actually an employer. For their completion rates for students who are employed with them, to be high is good, but some of those students may well be TAFE students.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: And then those that are within a group training organisation that aren't TAFE students possibly have a training placement in the private sector.

CHLOE READ: Yes.

DAVID COLLINS: I'll just chime in. Group training organisations employ apprentices and trainees. The way they operate is they employ them and then arrange for them to be hosted out with other employers. There may be a building company that employs a group of apprentices, but they're actually employed through a group training organisation. The group training organisation manages and provides a bit of mentoring and support for those apprentices. They also manage a relationship with the training provider. The group training organisations are probably saying they're getting better outcomes because there is that additional level of support there for their employees, which filters into whatever training provider they're with, as well as to their employment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I agree. That's very much consistent with some other feedback we've had about parents of TAFE students that are in a small business environment and feeling that there's a few gaps there in terms of the small business provider meeting the ongoing training and learning relevant to that apprentice. I can appreciate that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wanted to quickly go back to the issues around asset renewal. I think you'll have to take this on notice. The Minister talked about \$300 million, I think, in this financial year. Would you be able to provide any data around the previous two financial years, how much was allocated and also how much was spent of those budget allocations? If you've got it now, great; if not, on notice is fine.

JANET SCHORER: On notice is probably safer in terms of accuracy, so let's do that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I figured that might be the case, but that would be fantastic. Going to the new IAT that opened I think it was last month, now, is there a final cost in terms of the building for that centre?

JANET SCHORER: Yes, there is. It opened last month. The construction of the IAT and the multi-trades hub—the vast majority of this space is the multi-trades hub—\$80.4 million.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data on how many staff you've got there as well?

JANET SCHORER: We can provide that on notice. The staff for the IAT are shared across the two: Meadowbank and Kingswood. Some of that will be primarily at Kingswood, but there are some—it's a staff group operationally across both sites.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide that on notice and, if possible, a breakdown of whether they're full-time, part-time or casual, that would be fantastic. The capex in general for the centres of excellence, what funding envelope have you got for the three?

JANET SCHORER: The funding for the centres of excellence is still being considered by government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think pre-election the costing was \$42.7 million, but is that the envelope that you're working with or is that still to be determined?

JANET SCHORER: That's to be determined, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Likewise, with staffing, I'm assuming that's still a process that you need to work through.

JANET SCHORER: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. Just one more clarification around the 1,000 apprentices that, I think, Mr Collins was talking about earlier, and I think it was 250 that will start this year: Are you able to

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provide on notice where they will be based? I understand they will be across a range of government agencies, but—regional locations or communities, as best you can, any information or data on that would be good. If you've got anything now, you can provide it, but it might be a bit early.

DAVID COLLINS: What I can tell you now is that, across the 1,000, we're proposing 250 this year, 400 next year and 350 the year after that. We were originally proposing 200 this year but, because of the level of enthusiasm, we've bumped that up a bit. We are anticipating that there will be roughly a fifty-fifty split between metropolitan and regional. I can take on notice, once we get that first cohort in place, where they are—we can provide an indication of which agencies and the like. We may not have regional or metropolitan locations to report in a timely way, but certainly we will be, over time, reporting that kind of make-up.

Also, within the 1,000 that we're targeting, we are targeting some particular groups. We are looking for take-up by mature age women and women returning to work, by Aboriginal people and by people with a disability. There's a focus on people who are not in employment, education and training, long-term unemployed people. There will be a focus on refugees and asylum seekers and also a proportion that will be school-based apprentices and trainees. In taking information on notice, we can also take on notice the proportions of all the targets that we will be pursuing through that as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Is it possible to also get, particularly for the 250 this year, but if it's easier for the 1,000, that's fine, a breakdown of what trades and apprenticeships will actually be in—obviously different agencies will have different demands based on what they're doing, but even just some more information about what are the key areas that most of these qualifications will be in, if that's something you can provide?

DAVID COLLINS: Yes, certainly. What we will be able to provide to you immediately is what the agencies have told us they want. With our expression of interest, we've gone out with a list of qualifications, not specifically a list of agencies. In terms of recruitment, some agencies are recruiting directly; others have asked us to work with them and to coordinate that. So we're coordinating for a proportion of the places. We've advertised a list of apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications, so we'll be able to provide you that as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just pick up the issue of fee-free places, how many fee-free student places will TAFE have over the 2023-24 period? You might have mentioned this earlier today and I missed it.

JANET SCHORER: For 2023 we had 115,700 fee-free places. But that's our enrolment uptake; that isn't necessarily how many places we were allocated.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So that represents enrolments in fee-free places?

JANET SCHORER: Yes. For semester one of this year, 12,600, but we don't have the numbers yet from Training Services for semester two and beyond.

CHLOE READ: I might just check, are you specifically asking about the Commonwealth-funded Fee-Free TAFE agreement or are you talking about overall fee-free places?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I guess I was just asking about places within NSW TAFE.

CHLOE READ: Overall?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes.

CHLOE READ: That's somewhat difficult to predict because there is the Commonwealth allocation of fee-free places, there is also an entitlement for students to study under Smart and Skilled, so TAFE will have a number of places under Smart and Skilled that some learners will be able to study fee-free, and then also apprenticeships and traineeships, where they're offered by TAFE, are fee-free and they're not capped, so there isn't really a number of places—

JANET SCHORER: The variation in number that you heard there is because of exactly what Ms Read is saying: if there is, as we experienced last year, an extraordinary interest in enrolling across the board in those fee-free offerings. We expect that that will continue this year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But what we do know, just from enrolments this year, is 12,600?

JANET SCHORER: That's the initial uptake, but it's still early days and early days in terms of reporting in particular. We've got a long way to go.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Would there be some budget provision or planning for this going forward?

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JANET SCHORER: Yes. We have a regular conversation with Training Services about where we're sitting across those elements and, obviously, when there are no fee-free places left in a particular course, then we are no longer able to offer fee-free training, so we change the status of those. But ultimately, the vast majority of what we're providing at the moment is within those programs.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Do we intend to expand the offering of fee-free places in light of the current skills environment?

JANET SCHORER: That would be a question for Training Services.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I guess you're testing demand?

CHLOE READ: The program that I mentioned that's part of the Commonwealth funding arrangements has a forward view. Across 2024-26, they're looking for 147,400 places. As I said, Smart and Skilled continues to offer fee-free allocations, dependent on particular learners. For example, if you're unemployed or if you have a disability then you may not pay fees. Then, apprenticeships and traineeships are uncapped, so where there is demand for someone to undertake an apprenticeship they don't pay a fee at all at the moment in New South Wales.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Could you just elaborate on that? "Uncapped" meaning they don't pay for an apprenticeship?

CHLOE READ: That's right.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is it age-based testing? Or is it means testing? Or it's just an—

DAVID COLLINS: No. So—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There's no fee for an apprenticeship.

CHLOE READ: For an apprenticeship or a traineeship.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Within the NSW TAFE.

CHLOE READ: Within New South Wales.

DAVID COLLINS: Within the New South Wales subsidised training system.

CHLOE READ: That's because they're such in-demand, valuable—that's construction and electrotech and plumbing and then, on traineeship sides, things like early childhood.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are there any specific insights that are relevant to these offerings in regional and rural areas?

DAVID COLLINS: In relation to students in regional and rural areas, the fee-free allocation applies. We do have a loading for training providers in rural and regional areas. In regional areas—by "regional" we're talking places like Taree or Lithgow, Bathurst and the like—and remote areas, which might be Broken Hill, Tenterfield, areas that are more distant, there are loadings of either 10 per cent or 15 per cent on the subsidy that goes to TAFE or the other providers, additional funding to support their learning.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: And that additional funding goes to the TAFE provider.

DAVID COLLINS: Yes. It goes to the TAFE or the other provider who might be doing the training. Also, where regional or remote learners have to travel to access their training, for apprentices and trainees, there's travel assistance. There's a contribution towards the cost of travel and a contribution towards the cost of accommodation if they have to stay overnight.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just have a look at the national training packages, I understand that the breadth of TAFE NSW's course offering saw 178 courses suspended, and there were updates that were required to 1,545 units. I'm just wondering whether there might be an update on this base in terms of national training packages and TAFE NSW.

JANET SCHORER: Yes. Dr McNeill will be able to speak in terms of the transitioning training packages and the work we've done so far on that.

MARGOT McNEILL: I can explain to the Committee about the nationally recognised training package qualifications. I mentioned earlier around the completions data. Because we're a vocational ed provider, most of those nationally recognised training qualifications we offer are dictated by the training packages. And so what we had—you're talking about the unprecedented demand we had a couple of years ago. The whole of the product development is what we call that curriculum space in TAFE NSW. We were established several years ago—let's call it six or seven years ago—under the assumption that there would be about 30 or so courses affected by changes

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in training packages. And the peak of those changes happened in 2022, when we had 277 courses that needed to be adjusted because of those transitioning qualifications.

I'm happy to report that that number has been reducing because there aren't as many of those national changes that we have to adapt to. And last year, 2023, we had 179, and this year, on our pipeline, we have about 65 or so of the courses so far—that's a calendar year—that we're adjusting because of changes to those training packages. If you can imagine, when new technologies come the groups who do those adjustments, called the Jobs and Skills Councils, are the ones that liaise with industries to ensure that changes that are happening, driven by industries, are reflected in the qualifications, and then we need to adjust our qualifications—how they're delivered—to reflect those changes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just further, were all courses that required updates or adjustments for the start of term 1, 2024, finalised?

MARGOT McNEILL: Yes, they were. We have what's called progressive release. If you can imagine, there's a three-year program. We don't necessarily need to use all of our resources to make sure, for example, electives have all of the slides and all of the learning materials developed right from the outset. The assessment materials are critical; the learners need to know what that long-term plan looks like. But we have a progressive release, where all of the units that were required for delivery to start—and if we loop this back to our completions discussion, we know that the biggest completions risk is always the early units learners undertake. If they're going to be feeling like they can't cope with the course, it's usually at the beginning of that learning journey, so we invest more in those early units—therefore, that progressive release that I mentioned.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the TAFE NSW annual report for 2022-23, there was a reference in there to the New South Wales Government delivering digital skills to futureproof the hospitality industry then it went on to detail how apprentices and students studying certificate III in baking and commercial cookery at TAFE NSW Wollongong will complete technology units and a pilot program will see first-year students complete a statement of attainment in personal digital technology. It sounds very exciting. What is the projected cost of this pilot program?

JANET SCHORER: That's a great program.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I should do it.

JANET SCHORER: I'm happy to provide that on notice, if that's okay. That's really just part of the ongoing adaptation of our teaching.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Of digital offering.

JANET SCHORER: Yes. Every industry, whether it's cooking or hair and beauty or plumbing, is moving much more towards digital technology being part of work and so we adapt how we teach to accommodate that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could also get what the length of the pilot program might be, pertaining to this?

JANET SCHORER: Absolutely. Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That might be useful. Another highlight out of the annual report was the Women in Construction Industry Innovation Program. It was talking about how the year two grant applications are now open. Is there any data available to assess if year one of the program has indeed resulted in an increase of women in the sector, in terms of some outcomes of first year of that program offering?

JANET SCHORER: We can provide the data on notice. Certainly we've got a number of programs specific to TAFE NSW and that's one that relates to women in trades. I know that training services with responsibility for the sector overall has a focus on that as well, which they've mentioned earlier. We can provide that data on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. I think this might have been spoken about earlier today, but just in terms of the construction industry and skills, this very much fits in that space.

JANET SCHORER: Absolutely critical, yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think Ms Read might have made mention of that today.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can tell you that the Government's got a goal for women in construction—to have 15 per cent of women in trade and non-trade roles by 2030—that we're working towards. It covers things all the way from bricklaying to building design, painting, civil engineering, electrician, project management and site supervisor. There are about 20 different construction jobs that are classified under that.

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sorry, what year was that target?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a target to reach by 2030, that women in construction will be 15 per cent of the trade and non-trade workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of a strategic plan for TAFE, there was one that was launched, I think, in July 2022 under the previous Government. I'm wondering if there have been any changes or elements of that strategic plan that the new Government is looking at, or if that still stands as the overall plan for TAFE?

JANET SCHORER: We did a refresh of that strategic plan in middle of last year—the exact date I couldn't tell you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's okay. I won't push you for that.

JANET SCHORER: We've absolutely done a refresh of that, partly because, obviously, there is a change in some of the policy directions in response to a new government but also to reflect that TAFE is going through a season of change, and to reflect what our current strategic priorities were in relation to that. So, yes, that's available.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of some of the changes in policy direction with the change of government, are there any specific areas that you can provide more information on where things are different than what was in that original plan?

JANET SCHORER: Absolutely. I think what we really tried to do in the refresh of the plan was to elevate efforts that will address the administration burden on our teachers—so a lot of work on enrolments and offerings of technology and other things that support teaching. That's a big focus for us. Some of the effort around community engagement and our relationship with community is now part of our strategic plan, to give it the right emphasis. We've also elevated our efforts around Closing the Gap, because we see, for us as an organisation and the demographic of students that we have, that we need to have a much sharper focus on that. There's a number of things that we elevated. There's some things that we took out because we want to be able to focus on the right things in the strategic plan. But there's lots around supporting teachers to do a quality job, to continue to do the quality job that they do, and reducing the admin burden around them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wanted to ask about the connected learning centres. I think there were three the Minister talked about—I know one was in his electorate, in Jindabyne, and I think in Byron and Batemans Bay last year. I think there's more than 20 now across the State.

JANET SCHORER: Something like that, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been any indication from the Government or the Minister about expanding any of those CLCs to new communities? Are you working in that space or is the delivery of what has been provided already the extent of it at this point in time?

JANET SCHORER: We haven't got any plans at this stage for further connected learning centres. Yes, the centre in Jindabyne is the last to be opened, but we haven't got any plans at this stage for new CLCs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to go now to the Universities Accord, so it's probably to Ms Read. I'm keen to know a few things. Firstly, in terms of background, what was the involvement of the New South Wales Government in terms of the accord process? How were you engaged? How often were you able to provide feedback into the Commonwealth process?

CHLOE READ: Thanks for the question. I would say we're engaged in three or four ways. The first is in that formal process of submissions that happened before the interim report was released. New South Wales did make a submission to the Accord. The second way was through ministers, both skills ministers and the education Ministers. The third was through senior officials groups. And then the fourth was through the working group that we talked about earlier that worked on the gender-based violence action plan.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of going forward—and I appreciate the Minister saying earlier that the final report's been released but the Federal Government is yet to respond. But in terms of time frames—and I think you said earlier that some of this work would focus on the Federal budget—for providers in New South Wales, what should they expect in terms of the accord process and some of the recommendations in here? For the universities in New South Wales, what is that engagement going to be like, say, over the next 12 months? What do you envisage?

CHLOE READ: I think I have actually got time with the vice-chancellors, and the Minister may have as well, to talk through what they're seeing in the Accord report, what's their response and what would be their priorities. I think the Minister indicated that he's keen to have a New South Wales perspective on that and a

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New South Wales Government perspective on that. Of course, they may not be the same things. Some of the work is fairly straightforward recommendations that the Commonwealth, if they wished to, could enact. Other pieces of the work require a process.

For example, the establishment of the tertiary education commission was called out in the report as something they would like to do in partnership with States and Territories. For the framing of that piece and the scope of its responsibilities, I would imagine that they'd be working through the senior officials groups. They may decide to have roundtables. They may seek to have a working group, like we did for the gender-based violence action plan. We don't know the shape of all of the recommendations and the timelines that they have in their minds, but I'd imagine there'd be some close work between States and Territories and the Commonwealth on a number of the recs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of some of the recommendations around tertiary attainment—and I appreciate it's a Federal report, but I'm interested in the New South Wales Government's view or input into that—they talk about having more people having a tertiary attainment, whether it's a certificate III or above. But they specifically also talk about increasing the proportion of university-educated Australians from 45 per cent up to 55 per cent. What sort of feedback or input did the universities, through the agency, have in terms of those targets at a New South Wales level?

CHLOE READ: The universities also have direct engagement with the accord panel, I understand. They also worked through Universities Australia to put forward positions. In terms of the definition of targets, I'd have to take on notice whether we specifically fed anything through from them. Jobs and Skills Australia released a report recently that said that, I think, 92 per cent of occupations in the future are going to require either a vocational qualification or a higher education qualification. There's a roughly 50-50 split amongst that 92 per cent. So I think the targets in the Accord report are trying to drive towards that outcome, informed by the data.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If it's possible on notice, any information about how the universities fed in through senior leadership would be useful.

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I appreciate that a lot of this is Federal in many ways. The commission and that establishment—is there any concern that you might have about a disadvantage of New South Wales universities being bigger providers and being long term? I'm hearing early reports of some concerns about whether there would be a disadvantage. You might know more when you meet with the vice-chancellors, so I may be pre-empting it for you. Is that something that has been raised yet with the department in terms of concerns about how that will work going forward?

CHLOE READ: Sorry, can you explain to me what you mean by disadvantage?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding of the report is that the commission, if it was established, would look at things like how funding is allocated and research. I think they're talking about partnering with other organisations as well, and TAFE. And that's great; I'm not trying to say it's not great with TAFE. But for some of the more established universities in New South Wales who are a big part of the market already, I think there are some questions about what that looks like in terms of their future viability and what they're doing in this space. I wondered if you'd heard any feedback of that—

CHLOE READ: Not that I can recall, specifically. I think universities generally would say a change to the funding model might be welcome, particularly if they end up with an increased funding allocation, but that they'd want to work through how the transition happened, the quantum, the change and what it would mean for them. They'd really want to understand that in depth, and that makes perfect sense.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To be honest, I think some of it is just that it's such early stages of the report being released. There's no formal response from Government. But I'm keen to continue to explore that, so it might be something that we can come back to in a future hearing when there's been a little bit more rubber hitting the road in relation to that accord. Moving back to some of the recommendations from the Gonski-Shergold report, which occurred a few years ago, are there any updates or any view from this Government in terms of Careers NSW and what is happening with that organisation?

CHLOE READ: That is a matter for the budget process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might have to wait, then, until the next budget estimates hearings. Mr Dizdar, this might be one for you or it could be Ms Read. Again, as part of that, there were recommendations around improving the breadth and quality of the vocational education in schools. I know you mentioned before that change to the ATAR, which had happened under the previous Government. But it's a good initiative, and I'm

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pleased the Minister is keeping it. Is there any more in terms of provisions for VET courses for students in schools or any particular updates over the last 12 months that you could provide?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We're proud of the work that we've done around the staffing component that I spoke about, because that used to be an inhibitor. If you had a student go off to TAFE and undertake a VET course, you lost staffing. So that has been good to secure. The ATAR part we spoke about, and something that Ms Read keeps briefing me on—and when I'm out there I keep seeing and hearing about—is the Educational Pathways Program. That has been very, very successful. She could give you the number of sites et cetera. That has been funded by the department, from our budget.

Given that it's a successful program, we continue to have discussions about making sure we can strengthen that and keep that in operation. In layman's terms, the way I understand it when I'm out there and see it in action is we're working in a group of schools. We're not just isolating that careers adviser; we've got good support around them. In that geography, we're finding great industry placements and pathways for apprentices and trainees, and we're widening the horizons for the school by way of opportunity. That's how I describe it. We've got numerous students that are then the beneficiaries of that, as opposed to the school struggling on their own, but Ms Read can tell you the number of schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you've got any data around that, yes, that would be good.

CHLOE READ: Yes, it's currently in 148 schools, but this year it'll go to 168.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data on the number of students who are part of the program? It's fine if you need to take that on notice.

CHLOE READ: Approximately 64,000, which seems like a suspiciously round number.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, it is "approximately".

CHLOE READ: It is approximately.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's available to the whole school in that context, yes.

CHLOE READ: That won't include the extra 20.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On notice, could you provide the additional 20 schools that will be part of it?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great, thank you. There was also a recommendation in the Gonski-Shergold review around an income contingent loans scheme for students. Is anyone across that?

CHLOE READ: Yes. There is a VET Student Loans scheme already, but I think the recommendation—and this is from the dredges of my memory—was about providing loans for lower levels of qualification.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, cert III and IV qualifications.

CHLOE READ: Cert III and IV, yes. We continue to work with the Commonwealth on that. That's a Commonwealth program, and so we don't have any update on that beyond continuing to seek that with the Commonwealth.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think there was a Vocational Education and Training review and a Skills Plan that was announced by the Minister last year. My understanding is that there was meant to be an interim report by the end of last year and a final report due by mid-2024. Is that still the time frame?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any information about who is on the review panel and how they were selected?

CHLOE READ: Yes. Do you want to go?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for whoever.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can tell you who's on there, and then Ms Read might have the selections. Dr Michele Bruniges is the chair, and the Hon. Professor Verity Firth and Jason Ardler—they're the committee. They're supported by a secretariat from the department. Ms Read will have the details, but my recollection is that we gave a long list of names who we thought, from the department, would have qualifications and skills and capacity in this area to the former Minister, not to the current Minister. It was through that process that the names were selected. That's my recollection. Ms Read?

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CHLOE READ: There were kind of two stages. One was a long list of names that led us to the formation of a three-person panel, but then the names that are now on the panel were the recommendation of—this is highly confusing—a small panel of people who made that recommendation to the then Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so the then Minister in the previous Government or in—

MURAT DIZDAR: In this Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When it was Minister Crakanthorp.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And they're three very well qualified people, so I'm not in any way disparaging that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

CHLOE READ: There's also a stakeholder reference group that informs and supports the work of the panel, with a whole range of people on it, including the Business Council and others.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any remuneration for the members of the panel? I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

CHLOE READ: There is.

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a fee for service, so shall we come back to you on that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be fine. I'm assuming it's in line with other similar—

MURAT DIZDAR: It's in line with government requirements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if you could provide that figure on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're happy to do that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How does the work of that review tie into the work that I was asking Ms Schorer about before in terms of the TAFE strategic plan? Is there interaction between TAFE and those on that panel, and what does that look like?

MURAT DIZDAR: I might give it a little bit of coverage. and then both Ms Schorer and Ms Read can give you more. This is a pretty pivotal and seminal piece of work because it'll feed into the skills plan that we've got in the department by way of pathways and skills. It will, no doubt, feed into the TAFE plan as well, given the Government's commitment around TAFE, while still refreshed. I think the beauty of plans is they've got to be dynamic and ongoing. You don't want to set them in concrete and lock them away. I daresay Ms Schorer's team is on to that. I know Ms Read talks to me regularly about our skills and pathways planning in the department. So this final report, which is due middle of the year, will then inform both of those pieces. Do you want to talk to the TAFE side of that?

JANET SCHORER: All I'd add is that we—exactly that. We'd expect that when the review report is released, it will be significant for us. We'd had the opportunity to make submissions and speak to the panel, as you'd expect, and to share some of the insights and the challenges that we've shared with you today and at previous hearings. From our perspective and from what we've seen about their engagement with our staff, with local communities and with industry, they've really got a rich perspective on TAFE's part in the VET system in New South Wales overall, and so I look forward to how we adjust what we are doing to respond to that and take government direction on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Do you want to speak to the department's—

CHLOE READ: The one produced by the department obviously needs to be a New South Wales Government piece, so it needs to reflect priorities across government. It needs to focus on, yes, obviously the work of TAFE is really important, because they're such a really big part of the training system, but also other providers, adult and community education and industry partnerships. Then, also, it's a requirement under the National Skills Agreement that we have a jurisdictional action plan, so we envisage that the New South Wales Skills Plan will be the action plan that we need to deliver. We talked earlier about the National Skills Agreement that those priority areas—what they're wanting to see, I think, is that they're reflected in a State plan.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's the stuff around Closing the Gap in literacy and numeracy that we talked about earlier.

CHLOE READ: On those priority areas that you mentioned like energy.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's how you would capture what your requirements are under the national agreement, through that?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I appreciate it's in some way hypothetical, but would you hope that what the review determines is in line with your updated strategic plan, or do you envisage you might have to tweak that a little to align with what they come out with? Are you hoping that it's all in sync and you can just keep going with what you're doing?

JANET SCHORER: That would be lovely, but I think we'd always anticipate, as Mr Dizdar said, that TAFE is a dynamic organisation, and it's a dynamic policy environment not just at a State level but federally. Excitingly, TAFEs are at the centre of that, and I think we'd want to make sure that anything we did in a strategic plan maximised our opportunity for TAFE NSW to get the best benefit from that policy environment currently.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I think that's it from me. I'll hand over to my colleague for a little bit.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just pick up on the apprenticeships that we spoke about earlier and the fee-free arrangements on those in terms of needing to boost skills and training in New South Wales, I'm just wondering what the marketing or the public information strategy might be around that to try and alert young people to the availability of this?

DAVID COLLINS: There's a variety of things that we've done around communicating the value of apprenticeships and traineeships. A lot of it's been quite direct with young people in schools. We use the Regional Industry Education Partnerships program as a means of building a relationship between businesses, employers and schools, and through that we've conducted a number of events that are about informing young people about the opportunities that are there—about the different industries. We give them taster experiences or immersions, and there's a variety of those that are being run. We've got a very successful training awards program, and under the training awards we select the apprentice and trainee of the year and vocational students of the year. Those people who have come through that program, many of them work with us as ambassadors, and they will also get out into schools, to expos and to other events to communicate about apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities and other vocational opportunities.

We've used social media channels as much as possible to try and communicate the value. We are finding different ways to try and get to young people, in particular, to communicate with them about the value of an apprenticeship and traineeship. Part of that is the fact that those pathways are fee-free, so the opportunity is there to engage. It's really important that we are doing that, because of the other discussions we've had today about skills shortages. We really need to continue to communicate about apprenticeships and traineeships, and about contemporary views about apprenticeships and traineeships, and that's one of the values of the ambassadors. The ambassadors are effectively providing a kind of peer-to-peer communication about both what the program is like but also what the opportunities are in those industries.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So, really, a presence and information within the school itself? You would be regular visitors to the schools?

DAVID COLLINS: Our teams have been working with schools and supporting them in different ways. The Regional Industry Education Partnerships is one way that we're engaging with schools effectively.

CHLOE READ: We talked before a bit about promoting women in construction and non-traditional trades. A good example would be the Trade Readiness Program, which includes the Girls Can Too program which operates in the Riverina region promoting careers in construction. That is that Regional Industry Education Partnerships team trying to challenge those assumptions about whether trades is something that is only for the boys in the schools as opposed to the girls.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Earlier today the Minister alerted us to a Federal Government announcement in terms of meeting the TAFE teacher requirements by recognising school-qualified teachers. It makes me think of the teacher shortage in New South Wales. Is there anything specific, just from the training perspective, that we are doing to help meet that shortage of teachers in New South Wales?

JANET SCHORER: I'll ask Ms Tickle to speak to it, but the program that the Minister mentioned, and I think Ms Tickle covered earlier, Paid to Learn, whilst that provides a financial incentive for people to learn to be a TAFE teacher and bring more people into our teaching workforce, it also provides a truncated or a shorter way to get a teacher qualification. We acknowledge that perhaps doing a full qualification over some years is not enticing for everyone, so we are trying to work through ways. There are mechanisms that the Commonwealth, in addition to the one we've mentioned today, is acknowledging that across the country teachers in vocational

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education is challenging. So what are some of the barriers that we know exist to entry and how do we get through those? Ms Tickle might be able to speak to a few more of the efforts that we have underway or that we're aware of nationally as well.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, certainly. It depends on the vocation of our TAFE teachers in terms of the industry experience they need, but TAFE teachers need a qualification called Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, or equivalent. What this new announcement means is that secondary school teachers who are degree-qualified can teach at TAFE—if they're teaching in VET, they can teach in those areas but also in our career pathways and those sorts of examples, because we have year 10 students that come to TAFE. One thing that this will be really great for is remote communities. One of the VET review round tables that I attended in the Hunter, there was a lot of conversation there around a community like, say, Broken Hill where you have teachers teaching at the secondary school and teachers teaching at TAFE. Previously, it was difficult for them to meet the qualification requirements and cross-pollinate, I guess, but this makes it a lot easier and we expect that it will open up pathways to teachers in areas that we need them. That's certainly important.

As well as Paid to Learn, which is a really successful program, I think the great thing about Paid to Learn is that we've built more wraparound services into it each time we've had a new cohort. Those people start with us, they come straight from industry, they're really fresh. We have an intensive 12 weeks with them to take them through their certificate IV, but they also get a lot of wraparound support. They have a mentor. A current teacher is their mentor. They go into the classrooms for some time of their study; they study other times. They actually have a lot of exposure to the classroom. As well as that, though, we've also done bulk recruitment across the State. So instead of looking at construction teachers in Taree, where I'm based, or Western Sydney, we actually look statewide and try to place teachers in a statewide cohort. We're doing a number of things. We've also had over the last couple of years some scholarships through Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as well. They're people that haven't gone through Paid to Learn, but we offer them a scholarship and the qualification. There's a range of things that we're doing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What do we know about what the current vacancies for teaching in TAFE NSW are?

JULIE TICKLE: It's unlike schools, where it's easier to say where the vacancies are. Our vacancies depend on—TAFE delivers units of competency. Depending on how big the training package is—plumbing certificate III, I think, has 56 units, whereas a diploma in management, for example, that I used to teach, has, I think, 10 or 12. It just depends on the range of units, and it also depends on our enrolments. As we said, we've got a lot of opportunity in some of the skills shortages areas like construction, plumbing, electrotechnology, where the more teachers we have, the more students we can train. But in other areas we're okay for teachers. It just depends on the units that need to be taught and then where the teachers are located, and then our enrolments of course. So the vacancy rates aren't something that we can track, necessarily.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just in terms of skilled migration and discussions there between the State and Federal governments, is New South Wales playing a role there?

JANET SCHORER: Yes. We have some role in that, and TAFE NSW has our part. We have a role with international students who come to Australia to learn, a number of those through—because we're a dual-sector provider—our higher education function but also our tertiary function. But many of our campuses run the Adult Migrant English Program that I mentioned earlier. That's a significant part of a TAFE campus across many of our locations. It's obviously a pathway for migrants to get English skills but then a pathway into other aspects of vocational learning. So yes, absolutely, it's a big part of TAFE NSW.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I understand that in 2022 New South Wales had over 47,500 Aboriginal VET students in New South Wales and over 7,000 Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. I'm just wondering, are there any targets that we have in place in terms of 2023-24 for that sort of student cohort?

JANET SCHORER: For Aboriginal students, I think we increased slightly again this year. We don't have a target for the number of Aboriginal students, except to say more is always our ambition. There's a number of ways that we endeavour to do that, through the different types of delivery, talking to teachers who go into remote communities and offer some of our microskills or what you might call a taster, to give people an idea of what it's like to learn, giving people skills around economic development, running businesses—those sorts of things that are not dependent on having a local industry, because often smaller communities might not have a local industry, but what are the sort of skills that we can give people for life and lifelong learning—so, absolutely, a big focus for us.

JULIE TICKLE: I might just add to that if I may. One really great way of getting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is to have more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, because people "be

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what they see". I think it's really important to note that a number of those Paid to Learn places, as well as a number of the government-funded traineeships we were talking about earlier, that TAFE NSW has an allocation of, are actually identified Aboriginal positions. We have—you might call them faculties. We arrange our teachers into skills teams. The faculty that looks after Aboriginal languages is Career Pathways, Aboriginal Languages and Employability Skills. We have a number of Aboriginal language programs that have really, particularly in the west region, gone extremely well. So more Aboriginal teachers and other positions as well, like our education support officer position, for example—lots of identified roles there, and the people transition into teaching after a period of time working as an educational support officer.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can just add, Ms Merton, the department weighs in here as well through training services. We have the Barranggirra initiative. It's around apprentices, trainees and SBATs—school-based apprentices and trainees. We have the Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant and the OCHRE Opportunity Hubs. We've got data if you want that, or Mr Collins can give you more detail, but it is work that then cuts across outside of TAFE as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Secretary, I note the department participates in a lot of community events and different things, one of the highlights of the year being the Schools Spectacular. I was wondering where that might be in terms of student involvement and value for the students.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm very proud of the Schools Spectacular. It just had its fortieth anniversary. I'm very proud that we're in the Guinness book of records as the largest amateur showcase of its kind. We've stood in there and are yet to be broken. Other jurisdictions have had a go, like Victoria, but haven't been able to get there. Last year we had 5,500 students take part in Schools Spectacular. That goes from the mass choir to featured artists; featured dancers; the VET students, who are behind the scenes; those who are doing the catering and hospitality; and those who are doing the staging. It's an enormous showcase of public education talent.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: From an estimates perspective, do we know what the cost is of providing the Schools Spectacular?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I said in the Education committee, I'm happy to come back on notice. I think it's such a worthwhile investment when it brings 5,500 students from right across this State to the big city to showcase their talent for four sold-out events across two days. Having spoken with a number of those students, it's life-changing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just in terms of the cost of that, I was just—

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it at my fingertips but I'm happy to come back on notice. It's part of the Education committee that we took on notice too so the answer will be in train.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I just noticed that the department participated in last weekend's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. In relation to that, Mr Secretary, for how many years has the department participated in the Mardi Gras?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm enormously proud that, on Saturday night, the department had a float in the Mardi Gras to support the Pride Network—the LGBTQIA+ staff. I'm proud, as secretary, that I got to march with them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What was the cost for involvement in the Mardi Gras this year?

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, a very small investment. I'm happy to take it on notice. There's no more important feature for me than to make sure our people are seen, heard and supported, and it won't be the last time.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I recognise that but I'm just looking at what the cost was of the department's participation.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to get the figure wrong. Let me come back on notice but I also, just for the record, indicate that we look forward to building on the first two years of having a float in the Mardi Gras and continuing that as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So this year was the second year the department had?

MURAT DIZDAR: Second year, yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Do department staff get involved in the Mardi Gras? I thought I saw a post from the department about 70 staff being involved in the Mardi Gras.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm the department is co-sponsor of the Pride Network. It's a responsibility I've held for five years before I became secretary and I've maintained because it's very important to me. We're a workforce close to 170,000 employees so we had to run a ballot and there were 80 lucky individuals who were

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absolutely beaming on the night, alongside myself. In fact, Ms Read, as an executive member, was with me and I wish I could dance like she can.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you get through in the ballot?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: She got the lucky golden ticket.

MURAT DIZDAR: She is an exec member so she escaped the ballot like I did.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So 70 staff were involved in the float?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was about 80 on the night.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm assuming that staff are participating as volunteers in these events.

MURAT DIZDAR: Staff enter the ballot and they are either LGBTQIA+ staff or allies who want to be—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm not asking about the nature of the application, but just in terms of some of the costs relating to the department's involvement.

MURAT DIZDAR: We don't charge staff to be part of the float.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are the staff volunteers on the float?

MURAT DIZDAR: The staff are employees of ours who put their hands up to say, "I want to be part of the float." They don't pay anything to be part of that. The department, through my leadership, picks what the cost of that looks like.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the 70-plus department staff that participated in the Mardi Gras, are there time-in-lieu arrangements in terms of their participation? Is there a cost around that?

MURAT DIZDAR: This was an event on Saturday night, so they did that of their own accord and goodwill.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How many hours of department staff time would you envisage were used in preparation for such an event? I think there was a lot of preparation and activity.

MURAT DIZDAR: I couldn't tell you. I can tell the Committee that it's a fantastic event. To march with our people who identify as being LGBTQIA+ is so important to me as secretary. To see the eyes on that parade, where people are looking at us, cheering and saying, "You see us, recognise us and embrace us," will always stay with me. I intend to always have representation there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm not really asking for more detail on that, but thank you. I think people have seen your social media posts of you being front and centre of the NSW Department of Education's float. My question today was about what the cost to the department is of the float and whether there's a cost on the 70 to 80 staff that participated. If you want to take it on notice, I'm more than happy.

MURAT DIZDAR: I've already indicated, Ms Merton, that I'm happy to come back with what we paid as a department to participate. I don't want to get that figure wrong. I would also indicate that I'm very grateful to those from the arts unit and our staff who volunteered outside of work hours, including on weekends, who put the float together.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I look forward to your response.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wanted to go back to the remuneration for the review. I noticed that it was put on notice last time. I think we got back the overall amount for the VET review, saying it was \$2.2 million, but there wasn't actually a breakdown for the remuneration of those three individuals. I'm just clarifying with you, Mr Dizdar, that we can get the remuneration for those three individuals on notice, because that wasn't provided when we asked last time.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's make sure we give that. Ms Mitchell, if I've got it right—Ms Read will correct me—the budgeted amount for the VET review is \$2.2 million. That's the budget. It doesn't mean we have expended that or will.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that.

MURAT DIZDAR: When we come back on notice for those three individuals, we will be able to indicate how much we have paid to date.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. I want to now go to enrolments. Again, I know my colleagues asked about this last time because I wasn't here. For TAFE enrolments, do you have any updated

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data for this year that you can provide to us in terms of student numbers for the 2024 calendar year? I was going to say school year, but you know what I mean.

JANET SCHORER: I don't have any numbers for semester one yet, but we are tracking at about the same level as we did last year. I don't have numbers on record for—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would you get those numbers?

JANET SCHORER: We usually get to those in the second half of second term. It's closer into the second half of the year because a number of students might enrol and then withdraw. So to get an accurate reflection of what true enrolments were, we wait until later in the semester to actually clarify that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does that get publicly released? How does that work?

JANET SCHORER: We usually publish that in our annual report, from what I can tell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just trying to work out if there is a way to know a little earlier than an annual report how things are tracking. At the moment, you think it's similar to the previous year—

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —but you don't have that concrete data? In terms of staff numbers for 2024, are there any changes or updates that you can provide the Committee generally across all of the campuses?

JANET SCHORER: Ms Tickle will be able to provide that information.

JULIE TICKLE: The annual report reports 30 June, so I will give you those numbers and then just an indication of the movement. Would you like headcount or full-time equivalent?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you give me both?

JULIE TICKLE: Sure. In June 2023, the headcount in total was 13,835 across TAFE NSW and full-time equivalent was 10,841. Looking at the teachers, the teacher FTE is 5,992, which, as I said earlier, is an increased FTE of 262 on financial year 2022. However, since then, we've actually increased the numbers more—I said it earlier, but for the record again—advertising 556 permanent teaching positions since March 2023, compared to 278 in the same period in 2022. So we are adding more. Our numbers are going up, and we're increasing the number of permanent teachers as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have for that—was it 556 permanent?

JULIE TICKLE: Advertisements. Yes, that's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a breakdown—and, again, I'm happy for it to be on notice—of which campuses and which areas you're seeing that growth in terms of the permanent positions, as best as you can provide?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes. It's across the board. The Paid to Learn program, as I said, which started this week, has teachers all across the State, ranging from those campuses out west to the north region where I sit, as well as all around metropolitan Sydney. So it is across the board. The thing about campuses and our staff is that our staff, and our teachers in particular, teach across a number of campuses. From my own experience, my data was held at Taree campus but I actually taught at Port Macquarie and Great Lakes, which is in Forster. So campus-related data per teacher is not accurate because the teachers move around, particularly on those away from base, and the teachers in western New South Wales travel a fair bit to teach.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate it's challenging, given the example that you gave where you might have a home base. But you could be working across a number of campuses. How do you extrapolate that data? If you tell me you've got X thousand number of teachers, do you provide information in terms of how many campuses they work across, or how do we get an overview of that?

JULIE TICKLE: That's how we do it. The teachers record where they're teaching in their time sheet, which is called their teacher program diary, and that provides information around where they are teaching—the base campus. It doesn't necessarily mean that they're always there, though. A really good example of this was when I was recently in western New South Wales. The enrolment was recorded at Dubbo and the students spent some time at Dubbo. But this was for Aboriginal languages, so they went to other remote communities around Dubbo and taught out there. We do have a base campus and the teacher aligns themselves to the base campus but they can move around a lot.

The other thing to note here is that, based on enrolments, the time spent at a certain location changes. My example—in one semester I used to spend a lot of time in Taree and in semester two at Port Macquarie. Because,

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from what the Minister and I think Ms Schorer said earlier, sometimes we have a need for a qualification delivery in one campus and then it shifts, and we don't deliver it there. We deliver it in the other campus. That happens quite a lot.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know the Minister talked about this earlier. One of the things we were saying about regional communities was you don't necessarily have an offering and what that means. He said that you might look at saying we're going to do this at least every two years to give some sort of certainty to local industry employers and prospective students. Is there any update you can provide in terms of that work, what it might look like and when we might get some indication of whether that will be something that comes to fruition?

JANET SCHORER: Thank you. It is a work in progress. The alignment for us is, as I mentioned this morning, our Training Portfolio Strategy, which sets the three- to five-year horizon of where industry and skills demand is and where the right place is for TAFE NSW to have a role. Related to that is our course profile. That the connection with—that we're developing leaning and teaching resources and curriculum that align with what industry needs and then, as Ms Tickle has outlined, that we have teachers with the right skills and qualifications in the right location.

Once we have those pieces of information, which we have more of now, we can then program in how we want the plan for our delivery over a three-year cycle and know that we have the right teaching resources, that we're teaching in the right location to meet a community or a skills demand, and that we have the teachers available to do that. And we can communicate that over a cycle. That work is underway at the moment and we are expecting that will be something, as we go into our next cycle of education planning, that we'll be able to develop that in.

The other feature of that is wanting to be able to give learners choice about how they learn. There are many courses, as I said this morning, where you have to be in a classroom or you have to be around particular specialised equipment to learn, but there are lots of things that we can make available to learners in different ways online and through different modes that meet their needs. We are always about how do we improve what we do to meet learner, industry and community expectations.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, this might be something that we come back to at future estimates to see how these things are tracking.

JANET SCHORER: That would be good.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to quickly turn now to the Confirmation of Aboriginality Policy. I understand there were some questions asked about that at the last hearing, and one of the responses back on notice is that a draft Confirmation of Aboriginality Policy has been developed and will be published in 2024. Does anyone have an update on that?

JULIE TICKLE: We have, at TAFE NSW, a group which is called the ASLG, which stands for Aboriginal Strategic Leadership Group. Myself and the managing director sit on that as observers, and one of our executive directors is the chair of that group. We had some—I wouldn't call it a draft, but certainly some initial consultation around a Confirmation of Aboriginality Policy last year. I would have to take on notice where that's up to in terms of being published and released, but I can certainly say that I was in the meeting and we did have extensive consultation. It also went to the TAAC—which is our TAFE Aboriginal Advisory Council—which, again, the managing director sits on. We have a number of external people on there, as well, as well as the same person that chairs—one of our executive directors that chairs the Aboriginal Strategic Leadership Group. Both of those high-level groups have been consulted and given input into what was an initial conversation around Confirmation of Aboriginality at TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, the response did talk about a draft policy being developed, so if there is any further information that you can provide on notice, that would be good.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask about the Country Universities Centre. I know the Minister spoke about them earlier. I think the most recent one was in his electorate, which I'm sure he likes as the local member as well as the Minister. I understand that, from a State perspective, there was some funding allocated in the last budget. This might be for you, Ms Read. Is there any breakdown or data on how much State funding will be going to the CUCs, and over what period of time, as provided in the last budget?

CHLOE READ: I think it will be the same figures that we provided in the last session. As you know, the \$8 million grant in 2017 established five regional centres. An additional \$8 million grant was committed in 2019 for another five centres. The last one of those opens in Mudgee in a few weeks' time, I think. There's just over \$1 million remaining in that second \$8 million grant to pay, so payments made on milestones. Then there was also an additional amount, which is—

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any ongoing operational funding for them, as well?

CHLOE READ: No, not at this stage. An additional \$1.13 million was committed in August of last year, so we would have had this figure already.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's that for?

CHLOE READ: That was to support operations at stage one and stage two hubs, pending a couple of different things. One is the evaluation, one is the Universities Accord, and now, as we know, the process of the regional university study hubs—I think they call them—and whether they might be—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If only they could keep the same name, it would make life so much simpler.

CHLOE READ: Yes, it would.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because it's the same concept.

CHLOE READ: Yes. In fact, I think there's a proposal to change the name of the Commonwealth ones because they're not only going to be for university students, which is obviously a welcome thing in terms of TAFE enrolments and other vocational providers. We're just continuing to liaise with the Commonwealth on ongoing funding. Obviously higher education is a core responsibility, pretty much entirely, in terms of the funding of students, and so we really want to work with them on options for sustainable funding for the centres into the future.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously, and you'd appreciate, the \$16-odd million was for some of that initial capital that did come from the State.

CHLOE READ: But very much establishment costs with a view of—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, and then the idea is they get up and they can be self-sufficient. I understand that, but is there any direction from the Minister around particularly that establishment or capital money for any further locations, or just the ones that are currently operating?

CHLOE READ: Not at this stage because, obviously, the Commonwealth program is for expansion or new centres, so working through what that process looks like first, I think.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Minister also talked earlier about the Federal Government not wanting them to be on TAFE sites, but, as you've just pointed out, in the accord it does actually talk about better integration between TAFE and universities. What are the discussions at an official level around how you can deal with some of those problems?

CHLOE READ: We're working with them on that. I think they actually went out with two different types. There were regional ones and metropolitan ones, and one of them said not on TAFE sites. Actually, it wasn't singling out TAFE specifically. I think it was about government providers. You might remember, Ms Schorer. The other ones, I think TAFE were allowed to submit for, right?

JANET SCHORER: My recollection is that they said you had to be a community organisation.

CHLOE READ: Yes, that was it.

JANET SCHORER: We are clearly not that.

CHLOE READ: Yes, so I'm not sure—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For which ones, sorry?

CHLOE READ: For regional.

JANET SCHORER: For the metropolitan.

CHLOE READ: For the metropolitan ones, right. So I'm not sure that the intent was to exclude TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It seems a bit muddled to me. I don't understand how you can have one approach for one and not for the other, and I appreciate that's at a Commonwealth level. That's obviously just something that you continue to work through as part of the accord. Will TAFE have an opportunity to have input into that process as well?

CHLOE READ: Yes, we work really closely on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Fantastic.

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The CHAIR: Tea break? Or would you rather continue and finish early?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm in the hands of the Committee. We don't have a lot. We've used all our allocated time, but I'm happy to maybe just do a couple more and then, if it suits the Committee, you can have an early mark rather than a 15-minute break. But I don't want to stop anyone who might need a comfort break.

JANET SCHORER: We have no objection to that at all.

The CHAIR: Would that be okay with everybody?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We probably only have maybe 10 minutes left of questioning. My personal view would be if we could keep going—I don't know. Is that allowed with the resolution of the Committee?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: For the record, Chair, I don't agree with breaking down conditions, but if everyone agrees, I'm happy to go on.

The CHAIR: We have to have a tea break. We'll be back in 15 minutes.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We are back, and back to the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. We'll just foreshadow that we don't have a lot of questions, so hopefully we will be giving you all an early mark. I wanted to ask about some of the funding allocation. I think it was raised by you, Chair, at the last hearing, but I wasn't participating on that day. This question is probably to you, Ms Coutts, in terms of professional services. I think there is an investment in relation to some of the new initiatives through that intake. Is there anything that you could provide in your space?

LOUISE COUTTS: Sorry, could you just say the first part again, please?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The professional services—I think there was quite a bit in the budget in relation to the spend. I just wanted to know, from your perspective, an update on what are some of the areas you are focusing on in terms of that for TAFE. It's a pretty broad question, but I'm happy for you just to—

LOUISE COUTTS: So, professional services, what are we focusing on in relation to spend?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

JANET SCHORER: Specific areas where more of that spend is directed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Where more of that is going—yes, that's what I'm looking for. Sorry, it was a convoluted way of getting there, but that's what I'm keen to find out.

JANET SCHORER: As I said this morning, a great majority of our spend has been around IT, some of the construction elements—because, particularly around the IT, we've had building construction underway—and some of the business advisory services that go with that. But predominantly in ICT is where the professional services spend is at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there any updates from when we were here last in terms of the areas of focus or new things that have been delivered since the budget was handed down in that space?

JANET SCHORER: Obviously the main program of work that we have underway is our education technology ecosystem. That's tracking for the VET delivery of that in October. You might recall that we delivered the higher education system and we have done the program of work around the non-nationally-recognised qualifications, so some of the TAFE-owned. And then the larger portion of the VET system is being worked on currently to go into our new ecosystem in October, so that's underway.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there anything that you wanted to add, Ms Coutts?

LOUISE COUTTS: No, that's right. Where we need to engage temporary resources is for those programs that have an end date, so our focus in the organisation is the ETE program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To capital funding, I know that earlier, Ms Schorer, you gave some information about the projects that were underway. I wanted to check the time frames for forecast completion on a couple of those projects. Coffs Harbour, I think, was forecast to be complete by June 2025. Is that still the time frame that you're working on?

JANET SCHORER: That's what I understand, yes.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And Kingscliff was similar. Is that still the case?

JANET SCHORER: Yes, mid next year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think Muswellbrook phase one was due to be complete this month—it may have been finished or it might not have. I just wanted an update on that one as well.

JANET SCHORER: I'll have to provide you on notice an update on Muswellbrook.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Because I don't think it was one that was mentioned earlier, so it would be good to know where that one is up to. In terms of courses and waitlists—and, again, I think this might have been something that was raised previously—are there any insights you can provide into current waitlists of courses, which ones are higher in demand and how you hope to address that demand?

JANET SCHORER: The concept of waitlists for us in TAFE NSW is interesting because people will, once an enrolment is full—the vast majority of our enrolments happen online, which you'd expect. Once an enrolment's full, people can register to be on an active waitlist. What that means is that a prospective learner might inquire then about a number of courses. So our waitlist doesn't represent a single learner. It represents people who have inquired about courses. So what we try and do in our enrolment process is to funnel people into where their learning effort is best applied.

For example, about half of people who apply to study nursing with us don't meet the basic eligibility criteria, and so we now have a self-assessment tool on our website that enables them to work out, are they ready? Do they have the basic qualifications, the basic skills needed to study nursing? If they don't, the website directs them to a first-aid course or doing some studies in individual support that might give them a stepping stone into nursing—doing those sorts of things that isn't necessarily putting people on a waitlist but directs people to how they can continue to learn until they're ready to study in the course.

For some of our apprentices there is obviously significant demand across the sector. We don't necessarily keep waitlists for those, but it's an ongoing conversation with industry. As training plans come to us, we approve them and endeavour to move learners into training as soon as we have places available. We could always teach more apprentices. Our significant challenge there, which we've spoken about today already, is having the workforce available to do that. That's why having an uncapped program for fee-free learning for apprentices is important, because the more teachers we can bring on, the more apprentices we can teach, and that's our ambition. So the high-demand courses are where we know the demand is, so in nursing, some of the trades, individual support, in business studies. Those are the areas where we have high demand. Where courses reach cap, we'll try and create a new offering, offer in another location if that's suitable for the learner, put on mid-semester offerings—just doing those sorts of things to try and open up as much of our capacity as we can in that semester.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How does that interplay work? I'm picking up on what Mr Collins said earlier in terms of—and I appreciate that's just department recruitment or departments recruiting. But obviously you had more people apply for those apprenticeships and traineeships than places were available. I appreciate what you're saying in terms of waitlist data might not capture the whole picture, but how does the interplay work between where you know the demand is—clearly there's demand from government agencies, plus there's demand from industry as well—to make sure that you're trying to grow where those areas are? I appreciate it's challenging. But in terms of publicly available data, is there anything that's provided? How can we keep track of how that's progressing?

JANET SCHORER: Apart from what we publish in our annual report, I don't know that we publish anything externally. But certainly some of the efforts that we've spoken about today to align what we offer to what industry and what skills demands are, and that that means changing some things, stopping doing some things and starting new things, really focusing our workforce planning and recruitment to where we know there are significant skills needs and recruiting new teachers into those areas and into locations where we know there will be skills demand for particular significant projects across the State—that's all part of what we consider in our Training Portfolio Strategy. It is not just what types of courses are needed or what types of skills are needed but how do we plan for the future workforce and how do we plan for the future infrastructure that we'll need over the next three to five years?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. My last question—we're nearly done, I promise—relates to the announcement today about the AI scholarships the Minister announced in terms of providing one million Australians in order to get support. I think you said it's happening through the IAT, the delivery of that course. The funding for that—is that coming from the State Government or the Federal Government? I'm just a bit unclear.

JANET SCHORER: That one I'll have to take on notice. If it's through the IAT, we're part of it in some way so I'll have to take on notice how that's been funded.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good because the Minister, in the media release, has talked about it being offered to a million Australians so obviously that's bigger than New South Wales. There's some talk about it being available through the IAT and then there are partnerships with, I think, Macquarie Uni and the University of Technology Sydney as well.

JANET SCHORER: Yes, that sounds like the IAT.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just keen for more information about how many of those you would anticipate to be in New South Wales and what is the State component of that funding, if any—would be great.

JANET SCHORER: No problem.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you want to add anything, Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: I heard a million and two today, that's all.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would love to have some better AI skills. My 10-year-old will probably teach me how—or my six-year-old will probably teach me how to do it. Any information on that would be great. We can put on notice what else we've got. I think that's probably enough from us for today, so thank you all.

The CHAIR: Any questions from Government members?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: No questions, Chair.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you very much for attending today. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in relation to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions. That concludes our hearing for today. Thank you very much.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.