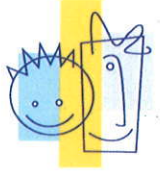




**Office of
Communities**
Commission for Children & Young People



Mr Andrew Cornwell MP
Chair
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People
NSW Parliament
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Cornwell

I am writing in response to your request for written answers to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People's questions about the Commission for Children and Young People's 2011-2012 Annual Report.

Responses to your questions on these reports are attached. I look forward to discussing them with you and members of the Committee at the hearing scheduled for 22 March 2013.

Should you require any additional information prior to the Committee's hearing please don't hesitate to contact me on (02) 9286 7278 or at Megan.Mitchell@kids.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Megan Mitchell
Commissioner
13 March 2013

Responses to the Questions on Notice

Recommendations from the previous annual report review

1. What steps have the Commission for Children and Young People taken in order to give more prominence to its presence online and to connect with children, young people and other stakeholders via the internet? (Review of the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 Annual Reports of the Commission for Children and Young People and the 2009 Child Death Review Team Reports recommendation 1)

The Commission has implemented a new email news bulletin to deliver information on the new Working With Children Check and to highlight new information on the Commission's website. We currently have 13,000 subscribers for this e-bulletin.

The Commission's Child Safe workshops, with their broad community reach, have also been used to significantly build the subscription numbers of our fortnightly "What's New" email bulletin. The Commission builds its online, social media networks by collecting Likes and Followers through Facebook and Twitter, and by proactively Liking and Following others.

In this activity the Commission prioritises youth-led and youth-focused organisations, and those working in the interests of children and young people.

The Commission has over 950 Followers and we 'Follow' more than 1,000 others.

On Facebook, the Commission's Page "Likes" more than 450 other pages, such as "Tamworth Youthie", "Young Carers NSW", "Dilly YAC", "Special Olympics Australia" and "Left Right Think Tank". Connections are also made with sporting groups, schools, cultural groups, and caring organisations.

Compared to the previous reporting period, web traffic (Visits) to the Commission's KidZone section of the website increased by 12% in 2011-12 – with an average of approximately 1,100 per month. In the same reporting period, seven (7) KidsPolls were run.

The Commission has also produced a number of e-products for use in the social media environment such as our online data book and app "A Picture of NSW children" and our e-book resource for young people's participation called "Citizen Me" which builds on the Commission's earlier groundbreaking work in this area. Policy and research forums and seminars are also routinely recorded as webinars and made available on our website.

Another area we have done extensive work on is our online Child Safe Organisations training involving webinars and the development of e-learning tools. This allows the Commission to have a much more extensive reach to targeted stakeholders in relation to child safety and the Working With Children Check.

Our online presence and connection will be further improved with the Commission's new website which is being redesigned and promoted under the guidance of our Young People Advisory Group and other key stakeholders.

2. How has the Commission for Children and Young People researched the most effective methods to connect and communicate with children and young people in New South Wales? (Review of the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 Annual Reports of the Commission for Children and Young People and the 2009 Child Death Review Team Reports recommendation 1)

The Commission has researched the most effective methods for connecting and communicating with children in the development of Citizen Me- the Commission's resource guide to promote and support the participation of children in decision making. The resource draws on international best practice to provide information about how to involve young people in decision making and includes information on capacity building of children and young people and evaluating participatory initiatives

The Commission also contributes to the development of knowledge on practice in this area. In the reporting period, the Commission:

- *initiated a research project on Student Voice and participatory practice in NSW schools. The project will investigate the most effective participatory practices for improving student engagement and develop a set of resources for schools to draw on when considering such initiatives. Preliminary work to support an ARC Linkage grant application in the 2013 funding round for this project was undertaken in the reporting period.*
- *undertook an evaluation of its own consultative practices and has adopted an improved model as result. (This model is now in its second year of implementation and is currently being externally evaluated)*
- *researched examples of exemplary practice in NSW for inclusion in the Participation Showcase at the end of 2012.*

The Commission also contracted the Bendalls Group to provide advice about the use of online technology to promote the new Working With Children Check and digital based strategies for engaging children and young people.

3. How does the Commission monitor the effectiveness of methods of promoting

the work that it does?¹ Does the Commission examine best practice in external communication techniques used by comparable organisations in NSW and in other jurisdictions?

The Commission monitors the effectiveness of its methods to promote its work using both quantitative and qualitative tools.

Communication continues to move into online mechanisms, which are tracked by Google Analytics and other tracking tools. For instance, Citizen Me has been downloaded more than 3,000 times in its pdf and epub (e-book) format since its launch in September 2012. The publication also includes a link to an online, qualitative user survey. The Commission also evaluates its seminars and workshops via paper-based user surveys.

In line with best practice in external communication techniques, the Commission is developing more targeted email campaigns, with the development of the news update for the New Working With Children Check, with about 13,000 subscribers. The Commission has also benchmarked its current website as a tool for monitoring the effectiveness of the website redevelopment now underway, with more than 500 respondents.

4. During the previous Annual Report review conducted by the Committee, it was indicated that of the 4,000 subscribers to the Feedback magazine, only 508 were aged 17 or less. Have there been any efforts to increase subscriptions to Feedback magazine, particularly by young people? Are there updated figures on the amount of young people subscribing to Feedback magazine?

The Committee should note that the Commissioner made a correction to the 2010-11 Annual Report hearing transcript where she mistakenly quoted a figure of 4,000 child subscribers to our e-bulletin and Feedback magazine. This figure related to the total number of subscribers. The number of subscribers who indicate they are aged 17 or less was 508.

Feedback Mag was created as a "web-e-zine" about the Commission's work in 2008.

As of 4 March 2013, there were 2,176 subscribers to Feedback Mag.

Consultations with the Commission's Young People Advisory Group have indicated a more frequent, blog-style news approach would be more appealing to younger audiences. This new and more contemporary approach will be implemented as part of the Commission's current website redevelopment.

¹ *Corrections of fact to Transcript of evidence, provided by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, 16 May 2012*

Child safety

5. What efforts were made by the Commission to prepare for the implementation of the new Working With Children Check, as announced in June 2012? Has the implementation of the new Check in early 2013 been successful?

The Commission for Children and Young People is managing a major project (including a number of sub-projects) to implement a new Working With Children (WWC) Check this year. The Commission's implementation project has been assigned to a senior officer, the Director of Working With Children Strategy and is supported by a full time project manager and a number of specialist officers.

The overall implementation project covers the following sub-projects:

- *legislative change*
- *database development*
- *partnerships and agreements*
- *transitions and phase in*
- *change management (restructure)*
- *marketing and community education*
- *regulation and compliance*

Each sub-project area is supported and managed by a project plan, which maps key interdependencies within the overarching project plan. Project plans also include a risk management plan, which are consolidated into a single high-level management document. Progress against the plan is monitored at weekly project meetings chaired by the Director Working With Children Strategy. The Commissioner attends these meetings when available and is briefed by the Director at fortnightly meetings.

Whilst the Commission initially intended to commence the new WWC Check in early 2013, a community consultation process was conducted indicating that more time was needed by the community to prepare for the significant changes to the WWC Check, with commencement of the new system now expected in mid 2013.

6. How has the Commission attempted to inform the public, and in particular relevant stakeholders, about the new Working With Children Check and how people can apply for the new check?

The Commission has:

- sought community feedback on the draft Child Protection (Working With Children) Regulation , receiving feedback from over 200 organisations and individuals
- consulted extensively with key stakeholders in refining the draft Regulation
- consulted extensively with key stakeholders about critical guidance materials for the new WWC Check
- held more than 150 Information Sessions about the new WWC Check to over 3,000 attendees across NSW since August, 2012
- responded to a large number of telephone calls and email inquiries about the new WWC Check
- produced fact sheets and made them available on the Commission's website as PDFs and as hand outs for conferences, seminars, forums and the Commission's Information Sessions
- attended, presented and exhibited at the ACWA Annual Conference and a number of other relevant conferences and forums
- provided regular updates on the current Commission website about the new WWC Check
- distributed two e-newsletters to more than 13,000 subscribers about the new WWC Check
- provided regular updates about the new WWC Check in the Commission's fortnightly external e-newsletter
- provided regular updates about the new WWC Check in the Office of Communities' monthly, all staff e-newsletter
- provided regular updates about the new WWC Check in the Department of Education and Communities' all staff, quarterly e-newsletter
- commenced redevelopment of the current Commission's website to ensure it has a stronger focus and capacity to facilitate the new WWC Check
- developed a focused communications strategy and plan for the new WWC Check.

7. Can you outline the implementation process for the new Working with Children Check, including regarding the five-year 'phase in' period for volunteers and existing workers (page 26)?

The new WWC Check will apply at commencement to any person seeking new paid child-related work.

The five year phase-in covers volunteers and existing paid workers in child related work. Each child related sector is identified and assigned a calendar year during which the sector's workers and volunteers must get a new WWC Check. The schedule provides for earliest phase in of the highest risk sectors and balances out the numbers so that the demand is spread as evenly as possible over the five year period. The details of the phase-in will be contained in the regulation currently being finalised by Parliamentary Counsel

8. How often has the Commission conducted audits on approved screening agencies for the Working With Children Check, and what action would be taken by the Commission towards approved screening agencies if issues are identified during such audits?

The Commission audited two approved screening agencies each year, so each of the four existing ASAs was audited every second year. There have been no audits over the last year as the Commission prepares for the amalgamation of the screening agencies to deliver the new WWC Check.

The Commission used standard audit procedure when issues requiring action were identified in an audit. The Commission articulated the remedial actions required and monitored the agency to ensure the actions were taken.

9. During the reporting year, the Commission audited declarations given by volunteers who work with children that they are not prohibited. The Commission advised that from over 360 declarations that were checked, no volunteers were found to have untruthfully signed the declaration (page 31).

- How does the Commission check whether volunteers have truthfully signed declarations that they are not prohibited from working with children?

The Commission obtains the signed declarations from targeted child related organisation. The declaration includes consent for a criminal records check by the Commission. The Commission then obtains the signatory's criminal history from CrimTrac and identifies any prohibiting records.

- How does the Commission work to ensure that all volunteers for small community organizations (such as sports groups) who work with children are not actually prohibited from doing so?

The current Working With Children Check is ineffective at excluding prohibited persons from volunteering roles because it relies on self declarations that cannot be regularly checked for truthfulness. This was noted by the Auditor-General in his 2010 performance audit of the Working With Children Check.

While the Commission cannot currently verify that prohibited persons are excluded from volunteering roles, the Commission works in other ways to increase the safety of children in volunteer organisations.

The Commission conducts regular Child-Safe, Child-Friendly training to volunteer organisations such as; sports groups, rural fire service, Scouts

NSW etc. The training provides organisations with information and resources on how to work with volunteers to ensure the safety of children.

The Commission partners with 'Play by the Rules', a child safe program operated by the NSW Sport and Recreation agency for sporting bodies. The program has interactive website to provide information, resources, tools and training. Play by the Rules helps to increase the capacity of sporting organisations to keep children in their care safe.

The Government has passed the Child Protection (Working With Children) Act 2012 with bipartisan support to provide the same level of Working With Children Check to volunteers and paid workers. When the new Check commences in mid 2013, its provisions will apply equally to volunteers and paid workers.

- How is the Commission advising small, volunteer based community organisations of the implementation of the new Working with Children Check and their responsibilities under the Check?

Since September 2012 the Commission has delivered over 150 information sessions throughout NSW to child-related employers and peak groups. Feedback from these sessions indicates that volunteer sectors are attending the sessions.

The Commission has also delivered targeted information sessions for volunteer organisations, such as:

- NSW Rugby League
- NSW Rugby (rural)
- Football NSW
- Surf Life Saving
- NSW Rural fire service
- Centre for Volunteering
- Religious organisations
- Parents and Citizens

The Commission is currently developing guidance material that will assist the volunteers in understanding their obligations, which will be distributed with release of the Child Protection (Working With Children) Regulation.

Strategic Directions

10. The Commission's Strategic Directions 2011-2014 set out performance measures against four domains (page 7):

- Children benefit from improved legislation, policies, practices and

services

- Children participate in decisions that affect their lives
- Children are safe in organisations and their communities
- The Commission is accountable, responsive and adaptive

a) How were the Commission's Strategic Directions 2011-2014 developed?

The Commission's Strategic Directions are framed around a results logic methodology that defines the Commission's business and the broad strategies the Commission will undertake to achieve these results.

The key result areas derive from the principles that govern the Commission's work and the principal functions of the Commission as defined in the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998. In developing the Strategic Directions 2011-14 the Commission consulted with a range of key stakeholders as well as engaging all Commission staff in developing the strategic objectives, strategies and measures.

The Strategic Directions are supported by individual directorates Business Plans, the Commission's Risk Management Plan and Commission staff individual Performance Development Plans.

b) To what extent were external stakeholders involved in the development of the Commission's Strategic Directions 2011-2014?

The Commission's Strategic Directions 2011-14 were informed by the independent legislative review of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 that commenced in 2010 with the final report being tabled in Parliament in August 2011. This review involved the calling of public submissions, releasing a discussion paper, consultation with government and non-government agencies as well as children and young people.

The Commission also surveyed a range of stakeholders in the development of the Strategic Directions 2011-2014. Input was sought from Heads and Deputy Heads of Departments, Parliamentary Committee members, Expert Advisory Committee members, the Commission's Young Peoples Reference Group, the Minister for Youth, senior officers of the Department of Premier and Cabinet well as a range of non-government stakeholders including the Council of Social Service NSW (NCOSS) and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA). Young people, involved with the Commission, current and past were also surveyed.

c) How will organisational performance against these directions be measured by the Commission?

The Strategic Directions 2011-14 contain a number of quantitative and qualitative measures to report on the Commission's performance. Performance measures and indicators that align with those in the Strategic

Directions, are included in each Directorate's Business Plan and monitored by the Commissioner during her monthly meetings with the Directors.

- d) How will the Strategic Directions be reviewed in 2014, and is it envisaged that new Strategic Directions will be introduced?

The Commission is currently planning for the review and development of new Strategic Directions for 2014-2017. Initially the Commission will review the current key result areas and objectives to ensure that they remain valid, appropriately reflect the legislated functions of the Commission and align with stakeholder expectations of the work of the Commission.

Critical to the development of the Commission's Strategic Directions is the engagement of external stakeholders, including children and young people. The Commissioner has also held interviews with the members of the Parliamentary Joint Committee. The Commission will again seek to obtain feedback from these stakeholders of priority areas for the Commission, how these priority areas align with the priority areas contained in the NSW 2021 State Plans and where the Commission should be targeting its limited resources to maximize outcomes for children and young people.

Senior staff of the Commission have already commenced the planning for the review of the Strategic Directions 2011-2014. However, with the appointment of a new Commissioner it is envisaged that the review and establishment of Strategic Directions for 2014-2017 will be a key priority of the new Commissioner.

- e) What are the main organisational performance targets for the year?

The Commission's performance measures for 2011-12 are detailed on page 7 of the 2011-2012 Annual Report.

The key performance targets for 2012-13 are:

- *80% Working With Children Checks completed within two days*
- *90 percent of Working With Children Checks completed within 10 days*
- *70 % of risk assessments completed within 16 weeks*
- *Target of 85,000 Working With Children Checks per annum met and exceeded*
- *Target of 200 risk assessments per annum met and exceeded*
- *100% compliance with Working With Children Check obligations following an audit by the Commission*
- *90% satisfaction with Commission training programs and seminars*
- *20% increase in subscribers to the Commission's e-news letter, social media and other digital engagement strategies*
- *85% of audit recommendations implemented within 12 months and 10% implemented within 18 months*

- 85% of correspondence completed within 14 days

Training and Workshops

11. The annual report states that representatives from 686 organisations attended child safe organisation training and information sessions in the reporting period, an 18% increase in unique organisations attending from the previous year (page 7).

- a) What industries did the new organisations who attended child safe organisation training represent?

These new organisations were from a variety of sectors, including children's services, youth, sport and recreation, residential and refugee services, Aboriginal and CALD services. Both government and non-government organisations were represented.

- b) What efforts are made by the Commission to advertise and attract new organisations to attend child safe organisation training and information sessions?

The Commission uses data from the Working With Children Check to identify the geographical spread of child related work. The Commission partners with local councils and TAFEs regarding use of facilities and participation of local organisations where child related work is focussed. The Commission emails local child related organisations to alert them to the training opportunities in their local areas. The Commission also targets newly registered employers with invitations to nearby training sessions. The Commission advertises courses through its website and invites local media to publicise these events.

Attendance data in 2011/12 showed that Aboriginal services were under-represented at child safe training. The Commission is now working in partnership with several Land Councils to establish links within Aboriginal communities. The Commission has recently delivered child safe training sessions to Aboriginal communities at Wilcannia, Menindee and Broken Hill. A program to increase the Commission's engagement with Aboriginal communities on child safe practice is continuing throughout 2013.

12. It appears that a decreased number of seminars and workshops regarding child safe organisations were held in 2011-2012 in comparison to 2010-2011 (page 32). Can you advise why this was the case, and whether the Commission is intending to conduct a greater number of seminars and workshops in 2012-2013?

Although 2011-2012 saw a reduction in the number of Child Safe Organisations workshops, an increase in the total numbers of attendees was recorded. The Commission also targeted industry specific conference and sector forums.

The Commission intended to refocus our workshops and seminars to include the new Working with Children Check in 2011-12 but the new Check was delayed.

Once the legislation was passed in June 2012, the Commission commenced information sessions about the new Check as well as child safe organisation education. These sessions have been held across the state, in many regional areas.

Since August 2012, the Commission has held 155 information sessions about the new Check to more than 3,000 people. We have 35 information sessions organised until the end of April. In late 2012, the Commission commenced webinars and we have held four to date. We have eight webinars scheduled from now until the end of April.

The Commission has also added a new e-learning tool for training and workshops to its kit.

Communication and Participation

13. The Annual Report states that seven KidsPolls were conducted in the reporting year, with a 41% increase in average votes from the previous year (page 7). However, the participation of children and young people remained consistent with the previous year.

- a) Does this represent an increased involvement of adults in the online KidsPolls?

Yes, an increase in KidsPoll votes does indicate an increase in votes from users aged 18 or older.

- b) What techniques does the Commission use to increase the participation of children and young people in online Commission activities such as KidsPolls?

The Commission engages with youth-led and youth-focused organisations via social media and online services such as Youthgas. The current redevelopment of the Commission's website includes a redesign of KidsPoll to increase its visibility from the Home Page. The new website will be promoted to the children and youth related sector and through our ongoing Kids Participation projects.

- c) How does this activity lead to children participating in decisions that affect their lives?

The comments left by children and young people on KidsPolls are frequently incorporated in the Commission's submissions on issues affecting the lives of children in NSW. For example, the Commissioner quoted figures and comments from a Kidspoll on the supply of alcohol to minors in oral submissions to a Parliamentary Inquiry on this subject.

14. One of the strategies listed within the Commission's 'Strategic Directions 2011-2014' is 'obtain the views of children and young people to inform our work including those of vulnerable children' (page 40). How does the Commission seek the views of vulnerable children and young people in NSW and how is the information gathered in this way used by the Commission?

The Commission seeks the views of vulnerable children and young people through organisations that work closely with these children and young people, and does so in a targeted way on specific issues affecting a particular group of 'vulnerable' children.

For example, the Commission recently consulted with the CREATE Foundation, which ran a series of workshops with children in out-of-home care on future directions for the NSW child protection system, which helped inform the Commission's submission on these proposed reforms.

The Commission has also worked closely with Oasis, which provides alternative education programs and supports for disadvantaged young people who are disengaged from school, on the Commission's research project on how meaningful student participation in school decision making can contribute to student engagement in schools.

The Commission has also incorporated the views of particular groups of young people in its broader participation work. This included involving young people with experiences of mental illness and school disengagement presenting at a Participation Showcase held at the end of 2012.

The Commission is currently trialing a new method of consulting with children and young people through school classrooms and it is anticipated that this will diversify the range of children that the Commission routinely consults with, including more vulnerable children.

The Commission will also be consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

organizations to develop resources on how to engage and encourage the participation of children from these communities in the decisions that affect their lives.

15. The Commission has advised that connections made on the Facebook organisation page and Twitter profile during the reporting period more than doubled compared to the previous year (page 18). Can you outline the goals of the Commission's social media engagement strategy, particularly in regards using social media to connect with children and young people? Are the majority of the Commission's social media connections with other organisations, or directly with members of the public?

The Commission aims to be responsive and diverse in engaging with, and communicating to, its stakeholders, including children and young people.

Social media is one important element of how the Commission does this.

On Facebook, as at 4 March 2013, of the Commission's 763 page Likes, 490 were registered as 'people', however many of these registrations are for organisations. For this reason, figures cannot be definitive. It is likely that the proportion of individual and organisational connections is closer to one third individual, two thirds organisational.

On Twitter this is even more difficult to measure definitively, as some individuals represent organisations, while others name their organisations, but Tweet as individuals.

Growth in connections on Facebook and Twitter continues to be strong, for instance, Facebook 'Likes' as at 4 March 2013 numbered 763. This compares to 460 at the end of June 2012. This is an increase of 66%.

Twitter followers at 4 March 2013 numbered 950. This compares to 538 at the end of June 2012. This represents an increase of 76%.

Social media and online tools are being incorporated into the development of a strong user friendly accessible website to support the new Working With Children Check, to make registering and checking a more simple and effortless process and will also form a key component of future research to augment Citizen Me – the Commission's child participation resource.

The Commission's communications strategy is also being refined to better utilize social media technology in communications.

16. The Commission has advised that its 'Online engagement with young

people' project was discontinued during 2012 at the NSW Government's request (page 25). Can you advise why this project was discontinued and what opportunities are now being explored by the Commission to partner with Government agencies to ensure that they are able to effectively engage with children and young people online?

The Office of the Minister for Citizenship and Communities and Aboriginal Affairs requested that work on this project cease. It is understood that the money allocated to the project was used to contribute to cluster savings targets.

The Commission is currently researching and developing a new section of Citizen Me (the Commission's flagship participation guide) on online participation of children and young people that will be a resource for government and non-government agencies who want to effectively engage with children and young people online. The Commission will be consulting NGOs with expertise in this area, including the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action and Policy Association, as well as with children and young people through the Commission's Young People Advisory Group and the NSW Youth Advisory Council.

The Commission continues to work to encourage and support government and non-government agencies to develop their capacities to consult with and involve children and young people in agency decisions that affect the lives of children and young people, both through online and more traditional means. In particular the Commission will work closely with the Department of Premier and Cabinet to develop "Have Your Say" in ways that better engage children.

17. With regard to the performance measure 'Children participate in decisions that affect their lives', what kind of life affecting decisions did children participate in during the reporting year, and what was the extent of that participation?

A core function of the Commission is to promote the participation of children in decisions that affect their lives, particularly in relation to decisions, policies and practices of government and other agencies.

The Commission's projects and initiatives that were targeted to this goal in the 2011-12 reporting period included:

- The development of Citizen Me –a resource for organisations to promote and support the participation of children in their organizational decision making was developed. The resource*

provides information about how to involve young people in decision making and includes information on capacity building of children and young people and evaluating participatory initiatives. It was developed with young people themselves in a consultant role.

- *Initiating a research project on Student Voice to investigate the most effective ways to promote children's participation in school decision making*
- *The Commission's Young Peoples Advisory Group (YPAG) was established to advise the Commission on issues affecting children and young people, provide input into the Commission's policy work and to model participatory practice to other organizations. This new consultation model also involved participants undertaking consultative research with their peers to provide a broader input from young people in their communities to inform the Commission's policy recommendations. The areas where the Commission consulted the YPAG on issues affecting the lives of children and young people in NSW included the provision of alcohol to minors, mental health in schools, children and the NSW planning system, sexting, injury prevention, Proud Schools, and after school activities. The views obtained from the young people on these issues were incorporated in advice to government.*
- *Planning for the Participation Showcase, which brought together heads of government departments, NGOs and MPs to showcase examples of successful participation practice and involving children was also undertaken in the reporting period. This will now be an annual event*

Research and Advocacy

18. In 2011-2012 the Commission made 23 submissions to inquiries and reviews, including eight joint submissions with the Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (page 8). Does the Commission specifically consult with young people when particular submissions are developed? By what measures are the views of children and young people captured and reflected in the Commission's submissions?

The Commission completes a substantial volume of submissions each year and these often involve short timeframes for input. The Commission can only consult with children and young people on a select number of submissions and does this primarily through the Commission's Young People Advisory Group.

The views of children and young people are reflected in these particular submissions by informing the Commission's analysis or commentary and/or as direct and pertinent quotes from children and young people.

Depending on the subject of the submission, the Commission will liaise with community organizations that consult with children and young people in the course of their work. For example, the Commission recently consulted with the Create Foundation to understand what young people with experience of the out-of-home care system in NSW thought of the Government's proposed reforms to the child protection system (Create ran a series of workshops with young people on this issue).

The other way that the Commission can capture and reflect the views of children in submissions is where the Commission has done prior proactive consultation with children and young people and the findings of this work are relevant to a current inquiry or review. For example, the Commission's work on children's understandings of their own wellbeing has influenced many of the Commission's submissions over the past few years. Work just completed on how children spend their time after school and current work on mental health first aid in schools are further examples of proactive consultation that are expected to be of relevance to a range of potential future reviews or inquiries.

The Commission is currently trialing consultations in the classroom as a way of reaching a broader range of children and young people in NSW. This involves working with individual schools and classroom teachers with an interest in running consultations and providing the necessary background material. The outcomes of these consultations have already been used to develop new research on mental first aid with the NSW Mental Health Commission and are expected to inform a range of issues over time on which the Commission is likely to have input to government inquiries and reviews.

The Commission also aligns its KidsPoll with relevant inquiries or reviews of programs or policies in order to capture views.

19. In early 2012 the Commissioner called for increased sexual health education for young people in response to survey data showing a lowering in the age of first sexual activity among teenagers (page 16). How has the Commission been involved in delivering effective messages about sexual health for young people, and more generally in public health campaigns targeted at young people in NSW? What have been the outcomes of the Commission's involvement in this area?

The Commission's main involvement in delivering effective messages about

sexual health for young people has been in monitoring the sexual health of children and young people through publishing and promoting data in the Picture of NSW Children and liaising with the NSW Department of Education and Training about the quality and dissemination of sex education in NSW public schools.

The Commission has limited expertise on public health campaigning or the delivery of messages to children and young people in these settings. However, the Commission has encouraged and has also offered to assist those working on public health campaigns targeted at children and young people, such as NSW Health, to seek the views of children and young people on the messages and approaches are likely to work for them.

20. Section 3.1.3.2 of the annual report lists a number of research partnerships that the Commission was involved in between 2011 and 2012 (page 21). How are research partnerships identified for involvement by the Commission, and how does the Commission assess the results of research partnerships against the quantity of funding provided in each case by the Commission?

Research projects are identified in the context of the Commission's legislated and strategic priorities. Research partnerships with relevant agencies and researchers are developed around these focus areas.

A number of current projects focus on the middle years of childhood with an emphasis on young people's wellbeing, engagement and participation and on vulnerable youth. Other current research partnerships include work on children and the built environment, serious childhood injury, 'sexting', and promoting children's wellbeing through technology.

The Commission's funding contribution per project is relatively low and often in kind. Contributions are assessed on the likely impact and relevance of the project in relation to the Commission's priorities and the information gap they contribute to.

The majority of projects are competitively funded Australian Research Council Linkage projects which have their own quality control processes, reports commissioned in partnership with authoritative agencies such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) or small research initiatives that support the Commission's publication of participation resources. The latter research products are peer assessed in production and from feedback and usage once they have been published.

General

21. The Commission has advised that government saving targets will result in the Commission making savings through various approaches, including reducing resources for child participation activities (page 43). Why was this area identified as an area where savings could be made? How were areas of the Commission's work identified and prioritised as areas where savings could be made?

Following the Departmental amalgamations that occurred in 2011 the Commission for Children and Young People is now part of the Department of Education and Communities cluster and administratively comes under the Office of Communities.

The Commission, like all government funded agencies, is required to meet savings targets and efficiency dividends imposed by government. For 2012-13 the Commission was required make total savings of \$862,000. These savings comprised efficiency dividends of \$115,500, procurement savings of \$81,500, employee –related expenses savings of \$122,200 and \$543,000 to contribute to Office of Communities revenue shortfall. These savings figures were based on the Commission's original total expenses budget for 2012-13 which was framed around a September 2012 start date for the new Working With Children Check (WWCC).

The delays in implementing the new WWCC has had the effect of reducing the Commission's total expenses budget for 2012-13, however, the savings targets for the Commission have not changed.

For small agencies like the Commission such blanket approaches and application of budget reductions to agencies that are already operating in an efficient and effective manner are extremely challenging. A significant portion of the Commission's budget is dedicated to staff related expenses to meet the Commission's statutory obligations and fixed costs for the WWCC. The Commission, for example, undertakes very little procurement and therefore has little capacity to make procurement savings of \$81,500 as required in the 2012-13 budget allocation.

The Commission has very little discretion about how we achieve this level of budget savings. One of the only ways we can achieve these savings is to leave positions vacant or defer the recruitment to vacant positions. At the time of being advised of the level of savings required for 2012-13 the dedicated position of Senior Participation Officer was vacant. We have decided to leave this position vacant. However, most of the work attached to this position is being undertaken by other officers in the Policy and Research Team. This

obviously means that there are then fewer resources allocated to other policy and research functions of the Commission.

All areas of the Commission were reviewed to identify and prioritise strategies to meet the savings targets. The Commission is also carrying a number of vacant positions in both the WWCC Operations and Education and Compliance teams as well as the Business Services team that supports the Commission's operations.

22. The Commission also advised that its website is in the process of being redeveloped (page 43). Were the funds allocated to the website redevelopment considered for savings? Is the Commission website being redeveloped based on feedback from stakeholders?

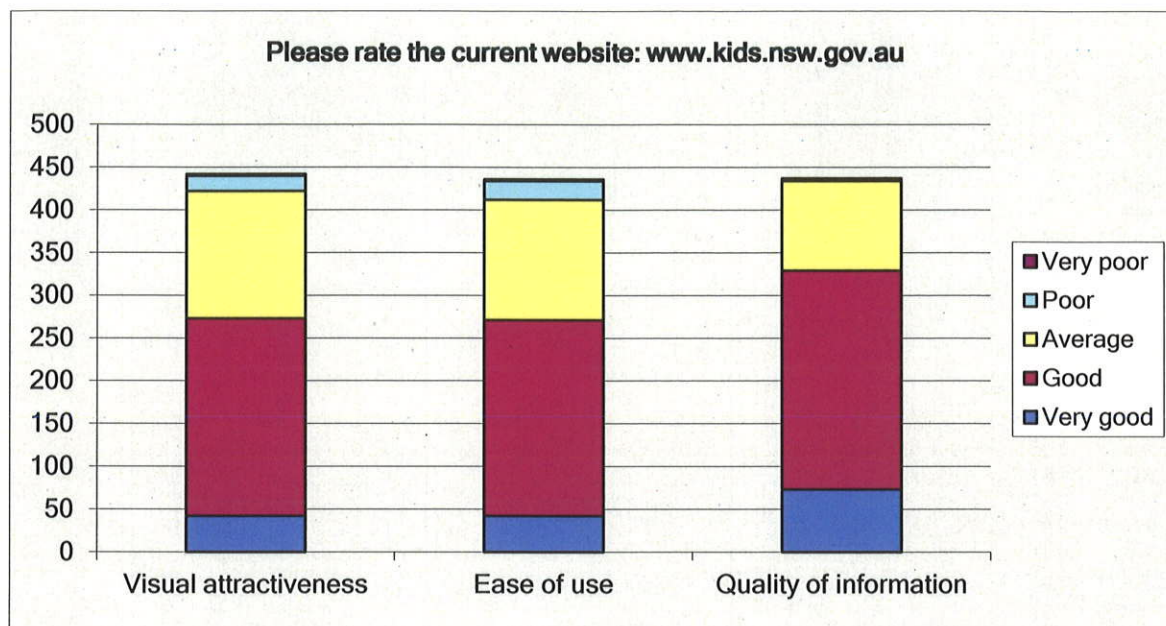
The Commission's website is currently being redeveloped due to the imminent commencement of the new Working With Children Check (WWCC). The new WWCC will involve an on-line web-based application for employees to apply for their WWCC as well as a web-based portal for employers to verify an employee WWCC status.

The Commission's current website's content management system (CMS) was built in 2005. The Commission's website under this CMS went live in 2006 and the site continues to be managed by the old CMS. This software, however, is now outdated and no longer supported by the vendor. The current CMS cannot support the required changes to meet the web-based WWCC application and verification processes.

The Commission received dedicated funding to meet the implementation costs associated with the new WWCC. These costs included the development of a web-based portal and systems. These funds were therefore not available to be allocated to meet the Commission's savings targets.

The website redevelopment has progressed with advice from the 2012 and 2013 Young People Advisory Group, as well as members of the Commission's Expert Advisory Group. The Commission also gained feedback from users of its website via an online user survey, with more than 500 respondents.

Survey results included bench-marking of the current website for later evaluation of the redevelopment now underway. Feedback from the respondents is contained in the following graph:



Extensive user testing is being carried out during the development, especially of the online forms for the new Working With Children Check.

The Young People Advisory Group

23. In 2011, the Young People Advisory Group (YPAG) model of consultation with young people was implemented as a result of an evaluation by the Commission of the previous model, the Young People's Reference Group (YPRG) (page 24)

- How has the new advisory model worked in comparison to the previous approach?
- Has the implementation of the YPAG model resulted in any measurable improvements in terms of outcomes?
- What benefits and insights have the YPAG brought to the work of the Commission?

One of the key elements of the current Young People Advisory Group (YPAG) model, which builds on the previous Young People's Reference Group (YPRG) model, is the strong relationship formed with member schools. Support from the school teacher and principal assists members to prepare for meetings and carry out the roles and responsibilities of the YPAG outside of meetings, including capturing the voices of other children and young people in the community.

The support teachers from each school played a crucial role in conducting the

2012 YPAG research project exploring how children aged 9-14 years spend time after school. Support teachers provided administrative support and assisted to arrange consultations in members' schools and other schools in the community. The research includes the views of 1,175 children around NSW which will inform the Commission's work on the middle years of childhood.

An independent external evaluation of the YPAG was commenced in November 2012 by Noetic Solutions. The evaluation will assess the impacts of the Commission's consultation models on the work and effectiveness of the Commission, and the effectiveness of the participatory models. The evaluation will be carried out throughout 2013 and the final report will be available in April 2014.

The YPAG model has captured the voice of children and young people around NSW which has informed the Commission's work promoting the interests of children and young people in NSW. The advice of the YPAG has informed the Commission's work in relation to the NSW Planning System, childhood injury prevention, participation, alcohol and minors, mental health and the middle years of childhood.

The YPAG has provided positive feedback to the Commission about how their experiences have built their capacities:

"I have gained far more than I expected from being a part of the YPAG. I have learnt about causes and impacts of various aspects of children's lives, ranging from safety to alcohol use. I have also learnt how to act in front of media. Being a part of YPAG has enlightened me in so many aspects that I would have otherwise not known about."

"I have learnt a lot already from being a member of YPAG, met new people, learnt many things and completed an interesting research project."

"The skills that I've learnt have helped me in school assignments when I'm online and have to look for certain information. It helps a lot."

"We learn off each other and gain different views and opinions, and it's good in that way."

24. Is financial support provided by the Commission to enable members of the YPAG (particularly members representing regional NSW) to contribute to YPAG activities and to provide members with training?

Young People Advisory Group (YPAG) members are provided with financial support to attend meetings. (Meetings are held six times each year for a total of

eight days. Training is provided in the context of the meetings. The total YPAG meeting and research support budget is approx \$38,500.

- YPAG members are paid the standard government sitting fee (\$207 for a full day in 2012).*
- Full travel and accommodation costs are covered for all members.*
- Sydney based members are reimbursed for public transport to and from meetings.*
- Regional and rural members' travel costs (flights / regional train), overnight accommodation with youth worker supervision are paid by the Commission.*

Each YPAG school receives \$1,000 per year to contribute to administrative fees to support members carry out the work of the YPAG, including their research project.

The Commission utilises online communication to facilitate YPAG work to address geographical barriers.

Current and past YPAG members are also invited to participate in a range of other participation opportunities with the Commission and also more broadly. Sometimes, opportunities are limited to Sydney-based young people. However, on larger projects regional and rural members are invited and financially supported to participate. Examples include:

- The Commission's Participation Showcase at Parliament House – members from Byron Bay, Scone, Wollongong and St John's Park co-hosted the event and participated in roundtable discussion.*

YPAG members receive training in the context of meetings in the following:

- Meeting procedures and chairing*
- Government decision-making*
- Media*
- Research*