

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 1

Inquiry into the proposed closure of Seaforth TAFE

At Sydney on Friday, 12 November 1999

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chairman)

The Hon. P. Forsythe
The Hon. A. B. Kelly
The Hon. D. F. Moppett
The Hon. P. T. Primrose
The Hon. H. S. Tsang
The Hon. Dr P. Wong

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Inquiry into the proposed closure of Seaforth TAFE

BRIAN ROBERT SYMS, Director, Studies, Northern Beaches, and Acting Deputy Director, Northern Sydney Institute, 213 Pacific Highway, Gore Hill,

JOHN ROBERT BURKHARDT, Group General Manager, Properties, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney,

TERENCE RICHARD BURKE, Deputy Director-General, Operations, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, and

LESLIE LOBLE, Director, Vocational Education and Training Policy, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you each receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

ALL WITNESSES: We did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

ALL WITNESSES: We are.

CHAIR: We will now proceed with questions. All members of the Committee will direct questions to the witnesses. At the conclusion of formal questions it is customary for the Chairman to make the following statement: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present, to be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request and that result in confidential session.

I should warn you that the Parliament may override that decision at any time and make you evidence public. You are also welcome to make an opening statement on behalf of the department.

Dr BURKE: I think we would like to make an opening statement, and particularly address some issues that certainly are contained in our written submission, but the comments we might make now would particularly emphasise some of those things we believe the Committee should be aware of.

In the first instance I would like to make some comments about the nature of TAFE because I think it is important that the Committee be aware of the context in which this decision was made. I think that most people would be aware that TAFE is the largest provider of vocational educational training courses in Australia. It offers 1,500 major award courses, which is a quite significant number. There are 129 sites across the State on which TAFE courses are offered. Those sites are aggregated into 11 institutes of TAFE.

The subject of discussion today is in relationship to Northern Sydney institute of TAFE. We have in excess of 440,000 students and, of course, most of the courses offered are nationally recognised courses and most courses are accredited under the Australian qualifications framework which is about courses that are designed to ensure consistency from State to State.

It might be of interest for the Committee to know that in fact one in 12 people over 15 years of

age in New South Wales are enrolled in TAFE courses, 25 per cent of students in TAFE are under the age of 20 and 20 per cent over 40. A lot of the courses are specific industry courses and, certainly, the courses are related to work and, of course, there are a number of courses that are offered as workplace training courses.

The growth in TAFE enrolments between 1996 and 1998 has been in the order of 2.4 per cent and basically and this might well be obvious but the objective of TAFE is to deliver quality response and competitive vocational educational training programs and products and services to meet customer needs. The customer needs are customers in industry and individuals.

In recent times TAFE has been under a great deal of pressure because of a number of changes in policy, particularly by the Commonwealth Government and I think it would be useful to the Committee if I ask Leslie to explain to you what the pressures have been from the point of view of finance, particularly as it relates to Commonwealth Government policies because that is the basis on which decisions were made in regard to the Seaforth building.

Ms LOBLE: If I can just quickly paint for the Committee a sense of how things have changed in recent years in Commonwealth policy around vocational education and training. Essentially the old format was that States individually determined their priorities, ran their programs and implemented their vocational education and training objectives.

Beginning in the 1980s, as the economy changed, there was increasing pressure to recognise that it was, indeed, a national labour market and that skills were increasingly imperative in light of globalisation and the knowledge based economy. But in terms of the training system, there was pressure growing to establish mechanisms that would facilitate a national labour market, greater mobility and skills, increased economic efficiency, those sorts of things, and so a consensus developed that there should be some mechanism for national reform.

That led, in 1992, to the formation of the Australian National Training Authority administration. It is the mechanism by which the States and the Commonwealth address national priorities, national policies and funding, those sorts of issues. At the heart of the agreement in 1992 was the negotiated positions of the States and Territories arguing that, in exchange with going ahead with these national reforms and forsaking, if you will, localised priorities, the Commonwealth agreed to put in not only recurrent funding but in addition growth funding to recognise as well the need to enhance skills for the economy generally.

It was founded on three core principles: first, that skills needed to be developed to enhance business activity and economic competitiveness generally; second, that opportunities needed to be expanded for youth, existing workers and disadvantaged populations in order to attack persistent unemployment and to ensure that not only was there good entry into the labour market but people could move through the labour market across their lifetime and that the economic incentives of the market will drive firms only to invest in skills that people need for the moment and that are specific to the firm, that public investment, therefore, needs to provide an incentive for people to get skills that will help them move to the next job; and third, improvements in efficiency and quality provision. Those were sort of the bed rock foundation principles of the system.

The funding process in that was built around States and Territories submitting plans and those plans were derived both from population data as well as skill priorities, including an assessment of

where the skill shortages were going to be for the coming year which largely was built from industry input. Those plans were negotiated by and large on a bilateral basis and funding provided. In addition, there was growth funding that was in the order of \$23 million a year for New South Wales and that growth funding was demand driven and in recognition of the growing numbers of people seeking training opportunities, additional funding should be provided for them. That funding grew. It was not just \$23 million each year, it was \$23 million the first year, \$46 million the next, \$69 million the third, and so it was a cumulative set of growth funding. That lasted from 1992 to 1997.

In 1998 the new ANTA agreement under which we are now operating was negotiated and the Commonwealth introduced the principle of growth through efficiencies which essentially meant that the States and Territories no longer received growth funding. The Commonwealth guaranteed base line recurrent funding but growth would have to be achieved through efficiencies. In other words, the States and Territories were going to have to find a way to meet the expanding demand through cut backs in one way or another or efficiencies in operation and provision. That in turn rests on a notion of unit cost, in other words the cost of providing a student contact hour, as it is called.

The process changed a bit also in terms of how the funding is provided. We still provide State plans but rather than them being built entirely off our industry analysis and skill shortages, while that plays a role, we technically now record against national priorities that are given to us and we have to show how we are going to meet those priorities and that triggers funding.

The priorities that we are required to account against include things like implementation of user choice, which is the title for the competition policy that has been introduced and expansion of contestable funding or, in other words, expansion of competitive dollars and that is clearly a priority. We need to report against it.

Despite the fact that we report against it, the funds ultimately are triggered by our meeting what is called the growth and efficiency target. Each State has to say how much efficiency they will gain and how much growth there will be in student contact hours. That triggers the funding and each year New South Wales obviously has to do its own assessment and negotiate in terms of whether we get the provision of the dollars.

I know you have our statements and I will not go through all the detail and we will leave it to you if you want to ask any questions about the numbers, I mean our unit costs have been rising. Last year we were the only State that did have an increase in unit cost and there certainly was a reaction on the part of the ANTA board and ANTA to that.

We are taking our efficiencies in a variety of strategies including the state budget and that has reassured ANTA and the Commonwealth sufficiently to say that they would go ahead and give us our funding this year. In 1997 we actually came dangerously close to not getting our funding because of concerns about our resistance to opening up immediately the user choice and the ANTA board and the Commonwealth only funded us contingent upon a series of conditions demonstrating our efficiency and commitment to those principles.

I will just finish by saying the effect has been fairly significant in general on this sector as well as in New South Wales. The Commonwealth - and this is across governments but particularly lately - as a general strategy viewed the development of ANTA and a national investment as a way to increase its leverage over States. That is what they were seeking to do and that was at the heart of

the agreement. In fact, the Commonwealth government uses its financing to drive States and Territories in the direction they want to go.

Secondly, it has pushed very much lately a focus on efficiency and rationalisation. This is the history of vocational education and training in Australia published by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research. It says in here, and I think it is probably a fair summary, that “economic rationalism and corporate managerialism of training reform had narrowed the education policy agenda to issues of economic efficiency, economic productivity and institutional competitiveness at the expense of concerns such as personal development, democratic citizenship, equality and social justice.”

Mr KELLY: And that is relevant right across every form of rational competition policy in the country.

Ms LOBLE: It may be, but this is a discussion exclusively of vocational education and training and the Commonwealth strategies in that direction.

The third effect has been, I think, as a result of those core principles that underlie the training agenda, while they are still there because the financing structure is set up explicitly around growth through efficiencies, there has been, naturally, an incentive. If you have to get your money by meeting growth through efficiency there is a constant pressure to try to continue to meet the fundamental principles of expanding opportunity and increasing skills and economic efficiency generally against this very clear explicit pressure to improve the efficiency and meet, essentially, the cut backs that are going to be required to trigger your funding.

That is just a brief overview. As I said, I know you have all of our specific data and look forward to any questions.

Dr BURKE: Mr Chairman, with your indulgence could I just move from there. I would like each of the four of us to make a brief statement relating to our areas of responsibility. I think what Leslie has been saying to you is basically emphasising the fact that whilst TAFE has an extraordinary difficult task at any time in terms of judging the needs of industry, judging the needs of individuals and therefore being responsive and flexible enough to change and to move with the times, to move in terms of demographic shifts and so on, in addition to that we have had this extraordinary pressure from the Commonwealth in regard to funding which has exacerbated the situation a great deal.

On pages 1 to 11 in your document we spell out the particular pressures that have been brought about in recent times by the Commonwealth and it involves all of those things listed there. You will note at the end of that section, page 11, we spell out what that means in terms of Northern Sydney's Institute budget. There had to be a reduction in Northern Sydney's Institute's budget of 2.9 million, and that had to be brought about by efficiencies and consolidations and changes, and so on. Basically, we became aware of that imperative just in the last couple of months. That is why decisions were made in regard to the Seaforth building.

On all of the pages in section 2, it spells out the background to the decision and you will see that it actually begins way back in 1992 and 1993 when the Northern Beaches campus was established. Initially, that consisted of three sites. It consisted of the site at Brookvale which was

the new building, it consisted of a part of Balgowlah Boys High School and the Seaforth building, but you will see from the document that between 1992 and the present there has been a steady progression of rescissions relating to consolidating the Northern Beaches Institute.

That sort of movement is not unique to Northern Sydney. That is the sort of decisions that TAFE institute directors have to make all the time. If they are going to be flexible and responsive in terms of changing needs in industry and so on, they have to be sensitive enough to pick up those changes and to move and change and so on. I think that it is probably well known to all members of the Committee, there are certain areas of industry that have declined; fashion industry, clothing, manufacturing, engineering, and yet there are other areas whether there have been increases, information technology and so on.

That whole pattern of movement where there has been consolidation is spelt out very clearly on those pages beginning on page 13, pages 13 and 14 in particular. In 1993, for example, the Balgowlah annex was closed. The staff had been involved at various periods between 1992 through to the present in discussing the movement of particular facilities to the Northern Beaches. In particular, I would point out that a lot of the services, administration services, student associations and so on, have been amalgamated during that period and located at Brookvale.

Now, Brookvale, and there are some photos there in your document, is a large modern construction. There has been gradual improvements over that period of time and basically it is a far superior site to the Seaforth site which is quite a confined site with all sorts of limitations. Mr Burkhardt will give you more detail in regard to that. Basically, you can see from the wording in our document we talk about the merger of the sites for the Northern Beaches campus and we use the term "wind down". It is quite obvious that there has been a wind down period over quite some time, but there were no definite plans until just recently to actually close the Seaforth building.

Technically, Seaforth has not been a campus. Seaforth has been a building and in fact there are documents that indicate that Seaforth was not a campus. I point that out particularly because in documents like this, for example, which is the Northern Sydney's Annual Report for last year, it actually talks about the Northern Beaches campus in which there are sites, certainly, Brookvale and Seaforth, but technically it was not indicated as a campus. I point that out because there is some confusion about that.

The decision certainly was taken a little while ago to close the Seaforth building site. A lot of decisions go way back to 1992 and 1993 and it goes back to some decisions made, in fact, by the previous government.

The thing that I would particularly like to emphasise is that there have been falling enrolments and that is spelt out in our document. It indicates that between 1993 and 1999 in the Northern Beaches campus there has been a reduction of 33.9 per cent and a reduction on the Seaforth site of 11.3 per cent of enrolments. It also indicates that there were savings to be made by closing the Seaforth building site, and that is spelt out there for you as well.

Basically, we believe there are very significant benefits in closing the Seaforth site and consolidating on the Brookvale site. There are budgetary benefits, there are benefits in terms of services both to students and to staff, and basically in terms of the provision of TAFE courses in that part of Sydney. Certainly, there are improvements in terms of parking facilities, library facility,

staff amenities, amenities for students with disabilities, and we can illustrate all of those things.

I think perhaps, with your indulgence, if I ask Mr Burkhardt just to spell out some of the issues relating to properties and then perhaps Mr Syms. Basically what we are doing is speaking to our submission, but it does focus the attention, I think, of the Committee on those things that we think are important.

Dr WONG: I have an urgent question. I need to find out from Dr Burke when is it a campus, when is it a building?

CHAIR: I think we can have those questions when we finish their submissions. This is the introduction and then you can question them.

Dr WONG: Definition, that is all. I am not questioning, I just want a definition.

CHAIR: I think that is opening up what is part of the problem. It is more than a definition.

Dr WONG: Okay, fine.

CHAIR: You have put your finger on the problem.

Dr WONG: Thank you, Sir.

CHAIR: Can I just remind the gallery, I know there is a lot of interest in this issue, but under the Parliamentary Rules the gallery are not to interfere with the conduct of the inquiry by either clapping or booing or any other noises, thank you.

Mr BURKHARDT: I would just like to make a few general comments, first of all, following on from Leslie's comments about the general financial background. The 1990s have been a period in TAFE of rationalisation and consolidation. This has been undertaken against a background of dramatic shifts in the nature of work and TAFE offerings. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s there was very little in the way of information technology within the TAFE sector. It is now one of the largest parts of the TAFE organisation. My own experience as an institute director in Western Sydney, when I took the institute over there were 1,200 IT students. When I left at the middle of this year there was in the order of 4,800 information technology students.

Similarly, there were shifts and downturns in a large number of areas. Dr Burke has already mentioned changes in respect of the fashion industry. In many of the engineering industries there has been not only shifts of the nature of those industries, but in the quantum in the workforce. TAFE has moved to address those sorts of shifts.

Within building, in the 1980s it was not possible to use Commonwealth funds to do anything but to build new facilities. The 1990s have been characterised by the consolidation and the rationalisation of facilities and the reuse of buildings. In fact, our whole approach now is the consolidation of facilities to maximise their utilisation. In many areas, utilisation levels in small demographic areas are insufficient to warrant the on-going consideration of those facilities.

What funds that we do have for growth have obviously been concentrated in those areas where

there is real demographic growth and industrial growth. The greater west of Sydney and, increasingly, in areas like tourism and hospitality, up on to the north coast and the south coast. So there are dramatic shifts within a population count within TAFE that has only marginally moved over the last decade, but within that there are significant shifts in individual areas.

I think what has happened at Brookvale and Seaforth demonstrates, and the report to the Committee demonstrates, that there has been an on-going process of shifts, reuse, upgrades but the focus has also been in providing for the consolidation of the Northern Beaches into Brookvale. That is the facility that provided the reasonable opportunity to maximise our efficiency.

In the future we will continually be consolidating and rationalising. It is an imperative part of us achieving the efficiencies in operating costs because a facility that is part utilised is very inefficient in terms of its operational costs.

Whilst a number of issues discussed here this morning will obviously be about some properties matters, it is the flow on effect. It is the effect of having multiple facilities and the costs of keeping multiple facilities open when in fact the same job can be done in a single facility. It is about the on-going operating costs. Savings have to be achieved in perpetuity. It is not about one-off capital costs, it is about the impact of that capital costs. That is the total asset management approach that has been introduced into New South Wales now for some nine years. We have to utilise the facilities we have in an economic and rational form. I might just leave it at that.

Mr SYMS: I went to Northern Beaches in the middle of 1996 as the Acting Director. My briefing when I entered on duty was the then Institute Director and also my briefing from the person I was taking over from both made it quite clear that the long-term target was consolidation. At that stage, we had classes at Balgowlah in part of the Boys High School as well as at Seaforth and as well as at Brookvale. It was made clear to me that in the interests of the sorts of things that Mr Burkhardt has been talking about, that the long-term goal is to consolidate steadily on to the Brookvale site.

In our document starting on page 24, we have listed a number of benefits that we believe flow from this latest step of consolidation having successfully closed the Balgowlah site about a year ago now. This next step will produce an integrated fine arts facility at Brookvale. Up to now we have had ceramics at one site and the rest of fine arts at the other. Under this move we will then have the whole of fine arts together with an integration of ceramics in with the rest of fine arts as well as introducing a new area called Digital Art.

We will still be offering the Higher School Certificate and the Certificate in General Education at Northern Beaches, now at Brookvale. So just a change of location associated with that.

Seaforth has no student car parking. There are 370 parking places at Brookvale which has to be an advantage to students compared with the current parking situation for the students who are at Seaforth.

They have a large modern library at Brookvale. They are weeding out old stock and all the current holdings from Seaforth will go over there making a stock of over 30,000 items in the combined library. The Seaforth library staff will also be going to Brookvale and that will enable us to provide a better service to students, subject to demand, including things like weekend openings

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which we have not been able to do in the past.

We have a student association which, up until now, has attempted to maintain a presence at both Brookvale and Seaforth but they will be able to offer a better service if they only have to manage the one site. That goes for things like the bookshop and the cafeteria.

We believe that we will be able to provide improved learning services and facilities generally with the newer buildings at Brookvale, so that the students that will transfer from Seaforth to Brookvale will generally all round finish up with access to better services in more pleasant surroundings. A number of the changes we have made at Brookvale over recent years have been to create industry specific skill centres specific to the needs of the Northern Beaches, and they will all be accessible next year to the students from Seaforth.

In short, I think we will have a greater choice of programs and modes of studies available all at one location and I think we will be serving the Northern Beaches better and more efficiently by this consolidation.

CHAIR: If that concludes the opening statement we will proceed with the questions. We normally let the Opposition go first.

Dr WONG: I want to know what is your definition of campus and your definition of a building.

Dr BURKE: A campus in TAFE terms is a site within the TAFE definition where there is an administrative function relating to the provision of courses for students, and basically you would see from what we have provided on pages 13 and 14, there has been a gradual move of all of those administrative services to the Brookvale site. I point out to you that the official documents do not talk about a campus.

Dr WONG: I notice from your letter you sent to the students at Seaforth that you mentioned the Seaforth campus. What is the reason?

Dr BURKE: I suggest to you that perhaps the word campus in this case has been unfortunately used. That is part of the issue. The issue is Seaforth has, since 1992 and 1993, been an extension of what happens at Brookvale, largely under the broad umbrella of the title Northern Beaches. Maybe my comment about that might have been a distracter, but the fact is, and I want to emphasise this, there have been all of these movements between 1992 and the present. We have moved all sorts of things to Brookvale.

Certainly the view was widely held that Seaforth had the potential for closure. I think the reasons are quite obvious.

Dr WONG: Mr Chair, he is not giving me an answer.

Dr BURKE: I think I have answered.

Dr WONG: I will table the letter I have from the Seaforth campus. Are you trying to tell me

you, as a head, did not know there was a campus?

Dr BURKE: I am saying the term campus in this context might well be a distracter and technically was not a campus. It was part of the Northern Beaches campus.

Dr WONG: Are you trying to tell me that the letter was wrong?

Dr BURKE: Not technically wrong.

Dr WONG: Your definition of campus does not apply to Seaforth?

Dr BURKE: The point I am making is some people have made the point that we are closing a campus. What we are saying is the campus is the broader term and I point out to you in this official document also, and I take the point that here we have Seaforth campus on there, and there has been some confusion about the word campus. Technically it is Northern Beaches campus of which Seaforth is a part.

Dr WONG: Brookvale is a campus; Seaforth is not a campus?

Dr BURKE: They are both part of the campus of Northern Beaches.

Dr WONG: You have not answered my question. Is Brookvale a campus?

Dr BURKE: It is a campus.

Dr WONG: But not Seaforth?

Dr BURKE: I am saying it is not technically a campus.

Dr WONG: You cannot have it both ways. Is Brookvale a campus?

Dr BURKE: The campus technically is Northern Beaches.

Dr WONG: You have not answered my question.

Dr BURKE: Brookvale is part of that campus. Can you rephrase the question?

Dr WONG: I have only got one question.

Dr BURKE: Is Brookvale a campus by itself, it is part of the campus of Northern Beaches.

Dr WONG: You are trying to tell me Brookvale is not a campus.

Dr BURKE: Technically it is not.

Dr WONG: If Seaforth closes and comes into Brookvale, there will be no campus in the Northern Beaches?

Dr BURKE: There is a Northern Beaches campus. What I am saying is this, there is a Northern Beaches campus. It is a major administrative site in terms of that TAFE provision. It happens to be located at Brookvale, therefore in that sense Brookvale is a campus.

Dr WONG: Now you say Brookvale is a campus and Seaforth is not a campus.

Dr BURKE: The campus site --

Dr WONG: Therefore the letterhead was wrong, was misleading.

Dr BURKE: It probably should have said Northern Beaches campus, Seaforth.

Dr WONG: That makes me concerned about how the whole thing was managed.

Dr BURKE: We are not talking about the management, we are talking about terminology, surely.

Dr WONG: Fine. When did anybody decide to close Seaforth campus?

Dr BURKE: The process was that the institute director was asked to consider her budget. She was asked to indicate how she would meet the budgetary requirements and still retain the provisions in Northern Sydney. She indicated that one of the ways that she could meet the budgetary requirement was to close the Seaforth site.

Dr WONG: May I remind you that in the beginning when answering my questions you mentioned Seaforth campus.

Dr BURKE: I do not think I did.

Dr WONG: Yes, you did.

Dr BURKE: In regard to this question?

Dr WONG: Yes.

Dr BURKE: If I did use that I am saying --

Dr WONG: You are confused, are you not?

Dr BURKE: I have got it quite clear in my mind. I may have used the wrong term.

Dr WONG: That is not what you said.

Dr BURKE: Would you like me to state it again?

Dr WONG: Yes, please and retract what you said before by all means.

Dr BURKE: I will retract. I should not have used the term Seaforth campus. The campus is Northern Beaches campus, of which Seaforth is a part.

Dr WONG: When was the administrative decision made to close the Seaforth campus?

Dr BURKE: The institute director indicated that in order to meet budgetary requirements that she would need to close the Seaforth site. Now, could I just finish my answer?

Dr WONG: My apologies.

Dr BURKE: That decision was endorsed by the managing director and basically that was towards the end of July.

Dr WONG: Was the Minister aware of it?

Dr BURKE: The Minister was aware of it.

Dr WONG: Who advised the Minister?

Dr BURKE: The managing director advised the Minister.

Dr WONG: Is the letter advising the Minister available?

Dr BURKE: There is a document that indicates that the Minister was aware of it.

Dr WONG: Who has a copy of the letter to the Minister?

Dr BURKE: I do not have it with me.

Dr WONG: Can we request it?

CHAIR: Is there any problem with providing the letter on notice?

Dr BURKE: No. There was a briefing to the Minister indicating that this was the intention.

CHAIR: Are you prepared to make the briefing available to the Committee?

Dr BURKE: Yes.

Dr WONG: Was there a reply from the Minister?

Dr BURKE: The Minister has signed it.

Dr WONG: Could we have a copy of the letter to the Minister, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: It is a briefing to the Minister?

Dr BURKE: Yes. There was no response from the Minister. It just has a signature.

Dr WONG: You spoke to the Minister and advised on this matter?

Dr BURKE: We have given the Minister advice on this matter.

Dr WONG: Which advice was that?

Dr BURKE: We have spoken to him about it.

Dr WONG: Personally, or through his adviser?

Dr BURKE: I have been personally involved with other senior officers, talking to the Minister.

Dr WONG: What did the Minister say?

Dr BURKE: I am not sure that I can recall exactly what the Minister said, but he listened to advice we gave to him and subsequently there was a submission which the managing director endorsed and the Minister signed.

Dr WONG: You are trying to tell me that you saw the Minister, you briefed him on such an important thing as the closure of the Seaforth campus and you cannot remember what the Minister said?

Dr BURKE: There were quite a number of discussions. Bearing in mind that we are talking about --

CHAIR: It is difficult to quote hearsay.

Dr WONG: I am not saying what the Minister said, I am asking for his impression of what the Minister said.

Dr BURKE: I think at that point in time the Minister did not indicate his thinking. He indicated his thinking by signing the document that had been endorsed by the managing director.

CHAIR: That was dated July 1998 was it?

Dr BURKE: July 1999.

Dr WONG: So the closure of the Seaforth campus was suggested by Susan Holland, I suppose?

Dr BURKE: Yes, that is true.

Dr WONG: She is an intelligent, capable person?

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Dr BURKE: I think so.

Dr WONG: She knows exactly what she was saying?

Dr BURKE: I presume so.

Dr WONG: She knows her duties, her definitions, her running of TAFE and everything else? She is very capable?

Dr BURKE: Certainly.

Dr WONG: Let me quote you a letter from Susan Holland.

CHAIR: Make it clear what you are quoting, Dr Wong. Tell us what the document is.

Dr WONG: The document is a letter from Susan Holland, sent on Thursday 10 December at 12.53. Northern Beaches College. Message to all staff at Northern Beaches Campus. "I write to assure you that at Northern Beaches - Seaforth Campus of the Northern Sydney Institute will continue to be a provider of quality Vocational Education and Training as an integral part of the Institute into the 21st century". That is the first paragraph.

CHAIR: Just give us the date again, Dr Wong.

Dr WONG: Can I table it?

CHAIR: Is that the letter?

Dr WONG: It is a quote from a letter.

CHAIR: Do we have the original letter?

Dr WONG: We do.

CHAIR: It would be better if we get the original. It would be good to have the actual letter.

Dr WONG: Let me ask you again, is Susan Holland capable, intelligent and knows all about TAFE?

Dr BURKE: She is.

Dr WONG: She said Seaforth campus.

Dr BURKE: I want to repeat again that officially Seaforth is not a campus. It might be generically called a campus.

Dr WONG: She was wrong.

Dr BURKE: There is a lot of general terms that might be used at times. I can show you other documents. I have already pointed out that there is the official document.

Dr WONG: This was an official document too.

Dr BURKE: I am talking about the differences between them.

Dr WONG: These are official documents.

Dr BURKE: Of course. I am saying generically it might have been called a campus. It was part of the Northern Beaches campus of TAFE.

Dr WONG: It could be a campus.

Mr MOPPETT: Mr Chairman, point of order. Could we accept that there is such a thing as a capital C campus and little C campus. The words are sometimes mistakenly interchanged. Those of us who have been involved in TAFE know what is going on and I am worried that we are losing too much time.

Mr TSANG: There are seven of us here. Can we define how much time we each have, so that we all have a chance to ask some questions, instead of one member taking over with a definition. The definition I have heard three times is that the campus is simply a part of Northern Beaches campus, therefore I understand it. Can we accept that Seaforth is part of the Northern Beaches campus and therefore accept the definition as such. We might not have to agree, but that is the definition coming from a director.

Ms FORSYTHE: I do not think that we actually have to accept it.

Mr TSANG: We will take on and record, as such, the definition rather than trying to convince the director how one member wants to see that definition. Can we accept that?

Dr WONG: Yes.

CHAIR: Have you concluded Dr Wong?

Dr WONG: Yes.

CHAIR: We have not allocated specific times. We thought that for this inquiry we would allow members to ask questions.

Mr TSANG: I want to make sure that I have a chance during the day to also ask questions.

CHAIR: I took Dr Wong's questions as definition questions to clarify what we are talking about, so that we get that clear as a basis for the rest of the questions.

Ms FORSYTHE: Mr Burkhardt, I have one question stemming from your introductory statement. You talk about efficiencies, consolidating sites and directing resources where there was growth in demographics and you used the example of Western Sydney. In the Estimate Committee

the Minister said that the department would be providing courses which meet local needs and which meet the local demands of people wanting to enrol in those courses.

That would seem to suggest, rather than looking at a whole, shifting things where the demographics are, but that local needs might be important. Would you agree with what the Minister said? Is that part of the policy of TAFE?

Mr BURKHARDT: They are not inconsistent.

Ms FORSYTHE: They are not inconsistent?

Mr BURKHARDT: No.

Ms FORSYTHE: Earlier we heard from Dr Burke about the enrolment figures and those figures are in the submission supplied by the department. When you look at the Seaforth figures, the actual numbers at Seaforth seem to have grown in the past 12 months, even though some of the courses have been cut. That would seem to suggest that there was a local demand.

Mr BURKHARDT: From memory there was 13 or 15 persons growth in the actual head count at Seaforth between 1998 and 1999, but preceding that both the sites of the Northern Beaches campus had shown considerable decline. There was a time in the eighties, for example, when there were over 4,000 students at Seaforth.

Ms FORSYTHE: That is not the position, surely.

Mr BURKHARDT: But demography is not a flash in the pan thing. Demography is about taking the long picture. Selectively quoting statistics that are one year's statistics to another, when you look at the long-term trends - and if you go to the document you can actually see that the long-term trends on the northern peninsula have been one of decline - as a demographer you also need to look at the trends that are coming through from the high school sectors and births and other areas, and there is no getting away from the fact that the Northern Beaches generally are an area of population decline and ageing. I am saying that it is not inconsistent.

Ms FORSYTHE: I will come back to the issue of statistics later. I do want to ask Dr Burke a question both arising from your initial statement and then that interchange of units. Earlier you referred to the fact that there were no definite plans until recently and it was a decision taken in the last couple of months. You have suggested that the institute director was asked to consider how she would meet her budget, so it is a pressure put on the institute director.

The Minister, in the Estimates Committee, said that each institute would make its own analysis and offered redundancies based on how they would assess their own local needs. Do I take it that the institute director for the Northern Sydney Institute region, of her own volition, made the decision that the way forward for the Northern Sydney Institute was to cut Seaforth?

Dr BURKE: She made the suggestion, the recommendation. There was a process whereby institute directors came in with their budgetary proposals and their proposals were examined by a number of senior officers and they were asked to either change or their proposals were endorsed.

Ms FORSYTHE: In relation then to that decision, if it was a decision only taken in the last couple of months was there a cost benefit analysis done on the proposal? Was there any other feasibility study done, and over what period of time was the decision taken? You are saying over the last couple of months. It is a fairly radical decision to close a TAFE of 1,700 students.

Dr BURKE: I want to emphasise that there was this thinking about Seaforth over many years and in fact the previous managing director of TAFE used the term "that have potential for closure" way back when the Brookvale site was first developed. Similarly, the previous deputy used the same terminology, that there was thinking along those lines for quite some time, so whilst there was no planning, there was potential.

By that I am saying that although there was nothing tied down, that people were very conscious of the fact that the Seaforth site was very limited and that there were benefits in consolidation on the one site.

Now, the point I was particularly emphasising was that whilst the decision came to a definite conclusion, if you like, in the last couple of months, there had been thinking for some time that there were problems with the Seaforth site and there were benefits in terms of consolidation on the Brookvale site.

Ms FORSYTHE: The comment that was made in the Manly Daily of last year and the Northern Beaches Weekender of November last year, when it was stated that there were no plans, no basis for the claims that Seaforth would close, who authorised the Northern Sydney Institute deputy director to make that statement and when he said that you would only make that sort of decision based on a three to five year period, was that something that was the official policy of TAFE at the time? Who authorised him to make that statement?

Dr BURKE: At that time that was the decision. There was no decision at that time to close the Seaforth site. The point that I was hoping that we had made was this decision was foisted upon us and it was a decision that had to be made urgently in the light of the sorts of things that the Commonwealth Government had forced upon the State.

Ms FORSYTHE: Well, the statement did say that there was no proposal for the closure of Seaforth.

Dr BURKE: Technically it is true.

Ms FORSYTHE: Technically it is true but it obviously had been an issue under discussion.

Dr BURKE: When you think about the number of sites in TAFE or schools or anywhere, there are people who have to consider the long-term and I guess that is part of what you would expect senior people to do. Only this morning I have spoken to Gregor Ramsay who told me that in 1992 and 1993 it was considered that Seaforth had the potential for closure because of limitations on parking and all the things that have just been said. Technically there was no proposal but it is one of those things that is long-term thinking.

CHAIR: You did give a reference to that quote you were making?

Ms FORSYTHE: The Manly Daily and the Northern Beaches Weekender, the Manly Daily of 18 November 1998 and the Northern Beaches Weekender was the 20th. It is a quote.

CHAIR: Quoting who?

Ms FORSYTHE: The deputy director of the Northern Sydney Institute.

Dr BURKE: I just point out that was seven months before the budget.

Ms FORSYTHE: November 20 last year. When was the decision actually taken by the director? When did she actually make the recommendation? What was the process of consultation? Who was consulted by the Northern Sydney Institute Director in making the decision?

Dr BURKE: I do not know all the detail of what consultation she might have made at that time and I am not able to do that but the process was that, in terms of the State office situation, she made that submission on a number of occasions in meetings with me and with the managing director and other persons.

Ms FORSYTHE: Are they verbal or in writing?

Dr BURKE: There were some documents associated with her proposals, yes. But certainly she made out a very convincing case of the things we have already mentioned, in terms of the limitations of the site, her budgetary imperatives, the ability of northern beaches to offer all of the things that students might require at northern beaches and, therefore, it was our view that it was a very reasonable decision.

Ms FORSYTHE: I am not certain whether the submission Dr Wong requested earlier would contain the information that sets out her reasoning. May I confirm whether we are getting a copy of that submission?

Dr BURKE: Yes. I am not sure it does contain all of those reasons, but this submission to you people today does contain all those reasons that certainly were the subject of discussion.

CHAIR: In other words, the submission had sufficient information for the Minister to make a decision?

Dr BURKE: Certainly there have been discussions with the Minister. I said to Dr Wong that I could not remember exactly what the Minister may have said, but I have no doubt the Minister asked questions about the sorts of things I have already mentioned: why is it appropriate, what sort of provisions can be made for the students and so on. But the document to which I am referring I am not saying it necessarily picks up all those things. In our preparation here we have picked up those things that were certainly part of those discussions.

CHAIR: That is the point I was making. The submission to the Minister would only contain information he would need to make that decision.

Dr BURKE: It would have been building upon discussions and so on.

CHAIR: Following up the question of consultation, because there has been a community reaction to the decision, leaving aside consultation on a departmental area, it does seem, to be quite frank in reading your submission, that Seaforth had a limited life starting in 1992, following the development of what you have said here.

Dr BURKE: That is right.

CHAIR: In view of that, what effort was made to consult with particularly students, staff, the community, the Manly council, interest groups, so you would have avoided perhaps a public relations debacle?

Dr BURKE: I think that is a fair question. I am not aware of all the consultations that might have taken place. Certainly this document talks about consultations that took place between students and staff, but I am not in a position to know what other consultations may have taken place. The Institute Director might have had discussions on an individual one-to-one basis with people but because she is now in Western Australia, I am not in a position to know exactly what occurred at that time.

CHAIR: Obviously, because of the change in population there will be closures at different times. Does the department have a policy that would lay out some consultation process to take place with the local community? Is there a policy?

Dr BURKE: There is a general expectation that TAFE institutes would be sensitive to local community needs and would have a network of people with whom they discuss and organisations that they relate to. I guess one of the things I was endeavouring to say earlier was that it is extraordinarily important that TAFE be sensitive to the shifts in industry requirements, needs of individuals and so on. That is why TAFE institutes have an advisory council with generally wide representation that provides them with advice in regard to a whole range of things.

I have no doubt, and I do not have the records or anything at this point in time, that there were discussions from time to time with people on that council. Bear in mind that those people are part of the broader community. The advisory councils are not internal. But it is expected that TAFE institutes would certainly relate to the community and be sensitive to what those needs and demands might be. However, in this specific case I cannot answer for Dr Holland.

CHAIR: Could you perhaps report to the Committee what consultation did take place with the stakeholders and what attempts were made to have that consultation over this period that we are discussing?

Dr BURKE: Certainly.

CHAIR: In view of the evidence so far about the importance of the Brookvale campus, our Committee proposes to visit the Seaforth campus next Friday. All Committee members have agreed they would like to visit the Brookvale campus next Friday as well as Seaforth. Would you be able to assist in making similar arrangements?

Mr BURKHARDT: Certainly. I will assist the Committee to visit Brookvale and Seaforth.

Mr TSANG: I have heard your statement that there was a general winding down of the Seaforth property.

Dr BURKE: Yes.

Mr TSANG: If that is the case, when the northern beaches college of TAFE was announced by the then Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Virginia Chadwick in 1993, what was the intention in regard to Seaforth at the time?

Dr BURKE: The intention was the provisions at Seaforth would be wound down. As I have indicated on pages 13 and 14 of the submission, there was a general process of moving facilities from Seaforth to Brookvale. Seaforth would be part of the northern beaches campus and there would be an amalgamation of administrative functions, of the student association and so on, on the one site.

Basically the winding down was seen that Brookvale would become the major component of the TAFE provision in that part of Sydney. I think that is probably fairly well illustrated on those pages I have referred to. The general intention was that, as I have indicated, that it be wound down and that is why, given that the staff of the fine arts group and so on were involved in discussions about movement to Brookvale, there was a general understanding that most of these things would move to Brookvale over time.

Mr TSANG: Why was it necessary for northern Sydney to make so many changes? I have heard of some benefits of car parking, and libraries. Is it necessary because of the Commonwealth demand? What about the skill bit, the Commonwealth demand to bring up relevant skills? Did such move give you any benefits in terms of your Commonwealth commitment?

Dr BURKE: Certainly one of the major issues is that it wipes out a lot of the duplication that was occurring, the duplication of services on two sites. The point I would like to emphasise is the sorts of things happening in the Northern Sydney Institute is similar to the sorts of things that are happening in other institutes, the need to be continually flexible and move from areas of decreasing demand into areas that industry requires in the future.

There was also a need to provide expanded services that could not possibly be provided on the Seaforth site. So it really was a matter of good management; such things as the library at Seaforth is limited, what could be done with the library. You have a modern new library that could cater for students from both sites. In terms of other areas, I think it is probably spelled out fairly well there but in terms of shift of courses and skills, fashion courses at closed Seaforth because of lack of demand. Fine arts, there was a need to have a ceramics provision at Brookvale. The proposal that we are dealing with now is that fine arts will move to the Brookvale site and it makes good sense to have those consolidated on the one site.

Basically the whole Seaforth Brookvale saga is about the very thing we are talking about in terms of institute directors being responsive and flexible, meeting local demands and at the same time having this extraordinary pressure in terms of finance and budget.

Mr TSANG: My impression is that the closure of Seaforth is not a conspiracy. Is there any other colleges as small as Seaforth in the State or is it just a northern suburbs conspiracy?

Dr BURKE: I think we should be saying perhaps in Sydney because I think there would be sites that are smaller in terms of enrolment in some parts of the country where we have endeavoured to ensure there is some provision in small towns and so on which I think people would agree with. But Seaforth is the smallest site in Sydney. The only one a little similar is Crows Nest but it is larger.

Mr TSANG: Can you explain to the Committee what is your mission and role for TAFE in New South Wales and in particular how is that related to the mission and role of the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE? How is that different from the rest of the State?

Dr BURKE: Technically it is not different. As I indicated earlier, the mission of TAFE is to provide quality vocational education and training and meet the needs of the clients. I am using the term "client" in terms of both industry and individuals, and that would be so of all institutes across the State.

It has been extraordinarily important for us to give institutes and institute directors space to move if they are going to meet local needs. The local needs at Orange might be quite different in terms of rural areas might be different to the needs of Sydney metropolitan, so they have to have that flexibility. As I said also, they need to interact with the local community, industry and make sure they are responsive to local needs. Therefore, all of them have the same mission in terms of providing quality education and training.

I emphasise that I think we have been very well served by TAFE in this State. I think it is something that is often overlooked in discussions about TAFE. When I see the preparations in terms of buildings and all those things that are happening for the Olympic Games and road construction, et cetera, we have to remember that most of the people who are involved in these enterprises are people who have been trained in TAFE. So TAFE really has done an extraordinarily good job and it is recognised both nationally and internationally.

You would probably be aware in recent times TAFE has expanded its provision on a commercial basis and it has been able to provide courses that are available in Malaysia and other places. I might say we are paid for that, so that does not impinge upon what we are providing within the New South Wales sector, but at the same time, if we are going to give TAFE institutes flexibility so that they can be competitive and so on, then they have to be responsive and that is why northern Sydney has developed its mission. I will just read from its document about what it is providing. It talks about a clear customer focus for example. It talks about "Northern Sydney Institute remains committed to providing excellent customer service to its internal and external clients through continuous quality improvement. The initiatives taken to improve service for students who are our primary customers include", and it goes on.

If we take the second area, it talks about all efforts, activities and resources of the Northern Sydney Institute are directed primarily towards achieving its vision which is to be recognised internationally and nationally as leading through innovation, skilling for a global future".

I could go on, but basically what I am saying is that we have this situation where TAFE is a government instrumentality. It is out there competing with the whole of private providers. In the document we indicate the extraordinary increase in the number of private providers. That has meant

that TAFE has to be far more competitive, ensuring that its provisions are economic. That is why consolidations and rationalisations take place. At the same time they are expected to grow and they have grown and they have to meet changing industry demands. I think northern Sydney has done a remarkable job, but it does mean that some decisions like this have to be taken. It is my view that the provision for students in northern beaches has not been diminished.

CHAIR: So far as I understand, this Committee's inquiry is in no way set up as a criticism of TAFE as an organisation or what it is supplying to the people of this State. We all admire TAFE and what it is doing. It is focusing on this one particular situation with the aim, hopefully, of assisting TAFE to be even more efficient.

Dr BURKE: I understand that. It is important contextual information because the decisions made by TAFE institute directors are not taken lightly.

Mr TSANG: So you are saying that being efficient, including closing down the Seaforth property, it is necessary to gain grants from the agreement with the Commonwealth? That is part of the whole deal.

Dr BURKE: It is part of the efficiencies we have to provide in order for the Commonwealth to fund us.

CHAIR: I note on page 3 it says that the New South Wales budget allocation for TAFE was reduced by \$35 million. It speaks as if that was all they cut by the Commonwealth. Is that \$35 million solely a result of Commonwealth funding? Was there funding reduction of \$35 million?

Ms LOBLE: The Commonwealth funding has maintained the base funding but has not provided any growth funding. Meanwhile, we have had growth, so the effect of growth with no additional funding has led to a budgetary decision at the State level. For example, the loss of the growth funding over those first years where we got it amounted to a total of \$345 million. Had we been getting it for the three years of the current ANTA agreement, we would have had \$138 million, but New South Wales does not have that money. It has been growing. There is increasing demand and we are committed to growing under the agreement with AANTA but the funding, it has to be achieved through efficiencies.

CHAIR: So in spite of TAFE growing, the New South Wales budget reduced TAFE's allocation by 35 million, is that what you are saying?

Ms LOBLE: Yes, because we must demonstrate efficiencies in order to trigger even the base money. You do not get any money unless you meet the requirements of the Commonwealth.

Mr TSANG: It is a bait.

CHAIR: I understand that. I just want to get the quantity of money.

Ms LOBLE: You would not even get your base.

CHAIR: You are obviously using that as an argument while you are rationalising to achieve efficiency in closing Seaforth. I assume that is the point of your presentation.

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Ms LOBLE: Yes. There is no doubt that we are not receiving any growth funding. We are required to demonstrate efficiencies in order to trigger even the base funding.

CHAIR: So up there in the Commonwealth, it impacts on Seaforth.

Ms LOBLE: Yes. They do not sit there and say specifically, but yes, it affects the decisions that are made at a local level.

Mr KELLY: Just to follow on from that, effectively saying in real terms the cut was 128 million, in real terms over the three years?

Ms LOBLE: Had we received the growth funding it would have amounted to 138 million over three years.

Mr KELLY: 138 million. So in real terms it is a cut of 138 million of which you have reduced the budget by 35 million and the rest has been happily picked up by efficiency cuts.

Ms LOBLE: That is correct, or State dollars.

Mr KELLY: You raised a question, and I think Doug Moppett might be particularly interested in this, that you nearly lost that base funding or it was under threat a couple of years ago or currently because you are not implementing user choice, a term obviously trying to make national competition policy look good.

If that is the case, I sincerely hope you keep doing that because my understanding of the national competition policy or the user choice suggestions for country New South Wales was that originally all the TAFEs had to be tendered out. I think that got wound back to 50 per cent of them. That would have meant like places like Coonamble, Wellington Gilgandra, Narromine, all of those smaller ones would have actually closed, the whole lot of them, and the Queenslanders who are coming in and operating our motel rooms would have been running all of our TAFEs. If that is the case, if that is what you are doing by being tardy, please keep doing it.

My questions are really to John Burkhardt and it follows on from that. I understand that Seaforth and Brookvale are only 3.8 kilometres away from each other.

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes.

Mr KELLY: In Doug's and my terms, that is probably about the distance from Doug's house to his front gate and in mine terms it is about the length of river frontage I have on my farm.

Could you please outline the proposals for upgrading facilities at Brookvale?

Mr BURKHARDT: They are actually referred to on page 29 of the document. It is part of this reuse of buildings. There is a proposal that was approved previously at Brookvale in Building H which is a major trade block and it has a footprint of about 740 square metres. At the moment there is welding upstairs and fitting and machinery downstairs.

There is a project that is outside of the discussions here that has been initiated which would

consolidate the engineering skills centre into the top floor of Building H. That is a job around \$500,000. What that does is give us an engineering and skills centre which is more modern, which is geared towards the engineering trades training modules that are current in 1999, 2000 and beyond. What that does, of course, is free up 740 square metres on the ground floor and one of the major proposals for the upgrades at Seaforth is to use the ground floor of that building, to renovate it for business and general purpose classrooms. In that downstairs what was once a fitting machining workshop will become six general purpose classrooms and two computer labs as well, as ancillary spaces for students toilets, student amenities, student study areas and staff accommodation.

We are also looking at two other buildings that exist on site and in those buildings the integrated fine arts centre will be created. There will be provisions for painting, drawing, and the introduction of the high grade computer centre lab for digital art which is an ever expanding area within both fine arts and the graphic and design area generally. There will also be renovations to another building to house sculpture.

In addition, it is proposed to provide some additional car parking, bringing the car parking up to 370 spaces. I will reiterate that there is no student car parking, other than some disabled car parking, at Seaforth. We will be able to arrange some for next Friday, I hope.

When we look at the site there you have got a site which has 5.5 hectares. It is a site which has considerable investment in libraries, disability units, all of those facilities are there. It is a site of in excess of five hectares. It is a logical place to consolidate the Northern Beaches.

It is difficult to look at the long-time utilisation of Seaforth. It is a constrained site, it is 0.6 of a hectare, not 5.5 hectares. It is also a building which was built largely and designed largely in the 1960s, so it is not one of our buildings that has the same flexibility and other possibilities for upgrades as buildings in other places.

CHAIR: If you wanted high tech stuff putting in, computers, there could be a problem with wiring?

Mr BURKHARDT: In building if you spend enough money you can do anything, but if you are making an economic decision about whether you upgrade a building or another building you have to take into account the on-going value of that building and the initial cost.

Quite clearly if you are operating on two sites rather than one you have outgoings associated with every aspect of maintenance; the lighting, heating, telephones, all the services of having an additional building far outweigh - the costs involved in doing that are much better when you consolidate. There is experiences all over the State of consolidating facilities. For example, I had, as Director in Western Sydney, two carpentry and joining sections. I closed both and consolidated them into one facility on a different location and that allowed me to provide adequate library and other facilities on the locations where they were closed. So those sorts of decisions are going on all the time.

CHAIR: There was a statement made, it may have been in the media, that there was some major building faults with the Seaforth building as well which made it difficult for repairing, the ceiling or the roof. Can you clarify whether that is accurate?

Mr BURKHARDT: I can actually take the Committee through those. I would stress at the outset, whilst there are immediate repairs that should go on at Seaforth to make it safe and habitable, we are not talking about upgrading and refurbishment or anything of that nature.

The roof, there is a section of the roof at the front of the west which has had water penetration problems for some time. In fact, there is a recommendation going back to February 1997 by the properties manager at North Sydney that we need to do something about the roof and that the cost of it will be \$180,000. This is a particular section of the roof. It has been patched and attempts have been made to replace the flashing and do various things.

In March a student put in a complaint virtually threatening to sue the organisation because she had slipped because of this water penetration. We actually have a problem that has been around now for a few years that has to be done.

Ms FORSYTHE: Is that the major building problem?

Mr BURKHARDT: That is one of them. We have advice from public works consultants that the best solution, if we were to go down that route, is to spend \$175,000 to repitch that roof, realign the drainage off it and replace the roof.

There is another significant health and safety issue that has to be addressed and that is in relation to ventilation in one of the fine arts area and it concerns vapours and acids and alkalines that are used in the processes that fine arts carry out. There is a series of rooms, basically rooms 3.33 through to 3.39, on the first floor of one of the buildings and we will actually probably have a look at that next Friday. Again, to put in current standards of ventilation based on the standards that have been provided by the industry grouping about this area, the estimate for that is \$175,375. They are public work consultants estimates for the cost of do that. It is an area that does have to be dealt with it. It is not something that we can just let go and forget about.

There are other minor issues in terms of work that needs to be done around concrete spalling and there is some movement and some rusting of the reinforcement. The estimate there is about \$50,000. So in terms of immediate things that need to be done, not to refurbish Seaforth, just to bring it up to a habitable standard --

CHAIR: This is health and safety type of issues?

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes. To bring Seaforth up to a reasonable standard is around \$400,000.

In addition to that at Seaforth, we spend between \$80-\$100,000 on normal maintenance, just the normal day-to-day maintenance; the contracts on lifts and what ventilation exists and so forth. So they are costs that need to be met.

In making this decision, because we would not proceed to spend that \$400,000, and in perpetuity the \$100,000 a year of normal maintenance would not occur, so you have that amount in perpetuity.

Mr PRIMROSE: Just to finish off the roof issue. I think the person who, I guess, is basically responsible for this inquiry who has been giving us piles of information is Mr David Barr, the local

member. In his submission to us he has indicated that at a meeting he stated that he believed you said it would cost \$400,000 to repair the roof. What you are indicating is that it would be \$400,000 for all of those urgent capital works?

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes.

CHAIR: Just to make it clear, we have had requests for copies of some of these submissions. I will now officially table the submissions we have received, numbers 1 to 113, so that the Committee can resolve the publication.

The other one was that you did quote the North Sydney Institute Annual Report 1998, Dr Burke. Could we have ten copies for the Committee? You may not have them here now, but if they could be supplied to the Committee they would be a help to our inquiry.

Dr BURKE: Yes.

CHAIR: You said there were discussions between the North Sydney Institute re the closure of Seaforth and the Advisory Committee or the council.

Dr BURKE: I said I presumed there was some discussion, but I do not know.

CHAIR: Can you make some inquiries and if there were, were there any records kept of the minutes of those meetings? We put that question on notice.

Dr BURKE: Can I just clarify? I think you asked me for any record of consultations and that includes that, I presume.

CHAIR: Yes.

Dr WONG: Could I also clarify something, I am not quite sure. Did Patricia Forsythe ask for a copy of the submission from Susan Holland to the department to be tabled?

Ms FORSYTHE: Yes.

CHAIR: That is been agreed to. That is a submission to the minister.

Dr WONG: And the department. Usually it goes through a department first.

CHAIR: We will break for ten minutes.

(Morning tea adjournment)

CHAIR: We are ready to recommence the hearing and we will commence with Mr Kelly.

Mr KELLY: I am particularly interested in some of the comments I have heard. My background was as general manager of council. Just as an aside, one of the residents of Seaforth, and I think he might have moved now, was the Town Clerk of Manly Council Cecil Rothmenzies

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and he gave me my first job. Is it normal for TAFE and schools to seek development consents when existing facilities are upgraded, or refurbished.

Mr BURKHARDT: It is not usual. We seek building approvals but development applications are not required under the State Environmental Planning Policy. SEPP4 does not require those.

Mr KELLY: It is not normal either?

Mr BURKHARDT: No.

Mr KELLY: What impact would the closure of the Seaforth campus have on the Balgowlah heritage library?

Mr BURKHARDT: At the moment for those who are familiar with the site, there is a boundary fence of the TAFE college. That is a major six foot fence and outside of that there is an 1893 sandstone cottage which has a sign on it, the Balgowlah Community Library and the department in fact owns that part of the site and I think there has been some concern about what the closure means for that particular facility.

It certainly would not be anyone's intention to include any in plans, were there any for Seaforth, for that particular community facility and I will certainly recommend this the boundary fence where it stands would remain and that the council's continued use and operation of that sandstone historic heritage building would continue. I do not see any impact from the decision about closure on that particular facility.

Ms FORSYTHE: In relation to costs, with the intention to move approximately 1200 students to the Brookvale site, and the additional building works that is going on there, has an estimate been done of the additional annual maintenance cost at the Brookvale site?

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes. There was a consideration of the all up operating cost savings that indicated there was something like \$390,000 worth of operational costs that we have a Seaforth that will no longer apply and in the documents you will find a figure of \$240,000 has been used for ongoing savings. In other words, the figure has been discounted by \$150,000 so in fact in moving from one site to the other, the initial saving of \$390,000 per annum is reduced by additional costs of \$150,000 for operating and maintenance costs at the Brookvale site.

Mr KELLY: Permanently, or for how long?

Mr BURKHARDT: \$240,000 a year is the net.

Ms FORSYTHE: In relation to the Seaforth site, has a valuation been done at the site?

Mr BURKHARDT: There is a valuation. The State Valuations Office have done a valuation of the site.

Ms FORSYTHE: What is the valuation?

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Mr BURKHARDT: The valuer values the site depending on use, between \$5 million and \$8 million.

Ms FORSYTHE: When was the valuation done?

Mr BURKHARDT: Recently. I can provide a copy of the document.

Ms FORSYTHE: Was it done before or after the decision to close the site?

Mr BURKHARDT: It was certainly after July but could I say we do valuations on a routine basis. The previous valuation that we had valued it at around - I am really going by memory but there was a valuation prior to that. We had a valuation.

Dr WONG: When was that?

Mr BURKHARDT: Two or three years ago. We do not update every site every year. It costs money.

CHAIR: Was that just the site, the land, not the buildings?

Mr BURKHARDT: The valuation is silent on that. In a sense it could depend. It would be a decision determined by whoever was providing it to a purchaser, but basically they look at land value.

Ms FORSYTHE: At the moment, effectively at December or January, whenever the site is closed, you have an asset valued at between \$5 million and \$8 million.

Mr BURKHARDT: On the State Valuation Office's valuation, it could realise on the open market up to \$5 million to \$8 million.

Ms FORSYTHE: Have any decisions yet been taken about the future of that site?

Mr BURKHARDT: No.

Ms FORSYTHE: You are just going to have the asset sitting there in the short-term at least?

Mr BURKHARDT: In the short-term. No decision has been made. The disposal of the site is a separate process to the actual closure.

Ms FORSYTHE: Which officers of the department will be making decisions about the disposal of that asset?

Mr BURKHARDT: No officer of the department can make decisions about that. That will be a Ministerial decision.

Mr KELLY: Are you suggesting that TAFE or the Department of Education will end up with that \$5 million to \$8 million? How much of that share does Treasury get? Generally departments do not get to retain such funds.

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Mr BURKHARDT: There are two regimes operating in terms of returns. The sale of school sites is 100 per cent reinvested in the schools part of the capital program, and in relation to TAFE it is 50 per cent and it has been that way for as long I can remember.

Ms FORSYTHE: In terms of the costings at the moment, is there a costing done or is there budgeting for ongoing care and maintenance of the site?

Mr BURKHARDT: Sorry, of what?

Ms FORSYTHE: Of the site at Seaforth. You are not going to close the doors, I presume, and not have somebody providing security or providing general maintenance.

Dr WONG: Or to repair the roof?

Ms FORSYTHE: I am not worried about the roof. You are not going to leave it as a derelict building on the site?

Mr BURKHARDT: We do not provide static security on our buildings in most cases anyway, but certainly we would have some costs. It is a matter for the institute, but I imagine that there will be some costs involved in having the normal security firm providing some security service to the site. We certainly would not replace the roof or do any of the other things.

Ms FORSYTHE: I am not asking about the roof. Can you take on notice and provide information to the Committee that shows whether there are plans by the institute, in terms of their costings, for the ongoing care and maintenance of the site?

Mr BURKHARDT: Yes, I can certainly do that.

CHAIR: Mr Syms, we are talking about Brookvale as though all students from Seaforth will go to Brookvale. Apparently there are a large number of students at Seaforth involved in the fine arts course. I gather they are expected to transfer to Meadowbank, which is certainly not your little property on the river.

Mr SYMS: That is not my understanding. My understanding is that the integrated fine arts facility that is currently being built at Brookvale will accommodate the certificate four students in fine arts and also diploma students in fine arts. In fact, it will give them a different range of things to do because they will be able to do ceramic subjects. Currently we are refurbishing buildings at Brookvale. Buildings O and C are being refurbished for a fine arts facility adjacent to the existing ceramics facility at Brookvale.

CHAIR: Will that include a gallery for exhibitions and so on?

Mr SYMS: It would not include a permanent gallery. There is a general space that can be used for short-term exhibitions, but no permanent gallery, no.

Ms FORSYTHE: Does Seaforth have a permanent gallery?

Mr SYMS: There is an area upstairs in the Seaforth building, a corridor, if you like, where

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things are put on display.

CHAIR: Will those changes be completed in time for February?

Mr SYMS: I was there the other day and I was assured that things would be ahead of schedule and they would be ready for next February.

CHAIR: How many students are expected to go to Meadowbank, if any?

Mr SYMS: It would be a question of choice in that not every TAFE site can offer every elective in every course, but there will be a sufficient spread of electives available at Brookvale for people to complete their diploma should they choose those particular electives. If they choose to do some of the things currently available at Seaforth, which will not in the short term be available at Brookvale, namely print making and photography, then they may have to travel to Hornsby or Meadowbank.

CHAIR: You hope they will be ready in February?

Mr SYMS: I am assured by Public Works that they will be ready by February.

Dr WONG: May I table a statement in relation to a meeting in which Mr Bannister and architect Mr Moller met Terry Burke, the Minister and John Burkhardt in which Mr Burkhardt stated the repair bill of the roof would be \$400,000?

CHAIR: You are saying that these were people present?

Dr WONG: Yes. Could I table that?

CHAIR: Who signed that?

Dr WONG: The individuals.

Dr WONG: Secondly, I looked up the Macquarie Dictionary which defines "campus" as meaning the grounds of a university or other institute of a higher education, and "building" as meaning a substantial structure with a roof and walls, as a shed, house, department store, et cetera. Furthermore, I table the document from TAFE itself, Campus Seaforth, and I would support the doctor who said, when Seaforth becomes empty it will be a building; it will not be a campus. Dr Burke, would it be true that as far back as 1992 or 1993 there was a general understanding between TAFE that there will be a run down of Seaforth and the building at Brookvale campus?

Dr BURKE: I am not sure that the term "run down" is correct. I used the term "wound down" and I think there is a distinct difference. What I said was that there was a winding down, and that terminology was used in the written submission we have given to the Committee, that there was a winding down in the period between 1992 and the present and as a result of that, there was a transfer of quite a number of things to Brookvale.

Dr WONG: Also the Committee was informed that the Minister of the day, the Hon. Virginia Chadwick, was aware of it. Is there a document about that?

Dr BURKE: I do not know if I have a document of that. It indicates in your document that Virginia Chadwick opened the building in 1993 and at that time she established the concept of the northern beaches campus of which Seaforth is a part. Up until that stage, Seaforth was a more independent operation, so she certainly was aware at that time that the status, if you like, of the Seaforth, whatever we call it, was going to be less in terms of the opening of the Northern Beaches Institute.

Dr WONG: There is no implication whatsoever from this evidence that the Hon. Virginia Chadwick was aware of a winding down. It was expanding.

Mr TSANG: Perhaps we could call upon Virginia Chadwick to be a witness.

Dr WONG: Thirdly, you were saying that the winding down philosophy was well known within TAFE. Therefore, I presume Susan Holland would be fully aware of this scenario.

Dr BURKE: I want to make sure we are talking about the same scenario.

Dr WONG: The winding down of the Seaforth building.

Dr BURKE: Let me just go back if I might. It is my understanding that when the Northern Institute of TAFE was opened by the Minister of the day, the status of the Seaforth site was then in terms of it being part of the northern beaches campus and, therefore, there was a winding down at that very point. Certainly the Minister would have been aware of that and Susan Holland would have been aware of the winding down because she was the institute director who made decisions about what things would be transferred to Brookvale.

Dr WONG: May I read a statement, again a letter from Susan Holland, paragraph 2: I am committed to involving staff at Seaforth in strategic planning groups for their respective disciplines to ensure we have a viable long term plan for course offerings for the Northern Beaches, including Seaforth". Therefore, I respectfully ask again if Susan Holland was aware of it, was it a deceitful document then, this one?

Dr BURKE: I can only repeat what I said. Certainly a lot of the decisions in relationship to activities being transferred to Brookvale were made by the then institute director. She also involved people in, for example, the fine arts group last year, sitting down and talking about what might happen in terms of the transfer of fine arts to Brookvale. Now, in my terminology that is about winding down. I am not sure that she would have used that terminology but certainly there was that process in place.

Dr WONG: Dr Burke, were you aware of this letter?

Dr BURKE: I am not aware of what letter you are talking about.

Dr WONG: The letter I just read to you. Are you implying then that Susan Holland as a director issued a general statement to all the staff of the northern beaches without your awareness?

Dr BURKE: Certainly.

CHAIR: I think the letter is open to various interpretations if you look at the terminology.

Dr BURKE: I want to make the point, and I am reading from the document, "... we have a viable long term plan for course offerings for the Northern Beaches, including Seaforth", the decision to actually close Seaforth was not made until this year. This is dated 1998. At that point in time I presume Susan Holland obviously had no intention to recommend that Seaforth be closed. However, there certainly was a winding down of provisions at Seaforth, so that I do not have a problem with what is written here. To take your second point, was I aware of it, no, and I would not be aware of every document sent by an institute director to staff.

Dr WONG: Right, so suddenly Susan Holland decided somewhere between December 1998 and some time this year to change her mind by 180 degrees, suggested that Seaforth should be closed, which to me is totally incredible and illogical. Could you brief the Committee of your advice to her that TAFE should wind down or close the Seaforth campus?

Dr BURKE: No, it was not my instruction to her at all. In fact, the reason Susan Holland would have made up her mind that Seaforth should close, and I have mentioned this on a number of occasions today, is because she was given her budget which indicated she had to find some savings and, as I have also said to you, if you look at the situation, you have a site, that is the smallest site in metropolitan Sydney in terms of enrolments. You have a site that is very limited, a site that has no parking for students, except students with disabilities. You have a site that has problems in terms of development. You have a site that is only 3.8 kilometres from Brookvale. You have the movement of a whole range of provisions from Seaforth to Brookvale over a period of time. I would think that Susan Holland's recommendation that that is what should happen is fairly logical. So I do not see it as an irrational decision at all. In fact I think it is completely rational.

Dr WONG: Are there any TAFE colleges in New South Wales that you are aware of that are likely to be closed in the future or near future?

Dr BURKE: No. The only other one was a site at Coolangatta which was not in this State, that technically was in a rented building and it was provided on the ANTA funds and that has been closed. There is no plan to close any other campus or site. There could be movement of some courses from one site to another, but that is not the closing of sites.

Dr WONG: I believe last year 167 adults were doing their Higher School Certificate. I believe at present the Seaforth campus has about three classrooms that provide facilities for HSC students and also believe in Brookvale there would be about 1.2 classrooms. Furthermore I believe there are no laboratories for physics, chemistry, biology or science in Brookvale. Is this true?

Dr BURKE: Maybe that is a question that should go to Mr Burkhardt in terms of property matters. We have given an understanding that higher school certificate courses will be offered at Brookvale. We also have plans for providing access to science laboratories. In fact there have been negotiations taking place recently with a number of high schools about access if we need it. At this stage we have no indication that people will need science laboratories, but if they do we will provide access to science laboratories.

Dr WONG: You mean that if I do a biology or chemistry course that there is no need for a

laboratory? As a scientist I have never heard of that.

Dr BURKE: I have never said that. You might have misunderstood what I said. What I said was that there will be sufficient physical provision for students to undertake the higher school certificate on the Brookvale site. If they happen to choose a subject that requires access to a laboratory, they will have access to a laboratory but not on the Brookvale site.

CHAIR: When the Brookvale site building was being planned, was there consideration that courses at Seaforth could operate from the Brookvale site? The actual design of the building, was there thought given to that at that stage or did you just have a package plan that you put up a building that is versatile.

Mr BURKHARDT: The building on the site of Brookvale, there have been additional buildings through the decade and variations and changes to the buildings there. The document indicates that we have closed fashion and panel beating and a number of areas and expanded carpentry and joinery, so there is a reuse of building on that site. In a sense it is the reuse of the particular buildings on that site that we are looking at. It does not provide the opportunity at this stage to provide those science laboratories that have been mentioned, but there have been negotiations with one of the local high schools that has ample space to enable those subjects to be taught in high schools. Right across the State high school buildings are used by TAFE. It is not an unusual occurrence.

CHAIR: On the discussion of the terminology of campuses, is it perhaps more helpful to say the plan was to centralise TAFE at the Brookvale site rather than the winding down of other places? So much as centralising on a larger site that had more opportunity or variations that could be used.

Mr SYMS: Certainly as the acting director those were the terms that were put to me in 1996, positive terms in building up Brookvale rather than winding down.

Mr MOPPETT: We have been pursuing questions that sound more like forensic accountants but sometimes the shrewdness of a Queensland drover is worth while applying and I would like to step back a bit. One of TAFE's outstanding virtues that distinguishes it from tertiary education and, indeed, from school education, is its dedication to accessibility and the meeting of current and real needs, whether they be in terms of the course content sort which can change very rapidly but where that is required at the time, so it seems there is a contradiction here where, thankfully, we have seen the development of the provision of TAFE courses through distance education, through the proliferation of not only campuses but facilities throughout country areas and yet where there seems to be a substantial number of students who find Seaforth very convenient to them, TAFE suddenly seems to be wanting to close it down. Do you think that is in conflict and I hate particularly with TAFE to use something as unctuous as a mission statement, but in terms of your aims and objectives, would you not see that as critical that you meet the needs where they are?

Dr BURKE: I think I agree with you in terms of TAFE being extraordinarily flexible and doing all sorts of things to meet accessibility needs, and certainly there has been a big development in terms of distance education, flexible delivery, on site delivery of courses in industry and so on. I think basically what we are seeing here is a rationalisation that allows for better provision. We are quite convinced it makes for better provision, that there are limitations on the Seaforth site. We talked about growth through efficiency which enables us to provide additional courses for other

people. I think that has to be taken into account.

We are saying if we continue with the Seaforth site, we will not be meeting the growth through efficiency and will not be able to provide the growth that would provide access for other students.

Mr MOPPETT: I think there was a time when people said, for instance where I live, that the most efficient way to make you a motor mechanic is to go to Dubbo or Sydney, that is where the facilities can be concentrated. We have gone right against that, yet I can hear what you are saying.

Dr BURKE: I think that there has been a mix of those sort of things in country places because there are some times we are not able to provide all courses in all places and it is necessary for people to go to other sites. It depends upon numbers, it depends upon a whole range of things, the actual physical provisions that might be required. Certainly it is not a general rule that we can provide everything at Coonamble or whatever.

Here is a case where we are talking about a distance of 3.8 for the majority of students. I do not think we ought to keep thinking that we are talking about students travelling from Seaforth to Brookvale. They might live between Seaforth and Brookvale, even north of Brookvale.

Ms FORSYTHE: Can you just clarify that bigger majority. What number will not be able to be accommodated?

Dr BURKE: I think it is what Mr Syms said earlier about photography and print making, otherwise it is basically the rest of them.

CHAIR: Out of 2,000 students --

Mr SYMS: Potentially tens. A maximum of tens.

CHAIR: Out of all the students, including the fine art students?

Mr SYMS: That is my understanding, that the number of places available at Brookvale will be able to accommodate just about the whole of the number of students - I will rephrase it. There is enough accommodation at Brookvale. There are 1,800 student places at Brookvale, and if you just do simple arithmetic, ignore offerings and so on, there is ample accommodation to accommodate everybody. The issue comes down as to whether they are offering the courses, not whether they have the accommodation.

We believe that the whole of the business courses will be moved lock stock and barrel. We believe that the vast majority of the fine arts student will be accommodated and we believe that most of the HSC students will be accommodated. There will be only a small residue that might have to travel.

Ms FORSYTHE: Why does the submission only ever refer to HSC courses in the year 2000?

Mr SYMS: I was not aware that it did.

Mr MOPPETT: I just wanted to finish off that point that, in my view, even though I do live in

the country, I would concede that for some people 3.8 kilometres in the city provides the same difficulties that 100 kilometres may mean in the country, so perhaps you have responded to that.

What I really wanted to get on to was that it seems to me that you have described nebulous discussions about the future - I am not saying that in a sensational way. You said they were not formal written down evaluations of the future of Seaforth, then suddenly from July the decision materialised in a fuller sense, closure, building would be left vacant until some decision. Is it not clear that this has been just simply a crisis budget response rather than a response to the real educational needs of people for technical and further education in the area?

Dr BURKE: No, I could not agree with that because that ignores the fact that all TAFE institutes do planning, they do it on an annual basis, they do long-term planning. As I said earlier, in my discussions with the previous Managing Director he said that there was always consideration of the potential for the closing of Seaforth. They were his exact words and I had his permission to quote that this morning. It is not something that was just done at a moments notice.

I have emphasised the need for institutes to be responsive and flexible and there is a certain urgency about those sorts of things, but the Seaforth situation was not something that was just suddenly plucked out of the blue in the last couple of months. It has been something that has been a part of a process for a period of time, and I guess it certainly was accelerated because of the budgetary situation.

Mr MOPPETT: I am not suggesting that it was peremptory, that it had no antecedent, but nevertheless in government terms, given that there was no documentation, no submissions up until suddenly when we saw the New South Wales budget, would you not agree it was a pretty precipitant decision?

Dr BURKE: No, I would not because of the things I have already said. I think the other thing that I would add is that there was an imperative for institutes to start making savings almost immediately and therefore the decision was probably accelerated, certainly. I think the limitations of the Seaforth situation, the fact that there had been falling enrolments for quite some time were out there in the public domain. People would have had to have known that at some time consideration would have to be given to that.

Mr MOPPETT: Finally, would you say that in these discussions where it was tossed about that it was a possibility some time in the future, at each time was it rejected then in the end or was it seen as something that was actively pursued?

Dr BURKE: It was never rejected. It was seen as certainly a consideration for the future.

Mr MOPPETT: It obviously was not convincing up until this year.

Dr BURKE: It was not an imperative at that time. It was convincing, I think, and there were certainly some good reasons why it might have to be in the future but the actual timing of it. If I just use a school situation, in a country situation you might have nine students in a one teacher school. Certainly it would be in people's thinking that at some time a decision would have to be made as to: Is this a viable unit? Basically that is the way you would be familiar with that sort of situation in country places.

Mr MOPPETT: One of the imperatives was the announcement that as the budget filtered down Northern Beaches Institute of TAFE had to find this money out of its budget?

Dr BURKE: That is right.

Mr PRIMROSE: I will hold a number of the historical questions I had until we interview Mrs Virginia Chadwick. I was very impressed by the submission that we have received from the New South Wales Teachers Federation.

For instance, there is a letter here dated 31 August 1999. It is actually written to the present minister from the Federation. It raises issues and is about a project architect who pointed out that Seaforth buildings have specifically been made accessible for disabled students with lifts and special toilets. The Federation pointed out that:

"The closure of Seaforth college would mean that the HSC has been eliminated from the peninsular. Consequently, students from ... to Manly seeking a second chance at the HSC qualification would have to travel to North Sydney or Meadowbank."

I will take the opportunity at another time to run through a lot of the other Federation's questions. In the time I have three specifically, perhaps to Mr Syms. Can you tell me, given all that has been said and the issues raised by the Federation, what actually will be the advantages for students if Seaforth is closed?

Mr SYMS: They will have access to a much pleasant campus. They will have access to student car parking which they have not had at Seaforth, access to a larger library collection, access to improved student association facilities, access to a flexible learning centre equipped with computers, a much better cafeteria and better book shop. A more pleasant environment all around. Newer buildings, greenery, trees.

CHAIR: Disability areas, is that covered?

Mr SYMS: Brookvale has had for many years in Building B a specialist disabilities unit for disabled students. So students who are, I guess severely disabled would be the way to describe it, have had to go to Brookvale anyway rather than Seaforth because they need that kind of special attention.

Mr PRIMROSE: What about issues like the library at Brookvale?

Mr SYMS: The library at Brookvale is in Building M. That occupies a lot of the first floor. It is a magnificent large --

Mr PRIMROSE: For people with disabilities is there access?

Mr SYMS: Yes, there is disabled parking just behind Building M and there are lifts in Building M that will take you down right to the door of the library.

Mr PRIMROSE: If Seaforth does close and the Northern Beaches needs to expand, how are you going to manage without Seaforth and its facilities?

Mr SYMS: There are several aspects to that answer. One is, if you just do the raw calculation and leave to one side for one moment the practicalities, even with Seaforth students at Brookvale there is still spare capacity at the Brookvale site. In fact, the total enrolments - we have looked back into the 1980s - of Brookvale post the closure of Seaforth is similar to the mid-1980s for Brookvale.

As far as further expansion goes, I think we are being overtaken by changes in the vocation, education and training scene and also changes in technology in that I do not think TAFE anywhere is going to be building any more large buildings. When it comes to traineeships and apprenticeships more and more are going out, sending our teachers out into the work place. When it comes to the information technology, business studies and so on, it is more and more on line learning. I think the nature of the use of the buildings at Brookvale will change and students will do more of their learning off campus. I do not think there will be any difficulty in Brookvale accommodating the future needs of the Northern Beaches.

CHAIR: "User choice" has been mentioned quite often. That was something that the Commonwealth was pushing all the time. What is your definition of "user choice"? Does that include locations as well as courses?

Ms LOBLE: The definition is not as precise as that in terms of Commonwealth policy. It is generally a requirement to introduce competition and, as I said earlier, States and Territories are required to report against it in order to trigger funding. As I said, each year we must submit something and one of the requirements in the current agreement is to report on "implementation of user choice". So we must say how we are going about doing that.

One of the effects has been to significantly increase the number of providers. We now have over 1,200 providers and when user choice was --

Mr KELLY: 1,200 private providers competing against --

Ms LOBLE: Total providers in the State, over 1,200. When user choice was first introduced it was roughly 175.

CHAIR: So it is not restricted within TAFE itself, it is between TAFE and other providers?

Ms LOBLE: That has been one of the manifestations.

CHAIR: Privatisation of education.

Mr KELLY: Exactly.

Ms LOBLE: Furthermore, a second thing that we must demonstrate that we are implementing in order to trigger funding, and this is to get even the base granted, is an increase in contestable funding. So leaving aside the number of providers, and we must implement the process used to enable any provider to register who meets the standards, that sort of thing, but separate and apart from that we must actually ensure that increasing share of the funding be allocated in a contestable manner.

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CHAIR: Do the providers get funding?

Ms LOBLE: They compete. Under contestable they must compete. TAFE can compete for that.

CHAIR: For Commonwealth funding, not State?

Ms LOBLE: That is correct, but overall the State must demonstrate that it is increasing the share of dollars devoted to contestable arrangements. So TAFE can compete against private providers for that and, indeed, TAFE often competes extremely well because of the quality of its provision.

One of the consequences of this is that we, for example, have the types of numbers that we are asked to explain in our submission to ANTA, the sorts of things like unit cost as I referenced and the fact that our net assets per capita are higher than any state except Northern Territory and ACT and the basic reason they are higher is they have a much smaller population.

So user choice as an umbrella has principally resulted in many, many more providers being in the State and then the contestable funding requirement has introduced competition. As I said earlier, the principal effect according to those who have looked at the history has been to really start focusing on economic efficiency to the exclusion of other concerns.

CHAIR: Do one of these providers supply to lease the Seaforth buildings and set up the courses?

Ms LOBLE: I think as Mr Burkhardt said I do not know that the decision has been made as to how to deal with that facility. Certainly private providers, there is a tender of issue each year under the contestable arrangements and pre-vocational and other sorts of things are part of that.

Mr KELLY: You have got to let them into your facilities. I know in the country that they actually come in on the weekends and use the TAFE facilities for very little cost.

CHAIR: It must be getting more difficult for your long-term planning if that is happening, not being actually certain the number of students you might be accommodating.

Mr BURKHARDT: To reiterate, there is this complexity and I guess the emphasis now, on any new buildings we build, is about flexibility and the fact that they are going to change their life. Over their 50 years of life they are going to constantly change.

Dr WONG: Once the Seaforth campus is closed, is it possible, is it likely, will you be receptive to the idea if a prestigious primary school leases it from TAFE?

Mr BURKHARDT: All things are possible but I would not imagine that that would necessarily be an economic solution in the use of that site. Any arrangements that are made about the disposal or leasing of sites have to be made within the context of probity and tender arrangements and there would not be a one-off arrangement certainly between the department and a particular school.

CHAIR: And that is government policy, it is back to the minister.

Mr BURKHARDT: Absolutely. Asset management requires that we maximise the use of those resources and that would be a decision about how those resources are maximised.

Mr TSANG: Unit costs for TAFE in New South Wales compared with Victoria, how far are we in between?

CHAIR: Is the answer readily available?

Ms LOBLE: You can see in our submission the unit cost in the most recent report New South Wales in terms of percentage change. In terms of actual unit costs, we are \$15.2 per hour delivered, Victoria is 10.3.

Mr TSANG: So you are forced to be efficient.

Ms LOBLE: And the per cent change is 1.6 per cent increase in unit cost for New South Wales and a negative 0.5 for Victoria.

Ms FORSYTHE: Every other State did in fact make gains last year except New South Wales from these figures on page 6. Can you explain that?

Ms LOBLE: I can say that in Victoria there has been an explicit policy to address the TAFE campuses and sites and to implement user choice across that. I think that we have a variety of strategies that we are implementing to try to bring our costs into line, one of which is reflected in the state budget, and we have been discussing some of the effects of that. The other are much tighter performance agreements with institute directors. We will, I think, significantly increase the number of hours we deliver. Olympics training alone is going to expand significantly the hours that we deliver.

CHAIR: Are TAFE salaries or the hourly rate higher in New South Wales than Victoria?

Ms LOBLE: I am sorry I cannot answer that.

CHAIR: TAFE salaries, or the hourly rate.

Ms LOBLE: I do not know. I cannot answer that.

Mr MOPPETT: I am concerned whether this is relevant to the Seaforth inquiry. We are not going to close any in Victoria, are we?

CHAIR: That concludes the hearing we thank you very much for your attendance today and your cooperation in answering questions and a little grilling by some members. We thank you for your cooperation.

(The witnesses withdrew)

TERRENCE KEVIN PIGGOTT, Head teacher of Pre-Vocational Studies at Seaforth TAFE, responsible for the HSC, corner of Forest Road and Sydney Road, Seaforth.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr PIGGOTT: I did.

CHAIR: Are you familiar with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr PIGGOTT: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Mr PIGGOTT: I would like to, thank you.

CHAIR: Should you consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request and continue in confidential session.

I should warn you that the Parliament may override that decision at any time and make your evidence public.

Mr PIGGOTT: I would like to thank you the Committee for hearing me. I would like to make a brief statement.

The first thing I would like to say in general about the closure of Seaforth TAFE, I think we would all like the Committee particularly to investigate the particular reason why this Seaforth site or campus, or whatever you would like to call it - and we will not be semantic- why Seaforth TAFE was the only site or campus to be closed in New South Wales as a result of these latest budget cuts, despite the direction of the Treasurer, Mr Egan, that no TAFE campus, and he used the term campus in his letter, should be shut. I use the term campus, but would be happy to use the term site.

I have taught economics continuously for 32 years in the HSC course and I also teach an accounting diploma. I have taught that long, so I am a numerate person. I understand economic rationalism. I am well aware that governments are constrained in this current era, particularly State governments are hard pressed for funding.

I can easily sympathise with the Government having to make cuts with their commitments and lack of funding. I have no objection to that, because to object would be to object to reality.

The point I would like the Committee to focus on in general is why is it that only the Northern Institute saw fit to go against Treasurer Egan's recommendations and close the whole site. Other institutes throughout New South Wales have had similar cuts, some greater, some lesser, yet none of them have seen fit to close an entire site.

They have maybe cut four, or five, or a percentage off a whole range of courses, maybe to focus on specific courses, but not one of them has sold a public education site and that is what Seaforth is and all of us are here to try to preserve that site for future generations in public education.

As Mr Primrose very aptly said, in future Manly-Warringah, like the rest of Sydney, is a rapidly growing demographic area. There is an increasing demand for TAFE, as Dr Burke said. I think the figure he gave was a 2.4 percent rise in enrolments. In fact in Seaforth in the last year it was 5.3 percent, so as a site we are not doing too badly.

It is the future that I am worried about. My kids and grandkids, where are they going to go if they are crammed into one site at Brookvale. I am certain that if there was good management in this institute that they could make the cuts without selling off this valuable public site.

Because I have particular expertise in the HSC, I should give a brief run down of the sort of HSC course that we offer and what has been most recently decided to be offered for next year down at Brookvale.

As far as the HSC goes, and as far as the abolition of Seaforth College itself, the site goes, the first we heard about it was in the Manly Daily on 19 August, although we did get a fax late, about 4.30 in the afternoon, from the institute director on 18 August that we were to report for an urgent meeting at Brookvale.

Mr Siva Kumar, the acting director of the institute, announced to us on the Thursday, 19 August, that the college was to be closed. We were gob smacked and had no inkling. There was no consultation. During that meeting most tragically for my teachers and myself and the students, we found out that there would be no HSC provision and no fine arts provision.

Our college runs basically three sections: business services, particularly accounting which I teach in as well as my own section; fine arts and HSC. As well as HSC we also offer what is called the certificate of general education, which is the equivalent of school certificate. That course is basically for kids who come off the street from the Manly drug scene, kids who have been expelled. 15 and 16 is the typical age. Many of these who do our CGE course go on and do the HSC.

That was the first inkling we had of it. I had a meeting with Mr Puffett on 18 October. I had been to previous meetings at which Mr Kevin Harris was introduced to us. Mr Bob Puffett said to us that for a reason he did not really go into, the HSC was going to be reinstated. I was naturally very interested.

CHAIR: What role has this chap, Mr Puffett?

Mr PIGGOTT: He is one of the senior managers in the department. I think he used to be the director of the whole of the TAFE system but when they were merged, he would be the most senior ex-TAFE official, I believe, in the whole of the department. He is a very senior official.

CHAIR: Assistant Director-General?

MR PIGGOTT: Yes. Mr Bob Puffett suggested there would be some provision for HSC. I

was interested, but he could not give details. I was in the delegation that saw the Minister for Education, Mr Aquilina, two days later on 20 October. At that meeting I brought up the problem that the HSC was going to have no provision on the northern beaches peninsula.

Dr Burke, who was here this morning, was at that meeting. When I said at that meeting that there probably would be some provision, that Bob Puffett had mentioned this, and flexible delivery is the term mentioned he said, "who mentioned flexible delivery?". That is basically done with minimal face-to-face teaching, where they use the correspondence school notes. We use the term OTEN, but most people know it as the correspondence school.

When Dr Burke suggested that, I said to him "your own management at Brookvale suggested on the 19th, the day before the meeting with Mr Aquilina that flexible delivery would be offered". A flyer was published, which we gave to Dr Burke. We heard no more about flexible delivery, I think because it was thought to be not an adequate offering.

All of the staff in my HSC section wrote a letter, signed by all of us, saying that this is not a real HSC, not suitable for our students and not a viable course and I believe management dropped that.

The final saga in the HSC story is that we heard on Tuesday of this week, three days ago, in the Manly Daily that the HSC was to be reinstated. Naturally we were pleased. We did hear a rumour. I am one of the two head teachers in this section and the other is Mr Garry Morley. At the end of last week he rang two of the institute managers and asked what they could tell him about the reinstatement of HSC, not flexible delivery. He was told that there was something but they could not tell him details.

We found about it in the Manly Daily. That is a general statement. What sort of consultation is that? Dr Burke talked about consultation. There has been absolutely zero consultation between any college manager and myself or Gary Morley as the two head teachers, or any of our staff.

We have been consulted about the move to Brookvale to cater for rooms for our CGE classes, but not been consulted about course provision, about subjects offered or the type of HSC. I have 32 years experience teaching HSC and Gary has about 30 years teaching HSC continuously. We have a highly competent staff who were not consulted either. All of the people we saw today do not have an HSC background.

Mr Siva Kumar does have an HSC background. He was an HSC teacher in TAFE before he became an administrator. There are two other people with expertise who could have been called, Colin Chase and Laurie Walkley who are managers on the campus. That word is on the literature and that is what we use. Maybe we should call it a site. There has been basically no consultation.

We found out on Tuesday, after the Manly Daily published this. As a result of Gary Morley's phone calls to local managers and to Susan Hartigan, who is responsible for the institute-wide provision of the HSC and she agreed to come out and talk to us. She talked to us on Tuesday of this week and she gave us the details of the new HSC offer and that was supported by Laurie Walkley, another manager, and Colin Chase came into our office on Wednesday and further confirmed the details.

What I would like to do is to distribute to members of the Committee some information. This is a sheet which has a copy of the letter that students were informed about the HSC and other matters, about the official closure of Seaforth but in it, it says that the HSC is safe and going to Brookvale.

We have made a response from the teachers at Seaforth about the inaccuracies of this letter and in those responses we have got the details which I can explain to the Committee very quickly before I answer your questions. I would like the Members of the Committee to have a look at it.

I also have another letter and if I read this through with the Committee I can quickly explain the sort of HSC provision that has been proposed that is going to run at Brookvale next year and this actually replaces the last page of submission A that we made.

CHAIR: It is updating the submission?

Mr PIGGOTT: Yes, because it has all happened in the last two days. We have had to get this ready at short notice. It is in this particular letter here, the submission that we made, the revision of it.

CHAIR: Is there a copy of that page going around?

Mr PIGGOTT: I have quite a few copies but probably not enough for every person.

Mr KELLY: You say to replace the last page of the submission?

Mr PIGGOTT: Yes, this replaces the last page of submission A. It is a chronology put together by a group of teachers, of the whole issue of Seaforth TAFE closing and the last one was in particular this student letter which was received on November 8, this week, and in that they mentioned that HSC would be safe and transferred to Brookvale.

Just as background, Gary and I, the other head teacher, supervise about 245-250 teaching hours a week. Half, almost exactly, are HSC and the rest are made up of CGE, career education for women and smaller courses, some of which are going and some of which will be transferred to Brookvale. Half of our teaching hours and half our resources are committed to HSC at the Seaforth site.

We cater for 167. In the previous submission I have printed 154 because that is how many people have turned up and attended the first class. There are 154 students this year enrolled and attending at Seaforth TAFE. We run 15 different subjects, including all the main academic subjects. The majority of our students hope to go on to tertiary study.

Whilst we offer a range of levels of English and maths, we also offer a full range of science, chemistry, physics and biology; all of the main more academic subjects, because most of our students hope to go on to do a tertiary course and they have to get a reasonable mark to get into university, or college, or wherever they are going to later on.

The new offering, and I hate to use the term but I have to, and I have been informed by our local manager in my office that this was put together last week at short notice. Gary and I, the head

teachers, were not made aware of this, let alone consulted, and this is how poor the planning is. It illustrates the lack of consultation and the inability to include us in the process.

Naturally we oppose the closure of Seaforth, but the other consideration is, if it does close, we want to see a viable HSC, for the sake of our students and future generations, because it is in demand. We would like to compliment management on the fact that they are reinstating some kind of HSC. This indicates that there is a real need. Originally we were told they could go back to school. We know our students will not do that. Some of them are excluded. School failed them in some way. We have any number of examples of people who will tell you that TAFE HSC is not the same as school. We can do it in one year at TAFE whereas at school it takes two years.

CHAIR: In advising the students what was happening, did they advise the teacher what was happening and where you fit in?

Mr PIGGOTT: We have yet to receive our letter. As soon as the college was closed the seven full-timers were informed where they were going. Three were to go to Brookvale and get some of their programming in CGE and other things, adult studies centre work, and half their program at North Sydney. The other four, myself included, are to go to other colleges and institutes, Hornsby and Meadowbank in the case of the two head teachers, another teacher is going to Hornsby with me and another to North Sydney.

Four of the seven staff are going to other colleges, three of them are going for half their programming to North Sydney and the other half of their programming at Brookvale. That was told to us right at the start, so we knew where we were going.

It is the student provision that we are concerned about because they were told no more HSC. Basically with this new provision they are going to offer four core subjects. We offer 15. That is a minimal offering. As a maximum, we have been instructed on Tuesday that we are going to have four hours face-to-face teaching in those four subjects, English, maths, computing studies and modern history.

Currently we offer all those subjects at six hours face-to-face teaching. That is clearly a reduction. There will be support through the Open Learning Centre, a multi discipline learning centre to operate at Brookvale. For any other subjects they said basically they will be done by flexible delivery.

We do not know how many hours face-to-face teaching, but certainly it will not be more than four hour, it will probably be less. Some subjects, like general studies, will be done on line with no face-to-face teaching.

A key issue of course is laboratories. We have a specialist biology, specialist physics and a specialist chemistry laboratory. For most students doing science is not a choice, it is a prerequisite for university. You cannot do pharmacy, medicine or veterinary science unless you do certain subjects like physics or chemistry. This is an integral part that cannot be provided at Brookvale. We have been told that laboratories somehow somewhere are going to be found off-site, we presume in a local high school.

Freshwater High was mentioned by Kevin Harris at one of the meetings with Mr Puffett in

October if we are to run it off-site. That is clearly going to be a reduced offering.

We were told a maximum of 80 students, but more likely 30 as there are only four subjects. You would only get 80 students if they all did one subject and they all did different subjects. That is absurd. You need 11 subjects to do a full HSC or three to do a mature age HSC. In reality it is probably an offering of 30 places as opposed to our present 154.

The proof that this is true is the fact that we have been provided 1.2 rooms. We have been given a minimum one room for a week and one room for one day a week that is 1.2 rooms. We need three rooms, including laboratories and access to computing. That is a reduction of almost two thirds. The numbers in student terms are much more reduced than that and to back that up, only three teachers, the existing three that they have told us are going to Brookvale, they are the only three going to teach. They do not want head teachers like me or Gary Morley.

They do not want history teachers. They do not want the other full time teacher. They are going to Hornsby, Meadowbank, North Sydney or wherever they are sent. Clearly this is not a serious attempt to offer a viable course. It is a very much reduced thing, probably a little last minute and probably has served a purpose.

CHAIR: A stop gap?

Mr PIGGOTT: That the HSC is apparently going to survive. I hope for the sake of some students it does suit them, but with all my experience I cannot honestly believe that many students would find such a reduced offering useful. Most will find it difficult to matriculate because there will not be the subject offerings and even if we got them, limited as they are, most of the students that we have, who have not had a very good education experience, want maximum face to face teaching. They do not want to be stuck in front of a computer using OTEN correspondence school notes.

It is very much a last minute thing, very much a severely reduced offering. I hope I am wrong but I doubt that it would be a viable course if it got up. I do not see that there would be a very long term future, because I do not see that there will be a demand.

In our section we have 154 enrolled students and many successful people graduating on to a career after their tertiary study. That is all I have to say. I welcome any questions you may have.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, you have certainly packed a lot of information into that period of time. We know what you are talking about. There is no doubt about that.

Ms FORSYTHE: One of our submissions, number 13 for the benefit of the Committee, is from a Mr George Andrews who is described as certificate in general education coordinator at Seaforth?

Mr PIGGOTT: That is the school certificate.

Ms FORSYTHE: He describes the students in his courses being 90 per cent categorised as youth at risk, many expelled from local high schools, many described as homeless or living in refuges and many from within proximity of the Warringah Mall, where a lot of youth at risk hang

out.

He says that his present students have commented that they would never come to classes if they were located next to the mall, as all their friends hang out there. In relation to your HSC students, would some of those comments be applicable?

Mr PIGGOTT: Possibly, but more pertinently, with these CGE students, last year we graduated 12. We had one class. We probably had 25 students through the class. Because of family problems and the fact that some have come from the drug scene, we inevitably lose a proportion. We have graduated 12 successfully. Of the 12, four went on and did HSC at Seaforth and one has been accepted to the Australian Defence Force Academy, which is a pretty outstanding thing for a kid. That is a very elite organisation to get into, and this was a kid who did not have the school certificate when he came to us just under two years ago.

So, this is the sort of avenue. They will go on and do HSC in TAFE. They cannot go back to school because most of them have been expelled from school. If we are going to run the CGE at Brookvale, where are they going to go when they are finished, back to the streets, hopefully to another TAFE course, but the better outcome is the more academic the potential of these students, a quarter at least or a third last year, maybe a half would go on and do the HSC. They will not go and do this restricted HSC.

Dr WONG: Mr Syms was saying that the Brookvale site has more than enough rooms to provide all types of activities. You mentioned there was only 1.2 rooms available. Are you trying to say that subjects are being cut off or what?

Mr PIGGOTT: Well, Colin Chase, the head of studies at Brookvale came to my and Gary's office two days ago and we said, "Is there any chance of getting more than 1.2 rooms," and he said, "No, I could not provide that". He is the person doing the rooms at Brookvale. Therefore, it is going to be a restricted offering of the HSC. Brian Syms does not have a direct association with the HSC course in TAFE but he made the point that most HSC students will be accommodated.

Clearly, this is incorrect. It will be a small minority who will be accommodated just by the hours, the rooms, the lab facilities, by the few staff who are being allocated to this. That is assuming they find the course suitable, which I doubt.

Dr WONG: For science students, such as physics, science and biology laboratories, Mr Syms was saying facilities would be available for them. Can you see this suitable for mature students of the HSC doing biology, science, physics or chemistry having to share mind with the normal high school kids?

Mr PIGGOTT: I think they will probably suggest that they will provide a block of hours in a local high school just for our students. The problem is we are doing years 11 and 12 in one year. We do our HSC in one year, and the Board of Studies requires a certain amount of set laboratory work. The majority of our science students are doing the full 11 units to matriculate to go on to university. For those students doing 11 units in one year, like the majority do, and requiring the full amount of laboratory work, to program 11 units into a week, our students come at 8.30 and leave at 5.30. That is standard in all TAFE HSC. Some students only come for half the week because they choose to accumulate over two years. But the majority of our students do it in one year. Physically, if they are doing 11 units at Brookvale, even if it is Freshwater High, how are they going to get from

five to 11 by five past 11 to a laboratory which presumably Freshwater or some school has set aside? It is physically impossible to do that and that assumes that they have cars.

CHAIR: So that when they say they can cater for HSC students, if you reduce the offering and the courses available, they will be able to accommodate the few who are happy with that arrangement?

Mr PIGGOTT: That is right.

CHAIR: It is like a process of reducing applications so the ones who remain will fit into the slot available?

Mr PIGGOTT: Exactly, and I think that the more academic students in particular will find this offering reduced and they will either drop out of education or do another course. Hopefully some of them might be able to get to North Sydney where they get the full HSC.

CHAIRMAN: I think you have covered the main areas and we appreciate the comprehensive way in which you did that.

(The witness withdrew)

(Luncheon Adjournment)

JAMES HENRY BANNISTER, Head Teacher Accounting, 11 Ocean Grove, Collaroy, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr BANNISTER: Part of the Save Seaforth TAFE Committee.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr BANNISTER: I did indeed.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Mr BANNISTER: I am.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request and resolve into a confidential session, but I must warn you that the Parliament may override that decision at any time and make your evidence public.

Mr BANNISTER: Thank you.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Mr BANNISTER: I would like to make an opening statement if I may. I have been involved in saving Seaforth TAFE now since its inception which basically was from 16 August of this year when we were first told that Seaforth TAFE would close. When I was told, I did not believe it. They said Seaforth TAFE would close, I said "That is a lie. I do not believe it". They said, "Well, that is what has been told". I said, "I do not believe you". I said, "We had our institute director, Susan Holland, come out to this college and tell us eyeball to eyeball that Seaforth College of TAFE would continue into the 21st century and I believed her".

She spoke for three hours. It was not a short conversation and at all stages and all the way through she was telling us about how viable an educational institution we were. That was last December.

I then read in the paper that the acting or the Assistant Director of NSIT, Siva Kumar, said in effect that there was no truth in any of the rumours because it would take three to five years of planning before this would happen. And I believed him. Two out of two.

Then the other Assistant Director, these are the top people in an organisation with costs in excess of \$100 million, said to me, "There is no plans to close Seaforth TAFE", and I believed her. Then when somebody came along on 16 August and said to me, "I have heard a rumour that Seaforth TAFE is going to close", I said, "I do not believe on the evidence before me that is true". I was wrong. I was completely wrong. I was deceived and I was very unhappy.

Since that time the amount of secrecy that has gone on with the senior members and management of TAFE and the education department, including some of the gentlemen that were sitting out here, the changing of the plans, if there was a plan, from day-to-day, I thought made me feel a bit like Watergate; it did not matter what I said no-one would answer my questions.

For example, on 18 October this year I had a meeting with Bob Puffett, who I was hoping would be here, at head office in town. He is the top TAFE person in New South Wales. 11 times he said to us - and there were plenty of witnesses there - "I will not tell you". I would say, "Why are you closing Seaforth TAFE?" "I will not tell you". "Is there a hidden agenda?" "I will not tell you". It did not matter what question, 11 times and then I stopped counting. There were plenty of witnesses there at that meeting, some of the people who are here today.

So I then applied through the Freedom of Information Act to find out if there is any documentation about the closure of Seaforth TAFE from head office. I said to them before are there any documents, any feasibility reports, anything like that that we could use to try and come and have some sort of discussion about this and they said, "I cannot tell you". So I put in an application under Freedom of Information, paid my \$30 fee and of course got a note back saying it will cost me \$1,050 deposit before they are prepared to do anything. I did not have \$1,050 so that effectively stopped any consultation that we could have with them.

I said to them we believe in economic rationalise, we will work with you, we will help you save money. We will work through the issues. Let us work together as a team and solve the problem, but do not make it tough on the students. We got no reply. It was just so sad, it was so sad.

You will hear me talk about it a bit as I go along. Of course, the latest thing that happened is this letter that you have got a copy of there on 8/11 sent out with Laurie Walkley's signature to 1,700 students. It is incorrect. The first line is wrong. The first line talks about consolidating Seaforth TAFE starting semester 1 2000. Consolidating TAFE starts on 17 December this year, 1999. That is when it starts. If a student comes in on the 18th, or whatever the next working day is after that, they will be sent to Brookvale. You can rest assured on that.

So I am very disillusioned with the management within TAFE and the education department.

Now, TAFE is a different sort of education and you must have this firmly in your mind because people who are school education people do not understand this. We are second chance education. You get expelled from high school, are you going to go back to high school or are you going to go on to the streets? You come to TAFE. They are the people we take it. We have at the moment some kids who have been expelled from private school and they come to us and they fit in and there is no problem. We have kids off the street. We have got a drug problem in Sydney, kids on the streets taking drugs. They come to us because of the site, and when you come out next week you will see why, and they are treated well, we listen to them and they go on and they progress. So that is my opening little comment.

As far as planning is concerned, I would like to just run you through some of the points that are in our submission there, but I will just highlight a few facts.

On 19 August 1999 at Queenscliff Surf Club we had a public meeting. Siva Kumar, the

director, got up there and said, "There is no negotiations. It is not negotiable. Fine arts and the HSC have gone from the Northern Beaches". We said that is ridiculous. He said, "No, I do not care what you say. Fine arts and HSC have gone from the Northern Beaches".

In September we hear: We have changed our mind. Some fine arts but no HSC is now going to be on the Northern Beaches. On 19 October we hear there is a little bit more: Certificate 3 in fine arts and HSC will be run as flexible delivery; in other words, like a distant student for two subjects. Then we were told: No, no that is not right, we are only going to have Certificate 3 fine arts and no HSC, back to where we are again, until we now have what I call a Clayton's fine arts course and a Clayton's HSC course. If you wanted to design an HSC course which is going to fail, the courses that they have put forward in this room will do exactly that.

I ask you one simple question: if you are going to use your laboratories, you have to hop in your car and drive to Freshwater High School some five or six kilometres away. You have five minutes to get there, or whatever between the lectures. You then do your work there and you have to come back again. What happens if the students have an accident on the way in their car? What about the insurance liability problems? I have not heard anything about that and that is the first thing you should ask. That is how important that is.

Of course it will not happen because the students who are doing the HSCs have been kicked out of high schools. You cannot put them back into a high school. Mentality they cannot walk through that gate. They have been down that track, they have not been successful, we showed them a different way.

So second chance education is vital. That is what we are in. We take the people that are hurting and we say come here, we will give you love, we will give you understanding, we will give you friendship, we will help you to achieve whatever your educational objective is. That is what happens.

We have people that have come out of war zones in Europe and in Asia, women in particular who have been brutalised and they tell some incredible stories, but they come in and they are successful. I get a bit teary when I think about some of the stories they tell me. I was talking to a girl in my class the other day and we were talking about Tiananmen Square. She said, "I was in Tiananmen Square. I was there when the tanks were firing." I said, "That must have been pretty tough. How can you then come back into education, come back to Seaforth TAFE?" She said it was a loving caring environment that got her in there, nothing else. I can tell you many stories like that with great ease.

What you have to recognise is that the people within TAFE that have been involved in closing Seaforth TAFE which, when I had a meeting with Minister Aquilina on 20 October, he listened very quietly and very courteously to us for 40 minutes and then he said, "This decision to close Seaforth TAFE is purely a budgetary decision". I thanked him because for the first time someone had told me why they were closing Seaforth TAFE. Nobody else had told me. I had asked Mr Puffett, who was the highest TAFE person in New South Wales, why are they closing Seaforth TAFE and he would say, "I do not know. You have got to ask the minister". Everybody kept passing the buck up to the minister and at least he had the guts - even though I disagreed with him - to say we are doing it for a budgetary measure. So at least I knew where I stood.

I would like to backtrack slightly just because there were a few things said earlier on that I just thought is indicative of what was going on. The people that should be here is Mr Siva Kumar who said on four occasions it was his decision, or Laurie Walkley or some of these guys that we deal with or try to deal with to try to resolve these issues. But they are not here so we cannot ask the questions. Unfortunately, some of the answers that were given by the guys out here demonstrated that they did not understand some of the issues.

For example, Brian Syms said just before we broke for lunch that there was no art gallery at Seaforth College of TAFE. There has been an art gallery there for years. It is open every Wednesday night to the public who come in to view the paintings as an exhibition area.

He then said we hang the paintings in the corridors. Of course we do. We hang the paintings in every where we can find; corridors, offices, anywhere they want a painting we will hang one. Or we will put a bit of sculpture in there because it brightens the place up.

I did not understand John Burkhardt's comment about the Seaforth building is uninhabitable but I must have got that wrong because 1,700 students have been coming along and they do not find it uninhabitable. One thing about students, if they are unhappy they vote the only way they know and that is they walk out. Our students do not walk out, they walk in. How many schools do you folk know where the students are happy to come to class? It is an interesting question, is it not? We have got the hurting students, right. They do not have to stay there if they do not want to.

Terry Burke, of course, got tripped up. He did not know the difference between a building, a site or a campus so I went off and the Oxford Dictionary says that a campus is an educational building so I guess Seaforth is a campus but I will not go into that because there are obviously some issues there that I do not understand.

I was just wondering how long it is since some of these fellows have been out there and been to Seaforth TAFE and had a look to see what the problems are. Again, I did not get a chance to ask them that question.

Let us have a look at Seaforth TAFE. As far as the educational dollar is concerned, as far as efficiency is concerned, as far as unit cost per dollar is concerned, I challenge the Department of Education to give me the facts on what Seaforth College of TAFE is and justify them because I believe that we are the cheapest and the most effective provider of second chance public education in the NSIT.

We do not spend any money on our buildings. Bob Puffett said that we have not spend any real money on our buildings for 10 years and yet the students keep coming back. It is a comfortable building and the architect says it is good for another 50 years of education. What is the matter with the building?

They talk about the roof. The roof leaks. We have some pretty heavy rain in the past 12 months. The roof has not leaked once. I am there every day. The other guys are never there. Why has it not leaked, because a guy came out and patched the roof up last year and it is perfect. It does not have to be replaced and if it did it would coast \$20,000 at the most, because it is only a cliplock roof. That is the roof where the problems were. There is nothing wrong with the building.

Our student numbers they keep talking about. This is a misnomer. Let me tell you as clear as I can say, using the department's latest own figures from 1998 to 1999, our student numbers have gone up nine per cent.

We are not going down. Seaforth building is going up. They say let us go back and have a look at what happened in 1993. In 1993 that included the student numbers at another site, so you cannot compare 1993 if it has numbers at another site, can you? Not only that, but now when they compare numbers, all of those students from the other site now get lumped in with Brookvale, because that is where they have moved to, to inflate their figures, so their figures in fact look good because of what has happened in the past.

Our numbers are going up. We are vibrant and vigorous. We are alive and we are dynamic and yet they want to close us down. They want to close us down because we are small. That is an interesting comment.

To me, in many cases small means efficient. Lean and mean is small. You ask the banks what they are trying to do. Are they trying to get bigger and bigger and have bigger sites? No way. They are all becoming lean and mean. Education in TAFE if it is going to survive has to become lean and mean.

We have niche marketing in our college. Our marketing is so good, and the calibre of our marketing students is so good that they have won national awards. In the last five years I am not sure whether they have won three or four times against every other TAFE in Australia, universities, you name it, we have cleaned them up.

Who are the people that employ students? Take this for a fact: the Hilton Hotel in town employed our students to do a marketing plan on how to run the Hilton Hotel more efficiently. You tell me if we are not a relevant college. How many colleges can say that? It is incredible, is it not? Tyrrell's Wines, one of the most effective and expanding wine producers in the whole of Australia employed our students to do a marketing plan on how they can be more effective in promoting Tyrrell's wines throughout the world. That is the quality of students we have at Seaforth. Why would you close us down? I do not know. The number is up.

The canteen is a classic. You heard him talking about the canteen. We have a little canteen. The food was pretty crook a couple of years ago and Siva Kumar said, "We are closing it down because the students said the food is crook". I said, "Siva, we knew the food was crook so we changed the caterers. We have now got good caterers and good food. Why would you close it down because we have a poor canteen?" He did not answer me. How can one big canteen, where you cannot get served because it is too big be any better than a small one where you can get served? Where is the benefit to the students?

There is no benefit to the students and through this whole exercise nobody from TAFE management has asked the students whether they want to go to Brookvale. That would have been the most fundamental question to be asked. We are going to give you bigger, better, brighter resources should you want to go to Brookvale. If they said yes, fair enough. No one has asked them. We have asked them and they have said "you have to be out of your mind".

CHAIR: We would like to allow time for questions. There may be points the members

would like to ask you.

Mr BANNISTER: I apologise because I am pretty emotional about this. Parking is a classic next week you will get in a traffic jam and they will tell you that the traffic flows better. You will see what the parking is like. They are going to give us 26 extra parking sites. They are getting to give us no extra parking sites, not one, because all the ones they are going to give us are the no parking sites that have been repainted to parking sites, so the students park there anyway. How can that be extra? We need a whole new area.

To one of the senior teachers TAFE management said "you can park in Warringah Mall". We said, "you cannot". He said, "it is fine. Go down there and park in Warringah Mall". Warringah Mall has almost got a gun pointing at us if we go anywhere near. They will kick out anybody who looks like a student.

We have the best art library in the whole of NSIT. It is a very selective library. It is not a big library but the best. Our library is so bad that students from Brookvale come up and use it. Now, if our library is bad, or if it is not functioning properly, or it whatever, I do not understand the comment. They have this fascination with bigger is better. Bigger is not better in education. Smaller is better.

The classic thing, if you want to understand education, remember one thing, education has short legs. I told it to Terry Burke and I hope he listened because he said to me we have got to have bigger university style TAFEs. That is a recipe for disaster. You have to have small, lean, mean, open long hours, provide the services and we will be right.

Disabled students: You ask disabled students where they want to go to. I challenge you. They all say that they drive right into the middle of the college. If they get stuck in their car, which is what happens, we can all go down and lift them out. They come across 30 feet to a lift, up to the floor. They can go to the library and everywhere.

We had an incident down at Brookvale with a disabled student who fell out of the his wheelchair. He had a wet acid battery in his wheelchair and the acid started to run down the hill towards where he was lying. A teacher pulled him out of the way, to save him being badly burnt. When you go there pretend are in a wheelchair and see how bad it is.

Transport: All roads lead to Seaforth. Remember that. When you go there, not all roads lead to Rome, all roads lead to Seaforth. Seaforth is the hub. Brookvale is four kilometres away and all the main roads go four kilometres away. It is pretty stupid. What is the rule in real estate, position, position, position. We have the best position. They are going to close it down.

Dr WONG: That is why.

Mr BANNISTER: I do not understand. I do not and no one will answer me. I can go on. There is plenty. I would ask you to read some of the letters written by the students. The student has said "We do not want shooting galleries, we do not want climbing walls, we do not want this or that, just give us Seaforth TAFE". That is a pretty good endorsement of what we are about. I think I had better stop and let you guys talk.

Ms FORSYTHE: Just listening to your timetable about the changes in the decisions that have been made, it seems to me that you have suggested that it is as recently as November and we are about 12 November now, that the announcements about the HSC and fine arts, as we think they will be next year, have really been made. When would the TAFE handbook have been printed and other than the Manly Daily, how will people know what is going to be offered next year?

Mr BANNISTER: That is a very intelligent question and I had forgotten because that was something I wanted to mention. If you ring up now TAFE to talk to Seaforth TAFE, guess what they tell you? This is TAFE, these guys here. Guess what they tell you, "I am sorry Seaforth is closed". That is your 1 600 number. That is great, is it not? I mean if you are a prospective arts student ringing up to find out where fine arts can be done, they will be told to go to Hornsby or Meadowbank.

They do not even know that this Claytons fine arts course they are talking about, certificate three, has not got through to the TAFE telephone network.

Ms FORSYTHE: In terms of when the TAFE handbook was published, I presume none of this information will be generally available.

Mr BANNISTER: All of this adverse publicity is self-fulfilling. The newspapers have seen the letters that TAFE have put out, erroneously saying that we are going to close and everybody is saying TAFE is going to close at Seaforth so we won't bother. The student numbers are going to go down next year, as night follows day. Blind Freddy can see that. What will happen is they will say "the numbers are down. We made the right decision to close Seaforth TAFE". That really is very poor management.

Dr WONG: Who do you think the key witness is that the Committee should call, apart from yourself?

Mr BANNISTER: I think that Siva Kumar, who has been critical, should be called in here. I would like the Minister to come in here and say what are the budgetary savings and costs that relate to this whole thing, because at the end of the day I challenge the figures that have been put forward. They say \$240,000 a year is going to be saved in costs. It is not going to happen. I will tell you now.

We have just had a new telephone system put in so that we can ring everywhere for nothing. We press a button and go automatically internally to Brookvale. We are not going to be saving telephone costs.

We are going to use less electric light. No. If we have the students here we will still use the same number of lights, so the costs are going to be pretty much the same. I would be interested for them to table what the \$240,000 is and I will challenge them when they put it down.

Dr WONG: You said that you contacted Bob Puffett many, many times. Is he a key witness?

Mr BANNISTER: He is a key witness. We have never had any success in getting information from him.

Dr WONG: Would this Committee of Inquiry be complete without these two key witnesses.

Mr BANNISTER: I do not think it would. You have to get a balanced view and you have to get these guys who made the decision to get up and justify themselves. You can attack me as much as you like, or ask me questions, or they can ask me questions. We have to get to the truth of it. Once we lose this educational site we will never get it back. It has gone. The most efficient spender of taxpayers' dollars in New South Wales is Seaforth TAFE. Why, because we have cut right back on the administration. We have put into practice over the last couple of years a lot of cost savings measures and we are getting down to a pretty low level.

Dr WONG: What documents will you ask for in your FOI?

Mr BANNISTER: I want all documents related to the closure of Seaforth TAFE. I wanted things like cost benefit analysis, feasibility reports, budgets, or anything like that, to see on what basis this decision was made.

Dr WONG: Could the Committee have a copy of your letter?

Mr BANNISTER: By all means. I will provide it later.

Mr KELLY: You have got me a bit lost. You have said that the best way, the most efficient way, is small.

Mr BANNISTER: Lean and mean.

Mr KELLY: You said that is what the banks do. They certainly do not do it in the bush and in Southern Sydney. They close them. You also said that you believe in economic rationalisation and would like to help.

Mr BANNISTER: I do.

Mr KELLY: That is the reason for this.

Mr BANNISTER: That is right, they say economic rationalism is the reason.

Mr KELLY: How can you believe in it?

Mr BANNISTER: I believe in efficiency. If economic rationalism means efficiency, I believe in it. In this day and age people want the best service for the cheapest price.

Mr KELLY: That is not economic rationalism.

Mr BANNISTER: That is what TAFE has got to do. If we do not do it, the students will vote with their feet, but the students so far have voted to come to us. Our library is so bad that we have disabled students with cerebral palsy in wheelchairs coming to use our library during the holidays. One student in particular is now doing an university course, because it is so accessible to where he is at home. He will not go to Brookvale.

Mr PRIMROSE: Just briefly, do you have any idea of the attrition rate over a year for students such as HSC students?

Mr BANNISTER: I have to ask my colleague, Terry Piggott on this, but we do have an attrition rate and this is one of the reasons why we have adapted our teaching. I am much more flexible now than I was five years ago.

I get a lot of mature age women in my course, who come along at night. They have kids. Hubby comes home at six or seven and she comes to tech and works with me until 9.30 at night. If kids are sick or there is a problem, they cannot come all the time, or if a disaster occurs they drop out. If they drop out they say, "Jim, I am going to come back next semester because I want to finish my course". We have to be more flexible in that regard. An attrition rate of 20 per cent, for example, is pretty normal

Mr PRIMROSE: Would it be as high as 50 per cent?

Mr BANNISTER: Not in my courses.

Mr KELLY: We were lead to believe that less than 100 students have completed the HSC.

Mr BANNISTER: I do not know.

Mr PRIMROSE: Perhaps if you take it on notice.

Mr BANNISTER: We have youth the risk. I do not know whether you people have dealt with youth at risk. You think the F word is in the English language. They use it every second word and as loud as they could while they are screaming. But they come back and after a while we settle them down. Do you know what one student said? He said, "When I came in here I was a vandal. I used to enjoy vandalising and smashing things. When I came in here I have seen some of the male teachers and seen the way they acted and they have become role models or father figures to me and I have change my behaviour". That happened at Seaforth TAFE.

Mr KELLY: Does it only happen at Seaforth TAFE?

Mr BANNISTER: It happened specifically with us because these kids will only come to a small family environment like Seaforth TAFE. I do not know about Brookvale, whether it does.

Mr KELLY: Youth at risk will not go to a larger facility?

Mr BANNISTER: No, never.

Mr KELLY: There are no other youth at risk programs in the area?

Mr BANNISTER: All I am saying is I do not know much about them. All I know is that on our site it is very successful. I do not know how successful they are elsewhere.

When you have got lots of buildings, trees and things like that, once they get off they can wander off and you have lost them.

Mr PRIMROSE: You believe there are no effective youth at risk programs?

Mr BANNISTER: I think they will diminish dramatically.

Dr WONG: When was the last time you spoke to Siva Kumar?

Mr BANNISTER: I have not spoken to him for some months. The last time I spoke to him was at Puffett's office when we had a meeting there about this and he was at the meeting. So that really is the last time.

Dr WONG: Which was?

Mr BANNISTER: 18 September. We met for an hour and 30 minutes and he spoke for two minutes. In that two minutes he decided to have a shot at me, and that is the last time I have spoken to him.

Dr WONG: Am I right to say that from 10 December 1998 when Susan Holland wrote a letter to all of you to September this year you have not been spoken to either Siva Kumar or Susan Holland?

Mr BANNISTER: I have not spoken to Susan Holland. Unfortunately, I spoke at the meeting on 19 August at Queenscliff where he was speaking and he has come out on one occasion to talk to the students and I was there then, but the students booed him off the premises, so that was the last time I have seen him.

Dr WONG: Am I correct then that it was in August that Siva Kumar informed you that Seaforth TAFE would be closed?

Mr BANNISTER: Yes, that's right. He has cut it down from three years to 8 months.

Dr WONG: When was the last time that Siva Kumar or Susan Holland informed you that Seaforth TAFE would not be closed?

Mr BANNISTER: That was in December last year. They categorically and emphatically denied we were going to close. That is why I was so upset when it happened. I thought I had been betrayed.

Ms FORSYTHE: You referred to a public meeting of 19 August. Approximately how many people attended that meeting? Obviously the issues around the HSC and fine arts would have been raised. I am interested in knowing what other issues were raised.

Mr BANNISTER: It was a packed hall. There were hundreds of people standing around the wall, and they were all outside. As I was inside I did not know how many were there, but it was overflowing out into the street. The fine arts in particular was a big issue and the HSC was also a big issue, but the whole thing was about lack of consultation. The local community felt betrayed because there had been no communication. If there had been some communication, we could have worked this out.

CHAIR: The expectation of the local community and the staff was that it was not going to close.

Mr BANNISTER: That is right. It happened so quickly.

CHAIR: You teach the accounting class?

Mr BANNISTER: I do.

CHAIR: What will be happening with you?

Mr BANNISTER: They want me to move to Brookvale at this stage. There they are working Saturdays and Sundays, so they have told me and I don't know whether that is true, to get everything finished in time. I do not know what rooms we have. There is a terrible fight at the moment within Seaforth as to who has what rooms. There seems to be a reduction in the number of rooms available. We have fewer rooms to teach in there than in Seaforth. It is not an improvement. Sculpture goes down there. When you sculpture you need a bit of room but the room down there is too small. When you get cramped facilities, students will not come. They know what good facilities are like.

CHAIR: It seems from what you have said that you doubt whether students will actually transfer to Brookvale. There will be a loss of a number of students, particularly the ones at risk, who do not think Brookvale is a good environment.

Mr BANNISTER: It is not a good environment. The thing about a risk student is this: we have them in one building. They walk in to the room, chuck in their bag, swear at their girlfriend, sit down and then tell you they have forgotten their books. The women who teach them should get Victoria crosses. If you leave your bag open they will steal the money out of your bag.

When they go off the deep end, you have them contained and you have Kim, the counsellor there close by. You can take them around to her and she can try to pacify them to find out what the problem is. When you have kids who have been beaten up before they come to lectures you have a real social problem. That is what happens sometimes.

Dr WONG: I noted that Mr Syms earlier on was saying there was plenty of capacity for all students from Seaforth. I also note in the *Manly Daily* of Wednesday, 15 September, 1999, a report by a senior head teacher said that Brookvale is totally overcrowded already and is short of computer rooms and parking is a mess. Who is speaking the truth?

Mr BANNISTER: You folk are going to go there next Friday and I will give you my old bomb of a car, right, because students drive old bombs like mine, and I will challenge you to drive into Brookvale, get out and see if you get run over by a truck from the mall or whatever. The problem is that Old Pitwater Road is becoming a huge thoroughfare. It is a main entrance into Warringah Mall where they have spent \$186 million upgrading it. It has huge parking areas. About a month ago I saw someone skittled in the pedestrian crossing which was very upsetting because I think it was a student, I am not sure.

Mr TSANG: Would you agree with the comment by Leslie Loble, Director, TAFE policy, that the Commonwealth should be held responsible for locally based closures, such as the proposed closure of Seaforth, because it was the arrangement of funding on terms and conditions that need to be, what is the word, competition and threshold. Would you lobby the Commonwealth Government for extra --

Mr BANNISTER: I am thinking seriously of going to Canberra and getting hold of Mr Kemp whatever his name is, and having a little blow in his ear. The question I want to ask him is, when do you stop. That is what they do not know.

Mr KELLY: I want to understand what the Save the Seaforth TAFE Committee is. It is generally teachers and students and a parents' committee and what your position is.

Mr BANNISTER: I am just one of the group. I am a chartered accountant by trade.

Mr KELLY: You teach the business program.

Mr BANNISTER: I teach accountancy, the certificate of management, diploma of management and some of the things like that. The committee consists of a group of concerned people within the college who came together, mainly teachers and students and some parents who are very annoyed. Believe you me, this issue will not go away. The head of steam in the community at the moment is very high. Even as late as yesterday, a concerned parent rang me and told me something and I explained some of the issues. He is getting stuck into Warringah Shire Council who has been a bit slack in this area.

Ms FORSYTHE: One of the submissions we received, No. 28, is from a person who says that based on assurances from Susan Holland, she made a professional decision in early 1999 to decline a promotion position because it involved a move to the Brookvale office. She goes on to say, "Of course, if I realised I would have to move later on I would have taken the position".

Has your committee done any work to determine whether there are other staff who, based on the assurances given late last year that the campus would remain open, would have declined promotion positions or in other ways impacted on their careers because of the advice they were given 12 months ago?

Mr BANNISTER: I agree with you entirely. That is one of them. There are other people there who, if they knew the college was going to close, would have transferred to other colleges. Opportunities came up and they said no.

Ms FORSYTHE: Do you know how many?

Mr BANNISTER: I do not know how many but there would be a few, four or five. There are people across the road, one woman bought a shop and put her house on the market as a mortgage and if Seaforth goes down to Brookvale she has lost everything. She sells art supplies and things like that.

Ms FORSYTHE: She has opened a shop with art supplies geared to the Seaforth TAFE. How long has she been there?

Mr BANNISTER: I do not know, 12 months or so, but she is an integral part of the whole thing.

CHAIR: The way you have spoken, because of your knowledge of economics, you seriously doubt whether, leaving aside what the Government thinks, it is an economic saving in closing Seaforth. That is the only reason the Government is doing it in your view. You question whether even that is valid, that there may not be any great saving at all?

Mr BANNISTER: There was a comment made earlier that intrigued me as an accountant. There is a fair bit of fudging that goes on. Accountants are pretty good at fudging. Let us do some quick mathematics. Say that you save \$100,000 a year. They are going to spend \$2.5 million getting Brookvale changed so that Seaforth can come down. So why would you spend \$2.5 million if you are going to save \$100,000 per annum. It will take 25 years to get our investment back. From a business perspective, that does not make an awful lot of sense.

Dr WONG: Can I offer you an alternative answer?

CHAIR: Let him finish.

Mr BANNISTER: To have a return on investment taking 25 years is not a good investment. In the business world you would not even contemplate it. That is rule No. 1. I think it is far less than \$100,000 regardless of the figures they have here. Secondly, let us say that it cost \$100,000, in effect, to keep Seaforth TAFE open. The North Sydney Institute budget is \$100 million. It is a lot of people, a lot of money, a lot of flexibility. If you divide one into the other, it tells you that if you save one-tenth of one cent out of every dollar you do not have to close Seaforth TAFE.

That is how little management savings you have to make to break even so far as Seaforth. It does not make one atom of sense to sell a jewel of an asset which is what is going to happen to it. It has a jewel position transport wise, all sorts of things, and it is not going to stay deserted for years. Someone is going to make a killing. We have heard in our community that one of the major private providers is circling us like a piranha at the moment because they know that educationally it is a very good building.

(The witness withdrew)

KIM ELIZABETH WHYTE, TAFE councillor, corner Sydney Road and Frenchs Forest Road, Seaforth, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms WHYTE: I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this Committee?

Ms WHYTE: I am.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request and resolve into a confidential session. But I should warn you that the Parliament may override that decision at any time and make that evidence public. Would you like to make a breach opening statement?

Ms WHYTE: I will, thank you. As I have said I am a TAFE councillor at Seaforth. I thought I would let you know a little about my role and my relevance to today. TAFE counsellors are located at campuses or colleges to assist both prospective and enrolled students with educational, vocational and personal counselling. Personal counselling is just for enrolled students. For prospective students, educational and vocational. A lot of my work involves seeing prospective students for career advice, course selection and educational planning and I see enrolled students for similar issues throughout their courses and at the end of their course and also to assist and support them with any difficulties they may have while they are studying at TAFE, be it of an educational, vocational or personal nature.

I have been employed with TAFE for 20 years next year and I have been at the Seaforth campus since 1983 but I have also worked in a relief capacity at Brookvale. Just in addressing some of the issues that have been brought up here today, I was very concerned to hear that Seaforth has been marked as a potential site for closure since 1993, the year that we amalgamated to be called Northern Beaches TAFE. I think if the staff, the students and the community had known that and had that confirmed, a lot of us would have made different decisions. I certainly might have looked for different options if I had known that the campus was, I guess, at risk for all that time and I certainly would not have advised prospective and enrolled students to take up long-term educational plans there.

When Susan Holland came at the end of 1998 to the Seaforth campus and addressed the staff there, she did assure us because there had been rumours and that is actually why she came. The closure of Balgowlah Boys enhanced those rumours until the staff were very concerned about what was going to happen and the public were, too. Being somebody who sees prospective students, I have lots of phone calls and appointments with young people, mature aged people, parents, asking me if Seaforth was going to close at the end of last year. When Susan Holland came to address us at the college in December 1998 I was very happy that she did that because I was allowed to advise people, I thought appropriately, that Seaforth was going to remain in the community and we were going to be able to offer that site as a site for education and we were going to be able to offer the range of courses available.

I advised people appropriately. So at the end of December I see a lot of prospective students. I come back usually early in January. I do not have teaching holidays. I am back in early January because HSC results come out so I am there along with office and information staff advising prospective students. It is a particularly busy time for me. During that time there were a lot of inquiries about the future of the campus and I was able to tell those people that we had been assured by the director of TAFE that Seaforth will be open and that any change, which was what was said, would have to be three to five years in the planning. So I assured people that if they started a course of study with us, they would have a good chance of completing it at that site.

On those assurances, young people, older people, women with children made decisions on those assurances. They made educational decisions, career decisions and life decisions. Women arranged child care. People give up full-time jobs to part-time jobs. It is a big step in a lot of people's lives when they return to education. It is a big and positive step and I think it should be encouraged and supported, particularly with young people which I am going to talk about now, what we call youth at risk. The sudden closure of Seaforth, I think, does bring up issues of access and equity for disadvantaged groups and I include in those youth at risk, early school leavers, women with children trying to return to the work force and juggle child care responsibilities and also to disabled students.

Youth at risk. We were inundated at the end of last year and the beginning of this year with young people, their parents, their career advisers, the principals of their schools, other interested people because young people seem to be dropping out of schools in droves at a very young age. We were getting people ringing us up from year 9, drop out was a common time, and year 10. We even had principals ringing us up asking what could we do for these people. I have never had such a large interest from these groups and also I have never had so many students come and see me with their parents.

In response to that, we set up a particular course which was looking at young people, not even year 10 level. We run a year 10 level course at Seaforth which is a CGE but we ran a pre-year 10 because these kids were not even up to that stage. CGE is the Certificate of General Education. It is an equivalent year 10 qualification and it is equivalent to the school certificate in terms of accessing other courses.

A lot of our kids were not even up to that stage. They dropped out year 8, year 9. A lot of them were just verging on school age, leaving age which is 14, 9 months, 15. So we actually set up a course at Seaforth which was for them and they involved a lot of work, a lot of counselling and a lot of care.

These young people drop out of schools for a variety of reasons. A lot of them have to do with family problems, family breakdown. Some are medical problems, both physical, psychological, psychiatric problems. Sometimes they might have significant learning difficulties, but one thing that is often said to me is that they have been lost in the system. They have been through the school system and for whatever the reason it did not work out, their needs were not addressed and they dropped out.

They come to Seaforth and I think what Seaforth campus can provide, just following on from what has been said before, is an appropriate environment for these young people. It is a nurturing environment, it is a more appropriate environment. These kids who need constant support, nearly

on a daily basis with what happens in their lives, they need easy access to support. At Seaforth campus everything is in one area. There is only a few steps from the classroom to the counselling unit. All the facilities - and I would like to go through the facilities that are available at Seaforth a little bit later because they have been challenged - but it is an appropriate environment, I think, for young people and we have done very well with them.

Our main CGE kids have done very well this year. A lot of them I would not have predicted that they would have lasted the year, but quite a few of them have. Some have dropped out but for reasons other than the TAFE environment, their personal issues. They have been able to survive, I think, because of the nature of the Seaforth campus. We can provide constant appropriate interaction with those people which would not be possible in a larger campus. My concern about them going down to Brookvale is that the lure of Warringah Mall right next to them. They have said that themselves. They have been to see me, they have talked about this issue and they have said themselves that if Warringah Mall was across the road they would very likely not attend. There are problems down at the mall in terms of young people and gangs of kids, particularly on Thursday nights.

My own feeling as a counsellor is I think it is not an appropriate site. It is an industrial area, Warringah Mall is there. There is a lot of distraction. These people are immature. They are not always that motivated. You want to provide the best possible environment for them to succeed and I think Seaforth campus does that.

The transport issue, even though there has been lots of changes to what is availability at Brookvale, and that has been a big issue for me in my job, I feel that I have misled lots of people over the last couple of months because people have come to see me and asked me what is going on and I have not known. I have had no direct communication with management about what is going on. I only find out about the changes to courses and what is running either through the Manly Daily or finding out myself by approaching teachers and just finding out that way. I know the course information officer also down at Brookvale did not know anything about the HSC program and I had to tell her myself yesterday from what I was able to find out.

I think that the lack of communication has really not allowed me to do my job properly and lots of people have been told already to go to North Sydney because I just did not know that things were going to happen down at Brookvale. There does not seem to be any planning and certainly no consultation. I would have thought that in any amalgamation the staff at Seaforth, and also the counselling staff who see prospective students, who are aware of what community needs are and what people want, might have been consulted about appropriate classes and courses to run at the Seaforth campus.

The other area I would like to talk about is disabled students. We have had six fairly severely disabled students at Seaforth campus over the last couple of years and that is severely disabled; in a wheelchair, with a carer a couple of them. Seaforth campus provides excellent access for students with disabilities. Once a student either drives into the college or is driven into the college they can independently move around that college without anybody else needing to wheel them or open doors for them or get them anywhere. For a disabled person, that is a very big issue. They want to be independent. They do not want to be dependent on other people. They are dependent on other people for many other areas of their life and they like to be able to access a site where they are independent like other students are.

At Seaforth we have a lift for disabled students, we have parking for disabled students, we have a toilet for disabled students. The canteen is easily accessible. There is nothing that cannot be accessed at that campus.

In comparison, there are real problems at Brookvale campus for disabled students, particularly with Building M which is a newer building where the library, the bookshop, the canteen, the student association, the job placement officer as well as officers and classrooms are located.

The difficulty with Brookvale campus is that it is a steep and sprawling site and students do need to drive up and then access coming in from the car park where their classroom is, but there is no continuous path of access from one section of the college to another. So if somebody is up at the canteen, they cannot move unassisted if they are in a wheelchair down to the bottom section of the campus where the consultants for disabilities are located.

CHAIR: There is no pathways.

Ms WHYTE: It is too steep. I know that this situation has been acknowledged and recognised.

CHAIR: There would be a lot of steps, too.

Ms WHYTE: If you had somebody to push you up and if you had somebody to make sure you got down all right, but you have to have someone with you. This is recognised, I know, by the management. I think there is a proposal to public works about maybe getting a lift and a walkway put in because, Building M is the real problem. But this has not been investigated at this stage whether that is technically possible.

CHAIR: Very expensive, too.

Ms WHYTE: I would think so. That is, I know, a real issue. Students have told me that. I have spoken to the consultant. I work closely with the consultants for disabilities at Brookvale and it is a real issue for that campus.

Mr KELLY: That should be addressed there anyway, regardless whether you come or not.

Ms WHYTE: Yes. A student can get into one section but cannot move around the college. And Building M does house significant services for students. That is the main problem, apparently.

I guess the other area I would like to address also is women with children. A lot of women with children chose Seaforth particularly because of the security at night. It may not have dedicated parking but it really has not been an issue with people that I have seen. I have never had anybody come in to see me for an appointment and said to me, "God, it is hard to park here". The thing is there is lots of residential streets. There is many, many well lit residential safe streets. You have Seaforth shops right there, you have lots of options to park. You have Kempbridge Avenue, all the streets going off the road. It is a five minute walk in a well lit residential street. There is people around, there is life.

At the Brookvale campus, and I have worked there at night recently and I understand people's

concerns, it is dark, it is an industrial area. When it is dark there is no-one there at night, it is closed. If you want to walk to your car at night you walk in a very dark area and if you are at Warringah Mall at night well I would not do that. On a late night I would not like to walk across there at night. I do not think parking is something that is better for students at Brookvale. In fact, a report that was produced by Bronwyn Bennett who is the student association officer down at Brookvale last year she did quite a comprehensive report on the problems of parking at Brookvale and they proved to be quite significant. This is before the Seaforth people come in.

Transport. The other issue I think that has not been addressed with this closure is the Northern Beaches population is isolated. Colleges like North Sydney, Meadowbank, Hornsby, they have a rail line connecting them. It is easier to get to those colleges. The Northern Beaches peninsular does not have any rail link. They are very isolated. People living at Bilgola Plateau if they want to go to North Sydney, which a lot of them will have to for their HSC program because the one we have here is not going to suit many people, they have to get two buses and they have to change at Neutral Bay and they have to get another bus. It is significant time, significant expense and I feel that the Northern Beaches, because of its isolation perhaps in some way warrants another campus because, you know, it is not easy to travel to Meadowbank from Bilgola Plateau or from Scotland Island or from Newport.

Other people can get the train lines. Hornsby, Meadowbank, Ryde, they are very convenient. The North Sydney area is very well serviced. They have North Sydney TAFE with HSC and they have Bradfield College with HSC. They have two facilities within two seconds of each other, whereas we are being isolated back. I think for young people that is a big issue.

Can I just run through, too, some of the issues that I feel - the public have said to me about how they feel about the situation. The announcement about the closure has caused considerable stress for the students, particularly as it was announced a couple of days before the trial HSC exams. That was just so distressing, it was announced the Wednesday or Thursday and their trial exams started on the Monday. That was a very inappropriate time.

Management have not addressed the stress upon students or staff in any way. I do not know of any communication with students at all except for the letter that came out just recently and that is a bit late. Some of our HSC students have already dropped out because of this closure. They did not know that maybe Brookvale might have some HSC. I know of two students who have dropped out already because they sort of gave up. They knew they could not get to North Sydney so they just decided to throw it in.

Staff, I think the stress level in staff has been incredible. It has not been acknowledged by management, it has not been addressed or acknowledged in any way. I would have thought that it would have been appropriate to provide some counselling for staff. It is quite a big thing when a college closes. Very stressful for everyone concerned. I have been concerned about the lack of consideration about the stress on staff and students over this issue, and the lack of communication about what is going on. There does not seem to have been any forward planning and I certainly have been totally in the dark and my job is to let people know.

Just about facilities at Seaforth, I was concerned when people said we were a limited campus and that Brookvale was a lot more pleasant I think the words were. We have a fully equipped library and an audio visual room, we have a fully equipped counselling unit, we have a fully

equipped career resource room with up-to-date computer assisted career programs, we have a student association office, we have a lift for the disabled, we have a disabled toilet, we have a canteen, we have a recreation area, we have a TV and a lounge area, we have a pool table, we have video machines, we have a bookshop, we have disabled parking, we have a photography darkroom, we have print making facilities, we have, as well as our other fine arts, facilities in painting, drawing and sculpture.

We have computer rooms. One thing I would like to add is that in the letter that has already been tabled that was sent out to students about what Brookvale could offer them as an improvement on what they had, they put additional computer rooms. Well, as far as I know, there is no additional computer rooms. The two rooms that are at Seaforth will be put down to Brookvale but that is not additional, that is just what everyone has always had. There is no additional rooms being provided.

We have got a dedicated computer room for design students. We have a functioning office, we have a cashier, we have a switchboard operator, we have staff that deal with course information. We have excellent access for disabled students and we have easy access for students to all areas of the campus.

My own feeling is this closure is going to disadvantage people greatly. I know our young year 10 students who are really looking forward to going on to the HSC are now feeling quite let down, quite disillusioned. They have got to know us. They are safe and secure at Seaforth. I think they will be lost in the system as they were in their own schools by going to a larger campus. I feel we have an obligation to those people.

Northern Beaches has the second highest suicide rate in New South Wales. That was quoted in the paper just recently. It has a higher number of welfare Centre Link recipients than the Parramatta area. I think sometimes people think of it as a wealthy area and I would just like to say that that is not the case. There is a lot of young, disadvantaged people on that peninsular who feel very isolated and I think Seaforth campus, because of its very nature, has provided a positive step for those people.

CHAIR: Thank you for that information. I am just wondering when you said the lack of information to you forced you to be giving false information, it actually appears that you were used to a degree.

Ms WHYTE: I do I feel - when somebody comes to a counselling interview it is a confidential interview and they tell you a lot about their life. You feel obligated to give them correct information because they are going to act on that.

CHAIR: They trust you.

Ms WHYTE: Yes. They are going to make plans on that and, no, I have not known very much. I found out about the HSC in the Manly Daily having been told only two weeks beforehand by one of my managers directly not to tell people that the HSC was available at Brookvale. So it is been very, very confusing for everybody, I think. It has disadvantaged people in their planning.

Could I just make one comment because it was not said before. The HSC is not going to be

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offered at night at Brookvale at all. One of our largest groups were night. So you can imagine somebody working full-time at Newport trying to get to a 6 o'clock class at North Sydney TAFE.

CHAIR: That is the main purpose of TAFE, to provide after hour classes.

Ms WHYTE: They go 6 to 10. Imagine coming home. The buses go, if you are lucky, every half an hour. You change at Neutral Bay and then out again. You do not just hop on a train.

Ms FORSYTHE: At this stage have you received anything in writing from the department, institute directors about the plans for next year's HSC or fine arts courses?

Ms WHYTE: No.

Ms FORSYTHE: So you are relying entirely on the Manly Daily?

Ms WHYTE: Yes. The fine arts courses, the Certificate 4 is listed now in the brochure that the Northern Beaches puts out, so that actually is now listed as running the fine arts certificate. The diploma is not listed as running and I might address that in a moment. The HSC is not in the official TAFE handbook. Seaforth campus is though. We are in it as being open for next year. So people will read that and think we are open. It is in the official publication. The HSC is not in the formal semester guide for the Northern Sydney Institute, or as far as I know it was not in there. I think it has gone to print and it should be out next week, so the HSC will not be listed in that. People are going to be very confused.

Just addressing the HSC again, 154 people enrolled and 122 people were listed for sitting for the HSC exams. So that is not a bad number. Also, just to stress that we have a very well equipped science lab, it does not make sense to me to be taking people to the local school to science labs when you have three fully equipped science labs at Seaforth TAFE. The other thing I would say about this, people do not want to go back into the schools. They do not want to go anywhere near those schools. They have been kicked out of that school or they have been bashed up at that school. There is a whole lot of things about schools. They do not want to go back in.

Ms FORSYTHE: Can I just confirm, it is 9 November that Manly Daily carried a story about the HSC?

Ms WHYTE: Yes.

Ms FORSYTHE: Is Seaforth building, site, campus, college, annex connected on the Internet? Are you able to get information on the Net from, say, North Sydney, from head office?

Ms WHYTE: About the --

Ms FORSYTHE: About anything. Are you connected? Do you have lines of communication?

Ms WHYTE: We have an e-mail situation, yes.

Dr WONG: Tell me, who is in charge of Seaforth TAFE or the building, apart from the

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building manager?

Ms WHYTE: Well, I guess it would be - Laurie Walkley, I thought, was our acting college director, however Brian Syms said something different. I thought he was still currently our acting college director.

Dr WONG: Do you not have a regular staff meeting to brief you what is happening?

Ms WHYTE: The only meeting that we have had since the closure about the closure and the impact and the planning has been the one with Siva Kumar which was called the day after we found out to tell us it was closed. There has been no other communication as a group.

Dr WONG: Is there a director's office within the Seaforth TAFE?

Ms WHYTE: There is an office but the director is located at Brookvale.

Dr WONG: So Mr Siva Kumar director is at Brookvale?

Ms WHYTE: There is the Northern Sydney Institute director who looks after North Sydney, Crows Nest, Hornsby, Ryde, the whole range of courses. Mr Siva Kumar is located at North Sydney. The acting director of the Northern Beaches campus is located at Brookvale. We do not really have any campus management at all at Seaforth. We often have nobody there.

CHAIR: Is that because back in 1993 you ceased to be an independent college.

Ms WHYTE: We amalgamated in 1993 to be called Northern Beaches College. Before then we had principals and deputy principals, and that all went. However, we still had a quite a strong presence in terms of administration at Seaforth. The idea was that recently the management plan has been that one manager comes up one day a week. That was our management of Seaforth. That has not been maintained for a long time.

CHAIR: You mentioned students not having classes at night. To clarify that point, you said there is no evening HSC?

Ms WHYTE: No evening HSC will be offered at Brookvale.

CHAIR: How many students will that affect from Seaforth, just roughly?

Mr KELLY: Take it on notice if you wish.

Ms WHYTE: I do not have it exactly.

CHAIR: It could be a large number?

Ms WHYTE: It is. We offer classes five nights a week from six until 10.

CHAIR: That is the main classes. It could easily be most of those students cannot go to Brookvale?

Ms WHYTE: It will not be offered. They will have to be forced to go to North Sydney, Meadowbank or Hornsby.

Dr WONG: How many disabled students are you looking after at Seaforth?

Ms WHYTE: We do not always know because they do not always acknowledge, but severely disabled people, of course, because they come for advice. There have been about six in the last two years quite severely disabled people. I had a student come to see me the other day and she suffers from chronic fatigue. That is why she left her job and why she is training. She came to me to say that she is concerned about moving to Brookvale because she tires easily and wants the parking and wants to be able to move around the campus carrying her related equipment and is concerned about the impact on her health.

There are students at Seaforth who suffer from some sort of disability. They do not often have to tell you because it is easy, flat and there is not a lot of walking or steps and people are able to access things without assistance.

CHAIR: You mentioned earlier that you have been giving advice to students that they can plan their lives thinking they had a four year span to complete their studies?

Ms WHYTE: Yes.

CHAIR: You could say that there is a moral obligation on the Department of Education and TAFE to give consideration to whether they should allow those courses to complete for those students who have enrolled at Seaforth.

Ms WHYTE: Yes.

CHAIR: Did you think it is a practical possibility to reopen or to keep Seaforth going, say for a three or four year period?

Ms WHYTE: I think that most people feel that we do not want the closure. We do not want it at all, but it is the way it has been done, the suddenness and the lack of consultation and having assured people at the end of last year, and then taken in students this year, I feel we do have a moral obligation to let them complete in the way that they thought they were going to complete when they enrolled and paid their money.

Dr WONG: It sounds like the line of communication is pretty poor. Would that be right?

Ms WHYTE: I would agree with that. I would say there has been no communication.

Dr WONG: And the person responsible primarily would be Mr Siva Kumar at this stage, would you say?

Ms WHYTE: Or his managers at the local level.

Dr WONG: Which is Bob Puffett?

Ms WHYTE: Laurie Walkley and Colin Chase.

CHAIR: If there was a possible recommendation from the Committee that Seaforth should continue, and you did not enrol any extra new students and obviously it would then wind down, do you think it is practical that you would have a smaller number of students each year in that building? I am thinking of any arguments from the department saying that that was impossible.

Ms WHYTE: I guess it is hard to know when a student will complete. One thing we mentioned before about TAFE is our flexible way of delivering services. A course might actually be completed in a minimum of a year, but if something happens in someone's life, they get ill or something happens with their children and they fail a subject or drop out, they may take 18 months or two years to complete that course.

Mr KELLY: Is not it five years in which you can do it?

Ms WHYTE: It may be. It is hard to say for everybody they can complete in the minimum amount of time. That is one thing which TAFE promotes, flexible arrangements.

CHAIR: I was thinking of having a smaller number of students each year. Maybe that would be unworkable a larger number for year one. If it is a four year placing it would scale down.

Ms WHYTE: It seems like a waste of resources.

CHAIR: You would have empty rooms and so on.

Ms WHYTE: Particularly when every room and every classroom is full. I work there at night and I work there during the day. It is full all the time.

CHAIR: It is maximum use.

Ms WHYTE: We had to convert our conference room to a classroom this year because of the lack of space. We are full.

CHAIR: The maximum benefit is being obtained from that particular building at Seaforth. The Government is getting maximum benefit with virtually every seat, a student on every chair in each classroom.

Ms WHYTE: Yes. People do feel safe and secure there. It is not intimidating. For people who are quite anxious about returning to study, as young people often are because of bad experiences, or women returning to the work force after 20 or 25 years, for people who feel intimidated a smaller campus is more approachable. It is not intimidating and allows people to build up confidence. That is why we have done well with those groups.

People will say, "I do not want to go to North Sydney because it is too big". For women, travelling to North Sydney is not an option. If you are dropping your child off at Newport Public School and travel across the Spit Bridge as it was this morning, to North Sydney and then pick your child up at 3.30, it is not an option.

One area that I meant to mention that I want to talk to you about is the diploma of fine arts. My understanding, and again this has not been explained to me in any way, I have tried to get it, but I have got, I feel, the correct information from the senior head teacher of fine arts at Seaforth campus, is that my understanding is what is being offered at Brookvale is a much reduced offering than what was available at the Seaforth campus.

Indeed, the fine arts diploma is not being advertised even at the Northern Beaches through the Northern Beaches advertising booklet. The only thing being advertised for next year is the certificate, which is a one year program and that is a lesser offering in lots of ways than what was available at Seaforth.

Print making and photography, because they are being lost, it means that the students that we had this year in the first year of the diploma, those people would want to go on and take either print making or photography as their major. Now, that is not going to be offered at Brookvale.

For our students who want to do that, and photography is our most popular option and also commercially the most viable, sometimes fine arts does not always easily slot into a particular commercial environment, so a lot of people feel it is a good one to take because it has commercial offerings. Anybody who wants to do a photography or print making major next year, of which there are quite a few, cannot go to Brookvale. They cannot complete. They have to go to Meadowbank and Hornsby.

The other thing about the offering next year, because they are not offering photography or print making, they are offering ceramics and a digital subject. That will limit what they major in afterwards as well. They will not have the scope of what they can major in next time also. It is a lesser offering. What we offered at Seaforth allowed people to do everything.

The diploma in fine arts is particularly important, I think. Number one, for access to university, which a lot of our students do, and to be able to get in you usually need the diploma and to get recognition, a year off your degree, you need it. To get teaching and everything else, it is the minimum you need.

Could I quickly refer to page 11 of our submission? The title page was fine arts. Matthew Tome, who was the senior head teacher, said:

"We recognise that the proposed facility is greatly reduced in capacity and variety from the current facility at Seaforth campus. Severely compromised in terms of the common areas, storage and the gallery exhibition space. Lacks true integration and is merely grafted into available space at Brookvale. The proposed lower level of course provision beyond 2000 means that without the diploma there is a lack of critical mass to the art school. While leader feeder arrangements may exist there will be a lack of local advancement into higher awards. The college will lack an educational balance to the core foundation that certificate four design fundamentals provide. The college may fail to attract dynamic staff and talented local students who would otherwise attend a college of greater educational depth. There will be less flexibility in offering electives."

It is a downgrading really. It is only being done on the run. As I said at the beginning, fine arts was

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not going to be available at Brookvale. It has not been a planned offering. It has been fitted in. I think that is my perception of how things have happened. There does not seem to me to have been any planning prior to the announcement of the closure, which should have been done. It has all been done after the announcement.

There was no consultation at any level with Seaforth staff or the community. You can tell by the reaction that people did not know anything about it. They deserved to be consulted.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee. We appreciate your evidence today. It has been very helpful.

(The witness withdrew)

JEAN FRANCES HAY, Mayor of Manly Council, Belgrave Street, Manly, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Ms HAY: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms HAY: Yes.

CHAIR: If you consider at any time during the course of giving your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request and resolve into confidential session in camera. I should warn you that the Parliament may override that decision at any time and make your evidence public. Do you wish to make a statement to the Committee?

Ms HAY: Yes. Mr Chairman and Committee members, Manly council and the Manly community are totally opposed to the closure of Seaforth TAFE. There has been no community consultation whatsoever on this proposal. Senior management of the Northern Institute gave assurances to council that the Seaforth TAFE will not be closed. We were told that any proposed move would be three to five years in the planning, so that alternative plans to accommodate students could be made.

This has not happened and council is outraged at being misled by the Northern Institute of Technology management.

The 1996 census reveals that in Manly one in four Manly residents were enrolled in an educational institution. Manly has an educated community with one in five Manly residents having a university degree or higher.

Some 72.8 per cent of all TAFE and university CAB students are employed either full-time or part-time. There are 1,054, which is 3.5 per cent of the Manly population, that attend a TAFE college. 30.3 per cent of all TAFE and university CAB students are between 20 and 24 years of age.

Seaforth TAFE is the entry point for further education for many mature age students. It provides training in key trade apprenticeships and provides a second chance for many mature age students. The Seaforth community and business sector have prospered through the finances generated from Seaforth TAFE. The 2000 students, teachers and ancillary staff contribute millions of dollars to the Seaforth economy.

Child care centres have in the Seaforth precinct to service the demand for mature age students with families. The closure of Seaforth TAFE threatens the survival of these centres.

Another related matter of great concern to council and the community is the future of the Balgowlah Seaforth Library. It is housed in a beautiful stone building of great heritage significance. The building is owned by the Minister for Education and is occupied by council, by agreement with

the council and the Minister.

This building, on TAFE property, has housed Balgowlah Seaforth Library since 1943. The library has been entirely staffed by volunteers, all locals, since 1943. Council and the community are eager to continue to offer this valued community service. We would like to know the likely impact on this facility if the TAFE college closes, as we have not received any satisfactory response to our submission in this regard.

Over the years the highly respected Manly Art Gallery and Museum have developed a marvellous partnership with the fine arts students and teachers from Seaforth TAFE, a partnership that has given many visual arts students their first experience of presenting an exhibition. Will they be afforded this same opportunity at Meadowbank and Hornsby?

The sheer volume of letters received and printed by our two local newspapers, the *Manly Daily* and the *Northern Beaches Weekender*, demonstrate the strong feeling of anger and frustration felt by the entire Northern Beaches community.

I come here today on behalf of our community to beg the Government and the Minister for Education to reconsider the serious and long-term consequences of denying further educational opportunities to Northern Beaches families.

Mr KELLY: Just on the question of the library, I actually asked a question this morning of the department officials, so when you get a copy of the Hansard you will see that they are keeping it open.

Ms HAY: We are not going to lose it?

Mr KELLY: That is what we were told. It is on the Seaforth site.

Ms HAY: It is.

Mr KELLY: If I remember the answer correctly, where the fence is, they basically intend to leave that. They have made no decision on what is going to happen to the rest of it. They have basically contended that area will stay available to the library.

CHAIR: It is not restricted to use by students.

Mr KELLY: It is a community facility.

Ms HAY: It is a community library.

CHAIR: Do the students use it? They have their own library in the TAFE building.

Mr KELLY: It has nothing to do with the students. It is a community library.

Ms HAY: It is a community library, but obviously it is run and funded by Manly Council, by volunteers. The only person who gets paid is actually the director, who is paid a very small honorarium.

Of course, what concerns us is the fact that we were also told that the TAFE college would not be closing. Can we now believe that we are still going to retain that library?

CHAIR: Do the students use the library?

Ms HAY: I suppose they have their own library.

CHAIR: I mean for general reading?

Ms HAY: Yes, I am sure they would use it.

Mr TSANG: As someone who has been in local government, may I congratulate Councillor Hay on her election as Manly Council Mayor. Perhaps one of our recommendations to the Minister should be to make sure that this building is retained for the use of Manly Council.

CHAIR: Thank you for that.

Ms HAY: We would also like the assurance, too, that the TAFE building will stay there.

Dr WONG: That is harder.

Ms FORSYTHE: The valuation of the site includes the library but in relation to the valuation of the site, we were told this morning that it is valued between \$5 million and \$8 million. Would that be an evaluation that the Manly Council would concur with?

Ms HAY: As a matter of fact, I was up at TAFE this morning. Mrs Chikarovski had a tour of TAFE and that was one of the questions that she asked during her inspection. The answer to her was, "We really don't know how much it is worth but it is rumoured to be around about \$6 million".

Dr WONG: Obviously the council itself has not done an evaluation.

CHAIR: They gave us a valuation of \$3 million to \$5 million and they did actually quote the measurement. We should check whether those measurements included the land on which the library is located.

Ms HAY: It is really like a little park as well where this lovely stone building is. There is quite a bit of land around it as well.

Ms FORSYTHE: You indicated that the council was totally opposed to the closure of TAFE. Since the announcement in August of the closure, has the council had a debate about the issue? Is there a resolution on the books and has council given any indication to the Department of Education about its views on the future use of the site? In other words, would TAFE, the Minister or the department be under any misapprehension or otherwise about what council might view as the appropriate or inappropriate use of the site?

Ms HAY: Council has never made any --

Mr KELLY: It has not been on the agenda of council meetings?

Ms HAY: No. The 12 councillors are opposed to the closure so all our correspondence with the institute and also with the Minister has conveyed this message to them. We have never said what we would like on there or what we think should be there because we want it to remain as it is. What does worry us is that perhaps we might end up with a SEP 5 development there.

CHAIR: Do you still think it is a practical possibility of Seaforth TAFE continuing? You are saying council would like it to continue. Do you feel that a is practical if, say, the Committee recommended that it continue to operate?

Ms HAY: I think it is practical. It has 2,000 students. I would agree that perhaps it should go if the number of enrolments was decreasing, but this is not occurring.

CHAIR: My concern was whether the news and the way it has been handled has disillusioned students and staff have moved away. I was wondering about the practicality of continuing to operate say, in January or February next year. Do you think it should be possible?

Ms HAY: As I said, we are committed. We want it to stay as part of our community.

Dr WONG: I know you are not an architect but there seems to be some opinion or advice to the Committee that somehow the building was not sound, the roof was leaking and it needed a fair amount of repair. I am sure council has inspected it. Is that the message you get from your inspectorial staff?

Ms HAY: No, we have not had any feedback at all. As I said, I was there this morning and it certainly looks in much better condition than a lot of other government buildings I have seen in recent times.

CHAIR: You were not planning to condemn it?

Ms HAY: No, certainly not.

Dr WONG: We also get a conflict of opinion. One view is that Brookvale can accommodate students coming from Seaforth TAFE. On the other hand, we get another opinion in a *Manly Daily* article that Brookvale is completely full. What is your impression? Who is speaking the truth?

Ms HAY: I would say the *Manly Daily* is speaking the truth. I would like to make one comment about the Brookvale campus. It is adjacent to the Warringah Mall shopping centre which in recent times has undergone an extraordinary amount of development. They are doing stage 2 development at the moment. Because there is not enough parking for the students who presently attend Brookvale TAFE, many of those students take advantage of using the parking area in Warringah Mall. The Warringah Mall management and merchants are concerned because so many spots are being taken by people other than those wanting to come to the mall to shop. They are looking seriously at introducing paid parking at the mall to try to dissuade TAFE students from parking there. Where are the students going to park? Brookvale is already overcrowded and Old Pitwater Road where the TAFE college is at Brookvale, there is always so many cars parked out on the street, so I think you will find there will be a huge parking problem at the Brookvale campus.

Dr WONG: In your opening speech you said the senior staff assured Manly Council that Seaforth TAFE would not be closed. When were you informed of that?

Ms HAY: After council made its submission to them in August there was actually a mayoral minute from the then mayor and we have on record the letter informing us of the fact that there would not be any closure, that was where I got the information from, saying if there was a proposed closure, it would be in that three to five year planning to be able to accommodate the students, which makes one wonder, has this been in the planning for the last three to five years and it has been kept secret.

CHAIR: Would you be able to table that letter you received from the department?

Ms HAY: Certainly. I do not have it with me but I can arrange to send you a copy.

Dr WONG: Has Manly Council improved the streets or made modifications on the assumption that Seaforth TAFE will continue?

Ms HAY: As a matter of fact we have just spent quite a great deal of money in conjunction with the RTA having traffic lights and new crossings installed adjacent to Seaforth TAFE and also more parking in Kempbridge Avenue which is adjacent to the TAFE college.

Dr WONG: So council did that in the belief that the letter was genuine?

Ms HAY: I cannot say in all honesty they did it because of Seaforth TAFE. The reason it was done was for public safety which, of course, would include the 2,000 students who do attend Seaforth TAFE because obviously at some stage they would want to use that particular crossing.

Dr WONG: I will put it the other way then. If you were aware 18 months or two years ago that Seaforth TAFE was about to be closed, would you have spent all this money?

Ms HAY: We contributed \$120,000. I think we would still have to have done something about the crossing but because the students are there it does add to the --

CHAIR: The RTA obviously had no idea that there was going to be a change.

Ms HAY: If nobody else did I could not imagine they were told, either.

Mr PRIMROSE: Can I suggest from what you said that the RTA probably would have allocated those funds anyway on the basis of public safety.

Ms HAY: Yes, for sure. Council and the RTA agreed that those traffic lights needed to be moved. They were further down towards Manly Road.

Mr KELLY: They moved them?

Ms HAY: Yes.

CHAIR: I know many local councils are most concerned about vandalism and young people

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involved with drugs. It seems that Seaforth TAFE has had a very good program for young people, youth at risk. Would you see that as a valuable training program to get these young people off the streets out of trouble as part of the general community --

Ms HAY: Also the health program. Council has been involved in that and, of course, many students attend TAFE through that as well.

CHAIR: So it has been a valuable contribution to the community welfare quality of life in that area?

Ms HAY: Yes.

CHAIR: Warringah Mall is not in your council area?

Ms HAY: No, it is in Warringah shire but by the same token, many people from our area do use it.

CHAIR: There have been some expressions of concern about the suitability of putting youth at risk people near Warringah Mall. I imagine there would be greater temptation for drug dealing in that area. Are you aware of that?

Ms HAY: Two weeks ago a neighbour of my daughter, I will not mention any names because the girl's father is a very well known personality, was actually down at Warringah Mall and during the day and was jabbed with a needle. They had to take her straight away to have tests and, of course, they will not get the results back from those tests for about three months.

Mr TSANG: Just for the heck of it?

Ms HAY: Yes.

Mr PRIMROSE: Just to clarify, was that as a result of having TAFE adjoining --

Ms HAY: No.

Ms FORSYTHE: Has the council or perhaps the Chamber of Commerce in the area done any economic analysis of the impact of the 1,700 students plus staff on the Seaforth local economy, on the retail facilities in the area?

Ms HAY: We have not done an actual analysis. Obviously when you have 2,000 people involved in TAFE and they use the facilities of the local shopping centre, which is right at their front door, it will have an impact on the local business economy. Also, as I mentioned, there are many child care centres. Council itself has a centre there as well and we are actually looking at the moment of investing \$2 million in building a 60-place child care centre in Ross Street, which is only really a stone's throw away from Seaforth TAFE. Perhaps that may be something council will have to reconsider because obviously many mature age students with young children take advantage of using these facilities. There is also a number of privately run child care centres as well, so obviously it would have an impact on them.

Mr PRIMROSE: If Seaforth TAFE closes, what other facilities may the council not go ahead with? You are indicating people will not drop their kids off at local child care centres any more so you may not proceed with those.

Ms HAY: So far as council is concerned, that is something we may reconsider but obviously projects that we are looking at are for the community, anyhow and we would still be going ahead with those.

Mr PRIMROSE: You have just put on the record, for instance, which I am sure other people now pick up, that council may not be in favour of proceeding with child care facilities which obviously will be taken into account by Federal and other funding bodies. Is there anything else if Seaforth closes that you may recommend not occur in your area?

Ms HAY: Not really. I could not say.

CHAIR: That mainly came up because you have not spent the money yet. You would have to reconsider the \$2 million.

Ms HAY: All the plans have been drawn. The site has been selected but --

Mr PRIMROSE: I am trying to clarify in terms of needs that the mayor is saying, as I understand it, child care would not be such a great issue in her view.

Ms HAY: I said it would be something we would have to reconsider.

CHAIR: The potential number of users.

Ms HAY: We were looking at a 60-place facility. Perhaps we may have to reduce that number.

Mr KELLY: So it was designed for TAFE, not the local people?

Ms HAY: No, it was designed for everyone. Obviously, as it is so close to TAFE it would be convenient for mature age students with families to use it. Council run child care facilities are far cheaper than privately run ones. We have a waiting list like everybody has.

Mr KELLY: Were they taken into account when you allocated the number of spaces? You would have to have made an assessment to apply for a government grant on the number of places that you were going to allocate. Are you saying you actually took TAFE into consideration?

Ms HAY: Yes.

Mr PRIMROSE: So basically the funding bodies would now be looking at --

Ms HAY: In actual fact, the State Government was going to provide \$200,000 towards it and we have at this stage had to refuse it because we are not in a position at this stage - we are looking further down the track to perhaps going ahead with it.

Mr KELLY: You have not got the money to do your part now?

Ms HAY: We have got our money but we will not be spending the money if it is going to be a white elephant.

Mr KELLY: You have knocked back State Government money?

Ms HAY: It has been postponed. We had to give a commitment by a certain date to them that we would be going ahead with it. At this stage we could not make that commitment but I am quite sure when we do make it that they will still make that funding available.

Mr TSANG: As the State and Federal governments are providing funding for child care, if it is not appropriate at Seaforth it might be more appropriate at Brookvale.

Ms HAY: That would be something Warringah council would have to take up with the State Government.

Mr KELLY: What is the total cost of the proposed child care centre?

Ms HAY: Just on \$2 million.

Mr KELLY: So council was putting in \$1.8 million?

Ms HAY: Yes.

Mr TSANG: Since the pressure is actually on funding through the Commonwealth Government in its obligation for TAFE to be economically response, with your connection do you think it would be appropriate to lobby the Federal Government to perhaps ease off the demand on getting TAFE --

Ms HAY: I assure you that Manly Council lobbies every council regardless whether they are Federal, State, Liberal, Labor. We go for the juggler with all of them.

CHAIR: Since it was publicised in the newspapers about Seaforth TAFE closing, have ratepayers indicated to council through correspondence asking council to take up this matter?

Ms HAY: Yes, many letters, probably 50, but I would say the majority of the letters have actually gone to the local newspapers. I think on one particular day there was almost a full page in the *Manly Daily* of letters. I realise when there is an issue, it is very easy to perhaps orchestrate these letters, but I think the sheer volume of the letters that have been sent to both local papers would be something that has been an orchestrated campaign.

Many people are very concerned about it. A number of women of my age group have said to me how their kids went there and they may not have done so well at school when they did their HSC, then they have gone there and improved their education and then been able to go on to university. Of course, many older women, too, have gone to Seaforth TAFE to get their HSC.

CHAIR: So you have had letters. You have had people obviously concerned, students or

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staff, so there would be a wider community who sees this as a valuable cultural educational facility in that location and would like it to continue.

Ms HAY: I can assure you the entire community is very, very upset about this. I can honestly say to you not one person has said to me that they think it is a good idea for Seaforth TAFE to change. Even my son, who lives in Kempbridge Avenue and can never find a parking spot because the TAFE students park in his street, he says he would not like to see them go either.

Mr WONG: It is virtually bipartisan.

Ms HAY: For sure. Very much so.

Mr TSANG: It will certainly impact on everybody.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance before the Committee. If you have any other information you would like to forward to the Committee, a follow-up letter of that and particular any copies of that letter that you did get.

Ms HAY: I will certainly have that letter sent to you that was sent to the council.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.05 p.m.)