

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3

Tuesday 19 August 2014

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

THE LEGISLATURE

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones (Chair)

The Hon. N. Blair (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. A. Fazio
The Hon. P. Green

Mr S. MacDonald
The Hon. P. Primrose
Mr D. Shoebridge

PRESENT

The Hon. Don Harwin, *President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: I welcome everyone to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2014-15. I welcome President Harwin and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of The Legislature. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography.

I also remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing. I therefore urge witnesses to be careful about any comments you may make to the media or to others after you have completed your evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decides to take action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that witnesses could not answer or they could answer if they had more time or documents at hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take questions on notice and provide answers within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Mr President, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to the advisers seated behind you. Transcripts of the hearing will be available on the website as of tomorrow morning. I ask everyone to please turn their mobile phones off for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies and corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. Mr President, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn in as you have already sworn an oath to the office as a member of Parliament.

DAVID MICHAEL BLUNT, Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council,

ROBERT STEFANIC, Executive Manager, Department of Parliamentary Services, and

JOHN GREGOR, Director, Financial Services, Department of Parliamentary Services, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of The Legislature open for examination. Questions on the portfolio of The Legislature will run from 2.00 p.m. to 2.45 p.m. There is no provision for the President to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning. Therefore, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr President, can I just ask one question of you regarding the issue of employing people with a disability who have high-level support needs? I know you will agree that Parliament should set an example in this regard. I was wondering whether you would consider examining the possibility, as part of the International Day of People with Disability, of holding an open day at Parliament for all agencies that place people with disabilities requiring high-level support into employment, with a view to identifying both issues and opportunities at Parliament House for such employment.

The PRESIDENT: That is a very interesting suggestion, which I would be happy to give consideration to. It sounds like a worthwhile activity.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: The magnificent Brett Whiteley painting of Patrick White at Centennial Park, as we all know, is located on level 8 and is not available for public viewing. Will there be an opportunity in the future to display it in an area of the Parliament that is accessible to the public?

The PRESIDENT: The issue that you are referring to is one that is uppermost in my mind because, of course, the Whiteley is not the only example of something that is unique or interesting or valuable that is not as accessible to the public as I would like. One initiative that I took as the President at the end of 2011, the beginning of 2012 was to ask the staff of the Department of Parliamentary Services to coincide with the January school holidays a period when some of the more interesting and impressive paintings within the parliamentary collection would be put on public display in the Fountain Court. The Whiteley, of course, was one of those. In fact, I think probably for the only time in my memory as a member over 15 years that was a period when it was put on public display. The exhibition "underSTATED" was a personal initiative of mine and I was very proud of it. I was glad that people were able to see that Whiteley because it is a wonderful work.

During the past four years there has been at least one period when it was loaned to the S. H. Ervin Gallery and put on loan there for an exhibition as part of the Opera House's fortieth anniversary. There was an exhibition that was curated just focusing on the Opera House. They managed to find a little Opera House in one corner of it and that was their excuse to borrow it, but we were happy to oblige so that people could see it. While I am not sure if it was during this parliamentary term, it was lent to the National Portrait Gallery as well. Your question is a good one. I would like to see more opportunities where we can take some of the more interesting works that we have in our small collection and put them in the Fountain Court. So I will factor that in in terms of future access to Fountain Court gallery.

It is a fairly resource-intensive thing in respect of the Department of Parliamentary Services staff curating a whole exhibition. So at best we can really only mount a major exhibition of our own collection every second year. But any requests, of course, to put it on public display we will consider as well so that it is not just kept on level 8. But it is, of course, an important work and we do need to be mindful of making sure that it is kept secure and protected.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I wanted to ask about the proposal to sell off some antique furniture and fittings that are currently not being used. Firstly, I wanted to know if all options have been examined for either the redeployment or display within Parliament House of these items. Secondly, could you provide a list of the items included in this proposal and some details of the sale process and the proceeds of sale?

The PRESIDENT: Most of that, as you would expect, we will probably have to provide on notice. Calling them "antiques" would be probably pushing the envelope in terms of the nature of what we have got.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Vintage perhaps.

The PRESIDENT: Vintage might be a kind way of putting it. I think the best thing to do is probably give you a proper response on notice. But, frankly, as you are aware, some of the stuff in the President's office was previously in storage; it was not there during your time. I have had a good look at all of it, and so, obviously, have the Department of Parliamentary Services staff. We have also had assistance from independent experts on what needs to be retained because of its heritage value and what could be used elsewhere in the precinct. That is uppermost in our mind. I, frankly, would prefer it be kept—if it is serviceable and if it is not going to lead to a workplace health and safety issue. But, as you can imagine, in terms of office furniture, there is not much that falls into that category anymore that has not been built in the last 10 years. As I said, we are happy to provide more detail on notice.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I have a question in relation to a public debate at the moment about the storage of metadata. It goes back to an issue we had in the Parliament a few years ago. I wanted to know how long does the Parliament retain records of internet usage by members and staff of the Parliament? What is the nature of the information that is collected? Is there any guarantee that can be given that no information on usage by members of Parliament and members of the Legislative Council will be improperly accessed?

The PRESIDENT: I think the preference of the Executive Manager is also to take that question on notice. We will be able to provide as much of that information as we can to you. I am sure that the guarantees you are seeking will be forthcoming. Again, I would prefer to reply to that question on notice.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: In relation to the policy of the Parliamentary Friendship Group, will you advise what stage the review is up to?

The PRESIDENT: On becoming President one of my priorities was to ensure that we had more effective regulation of friendship groups. As the Hon. Amanda Fazio will recall, she suggested that it was something I should have a look at. In May 2011 a friendship group policy was adopted by the Presiding Officers and currently there are 24 approved groups. After it had been in operation for two years the Speaker and I indicated that we wanted to have a review of the existing policy. I think some questions on notice were asked about this last year so I provided some of the detail in answers last year. I asked the Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant-at-Arms to conduct a review of parliamentary friendship groups. I believe I have provided the terms of reference before but I can provide them again in a supplementary answer if the Hon. Amanda Fazio so wishes.

One of the key things that I asked them to do was to consider, obviously, the policies of other Parliaments but, in particular, the House of Commons was having a review of its friendship groups policy because of some concerns about commercial influences in friendship groups in the Commons. That took much longer than was expected so it has been delayed. The Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant-at-Arms did not present the options paper to me or to the Speaker until April and since then, sadly, we have lost the Usher of the Black Rod which has held up the review. I am hoping to have something out within two months but it is not a high priority because so far as I am aware there is not a degree of demand to set up new groups. I might have been contacted twice in the intervening period and was asked how it is going. I apologise that it has taken a little longer than I had hoped, but I am hoping to have something in about two months.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: What do you think of the colour and design of the new carpet? You would be aware that there has been much wailing and gnashing of teeth?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is calling for an opinion.

The PRESIDENT: I am mindful of the rules that operate in budget estimates which also reflect the rules in the House. I note that in regard to questions seeking information it rules out questions asking for opinions.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will take a point of order on it, Mr President.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I will ask a different question.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to say that the carpet was recommended to us by the fit-out consultants we had. I think it takes a bit of getting used to—a little longer for some than others.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Mr President, you appreciate that the question had to be asked.

The PRESIDENT: That is where I might leave it.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I therefore will not ask you whether you would consider it appropriate for the office of the President.

The PRESIDENT: In relation to the new carpets, the overwhelming view of members under the age of 40 to 45 is positive but it is taking longer for some of the older members who have been here for a while. I am sorry as I cut you off. What was your question?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I will not ask whether you think it is appropriate for the office of a presiding officer as that would be ruled out of order.

CHAIR: That would be ruled out of order.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: As that question is out of order I will not ask it.

The PRESIDENT: I think your tongue is firmly implanted in your cheek, so I will let that one pass.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: But there is a serious matter. I note that people using wheelchairs find the new carpet preferable to the old one. However, I have been advised that those who are sight-impaired find the colour an issue as they cannot see the edges of the carpet. Could the Department of Parliamentary Services be asked to look into that matter? I can provide the names of some people who could offer advice, if required.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Hon. Peter Primrose for that information. Another member has raised one other matter relating to the carpet—and I will not embarrass that member by going into details—but I will certainly pass that on to the Executive Manager. Any assistance that members can give in that respect is much appreciated.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: A number of members who knew I would be attending the Committee meeting today also raised an issue relating to the film that has been placed on the windows of members' offices over the past year or so. They have reported—and I have witnessed and experienced this myself—bubbling, creasing and so on, but nothing seems to have happened. On a related issue, window cleaners have advised—and I also have been advised—that they cannot wash the insides of those windows, which has resulted in a somewhat misty view.

The PRESIDENT: That surprises me. I will get the Executive Manager to inquire about that. Believe it or not, one of the problems causing the bubbling will be fixed once the curtains go and the roller blinds are put in. Mr Stefanic may assist with some detailed information.

Mr STEFANIC: In regard to the film itself, it was a new phenomenon to 3M, the manufacturers of the film. They had to investigate what was causing the deterioration of the film. They put it down to the heat generated between the curtains and the windows in summer causing a deterioration of that film. Some time was required to do their investigation and that was the result. They found out that it was the heat. We have been trialling the new film with the new roller blinds and we find the amount of heat being trapped is significantly less than previously because the blinds allow a bit of air circulation. We are hoping that with the installation of the new blinds the film will not deteriorate. But we wanted to be absolutely certain. The 3M company will be replacing the film at its own cost once everything is confirmed. This is the first time we have been made aware of the window washing so we will follow up those concerns.

CHAIR: The time for questions from Opposition members has expired.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr President, will you pass on the gratitude of my office and my staff, and indeed I think of other members of The Greens who have had their renovations done for the professional, courteous and efficient way in which staff have undertaken those renovations, in particular, the information technology staff who have worked very late and who have been efficient and effective in getting things up and running in a short time. I know it is appreciated. I refer to staff redundancies. I know that The Legislature has to

meet the efficiency dividend for the Government. Am I right in understanding that the efficiency dividend has largely been met by a reduction in staff numbers in The Legislature?

The PRESIDENT: No, you would not be right about that. There have been different ways each year that we have met the efficiency dividends and by no means have they been largely funded by redundancies at all.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am focusing on the past 12 months and on this year's budget as well.

The PRESIDENT: It has certainly not at this stage, other than the likelihood of redundancies after the election due to the possible change in representation of members in either House. I do not think there any planned redundancies in the current financial year.

Mr STEFANIC: There are no redundancies planned for this financial year. Perhaps to clarify regarding the redundancies that were initiated in the previous financial year, they were not driven out of the requirement to meet the efficiency dividend. In each case the primary driver was to improve services to members and to the Parliament. In certain instances, for example, in the Engineering section of Facilities and also the IT Services area, there had been no change to the organisational structure for at least 20 years so the organisational structures did not really match the requirements for those area service needs. In both the case of IT, which was part of a broader information services review, and also the Facilities review, there were areas identified where service improvements were required and where there were different skills requirements now to what there were 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could I ask you then to provide on notice for this year what those cost savings are to the budget from those redundancies?

The PRESIDENT: Are you talking about for 2014-15?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: For 2014—

The PRESIDENT: The oncoming year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —because the redundancies were implemented last financial year and they have taken effect this financial year, so what the cost savings from wages are for this financial year as against the costs of the additional contracting from Engineering and IT Services? Can I ask you to provide that on notice, as best you can?

Mr STEFANIC: Yes. The restructures did occur mid-year in most instances and there were not full savings realised from those, so, yes, there will be savings going forward. We can certainly put a dollar value on that.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Point of clarification: Is that not a question for next year's estimates? We are here to examine what we have been through in the last 12 months, not to look at a foreshadowed figure which is something that would be realised in next year's estimates questioning.

The PRESIDENT: We are happy to provide that information because Mr Shoebridge is asking what the full year value of the redundancies that were made during the 2013-14 year would be this year. The point that Mr Stefanic makes is well made.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand.

The PRESIDENT: In terms of Engineering, what was being done was a very important change to the capacity we have here on staff in ensuring that we have the sort of staff we need for some of the complex new building systems we have got that we did not have in the old structure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There is a large concern that this is a very idiosyncratic building with a lot of general lore and knowledge about how those engineering matters run and with those redundancies we lost a lot of that lore.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know that that is actually right because we kept quite a number of staff. Even though we had 15 positions deleted, five of them had been vacant for many years and seven new positions were created, so there was only a net reduction of three positions and five of the current staff were appointed to positions within the new structure, three of which had actually been promoted.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr President, I am happy for the answer to flesh it out and not to give a false impact. I am more than happy with that. Could I ask you, though, about the historical books collection? There is restoration and renovation work going on in the stack?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand that hundreds of boxes of books of the historical collection have been gathered together?

The PRESIDENT: I have a quite detailed answer on that and I just would not want to preclude you asking anything else. I do not want to take up time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will probably ask you the elements that I was hoping might be addressed in the answer to it. I think in 2003 there were moves afoot to sell some of the historical collection, which raised very many concerns?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There are concerns that at the moment some potentially similar plans are on foot—I heard estimates of 800 or 700 boxes of books. There are concerns that there are proposals at the moment to sell the historical collection and, if so, there would be great concerns. It is a very historical asset.

The PRESIDENT: There is no proposal at all to sell the rare books. That is not happening so any suggestion that you might hear that that is happening you can immediately scotch. And by the way, the entire collection's management policy is on the intranet. There is no secrecy at all about what is happening because it is there and has been since October 2013 as to collection management policy that we approved. If the Hon. Paul Green does not mind, I might just finish off this answer?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Please do.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Shoebridge is quite right. Some years ago there was controversy about the disposal of books—the disposals that occurred between 1997 and 2001. At that time the Internal Audit Bureau [IAB] had a look at the process and made some recommendations. That was back in 2002. In 2004, while Meredith Burgmann was still the President, taking into consideration all of the recommendations that the IAB made, the Library staff then made an early start on what an effective collections management policy should be and then identified a list of books that could be—using the technical term—deselected from the actual collection.

The deselection did not proceed at the time. It also did not proceed during the last parliamentary term at all. But why are we doing this? When I became President obviously I received a briefing on this and the Hon. Peter Primrose and the Hon. Amanda Fazio would have been aware of the issues when they held the office themselves. We have effectively two issues: the physical limit to the storage and the actual equipment we have downstairs. In terms of the physical limit to storage, the actual storage unit is operating well above capacity. The books have effectively been double-booked on shelves and for years there have been 700 boxes of books placed on top of the compactus units.

The compactus units themselves are the original compactus units that were put in in the late 1970s when the library stack was built. They are operating well beyond their design capacity and replacement parts are not available at all. In short, they are dangerous; they are downright dangerous for the Library staff and there is a real risk of injury because, as you can imagine, with boxes stacked on top of them and double-booking they can be barely moved. It is a real risk.

Doing nothing was simply not an option. The size of the collection is quite considerable. If you were to line every single title up in a row it would be 6.6 kilometres long. It is an enormous collection. Of that, only two kilometres of the 6.6 kilometres are books but that, nevertheless, is still 85,000 books, so it is quite a

considerable collection. Another thing that the Library staff have had to factor into the preparation of a proper approach to the management of the collection, which they have done, is of course the impact of the internet and the fact that so much of the information that we use now is of course digital. So effectively these were some of the issues they had to grapple with.

The collection management policy that was signed off on in October 2013 has within it criteria for the deselection of some of those items and the disposal options are clearly shown in the policy. So I would encourage you to look at those. Effectively, the principles behind the policy are that the Library need not collect material where another government department already has the responsibility to collect and maintain it as part of a comprehensive and authoritative online collection.

The Library is not going to keep multiple copies of an item anymore in terms of keeping a hard copy and a digital copy. That just does not make sense. The Library in future is going to give preference to a digital resource rather than a printed resource. Again, that makes sense. Where there are available reliable alternative services through online services and reciprocal relationships with other libraries, that is going to be taken into account for whether we develop the collection further, and historically we have had a considerable recreational collection and in future that is going to be given a fairly low priority.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What do you define as "recreational"?

The PRESIDENT: Novels, effectively.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Literature.

The PRESIDENT: What is going to be done is it will be kept more current in terms of popular fiction. Applying the new policy, 23,000 titles have been identified for deselection. That is not necessarily 23,000 books but 23,000 titles, and that is a different matter. The Library staff have limited authority to dispose of material. By the way, this information is all on the intranet. Staff can dispose of items which have a commercial value of less than \$100 and which are assessed as having little information value in terms of the mission of the Parliamentary Library. Secondly, material that is valued at less than \$300 with potential value to other libraries can also be deselected and offered to those libraries. Thirdly, material we accumulate as a result of being a legal deposit library can also be offered to other libraries and not added to our collection or if it has been previously added, deselected. Disposal of anything regarded as no longer necessary for our mission as a parliamentary library that is worth more than \$300 requires the approval of the Presiding Officers. Obviously that is not done one book at a time. We have adopted a policy with regard to that which I will now explain.

We have asked independent valuers to look at items nominated for deselection by library staff after a peer-review process. The Library staff said that of those 23,000 books the valuers should look at 12,692 because they were assessed as having a potential significant dollar value, and that has been done. The Library staff were obviously very cautious and they suggested that the valuers examine more than 12,000 books. The valuers told us that only 792 of the books that had been chosen for deselection were worth more than \$300. The disposal methods for each of those various categories—the three that the Library staff can approve—are on the intranet.

The Presiding Officers recently signed off on a disposal method for the last 792 of those more valuable books. First, they will be offered to 10 libraries. The hope is that most of them will be taken up by those libraries, and that has certainly been our experience—some of them are taken up by the libraries to which they have been offered. However, those which have been assessed as having a commercial value of more than \$300 and which have not been selected by libraries will be put up for public auction later in the year. To avoid any perception of conflict of interest, no sales will be permitted to Library staff or others involved in the sale process. It is not clear how much will be raised because our hope is that libraries will take most of the books. If there are any net proceeds, I expect them to be modest, they will be used to conserve high-value items such as our rare books collection.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you for that response. If I have any further questions I will place them on notice. I appreciate the answer.

The PRESIDENT: It is an important issue. The Parliamentary Library will be 175 years old next year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is one of the most important historical collections in the State.

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely. I will provide three examples that lead me to query whether we need some books in our collection. They are beautiful books. We have *The Memoirs and Travels of Sir John Reresby*, published in 1813. He was a member of the House of Commons from 1673 to 1689. I query whether we need to keep a book like that in our collection. We also have the 1836 edition of Lord Mahon's *History of the War of Succession in Spain* and 12 volumes of the *Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, which were published in 1830 and detail the life of the author and include a critical examination of his writings.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think it is a tragedy to lose any of them.

The PRESIDENT: They are great books, but I query whether we need them in the Parliamentary Library and how they contribute to the Library's mission, which is to support our work.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Thank you for that exhaustive answer, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: Sorry to take up so much time.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It was warranted. I put on the record the Christian Democratic Party's appreciation of the way in which the Parliamentary Facilities staff have handled the office renovations; they went very smoothly and they were well done. For the record, I like the carpet. When will the renovations of the restrooms and toilets be undertaken and when will more wheelchair accessible toilets be provided?

The PRESIDENT: It will cost effectively \$250,000 to provide a disabled toilet in the tower block. It is not cheap. Obviously a great deal of building work is going on at Parliament House at the moment. We have squeezed just about every dollar we can out of Treasury at present. I should point out that an extra disabled toilet is being included in the work being done on the new office space being built on level 9. I would very much like to find the money to install a disabled toilet in the tower block at some time in the next two to three financial years. Money is not easy to get out of the Executive Government, but we have done our bit by at least incorporating a new facility on level 9. Hopefully we will be able to include one in the tower block at some stage relatively soon.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you update the Committee on how the wi-fi rollout has gone?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You want to make sure it is in the gym.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I would not have a use for it there.

The PRESIDENT: In the last 12 months we certainly have improved services with an expansion of wi-fi services. In August 2013 wi-fi internet access was made public by IT Services on a trial basis. Coverage was also upgraded to include public areas of the building on level 7 and all meeting rooms on levels 6 to 12. In January this year the trial was made permanent and coverage was expanded to include all offices on levels 6 to 12 in the tower block.

In July a new wi-fi service was launched specifically for Parliament-supplied notebooks, which in addition to providing internet access also provides direct access to the internal parliamentary network. This allows members and staff to freely roam the building while staying connected to the parliamentary network and their information. We now effectively have it through the whole of the building. That is great for members. Skype is now available for use on parliamentary computers and the installation of Skype on individual computers is available on request to IT services.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Green's question was when it will be in the gym.

The PRESIDENT: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Mr President, I know you have a great passion for education. Sadly, regional schools cannot easily visit Sydney. What have you done to improve accessibility to the Parliament's education program for children in regional areas?

The PRESIDENT: Equipment to enable schools to communicate via video with other schools in their region and with cultural institutions was rolled out by the Department of Education to all public schools in 2005. Many independent and Catholic schools also have video conferencing equipment. The aim is to assist small

regional schools by providing them with the technology to access similar information enjoyed by city-based schools. The existence of this equipment in schools and accompanying white board technology has also enabled cultural institutions to offer education programs across a number of subject areas to regional and remote schools.

The Parliament purchased video conferencing equipment some years ago and the equipment has not been fully utilised. In consultation with the House, the education section, however, has now developed a pilot program to be delivered via video conferencing to primary schools in regional New South Wales. Given around two-thirds of visitors to Parliament are stage three, that is years five and six, students studying the topic of government and the emergence of Australian democracy, it was decided to start with this very popular topic for video conferencing. A primary program was also developed with the same information delivered to schools who visit the Parliament.

The education team has been rehearsing the program to ensure the content is engaging and interactive, as the regional students are seated in the familiar environment of their own classroom. A trial of the 45-minute program was conducted with Milton Public School on Friday 1 August. The program concluded with questions from the students. The main aim of the trial was to confirm that the school could see the Parliament's presenter, the Chamber film footage and slides of the historic building simultaneously on the connected electronic whiteboard.

The program was received successfully, clearly and in its entirety by the school. An evaluation is currently being undertaken with feedback from teachers and students. Based on this feedback the program will be refreshed and rolled out to other regional schools. Secondary programs along the lines of "Ask the expert" for legal studies students will be developed for 2015. Teacher professional development sessions addressing civic and citizenship outcomes from the secondary curriculum will be rolled out from 2015 as well.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Do you have any comment or evaluation of the school program that is accompanying some of the inquiries?

The PRESIDENT: Absolutely. The regional secondary schools outreach visit programs is an initiative of the procedure office staff of the Legislative Council who go out with the committee staff to regional hearings to provide sessions for local high school students. They go for a duration of approximately an hour and a half, they give an overview of the State Parliament and its relationship to the community and lead a discussion of the role and function of the Legislative Council and its committees. In May 2014 a school outreach program was held at WIN Stadium in Wollongong in conjunction with the hearing of the Select Committee on Social Public and Affordable Housing. The session was attended by 35 students from Smiths Hill High School and the year 11 legal studies teacher. Students observed the public hearing and then remained to observe the public forum that followed.

The procedure team also took the opportunity to demonstrate to Ms Olsen, the year 11 teacher, the information available on the parliamentary website regarding committee inquiries and specific bills. Later in May a school outreach program was held in Tamworth in conjunction with the same committee. Eleven students from Carinya Christian School and their year 11 legal studies teacher attended the session. The procedure office held a further session in July 2014 in conjunction with the Standing Committee on State Development inquiry into regional aviation services. There may be a further session in Coonabarabran in September 2014 in relation to the inquiry into the Wambelong fire.

CHAIR: Time has expired for examination of the portfolio of The Legislature. I thank the President and his officers for attending the hearing today. Any questions you have taken on notice will be required within 21 days.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.