

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 - EDUCATION

Wednesday 11 March 2020

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SKILLS AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

The Committee met at 09:30.

<h1>CORRECTED</h1>

MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Wes Fang

The Hon. Scott Farlow

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Penny Sharpe

Mr David Shoebridge

PRESENT

The Hon. Dr Geoff Lee, *Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

The CHAIR: I declare this budget estimates meeting for the tertiary education and skills sector open. I welcome Committee members and our witnesses today and members of the public who are watching on. Before I commence, it is the custom of this Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I do that with all due respect as well as acknowledging other important contributors to the history of this site—those who constructed Parliament House, very often working in a dangerous industry, and the parliamentary staff over many decades who have supported members of Parliament and made our work and representative role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all.

I welcome Minister Geoff Lee and his officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Skills and Tertiary Education. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. In accordance with the 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 such photography. I also remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the Legislative Council in 2018.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised they can take a question on notice and answer within 21 days, and very often that is the best way to proceed—if in doubt, take it on notice. With regard to the witnesses, I note that Mr Mark Scott is here today. We thank you for your attendance but we also acknowledge that you have broader responsibilities than this important portfolio area. I think I would be speaking on behalf of the Committee in saying, with regard to coronavirus issues in schools, if they do drag you away or need to drag you away from this hearing today, the Committee would be understanding in that regard and expect you to discharge that as your primary responsibility. Do not feel under any compulsion, as much as you enjoy our company, to sit it out if you have other important work to do.

With regard to messages from advisers or staff members seated in the public gallery, they should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers with you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the website as soon as possible. Finally, would everyone please turn off their mobile phones or to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. Minister Lee, you do not need to be sworn in, of course, because you are already a member of Parliament and you have discharged that solemn duty in another place. I also remind the following witnesses that you do not need to be sworn in as you have done it earlier in budget estimates prior to this Committee hearing: Mr Scott, Ms O'Loughlin and Ms Penton. Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. with the Minister and then from 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. with the departmental witnesses. We are reconvening at 11.40 a.m. to 12.40 p.m., followed by our lunch break.

CATHERINE GRUMMER, Acting Chief Strategy, People and Change Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

KERRY PENTON, Acting Chief Delivery Officer, TAFE NSW, on former oath

STEFFEN FAURBY, Managing Director, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined

MARK SCOTT, Secretary, Department of Education, on former oath

MARY ANN O'LOUGHLIN, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Higher Education, Department of Education, on former oath

The CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Skills and Tertiary Education open for examination. As there is no provision for any witness to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Good morning, Minister. What preparations are being made to prepare our TAFE campuses for coronavirus or COVID-19?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that, as Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, my first priority is the safety and wellbeing of all students and staff at schools, universities and TAFE. NSW Health has been in close contact with the Department of Education and with TAFE NSW and universities to monitor and respond appropriately to the unfolding novel coronavirus situation. Following the Federal Government's advice, any student or staff member is excluded from all educational facilities if, within 14 days, they have been in or transited through mainland China, been in Iran, had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection or is under medical assessment or has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Students and staff who meet these circumstances must self-isolate at home for 14 days after exposure unless seeking individual medical care.

Can I say that from early on I think the most important thing is we manage it in line with the experts—NSW Health—and follow their guidelines and their recommendations, which we will take at all times and follow their guidelines. That includes things like self-exclusion, when there are incidences that we follow their recommendations. Certainly, we are being quite active in that space in terms of notifying staff and students. For instance, we have things like the website, the intranet site, for students and staff—a single point of information for both staff and students—and, obviously, they go off the guidelines from Health. For things like individual campuses we have posters as well as increased hand sanitation. We put it on social media. We have "frequently asked" lists for our teachers to inform their classes. We have a dedicated hotline for advice about COVID-19 if people want to ask questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is just within the TAFE sector?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes. We have student services, frontline services, directed at answering people's questions but, again, I say we still want to maintain that single source of truth and that single message from Health so that we align to the NSW Health guidelines. Where incidences do occur we have other places where we can email people—the managing director here, Steffen Faurby—to reflect the Health statements. We certainly have other advice that we send out over time but I am more than happy if the secretary can just briefly mention the overall government response because you are part of the schools, and then, Mr Faurby, if you can perhaps update about what we are doing in that space that is significant?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We might come back to the public servants this afternoon because we will have plenty of time with them then. Minister, who is staffing that helpline?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will ask Ms Penton to answer that question as an operational issue.

Ms PENTON: Certainly, with respect to the work health safety hotline within TAFE NSW, they are the staff who normally manage our hotline and they are under the support and supervision of the work health safety managers as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that a hotline for staff to contact if they have got concerns from a work health and safety perspective?

Ms PENTON: Yes, or if they have concerns in classrooms as well so that we can manage those inquiries.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Penton, we might come back to that this afternoon. Minister, there have been reports this morning that a person who visited St Leonards TAFE has now been diagnosed with COVID-19. What arrangements are in place, given that situation? Are you aware of those reports, Minister?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, I just want to get the right paperwork. I think it is important that we get the wording right because we do not want to alarm people unnecessarily. I understand that one previously confirmed COVID-19 case was found to have attended St Leonards TAFE on two days while potentially infectious. I am advised that she last attended the TAFE on 24 February this year. I am also advised that although it has been more than 14 days since the last attendance, NSW Health have been contacting all other students and teachers in these classes and, with the assistance of TAFE NSW, I am advised that NSW Health has contacted 20 out of 21 contacts and all report being well with no-one having a respiratory illness. The last students have been contacted via email and phone messages. I understand that TAFE NSW was advised by NSW Health that, as the student has not attended the TAFE campus for a significant period of time, there is no need to close that campus. I am just looking for the actual statement put out yesterday by NSW Health, which I think summarises it perfectly. If I could just quickly read that out, it is only short:

One previously confirmed COVID-19 case was found to have attended St Leonards TAFE on two days while potentially infectious.

Although it has been more than 14 days since the last day of attendance ... NSW Health has been contacting all other students and teachers in these classes, with the assistance of TAFE NSW.

Again, it goes on to state:

We have contacted 20 of the 21 contacts and all report being well with no one having had a respiratory illness. The last student has been contacted via email and phone messages. NSW Public Health officers will be continue to follow up with this last person.

I think that is appropriate way. I do not know if Mr Scott has anything to add?

Mr SCOTT: No. I will just say, we are in daily contact with NSW Health and have had discussions with this. It was relieved that this case has a connection with a previously confirmed case. I think it was pleased to note that the 14-day period had passed. It has done a great job, I think, in connecting to virtually everyone in the class and there is still that one student it has not connected with—it is still pursuing and tracking down but they may not be around. It is great news that the other 20 remain well. This is part of almost like detective work that NSW Health is doing in attempting to track the movement of the virus and to contain the movement of the virus. But it has worked assiduously, once this case came to light, and we are very pleased with the progress it has made. We have a very close working relationship with NSW Health around these matters.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, what are the steps or what is the protocol if you are to close down—what is the precursor for closing down a TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: TAFE has developed a plan for implementation as required. As you know, the COVID-19 landscape is changing rapidly from day to day. We are developing a plan in consultation with NSW Health in how we actually do it and I would ask either Mr Faurby or Ms Penton to go through those steps in case it escalates into the necessary—

Mr SCOTT: In our discussions with NSW Health, our expectation will be that if a decision needed to be made to close a TAFE college, just like losing a school, then that will come with the advice of NSW Health. We are in the hands of its authorities. Then there would be communications exercises and the like. One of the things I think we are seeing, at this stage of the management of the virus, are decisions that are being made to help NSW Health track the movement of students for a period of time so that they can then go to those who have been in close contact with the person who has contracted the virus and it can then track their health and wellbeing and their movement in the community, as well. So there will be protocols and communication protocols and the like that Mr Faurby and Ms Penton can talk about.

On the critical question that you are raising on who decides, and when and what is the threshold, we are still very much in the hands and will remain in the hands of NSW Health on that. As it is thinking and working these things through, part of the debate around social distance policy and isolation policy comes with the management of risk of having a lot of people who perhaps aren't in college and out in the community. That is what we are seeing in school system, as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks, Mr Scott. We might come back with some more questions this afternoon. Minister, if a TAFE is required to be closed, if that does happen, as we have seen with some schools it has been required, what preparations are being made for if practical courses are being undertaken? What arrangements are in place for that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: If, on the advice of—I think Mr Secretary summed it up quite well. If NSW Health advice is to potentially close a TAFE, that we are looking throughout our plan to look at but some of those areas, for instance, for practical areas—and I will ask Ms Penton to talk about those and maybe Ms Grummer would like to talk about the staffing arrangements—in terms of distance delivery we have TAFE Digital, which is a fantastic

opportunity to be able to deliver education into the households of people who may not be able to attend those campuses or the campuses are closed. But I would ask Ms Penton to talk about—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is okay, we will come back to this this afternoon. We have plenty of time this afternoon. Minister, have you directed your public servants to undertake any special preparations for these practical skills arrangements?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We have been in constant dialogue with TAFE NSW through our managing director Mr Faurby, who sits to my left, about looking at all the different situations about what we may or may not have to do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you concerned about the fact that you cut so many information technology jobs just before Christmas? Is that having an impact on what you are doing?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think the notion to link between reducing staff numbers and preparations for COVID-19—can I say that we are talking about 17,000-odd staff at TAFE—are wrong. To link the two is just incorrect.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am saying that you are looking now at scaling up your digital platform—you are saying that. Just before Christmas you cut 36 staff and 32 contractors out of your IT department. Isn't that a concern? Are you looking at taking on new staff?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely not and I think, as I said, you are linking two very different issues. You are looking at one before Christmas, which was looking at a reduction of waste and reduction of any duplication of services. In fact, TAFE Digital is a very large, well-resourced part of our business—something like 20 per cent of our business is through TAFE Digital. Ms Penton, do you know how many staff we have in that area and how many students exactly? 80,000-odd students and—

Ms PENTON: I think in excess of 80,000.

Dr GEOFF LEE: So it is quite an extensive part of our business and we have significant capacity to deliver distance education. We have our own development teams that are associated with it. I think linking the two is not the right way to go.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I disagree but we will move on. I will hand to my colleague.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, I noticed that you and the Deputy Premier made an announcement yesterday in relation to free training to help bushfire-impacted communities. Are you familiar with that announcement?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are talking about free training to help bushfire-affected communities. My reading of what is actually available is that there is one TAFE course at Bermagui, there is a course at Cooma and there are two courses at Merimbula—not delivered by TAFE. Is that the entire offering that you are providing to bushfire-affected communities when it comes to apprentices and those who are under pressure?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are doing more than that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Right. Well, what extra courses and what new funding is there to support apprentices who have lost their jobs?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that the bushfire-affected communities right throughout the north and the south are of particular concern. Can I say that we are looking at significantly how we actually—and I think the main challenge is, how do we actually allow locals to be involved in the bushfire recovery period now that the fires have gone out—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure, that is recovery. Can I just interrupt you, Minister. The question for me is: You have specifically made a big announcement that you have all this training to be delivered but it appears that, as I said, it is only in Cooma, Merimbula and Bermagui. Are there other places? What is happening in Lismore? What is happening in Tumut?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely, and if you would allow me to finish, I was just trying to go through it. Our priority in discussions with the Deputy Premier is to look at how we can actually empower our locals to get jobs in the recovery. As part of that, in recognition of the importance of supporting our bushfire-affected communities, I have directed TAFE to run otherwise unviable courses to support the community and help people in bushfire-affected areas to get back on their feet as quickly as possible. For example, Certificate II in Kitchen Operations is to run at Cooma with two enrolments, Certificate I in Spoken and Written English is running at Moruya with a class size of three students, and Certificate III—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, just to clarify—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: The Minister really should be given a chance to finish his answer.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, I am just asking for clarification.

The Hon. WES FANG: I have just raised a point of order.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, you have not; you have just said, "Point of order".

The Hon. WES FANG: I have said "Point of order" and I ask for a ruling.

The CHAIR: I am ruling pre-emptively on the point of order and the response to allow the Minister another 40 or 50 seconds to finish his answer, at which time Ms Sharpe can follow up.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Thank you, Chair. Basically, we are running courses in the south with unviable numbers typically because we understand communities have been devastated by those bushfires and we want to be able to help those people that want to enrol in those courses. We are also supporting on-the-ground communities and we are prioritising the fire-affected communities. We are introducing new courses, such as a new apprenticeship in construction at Unanderra and Cooma, and bricklaying at Bega. These courses are meeting skill demands. We are also offering practical training, which you mentioned before. These are the first of a suite.

What we are saying is that before we understand the necessary requirements of the skills for bushfire recovery—and that may be a period of two, three or four years—we are offering skills right up-front, things like fencing, asbestos identification, tree felling, things that people can get involved in now to participate in that recovery. We are also allowing apprentices to continue if businesses go broke, because typically when an apprentice loses their job they are not entitled to training, so we have extended that so that they can attend training at TAFE for 12 months. Whilst a student may have lost their job during the period, that may be because their employer goes broke, but we will certainly work very closely with students and allow them to continue at TAFE, continuing on. We are certainly prioritising ourselves. I do not know if there is anything you would like to add, Mr Faurby?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, that is okay. I have follow-up questions. Minister, you said that you are running an unviable course in Moruya, and you listed a few others.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Is that just for 12 months or are those courses going to continue so that those students can finish?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that, once we start a course, we will continue to run those courses.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: To the end? So if someone starts food this year, they are not going to find themselves without a course next year or having to travel a long way to access the course?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Our intention is certainly to run those courses and support our bushfire affected, and we are prioritising those bushfire-affected areas. Ms Penton, would you like to add anything?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, I am just wanting a guarantee that the young people or others who start those courses are not just going to be left in 12 months' time—

Dr GEOFF LEE: Our intention is very clear to run those.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I want more than an intention; I want a guarantee.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Our intention is very clear to run those courses.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not a guarantee.

The CHAIR: There has to be a question. We are not here to force statements upon Ministers; we are here to question them.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you guarantee that those courses will be run—

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said, my intention is very clear. Ms Penton, can I ask you to add anything if you choose to?

Ms PENTON: Yes, we have worked in detail with our staff and our students at those campuses in the commencement of these courses and we will be supporting those students to the completion of their courses.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Does that mean that if they start in Moruya they will be finishing in Moruya?

Ms PENTON: Depending on the program's perspective. If it has always been able to be fully delivered from starting to finishing the course, depending on the course—it may be a six-hour responsible service of alcohol course or a two-year diploma. They will all be worked through with those individual students to complete their studies, yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You have talked about a course at Unanderra and other places in bricklaying and building and construction. Are they not courses that used to be available and have been replaced?

Dr GEOFF LEE: That is purely an operational decision about the courses that I will ask Ms Penton to detail or take on notice.

Ms PENTON: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My understanding is that Unanderra and places like Bega used to have bricklaying and building and construction, and they have been cut.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, no, can I just—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are putting them in temporarily. That is what I am trying to confirm. I am not criticising you for putting them back, I am just asking whether they were cut previously.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I just say that TAFE is a large organisation. We have 130 campuses right around the State. We have around 400,000 students and 17,000 staff. We offer over 1,000 different courses, and to offer every course at every campus is just not viable, and it has not been since day one of TAFE, which is over 100 years, and—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, no-one is asking you about that.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, but what I am saying—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We are talking about bushfire-affected communities. No-one is arguing with you about that, but the point that I am trying to understand is the support that you are providing. How long is it for? Is it replacing courses that were already there, and are you committing to those bushfire communities long into the future rather than just for the next 12 to 24 months?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think, with all due respect, you are conflating two issues—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I do not think so.

Dr GEOFF LEE: —about previous course offerings and the bushfire affected, and Ms Penton was very clear. Our intention is very clear to help those bushfire-affected areas by running the courses at Bega and Unanderra and all—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Not at Lismore or elsewhere.

The CHAIR: Time is up.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I am glad to see you responded to the calls from the Teachers Federation to maintain those courses in the southern part of the State in bushfire-affected areas. I think that is a positive move.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will take that as a question. Yes, I agree.

The CHAIR: No, we are taking that as a comment.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is an introduction to the next point: What about the rest of the State which is bushfire affected? Have you agreed to provide the same level of support to other TAFE campuses in bushfire-affected areas, or is there one rule for the south and another rule for the rest of the State?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will ask Ms Penton or Mr Faurby to answer that after I have made just a few comments about it. I suspect you are alluding to what happened in the northern bushfire areas?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Correct.

Dr GEOFF LEE: What we have to do for TAFE is manage each region, or in fact each TAFE, in a separate way that is dedicated to that local community. The fires up north in general, I have been advised, were quite different in terms of the timing in that they were towards the end of semester. The difficulty with the south is that they were at the start of the semester, to prohibit or discourage enrolments. We had a very different situation up north, where enrolments continued to be strong. I am advised that we did not see a drop-off in those enrolment numbers. Certainly we made allowances for some additional support mechanisms or changes to how we run the courses and assess the courses to take into account those bushfire-affected areas. Maybe Mr Faurby would like to talk about those?

Mr FAURBY: Thank you, Minister, I will certainly say that, along with what you said, we give the same consideration to the requirements that exist in the north, and a portion of the 300 short courses that we have added here in direct response to bushfire recovery certainly are being made in the north.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question was quite specific: Will you commit to running courses in bushfire-affected areas across the State where the enrolment numbers are less than the minimum number that has been set in order to support those bushfire-affected communities? Will you do that across the State, Minister, or is there one rule for the south and another rule for the rest?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I thought I was clear in saying that we treat every campus and every area based upon its need, and we should have a plan that looks at the region and the individual campus to look at what we need to do, and what we need to do to support our industry, our students and our staff. Can I say, on my advice—and I think Ms Penton would like to say something—the north was very different from the south in terms of the timing of the fires, the course enrolments and our modifications to those units in terms of being able to delay assessments or change assessment procedures in order to cope with the different timing of the bushfire-affected and recovery process.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question was specific, so rather than go to Ms Penton for a dispersive response, we have plenty of time this afternoon.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: While I accept Mr David Shoebridge is able to ask questions, the way that he inserts little commentary within is detrimental to the process.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: He is wasting time.

The Hon. WES FANG: I would ask that Mr David Shoebridge just ask questions.

The CHAIR: Just to rule on this. I can understand the tension whereby the questioners can be perhaps frustrated with the Ministers referring to staff on such a regular basis. We need to get the balance right. If it is essential information that is required, it is appropriate for a Minister to refer to staff, otherwise I think it is the expectation of the Committee that this session is for the Minister to answer the questions. Non-immediate or non-urgent matters, the staff can handle questioning later on after 11.40 when we have those sessions and then through to the afternoon.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I ask if you can provide on notice those courses where there have been insufficient enrolments in bushfire-affected areas, those course and campuses where those courses have not been run.

Dr GEOFF LEE: More than happy to take it on notice, if that helps you and the Committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is not about helping me, it is about helping bushfire-affected communities. Minister, do you understand the difference?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that—

The CHAIR: That is not a legitimate question.

Dr GEOFF LEE: —if you want me to run through our bushfire-affected areas and the things that we are doing, I am more than happy to do it again. But I do not want to waste the time of the Committee. I am more than happy to talk about it all day.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, what steps have you put in place to ensure that all the staff at TAFE—casual, contract, permanent full time—will have the leave they need to survive the coronavirus if it shuts down TAFE? What have you done specifically for casuals to ensure that they will have the leave they need if they cannot attend work?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Our staff and our students are our primary concern—their safety and wellbeing. We want to help all our staff throughout the process of the coronavirus. As I said before, the coronavirus is an ongoing and fast-changing landscape of a dynamic situation. I put on the record that TAFE staff are covered by the enterprise bargaining agreement [EBA] and other public sector guidelines. There is what we need to do and I think we are being quite clear in respect of a whole-of-government approach to how we manage our staffing situations. These casual, full-time, part-time staffing arrangements are not unique to TAFE. In fact, the whole public sector is affected at the moment.

I understand that the Premier and the Treasurer are making some decisions at the moment. We certainly have a hotline for our staff. Each staff member is considered on a case-by-case basis. In respect of a whole-of-government approach, it is probably best if we turn to the secretary to—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question is very specific about what you are doing for casual staff who do not have leave entitlements. What are you doing for the large number of casual staff at TAFE, if they cannot attend work, to ensure they do not go without and they have financial support?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I ask the secretary to help out.

Mr SCOTT: We have been in discussion with the NSW Teachers Federation around this matter. It relates to TAFE, as you indicated. It also refers to school. As the Minister said, it is a government-wide issue as well. There are provisions under EBAs for sick leave, family and compassionate leave, also special leave provisions. You can anticipate some government-wide advice that will apply to TAFE, public schools and other public sector areas to be released shortly by the Department of Premier and Cabinet that will apply across the New South Wales public sector and will also apply to TAFE, to provide some clarity, to provide some certainty, to provide some reassurance.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, you would be aware that most of the sick leave, family and compassionate leave provisions do not apply to casual workers. That is not going to assist the casual workers in TAFE. My question is very clear. If those casual workers cannot attend work and therefore do not get paid as casual workers, what are you going to be doing to support them, given the large proportion of TAFE staff that have casual work arrangements?

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said, we are adopting a whole-of-government approach. We are talking to the Teachers Federation at this time. A position will be issued by the Premier and the Treasurer shortly. Mr Scott has clearly indicated that. As I said, our priority is to look after the wellbeing of our staff at all times. It is not unique to TAFE, the difficulties that we are going to have with part-time, casual staff.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the proportion of the workforce in TAFE that is on casual arrangements?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will ask Ms Catherine Grummer. Do you know or you can take it on notice?

Ms GRUMMER: I will take it on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is it 30 per cent, 40 per cent, 50 per cent?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We said we would take it on notice, Mr Shoebridge. We are entitled to do that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is a very large proportion of the workforce that is casual. You say it applies across the board. It applies specifically and quite harshly to TAFE, does it not, because of the large proportion of your workforce that is casual?

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said, the number we will take on notice and get back to the Committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you accept that it is unacceptable for casual staff at TAFE to be stood down and not have financial support from their employer? Do you accept that that is an unacceptable outcome?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Our staff are our main priority, whether you are full-time, part-time, casual. We are putting active plans together. As the secretary said, this is a whole-of-government approach, that we need a consistent message. It will be a priority for us to ensure we look after our staff to ensure we minimise any impact on any of our staff and students for our TAFE and the wider public sector.

The CHAIR: We hear a lot about the extraordinary numbers of overseas students in our university system. How many overseas students are in the NSW TAFE system?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will ask Mr Faurby or Ms Penton to get the exact number, otherwise we will take it on notice.

The CHAIR: What is a ballpark estimate?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will take it on notice.

The CHAIR: Are we talking a thousand here, 10,000, 100?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Best to take it on notice. I do not want to give you the wrong answer, that is all because then I will get in trouble. Can I say, it is not like the universities.

The CHAIR: It is not that big of course; that is vast. How many exchange teacher programs do we have with overseas systems?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Again, if Ms Penton has that or we can take that on notice.

Ms PENTON: We can certainly take the detail on notice, but we have a minimal number and we have reviewed all of our overseas contracts and also restricted overseas travel for our staff in order to ensure their health and wellbeing.

The CHAIR: Has that happened with the students as well—the unspecified number of overseas students in TAFE?

Ms PENTON: Yes, so we will get the exact numbers of overseas students. Numbers of our international students are already domestic international students. We have reviewed all of them and many of them had not travelled over the immediate period during the January period. There was a small number of students that we identified, contacted them individually, who were overseas at the time and remain out of the country. We are working with those around individual learning plans in order to support them.

The CHAIR: You are confident you can give the public a guarantee for students and teachers that everyone in the system is safe according to the best advice?

Ms PENTON: According to the best advice, and we are reviewing it as the advice is updated.

The CHAIR: You mentioned a small number of students where there was a concern. What has happened to them? They are in isolation, are they, and doing work online?

Ms PENTON: There were a number of students who were overseas at the time that the virus initiated and we have been in contact with each of those students to make determinations around their study plans. Some of them are receiving tutorials online and others have made personal decisions to defer their studies and we will support them on their return, when it is appropriate.

Mr SCOTT: I think the distinction is, as we have seen in the university sector, those who are Australian residents who have been able to return and self-quarantine, that period of time has largely passed now and they are back in our education system. But there are some international students who are not able to return to Australia at the moment. They might still be in China, for instance and they are the ones we are reaching out to and contacting and trying to keep learning ongoing.

The CHAIR: What about exchange delegations, TAFE experts coming from overseas to look at our system, our people going overseas? That has all been locked down, has it, in response to the coronavirus concerns?

Ms PENTON: Yes, we have reviewed all of our overseas travel and, in the immediate times, restricted travels to those earlier identified countries but have made a determination to stop all international travel for the foreseeable future.

Mr SCOTT: I can add, again, you will see government-wide policies emerging within days on this—high-level sign-off for any international travel and also domestic travel and a dramatic curtailing of international and domestic travel by New South Wales public servants.

The CHAIR: Mr Scott made an announcement about the digital platform in schools, where if the students are forced to stay at home they can still learn. Have we got a TAFE equivalent of that in the planning pipeline?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We do indeed. In fact, TAFE Digital is a fantastic asset and infrastructure and learning platform that allows us to teach tens of thousands of students. Maybe if Ms Penton goes through a two-minute explanation, because we are very proud of TAFE Digital and its rollout.

Ms PENTON: TAFE Digital is our online area of TAFE NSW. The Minister has already referred to the number of students that are enrolled there, so they will continue their studies, of course. Other students across the State—in many of our programs the learning materials are on our learning management system known as Moodle. Certainly we will be supporting our staff to be able to provide the theoretical parts of the courses and to continue studies where students are well enough to continue to study, if they need to remain at home.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, yesterday you were at the launch of Scott Cam's career ambassador nationwide program.

Dr GEOFF LEE: A very good TAFE—Ryde TAFE.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. What is Mr Cam going to do in the New South Wales system?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We are not paying, are we?

The CHAIR: I have got the questions here.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Mr Cam was engaged by the Federal Government to promote Vocational Education and Training as an equal and alternate pathway rather than going to university. I commend the Federal Government for taking any initiatives and I think we all agree that VET should be promoted as an equal alternate pathway instead of going to university. Some students are better off choosing the VET career. I commend the Government for making any investment in changing the perceptions of people. What we do know is that many people go to university that should not go to university. Not everybody needs to go to university when they leave school. They are much better suited to going into a VET career, including TAFE.

The CHAIR: We all support that objective. We could all be career ambassadors but perhaps not on that stipend. To answer the question, what is he going to do in our New South Wales system? You must have an idea of his itinerary of events that are in our TAFEs and in our schools?

Dr GEOFF LEE: That is yet to be released. I think anything he does like yesterday's event to promote VET as an alternate career is great.

The CHAIR: And what exactly did he do yesterday other than talk to the media?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Get in trouble.

The CHAIR: He spoke to the students in the TAFE?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Set fire to a big bucket of money.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Is that a question or a comment?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: I think it was the Chair asking questions.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think it is great to bring any publicity to the fact that TAFE is an excellent career option for your skills and training. Yesterday was great. For 21 years he has been a commentator and presenter. He started off at 17 years old as a chippie and now he has done good. He runs a very successful business—won a Gold Logie and things.

The CHAIR: That is the pinnacle in our nation—the Gold Logie. No doubt about it.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I have not won one yet.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What is he doing, rather than his resume? Come on.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: He has done three social media videos.

The CHAIR: To answer the question, did he speak to students at the Ryde TAFE yesterday?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes. We talked to the students. We had a demonstration class in hospitality, which was very interesting. Certainly his program will be rolled out. Really that is a matter for the Federal Government, but we will certainly assist as he puts out the right messages. We will leverage everything we can off him.

The CHAIR: Are you keen to have him in as many TAFEs and schools as possible?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely. I think he is a great ambassador to say, "I started as a chippie. Now I am highly successful for the last 21 years. I am a household name. I am a big brand name."

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: "I get paid \$300,000 for 15 minutes."

Dr GEOFF LEE: We will leverage him as much as we can.

The CHAIR: He mirrors your success story, Minister, coming out of the TAFE system.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am the poor one; I am the poor landscaper. He is the rich chippie. I should not say he is rich because I do not know him that well. That is the first time I have ever met him.

The CHAIR: He got the right side of the Jamie Durie story, did he not? The program "Instant Backyards" or whatever it was called. Good luck to him. Are we paying any money for Mr Cam?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No.

The CHAIR: Could I just turn to the inquiry that is underway into the TAFE system? What is the purpose of that? What are the terms of reference and what is the Government hoping in terms of outcomes from the Gonski-Shergold process?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think this is a fantastic opportunity to look at a number of issues, but mainly to really look at how we can actually have our VET and TAFE ready and aligned to the needs of the twenty-first century job market and twenty-first century students. We know that industry is changing rapidly. Their requirements are changing rapidly. We know that technology is rapidly changing. We know that we must provide a TAFE and VET system that adapts itself to the twenty-first century. We know that we can actually do better than at the moment. We see that there are significant skill shortages, so how do we forward-look at those opportunities to deliver those courses? When I talk to industry all the time they are saying to us that the existing system is good but there are areas that we can improve. We need to look at some of those areas of focus.

How we can actually improve the pathways between schools, the VET sector and universities? How do we work better with industry to deliver state-of-the-art training just in time for the industry that meets the learner requirements but also meets industry requirements about what we want to do in the future? It also looks at how we better involve industry in the design, delivery and assessment of our students. For far too long we have concentrated on the Government and the individual to pay and to invest in training, when industry needs to step up to the plate and actually be part of that process. You see other countries do it very well. The other areas are better information to students. There are some thousands of students every year that finish year 12, but it is really in year 10 that we have got to give them the right information to actually make the informed decision of whether to choose a VET pathway or a university academic pathway, or maybe try and stream in the middle if they have not made up their minds.

Quite often we find that evidence shows and the research shows that people do not always have an informed decision. They are channelled into a university career when clearly for that student the best pathway at that time would be a VET career. It is certainly to address those critical skill shortages that we find throughout New South Wales; there are significant areas in things like construction, hospitality, personal care and health care services. How are we better able to tailor our services to provide not only the educational and skills and training component but actually provide job-ready graduates that are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills for twenty-first century jobs? It is a great thing. Can I just make a note? Even the Teachers Federation thought Gonski and Shergold were appropriate people, as did the shadow Minister Jihad Dib.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, we do agree that Peter Shergold and David Gonski are good people to do good work. Minister, how much will this review that they are going to undertake cost?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I do not have that. I am more than happy to get back to you on this.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You will take it on notice?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Do you know, Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: No.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will take it on notice, yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is due to be finished by July this year. Is that right?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: And when would you expect to make that public?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We will consider those once we receive those and then make those decisions when the report is due. These changes will need to be thought through in detail.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure. End of the year?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Well, no. It would be wrong for me to predict the time at the moment.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So the report will be done by July and we will just have to wait and see. Is that right?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, and I am really looking forward to the review because I think it is a great opportunity. It is a once in a generation opportunity to change it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, TAFE spent over \$6.4 million on consultancies in the last 12 months or so, dealing with many of the issues that are in the current review. There has been \$1.4 million to McKinsey to tell TAFE NSW managers what the purpose of TAFE is. There has been \$2.5 million to Hudson to provide recruitment support services. There has been over \$1 million to Deloitte to produce a set of forecasts to inform TAFE about their training requirements. There has been \$180,000 to increase brand awareness and generate leads. Why so much money on consultants and why the need for yet another review?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I just quickly—they have passed me a note to tell me how many new and continuing international students we have.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, that is great. I would really—

The CHAIR: It is an important matter. It will only take a second.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Out of the odd 400,000—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It will give him time to get a note on the new stuff.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will take that as a comment.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: No, no. We are wasting time. Minister, just give us the information, please.

Dr GEOFF LEE: There are 2,746 new and continuing international students and of those the Chinese component is less than 300. That is the note I have received—the advice of the department. The question was why do we use consultants?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, the question is why you have spent \$6.4 million on consultants dealing with most of the issues that you have just outlined in the new review that is coming?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I think you are wrong. The review does not look at those things outlined for those consultants. Consultants are used to provide specialist services that we do not have in-house for projects that we need to bring in outside expertise to have a look at—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Let us look. On the e-tender website McKinsey states: To define the purpose of TAFE in a contemporary context having regard to the mix of social, financial, social and broader policy objectives, TAFE is required to deliver to both State and national governments. Is that not exactly the same as looking at the future of TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely not.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You would argue that that is a different issue?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, clearly if I can update the Committee, the McKinsey review looked at the One TAFE reforms about how we are going. We are halfway through a massive change to TAFE. As I said, 130 campuses, 400,000-odd students, 17,000-odd staff. We are converging 10 institutes into the one institute. We are halfway through the process. It looked at how we were halfway along that process we were going through. What we have done well. What we can do better. What we should realign—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How is that different from the upcoming review? Will it not be looking at all these reforms you have mentioned?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It will not be looking at those reforms?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order—

The CHAIR: The Minister should be allowed to answer the question.

Dr GEOFF LEE: The McKinsey review looked at the One TAFE reforms halfway through our period to look at the good things, the things we could improve and how we are going along that review and how—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Have you read the report?

The CHAIR: Constant interjections are not the best way to conduct the Committee process. The Minister is addressing the issue. If he filibusters and gets into long-winded answers you can be assured I will try to pull him up. I am the interjector here, not Committee members.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that the McKinsey review was very focused on One TAFE reforms, as I said, about our alignment to how we are going over that six-year One TAFE reforms. The Gonski Shergold review is looking at the future of the whole VET sector which includes TAFE and the opportunities and challenges that presented with twenty-first century industry.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Was that not what the Boston Group did?

Dr GEOFF LEE: The Boston Group?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The Boston Group report. It used to be available. It is no longer available online but the one that you also implemented, commissioned and had done? What has happened to the Boston review?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, this is the Gonski. Can I say that—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It looks like this.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Very good, that is very nice.

The CHAIR: We are going to give the Minister a chance to answer the question. What has happened with the Boston review?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think it is best to say that is some years ago and that we will build upon those consultants' review and we will continue to review. The Gonski Shergold review is actually to look at the future of the whole VET sector and TAFE to see how we can better cater towards that alignment of different areas of skills to VET to university to look at how we involve industry, how do we partner with industry, what new courses, how we roll out those courses.

The CHAIR: Minister, you have listed those previously so we will go to the next question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: There is a lot of duplication in consulting work that has already been paid for. Do you accept that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I do not say, but let me assure you—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Every piece of consulting was standalone, has been implemented and is not being reviewed again through this review? Is that what you are telling us?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No. Can I say to you that you will find that anyone who knows me simply will say that I am not the biggest fan of consultants.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are spending a lot of money on them.

The CHAIR: Let the Minister answer, please.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say my concerns have been echoed—in fact, six months ago I think it was I actually made the directive that any consultant above a certain fee I have to personally sign off to establish that it is a good practice and it is good value for money and we can actually use that information to make decisions. I am not prepared to sign off things that I do not think are good value for the taxpayers' dollar and I refuse to sign off.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have you read those reports?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Let me say to the Labor Opposition, there is an art in estimates. It is sometimes better to let the Minister talk. That was an answer. That was a genuine interest that you can follow up. We have still got time.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add that the Shergold Gonski review will reflect a number of things that have happened since the previous work was done. Professor Shergold has a major report of vocational education schools that will be central to the VET sector that will be landing in the next month or so. Mr Gonski made numbers of references around these matters in his second report which is also, of course, quite recent. They are both chancellors of major universities in Sydney and so part of this work as well is looking at the intersection between TAFE, the vocational education sector more broadly, pathways in schools and the higher education sector. To get these two eminent experts to be able to provide advice on the intersections between these different elements—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: There is no argument about that Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: That is new. That is fresh material that they are working on.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, the McKinsey report was completed in November last year. It was to assess the current role and purpose of TAFE in New South Wales. Have you read that report?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am very familiar with it but I have not read every page, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What are you changing as a result of the McKinsey report?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that the report is Cabinet-in-confidence, therefore, I cannot talk about that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You cannot tell the people of New South Wales, after you have spent \$1.4 million on a report, what you are going to change as a result of it?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am not asking you to release the report. We can have that discussion on a different day. What have you learnt from \$1.4 million?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say again, it is a Cabinet-in-confidence document and I will not disclose it. TAFE operates in a competitive environment. These are competitive and sensitive issues that we talk about. It competes in the market just as long as the other 2,000 or 3,000 RTOs in New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister that is a joke. You are here to justify how you spend public money. You have just commissioned yet another review into TAFE and you cannot tell us what you have learnt from the last one.

The CHAIR: What is the question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What have you learnt from the last review on which you spent \$1.4 million on consultants?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Ms Houssos, it is a Cabinet-in-confidence document and I am not going to reveal those details. That is appropriate.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, you would be quite shocked if you saw the Boston report and the fact that it is public if you are worried about that sensitive information. There is plenty of sensitive information in that.

Dr GEOFF LEE: That was commissioned well before I was Minister.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is publicly available. I mean hiding behind Cabinet-in-confidence now is a bit late.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is there a question?

The CHAIR: There needs to be a question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware it is publicly available?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Clearly not. Minister, what are the parameters you are putting around this new review? Are you guaranteeing that Smart and Skilled and fee-free places will continue into the future?

Dr GEOFF LEE: What we are very proud of is our fee-free places—100,000 fee-free places for apprentices.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am glad to hear you are proud of them but are you guaranteeing them into the future?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We have guaranteed a four-year commitment. Those are matters for our Government and we will update you. But we are very proud of our 100,000 fee-free places for apprentices over the next four years, 70,000 fee-free places for trainees, 30,000 fee-free TAFE VET courses.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you take on notice how many students have enrolled in those this year? I do not expect you to provide them now. I am happy if you could take it on notice in each of those categories.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is this the end of Smart and Skilled? Is it the end of fee-free places? Will you guarantee that they go forward?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I guarantee we are committed to 700,000 fee and very low fee paying things right across our four years of term. That is what I can guarantee. That is our Government's position.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When the Premier said that it could be replaced by a HECS-HELP system that is not to replace the fee-free places?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am very proud to say that New South Wales is leading all the other States at the Council of Australian Governments Skills Council. In fact we are going to Perth to discuss how we believe that our VET students are actually being disadvantaged and being pushed into university positions because of the current arrangement with loans, and help with funding their VET system compared to universities. The difficulty happens with universities having no up-front fees and some courses in VET, or many courses in VET, have fees. So quite often students will choose to go university when clearly they should go to VET because of the no up-front fees. We have to work out a system—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What evidence do you have of that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am more than happy to get back to you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I would specifically like to see the data on that. It has asserted a lot but I do not know where that comes from.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am more than happy to get back to you about that and take it on notice if you like.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Minister. Next question.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I just give you an update on fee-free apprenticeships? This year we have close to 23,500.

The CHAIR: That is fantastic.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Since 2018 we have had 31,000 fee-free traineeships, remembering starting at 1 January this year we have already had 1,308 enrolled.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is 1,308 out of 70,000.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you expecting an exponential increase in the next—

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely. We only released the first—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What are you doing to get the exponential increase?

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The Hon. Courtney Houssos is asking the question and she should allow the Minister to finish his answer before jumping in and interjecting over the top of him with another question.

The CHAIR: We have done this before. The Minister will answer.

Dr GEOFF LEE: All evidence base from the experience of the apprenticeships fee-free shows us that it takes a while before the industry gets used to it and gets to understand those. We will keep promoting those. I think you will see our marketing has changed to promoting those trainees and apprenticeships. It is early days

in that we are in the first eight weeks of the program. We expect it to take off and give away all our 70,000 fee-free traineeships.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many TAFE scholarships to mature-aged students have you given out this year?

Dr GEOFF LEE: For TAFE and VET, 30,000 fee-free courses.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many? Have you got that on your post-it note?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you provide us with the details of the dropout rate of those as well?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am more than happy to take that on notice, if you like.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, can you guarantee that the fee-free places will continue to be offered?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I can guarantee you that our commitment is for those 100,000 fee-free apprenticeships, 70,000 fee-free traineeships and 30,000 fee-free—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to move on. Can you guarantee that private providers will not be authorised to provide their courses on TAFE campuses?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Private providers—no, because what I would like to see actually—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No? Do you refuse to guarantee that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I refuse to guarantee it because we have many—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You will not guarantee that—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: The Minister will answer the question.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I finish?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yelling "point of order" is actually a point of order.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know because I am waiting for the call so that I can then address the point of order that the Hon. Courtney Houssos continues to interject on the Minister. When she asks the question—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And you continue to run interference.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am not running interference.

The CHAIR: I will rule on the point of order. The Hon. Wes Fang can be assured that I am very aware of what is going on here and I want the Minister to answer the question. Again I ask the Labor Opposition to give the Minister that courtesy and opportunity.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Thank you, Mr Chair. Can I say that one of the areas that I think is much undervalued is our community colleges, our not-for-profit community colleges. They deal with a different segment of the market that TAFE and the other RTOs tend not to deal with. They are really the ground roots, foundation level courses where they actually address things like kids who drop out of school, new migrants—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: TAFE used to do that, Minister.

The CHAIR: You should not interject. The Minister should answer the question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sorry, Mr Chair.

The CHAIR: I point out to the Labor Opposition that unfortunately this process wastes your own time. The clock runs down because we have these procedural disruptions. Minister?

Dr GEOFF LEE: They deal with the segment of the market, a very grassroots segment of the market. They deal in the most part very effectively with very little resources or limited resources but they do some wonderful jobs in the community in the grassroots level. Those not-for-profit community service providers—it will be wonderful to see if we can leverage our assets to help those deliver more courses at cost-effective rates in terms of their limited resources to help them out. I mean, I see them—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let us be clear, Minister. I have given you plenty of time to answer the question. I want to ask you: This is the first significant shift in Government policy to allow a non-TAFE provider onto a TAFE campus to provide a course.

Dr GEOFF LEE: As the Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, I would welcome any opportunities to partner with non-government, not-for-profit community education providers to look at what is appropriate and how we can actually deliver stuff and work in partnership with these organisations. I think we should actually support them.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Could you provide a list to the Committee of any existing arrangements where registered training providers are operating on TAFE campuses?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am more than happy to take that on notice, if I can.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: By campus.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am more than happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, are you prepared to rule out anything in this review? Are you prepared to guarantee the current staffing levels, current funding levels or current course levels?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think the worst thing that we could do at the moment is pre-empt any of the findings of Gonski and Shergold. I think they are eminent experts in their own fields. I think for me to direct anything or rule out anything would be prejudicial to their findings. I look forward to their approach to actually providing a report of informative things that we can actually action in Government and take forward to meeting the needs of the students and industry.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will be clear again: We have no issue with Professor Shergold or Mr Gonski. They are both highly esteemed education experts. What we do have an issue with is the fact that you are not prepared to put any parameters around this review. You are not prepared to say, "This is what we are prepared to guarantee. We are prepared to guarantee courses, we are prepared to guarantee staff, we are prepared to guarantee existing funding arrangements."

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said to you, I think it will be wrong of me to prejudice any of the findings of that report. I think they are eminent experts, as you have agreed. The Opposition agrees that we should respect their findings. We should wait for their report and see what their conclusions are. I think it is too early. I am more than happy to have another estimates session in another six months and—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We look forward to it, Minister.

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I do.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, what is the efficiency dividend that TAFE has to find by 31 July this year?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will hand it over to the secretary or Mr Faurby.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My Faurby will know; Mr Scott will definitely know.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Do you want to do it, Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: Give me just a second.

Dr GEOFF LEE: We will give him a second.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, that is fine. My understanding is that in the upcoming budget there is going to be a requirement to find further savings. Are you able to provide the Committee with that information, please?

Mr SCOTT: We will get the detail.

Dr GEOFF LEE: We will take the detail. We will probably get it during this session, otherwise we will take it on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You definitely know it, Minister—the first finding. Give it to us when you can. In relation to the review, will there be public contributions to the review?

Dr GEOFF LEE: It is up to Gonski and Shergold to see fit. As I said, they are the experts.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do you believe that they will be asking for public—

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said, I do not want to predict—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So you are not going to say as part of the terms of reference they have to talk to the community about it?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I think I have full confidence in Gonski and Shergold to conduct their review in the most appropriate method that they see fit to address the areas of focus and the scope of the review.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, as you know, people love TAFE. TAFE is a well-loved institution with many people having a contact with it. How are they supposed to contribute to the review if you cannot guarantee they can make a contribution?

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said, I am more than happy to empower, which we have, Gonski and Shergold to seek information as they see fit for the review. I think we should let them do their work. It would be inappropriate for me to direct them to do it because of their carriage of this review. I think we should let the experts get up to what they should do.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add, Mr Chair, in recent discussions I have had with Mr Shergold—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I give you one last option? I just want to ask the Minister.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My time is about to run out.

The CHAIR: What is the point of order?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: See, you got your aim there, Wes. You ran out the clock. Well done.

The Hon. WES FANG: What you need to do, Courtney, is understand—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will not take advice from you, Wes, about how I ask questions. I will take my direction from the Chair.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: You need to—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is enough.

The CHAIR: Order! I am not going to have an across the room slanging match.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, you will not give me advice.

The Hon. WES FANG: You need to understand that when you ask the question—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, I will not hear this patronising from you.

The CHAIR: Order! You will both be silent. You are both worked up about something that is not relevant to the procedures of the Committee. We now turn to questions from Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you, Mr Chair. Minister, the most up-to-date figure that I can find for the proportion of staff and TAFE who are classified as part-time casual and who have no work, no pay employment conditions is 75 per cent of TAFE staff. Can you provide now on notice the detailed figures about the proportion of staff for part-time casual?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am more than happy to take that on notice unless, Ms Grummer, you have it at your fingertips.

Ms GRUMMER: No, I will take the question on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can we get the employment breakdown, whether it is part-time casual, permanent or permanent part-time, or whatever? Can we have that broken down as at June 2019? I think there were 5,827 teachers and 4,324 support service staff in the education area. Can we also have the most current figures that you have as well on notice?

Ms GRUMMER: Yes, we will provide those on notice.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Mr Shoebridge, casual and part-time staff are actually encouraged to work at TAFE because many people—we can bring in industry experts who are great in the industry who want to teach part-time.

I think the assumption that is often made is that it is bad to have casual but the opposite is true. In fact, I was a part-time teacher at TAFE when I first started and I tell you, you bring your skill set into the classroom. More students in my experience love you to talk about your work experience and your war stories to interest them. I do not think it is a bad thing. In fact, I think we want to encourage people—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But, Minister, this is not a chance to have just a general chat—

Dr GEOFF LEE: I was just trying to make that point.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —this is to answer questions. The obvious difficulty, and it is where we ended the question in the last round, is that if 75 per cent of the teaching staff are part-time casual with no work, no pay provisions, if courses are not being run at TAFE because of the coronavirus, under the existing arrangements those staff will not be paid. Many of those staff are in regional communities already suffering from bushfire and drought. Will you guarantee they will get financial assistance if TAFE is not running courses?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think it has been clear from our previous answer that Mr Secretary gave that TAFE is not unique in this situation. The whole public sector faces these issues, and the Premier and Treasurer will shortly make an announcement in a government-wide announcement.

Mr SCOTT: There will be announcements on leave provisions but there is also an engagement on that casual issue; it is not only TAFE or schools. The Government is looking at that issue.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But, Minister, when you simply say there will be a whole-of-government response, I am putting to you this proposition, and you can either agree or disagree: the proportion of the staff who will be affected by it because of the high rate of casualisation in TAFE makes a distinct response for TAFE necessary because the rate is vastly higher in TAFE than across the public sector more broadly.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I suggest to you that we have provided a whole-of-government response. We acknowledge the problem, but I think it is important not to fearmonger and scare people into thinking this is something that people will not be able to pay their rent or be kicked out of their home. I think we are far from that position at the moment.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am not fearmongering; I am just looking at the EBA provisions that say no work, no pay.

The CHAIR: But I think we have covered this fairly extensively and the answer is still the same.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To suggest that I am fearmongering when the EBA provision says no work, no pay, you can answer those fears now by saying "We will pay you."

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say, again, that I think we have answered those, but I am more than happy for Mr Secretary to go through it again, if you like, Mr Shoebridge.

The CHAIR: No, we are not going to do that. We have covered this terrain extensively. There is a whole-of-government announcement coming, TAFE is part of the Government and will be covered in that. I think the facts are clear, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, rather than put apprentices and other people seeking to do TAFE or VET training on long-term debt like we see with HECS, why will you not just abolish fees for TAFE and have that as the method for encouraging young people, particularly working-class and other people who have not got the money? Why will you not abolish the fees as a far better response?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that we offer a significant number of fee-free places at TAFE right around the State—700,000-odd in the next four years. Certainly what we are committed to as a government is to try and get as many people into traineeships and apprenticeships as we possibly can in terms of fee-free placements. I have gone through it ad nauseam so I do not think I should do it again unless you want to.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But if you are a 17-year-old thinking about leaving school, starting an apprenticeship where you are paid \$300 or \$400 a week for the first however many years, the thought that you would sign on to a lifetime of debt, like happens with HECS, is going to discourage people rather than encourage people. Do you recognise the problem?

Dr GEOFF LEE: At the moment, if you are a 17-year-old thinking of going into an apprenticeship, it is fee-free.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What if you are looking to go and sign on to early childhood education and a career where you are going to be earning \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 a year at best? Why will you not abolish fees rather than put those students into a lifetime of debt?

Dr GEOFF LEE: You will be happy to know that we have offered 70,000 fee-free traineeships. It started on 1 January this year. They will get those free.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Certificate IV is not going to be covered by any of those arrangements. Why will you not just abolish fees? If you really want to encourage people to go to TAFE do the sensible thing—do not put people in a lifetime of debt. Why will you not just abolish fees?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Nobody is wanting to put anyone in a lifetime of debt.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is your policy.

Dr GEOFF LEE: What we want to do is encourage people to take up apprenticeships and take up traineeships. That is why we have a \$2.3 billion budget to spend on skills and training in New South Wales. That is why TAFE has a \$1.85 billion budget—that is, a 3.1 per cent increase. We are clearly funding a whole range of initiatives—there are scholarships, there are reduced fees, there is fee-free, there is a whole range of things and, if you like, we can go through them.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question was about why you are proposing to saddle people with a lifetime of debt.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I reject your premise to say that you are saddling people with a lifetime of debt.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, you are.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I reject your premise.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand that. Do you agree that part of what you should be doing with Smart and Skilled, as the Minister, is to be supporting and promoting TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, we do that already.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So why is it when you do a search for a course on Smart and Skilled—and the example I will give you now is a search for early childhood education and care—you go on Smart and Skilled, a government-funded website, and you search for courses under early childhood education and care, TAFE does not appear until the seventh or eighth screen search because it is organised alphabetically. You have the Aardvark community college coming up first—Ace Community College is actually the first—so when you put in a search on Smart and Skilled why do you not put TAFE first? You could change that tomorrow.

The CHAIR: Take off the "T".

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: A legislative change to AAA TAFE.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I make just a couple of comments about that?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just fix it.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I just make a comment? There is a distinction between the Training Services NSW website and TAFE—the two are totally different organisations. Yes, I happen to be the Minister for both, but the presumption is that we could say to Training Services NSW: "Give them the competitive advantage by sticking them at the top of the list". It does not work that way. Training Services NSW has a different mandate than TAFE. TAFE is in the fortunate position that it gets 80 per cent of allocated money—that is, \$1.85 billion out of the \$2.3 billion for Training Services NSW. The second point I would like to make to you is that we do have a competitive marketplace and we are actually agnostic in where people should train. Yes, I would love people to train at TAFE, but if it is more convenient to train in their local community and TAFE does not offer a presence there, let them do it, or if they choose to go down the road to something that is not TAFE.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, this is a policy choice you are making to simply place TAFE with all of the other for-profit and non-profit providers. You are the Minister responsible for both aspects of government. You could tomorrow direct Smart and Skilled to promote TAFE and put TAFE at the top of the list. That would be the best result for TAFE, do you not agree?

The CHAIR: What is the question?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that TAFE does really well, I think it does 90 per cent of the apprentices training, from memory. And can I say that it competes very much; it is a competitive marketplace.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, this is a zero-cost positive outcome for TAFE and you are refusing to commit to it. Do you understand how frustrated TAFE teachers across the State will be when they see you are refusing to commit to even this zero-cost positive benefit for TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We have to be careful that—it is a competitive marketplace—we are agnostic in where people want to train. Of course we want to see people train at TAFE.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, for Aardvark community college—

The CHAIR: Time has expired, Mr Shoebridge. The Minister will finish.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am very happy to promote TAFE, as I am very happy to promote the choice of providers that suits the student. We are putting the student at the centre of the decision, not a TAFE or Aardvark registered training organisation. We are actually letting the student decide which organisation suits the student best to train at. I would welcome people to choose TAFE; in any case it provides the majority of the apprenticeships—90 per cent of those apprenticeships. We are very proud of TAFE.

The CHAIR: When HECS was introduced at the Commonwealth level for the universities it was part of a very specific policy goal to expand the system—some might say it expanded too far. Is that the similar thinking you have got at policy level in New South Wales? It is not a cost-recovery mechanism; it would be to expand the system.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Professor Chapman, who was the original inventor of the HECS system some 25 years ago—

The CHAIR: Thirty-five.

Dr GEOFF LEE: It is renowned as one of the best systems to provide insurance for students so that they can get an education. I think his words were it provides an insurance policy for students to actually allow them to undertake further studies and defer those costs when they are in a position to repay those costs to the government.

The CHAIR: And what sort of expansion would you have in mind?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We are still looking at the modelling for that. What I would like to see personally—it is not a Government position because obviously it is a Government decision—I personally would like to see no barriers put in place for students to actually enrol in the VET career of their choice.

The CHAIR: So the Higher Education Contribution Scheme [HECS] would apply not just for TAFE students but also provider costs. It would be ownership agnostic across the whole sector.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The CHAIR: What is the mechanism for expanding the private providers? Is it just increasing the overall pool or would TAFE have some sort of guarantee that the money raised by HECS out of TAFE goes back directly into TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We have not worked it out, but I would expect—if you are asking me the question on the fly, which is probably not a good way to do it—we are still working through the details.

The CHAIR: Okay, but probably to expand the overall pool and still have a competitive market, the way it is structured.

Dr GEOFF LEE: A hundred per cent. I think the money should go back to TAFE.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You would hope so.

The CHAIR: Is Dr Chapman involved?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes—Professor Chapman.

The CHAIR: Yes. He is very good. Professor Chapman did an outstanding job at the Commonwealth level and has been a lifelong advocate for extending HECS-like principles to many other parts of the public sector. He is part of your process here.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Actively.

The CHAIR: Is he informing the Gonski-Shergold review as well, or is that just worked directly with your office?

Dr GEOFF LEE: He is working with our office and, as I said, we are very proud to say that we are leading the charge with all the States at Skills COAG to look at how we have a national approach to a HECS-style system that looks at removing the barriers for those students that are pushed into higher education university when they clearly should go to a VET system.

The CHAIR: Right. Is it possible to get a national TAFE HECS system in place? Are other States as committed as New South Wales?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, that is one of the—well, I cannot speak for the other States, I should say. I cannot speak but in all discussions at skills COAG there is no-one who says that it is a bad idea.

The CHAIR: Right. So the objective then, if students move from State to State, they would carry their financial obligations and it rolls over into a seamless HECS obligation in VET education.

Dr GEOFF LEE: One would think so. That architecture has not been—

The CHAIR: That is the broad objective?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The CHAIR: And Professor Chapman is working with other States as well to try to coordinate all that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Well, we are leading the charge on that in terms of working with Mr Chapman about doing those things.

The CHAIR: When would you hope that nationally coordinated structures might be in place?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I do not have an answer for you. We will present at COAG about our findings in due course. I would imagine that is within six months and then there are the deliberations.

The CHAIR: So that is the COAG in the second half of this year?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes. We have a COAG soon in Perth. The findings will not be ready but I would imagine the findings will be ready for the next one in four months. But you know how the Feds work; you have been in the Feds. They tend to work a lot slower than us good State people.

The CHAIR: Yes. I have noticed that.

Dr GEOFF LEE: That was not a swipe at my Federal colleagues.

The CHAIR: No, of course not.

Dr GEOFF LEE: It is just an observation.

The CHAIR: So this is work now at the heads-of-government level to get this done.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you. With regard to the introduction—another speedy initiative in New South Wales—of outcome-based budgeting. We have seen it in schools. Is there early work undertaken for TAFE and VET as to introducing a similar relationship with Treasury?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, there is.

The CHAIR: What does that involve so far?

Dr GEOFF LEE: If you just give me a second, I will just confer.

The CHAIR: I am happy to go to Mr Scott, who I am sure has been involved with the detail.

Mr SCOTT: The same process has continued, as we have discussed previously with schools—so initial discussions with central agencies around outcome measures for schools, and then also identifying what are the outcome measures for success for the higher education and vocational education sectors and also the early childhood sectors. Those conversations are continuing with central agencies. So it is an attempt to identify what would be the hallmarks of a success outcomes system. I expect that in due course Treasury will publicly release a version of those outcome measures but they are all still subject to those discussions taking place.

The CHAIR: And you are hoping to have this in place by next year's budget?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. I think of the eight clusters in New South Wales, Education is furthest ahead. You have done your review into the school-based outcome measures so now the discussions are continuing on the other parts of the cluster. I think then conversations will take place with other clusters and the Expenditure Review Committee as well and then there will be a presentation across government. But we would expect this to be in place to shape budget decision-making processes over the next financial year.

The CHAIR: The performance measures, will they be generic across private and public provision in the sector?

Mr SCOTT: I would expect—and again this is subject still to final ratification—they are outcome measures for the system as a whole. So I think the kinds of things we are looking at are pathways for students to complete schooling and then move into post-compulsory training or higher education and then what are the pathways of provision that go forward from there.

The CHAIR: Minister, the Government has an overall policy on outcome-based budgeting: that the performance targets and measures should be identifiable and published at the point of service delivery. Would you recognise that for an individual TAFE college and an individual private provider that is where the point of service delivery lies?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The CHAIR: So you would be supporting the idea of publishing these performance measures under outcome-based budgeting for each TAFE college and each private provider in New South Wales?

Dr GEOFF LEE: We are working towards looking at an open dashboard at the moment in terms of how we actually publish and release that information in terms of those key metrics.

Mr SCOTT: And I would simply add, Chair, that I think there will some government-wide decisions made on what are high-level reporting and then, in a sense, a cascading down that you could expect. But, again, the policies of that for Education, Health, Transport and others are all being worked out as part of the broad outcomes-based policy.

The CHAIR: We wish you well. I do not think the Committee wants to repeat an inquiry in this area in TAFE. We had our fill of outcomes-based budgeting with schools, which I think went quite well, and we will be watching, though, what happens on TAFE and, I am sure, asking questions here as it evolves through the estimates process. Minister, how many school-based apprenticeships and traineeships [SBATs] do we have in New South Wales?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will ask my colleagues but it is 2,500 thousand every year that we expect—around that.

The CHAIR: Right. So for 600 high schools, only four per school.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Exactly.

The CHAIR: It is a weak outcome, isn't it.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I think so, yes, absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So what are you doing?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You have had nine years.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that I think that is one of the areas in which we should do better. Did I hear a little bird?

The CHAIR: No.

The Hon. WES FANG: Was that a question?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No. It is a comment: nine years.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Sorry. I heard school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

The CHAIR: Please do not interrupt.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sorry, Chair. I do not mean to interrupt.

The CHAIR: We know that they have been in. If you are an Opposition, I would frame it that they are in their tenth year of government, but I am only a consultant to you.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I was actually wrong with our estimate—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Nine or 10 years—it is still a terrible outcome.

The CHAIR: No, no. I miss those days in opposition. They were so fruitful. But Minister—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are in permanent opposition. Come on. It is awful.

The CHAIR: Maybe you are too.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that I was a little bit off. We have 2,475 enrolments in the SBATs program in 2020. Before you pre-empt the next thing—it is bad to pre-empt—but I think we can do a lot better.

The CHAIR: By what dimension? That is what I am getting at.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Queensland—

The CHAIR: I know Queensland is over 10,000. Is that our objective for New South Wales—to have 10,000?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Look, I think the more that we can have, the better. We are the largest State; we should have the most. I think we need to refocus on our SBATs and encourage young people in year 10 to actually choose to decide about that option. When we were up in Queensland talking to the Queensland TAFE, in reality, their system has a 20-year head start. Their schools are better prepared for SBATs and that is why we are very proud of the pilot program that we are doing at the moment with 24 schools, looking at how we can encourage young people to make the right decisions in choosing a VET career or a university career.

We have got 14 schools in the south-west area. We have nine in the northern regions. We are really looking at how we can inform students of their options starting in year 7 and going through years 7, 8, 9 and 10 so they make their decision. We are looking at how we can better inform parents to make those decisions in concert with their children; better career advice to say the options of VET; we are looking at how to influence principals; and we are also looking at how that school sits within its industry framework where the jobs are.

The CHAIR: Can I just quickly ask: Is it available for any of the Gonski school funding, as there is quite a lot of money out there, to be used for this purpose?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that I have not got an answer back to you on that but I am more than happy to take on notice that question.

The CHAIR: Mr Scott, though, is jumping in.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. Thanks, Chair. I think we would say on the SBATs that, from the work that we have done, they are the most successful vocational education that is offering. We can map students through from SBATs to doing similar length vocational education post schooling and into the workforce, and we think our numbers are too low. Part of the work we are doing now is to identify what are the impediments and roadblocks that take place almost operationally for there being more, and part of that I think goes to the money question. Schools can use, of course, their Gonski funding money to broadly support vocational education provision in schools but one of the things that we are looking at is the flow of money in a sense out of the schools system into the TAFE system that happens with SBATs. We want to ensure that there are no financial disincentives that would be inappropriate that would stop schools being strongly supported with SBATs, so we are reviewing that at the moment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to give you the opportunity in this forum to rule out the privatisation of TAFE. Will you rule that out?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There will be no privatisation of TAFE.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That means you will not sell it off, you will not sell off campuses, you will not—

Dr GEOFF LEE: We are not privatising TAFE. I think that has been very clear. We are committed to TAFE as a comprehensive public provider of skills and training in New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Some Ministers in your Government have been a little tricky in recent days with their wording of these—

Dr GEOFF LEE: I am being very clear. You might ask those people.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They have said, "I've got no plans," and subsequently have then decided to sell off or begin the process of selling off WestConnex. So these are not weasel words; there will be no privatisation of TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No. We are committed to TAFE as the comprehensive public provider of skills and training in New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I want to come back to the questions that the Chair was asking you about the work you are doing on a HECS-style system for fees. Is that modelling being done on existing fee amounts or will that be done on full-fee places?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will check. I will have to get back to you on the detail because I want to give you the right answer. So if I can take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Just to be clear, we are asking about whether you are modelling or whether you are ruling out full fees for domestic students in TAFE.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I think the question you asked me was what is the modelling done on because there are various components of the fees—whether it is Smart and Skilled, whether that is a fee component of this student that the government actually subsidises or the fee component of the student. So I want to get the right answer for you, that is all. I am not trying to be tricky or anything. I just want to give you the right answer.

Mr SCOTT: I think Professor Chapman is simply responding to the question, "How would a HECS-style system operate in the vocational education sector?" recognising, as the Chair has identified, and I appreciate Ms Sharpe raised the question earlier as to what the evidence base is. But there is certainly a perception of money up-front being a disincentive for vocational education and TAFE students in a way that the HECS system mitigates against by its very structure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand that, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: It is quite a broad remit for Professor Chapman to look at.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think we are all unified in our respect for Professor Chapman and the incredible work that he has done but I just want to be really clear about the work that you are undertaking. Let me rephrase my question so you are very clear, Minister. Are you asking Professor Chapman or anyone else to undertake modelling on the basis of full fees for domestic students or are you looking at the existing fee structures? And you can take that on notice.

Dr GEOFF LEE: As I said, I will take it on notice. I just want to give you—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and I want to be really clear about what it is that you are planning to do.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely. Very exciting, especially the review, Gonski-Shergold.

The CHAIR: Yes, I think we can be assured that Professor Chapman has equity front of mind. That is the whole purpose of what he has done over a long period, including for a Federal Labor government.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have no doubts that Professor Chapman has equity at the front of his mind. I want to make sure that the Minister has got that there as well.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I can guarantee you that I have equity, and that is why I support the HECS-style system so that we do not put in disincentives.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You do realise a HECS system would actually load up particularly female workers in the aged care, enrolled nursing and childcare sectors with debts that they currently do not have.

Dr GEOFF LEE: That is what the modelling is looking at and they are decisions. We want to support all our childcare workers, whether you are female—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: For some of the lowest paid workers, Minister, the idea of an income contingent loan—I am glad to hear you say that you are talking about equity but those issues must be considered, otherwise you are simply loading up mostly female workers with debts that they currently do not have.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Absolutely. We want to make it equitable right across the genders.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, you have a new managing director. Congratulations.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes. Welcome, Mr Faurby.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Congratulations, Mr Faurby. I knew Mr Faurby when he was privatising ferries.

The CHAIR: That is right, McFerryface.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Is that going to be the headline? I think you are in the wrong committee. I think that is the committee investigation next door.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not sure that was his call. I think that was completely on Minister Constance.

The CHAIR: There are no ferries in western Sydney. That is the only thing I know about them.

Dr GEOFF LEE: There are in Parramatta.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is great. Thanks.

The CHAIR: We do not all do as well as Parramatta, that is the reality.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Well, that is true.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, Mr Faurby—

The CHAIR: Parramatta has got everything.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Come on.

The CHAIR: You can get a ferry to the museum.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Terrific, thanks. Minister, Mr Faurby is earning significantly more than was structured in relation to what the managing director previously got. That is correct, is it not?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: And Mr Faurby's salary is around \$575,000, is that correct?

Dr GEOFF LEE: From my understanding it is on the public record.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: More than the Premier's and looks possibly even more than Mr Scott's.

Mr SCOTT: I could not possibly comment.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not asking you to comment, Mr Scott.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I did not actually know you were concerned. It is on the public record.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am asking Minister Lee.

Mr SCOTT: All this is on the public record.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, I know. I am just confirming that the Minister is aware of all that.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes. It is on the public record.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Scott just gave him the answer, so that is great. Minister, were you the one who requested the additional funding for salary for Mr Faurby?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I advise the Committee here today that the education cluster led an extensive search to find the right replacement for the former managing director, Dr Caralee McLiesh, who left to take up a position with the New Zealand Treasury. It is great that Steffen Faurby was selected on merit based upon a worldwide

search. I will ask Mr Scott, who oversaw the process of candidate selection and the whole process, to let you know what happened.

Mr SCOTT: As the Minister said, we searched extensively. We conducted a review panel with independent members as well. Recommendation came from the review panel to government. A review of the remuneration for the position was also made as part of that context. A determination was made by the remuneration tribunal. The advice that Mr Faurby be supported as the appointment went to Cabinet, then to Executive Council and his appointment was made. That is why there is a remuneration tribunal—to make such independent assessments. They made an assessment of the role and Mr Faurby was then appointed.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What role did the Premier have in relation to the recruitment of Mr Faurby?

Mr SCOTT: I can tell you that I led the recruitment work for Mr Faurby's position in my position as the secretary of the cluster. I had no discussions with the Premier on the recruitment of Mr Faurby. Mr Faurby was an—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, did the Premier have a discussion with you?

Mr SCOTT: I am sorry. We are in the process—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Yes. This is very important. Mr Scott really should finish his answer.

Mr SCOTT: I ran the process for Mr Faurby, then he was the clear recommendation of the recruitment panel. The advice went to the Minister. The Minister then took the paper for Mr Faurby's appointment forward under the usual government processes.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I just make a comment?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, did you request the additional pay for Mr Faurby?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No.

Mr SCOTT: I put the process through.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So that was in your recommendation, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: No. The recommendation was to have the position assessed and reviewed. The remuneration tribunal does that work and it was done as part of the context of filling the appointment.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I should recognise Kerry Penton too, who was the acting manager and who did a fantastic job between Caralee McLiesh and—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Tough gig.

Dr GEOFF LEE: A tough gig, absolutely, and I just want to recognise that.

Ms PENTON: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, what discussions did you have with the Premier in relation to Mr Faurby's appointment?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I have discussions with the Premier all the time. We discuss many different things and those conversations—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Did you discuss Mr Faurby?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Those discussions are confidential and private. I am certainly not going to sit here and—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you are not going to tell us, I am not asking you for the content of them. I am asking whether you had discussions with the Premier about Mr Faurby.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Certainly those discussions are private and confidential and I am not going to sit here and talk about my discussion with—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So you are not going to tell us whether you did or whether you did not.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No. As I said, and for the third time, my discussions with the Premier are confidential and private. I am more than happy to keep those confidential, as one would expect.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, the appearance to the public is you have asked the bureaucracy to complete a worldwide search but it is a bit of a coincidence that someone who is very well known to the Premier then happens to pop up as the person and you are refusing to say whether the Premier has even—

The Hon. WES FANG: Is there a question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Whether the Premier—

The CHAIR: We need to come to the question and the question cannot be about coincidences. We have to deal with facts here.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did the Premier initiate conversations with you? Did you initiate conversations with the Premier? Was this a suggestion that came from the Premier? That is what the people of New South Wales want to know.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Certainly to fulfil the position of managing director after Caralee McLeish left, there was a need to recruit a new managing director full time. That was led by Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: Of course there were discussions within government, with the Public Service Commission and the head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, about the internal candidates as well as we looked externally. I can say that we interviewed a number of internal candidates. We interviewed external candidates as well. We had quite a long list of candidates that were prepared by the consultants we engaged to do this work. I would simply say that Mr Faurby's reputation as an outstanding leader in the public service, as someone who can deliver significant change in complex environments and work closely with staff to deliver that, was well acknowledged through this search program. But it was a fairly standard search for a chief executive or a senior executive that has been run many times before.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you. It is correct to say that Mr Faurby's previous roles were in the privatisation of ferries. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: Let me tell you how we—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is a yes or no answer. I am not—

Mr SCOTT: No, I would—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: We can ask Mr Faurby. He would obviously know.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: No, there is no point of order. If the question is about Mr Faurby's previous role, the direct way of getting an answer is to ask Mr Faurby.

Mr SCOTT: His previous roles were running the ferry system and the bus system here—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Both during periods which were prior—

Mr SCOTT: —which were big—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! The witness will answer the question.

Mr SCOTT: —at a time of significant change, big, complex organisations in the public sector. He also has extensive experience in the private sector. His ability to bring about substantial change with the expertise he brought, from private sector experience and public sector experience, meant that he was a very strong candidate for this role. That was the strong view of the selection panel.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure, thank you. I might just ask Mr Faurby. Mr Faurby, in your previous roles in ferries, you oversaw the privatisation of what was called by the Government franchising the ferries. Is that correct?

Mr FAURBY: It is correct that my employment with the ferries was happening subsequent to the Government having made the decision to franchise the ferries. I had absolutely nothing to do with that decision. I was only brought in—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not suggesting that you did.

Mr FAURBY: —at the time when that decision was made. My focus there, as well as my focus in the later role with State transit, as well as my focus with TAFE, is to run it as well as possible under the guidelines and the policies of the Government.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Just to confirm that your role with the State Transit Authority was also during a period where there has been further privatisation of the bus fleet.

Mr FAURBY: That is correct, further franchising.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Faurby, did the Premier ask you to apply for the job?

Mr FAURBY: She did not, no.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Faurby, your LinkedIn profile suggests that you still have a boutique consulting firm. Is that correct?

Mr FAURBY: It is a registered firm, which is dormant and has no activity whatsoever.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is not operating?

Mr FAURBY: Not at all and has not been for three or four years.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You might want to update your LinkedIn.

The Hon. WES FANG: We have got to that level, have we?

The CHAIR: Let us stick to the questions.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is actually a serious matter.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know, but you are going through someone's LinkedIn profile.

The CHAIR: Order! Let us stick to the questions, please.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It is a public document. It would be highly unusual for someone who is paid more than the Premier—

The Hon. WES FANG: How is your MySpace page?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Wes, stop running interference.

The CHAIR: This is not helpful.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: They are doing quite fine without your assistance. Mr Faurby, in relation to your KPIs with this new job as a change management agent, are you expected to reduce staff expenditure?

Mr FAURBY: We have, like any other organisation, a budget to deliver and live within. It is a big part of our responsibilities, and certainly mine, to make sure that we do so. There is also a number of other obligations and focus areas that we have, most importantly, of course, to provide and be the world-class public provider of vocational training. Our focus is to do so to the greatest possible satisfaction for both students and industry.

Dr GEOFF LEE: The gold standard in VET education, I describe it as.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is great. You have a big job to do, given that there are 175,000 fewer students than there were in 2011, do you not agree?

Mr FAURBY: It is a very, very important job, which I am certainly very excited to have been given. I am very, very pleased with having gotten that opportunity to work with the TAFE.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Faurby, you have a very tough job. Have you had a look at the Boston Consulting Group's very expensive piece of consulting done for the Government about VET competitiveness and the role of TAFE?

Mr FAURBY: I have had access to a number of reports that have been commissioned and prepared before I joined the organisation. I am not exactly sure whether the particular one you refer to is one that I have had a look at.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will part of your KPIs be to make further reductions in operating costs of TAFE?

Mr FAURBY: It is not a KPI in itself, but what I said before is that we certainly have an obligation to make sure that we operate within the budget that we have been allocated by government. That in itself, of course, will require us to look at our expenditures at all levels, not just staffing expenditures but overheads, maintenance of facilities and equipment and all those sorts of things, to make sure that we indeed stay within the funding envelope that we have been given by government.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Are you able to tell me what is your efficiency dividend that you have to meet by the end of July?

Mr FAURBY: I am now in a position to do that. As you would be aware, the efficiency dividend does not apply to teaching or other teaching services in the Education cluster.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Does that include casual teaching? How does that work?

Mr SCOTT: I can get you a brief. Basically, we look at the frontline provision of services that exist—so the teaching services—and the costs allocated to that are exempt. In the cluster, the focus comes more to play on back-office support and the like. For the 2019-20 TAFE budget of \$1.8 billion, the efficiency dividend is \$8.4 million, because it only applies to the percentage of back-office operations.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: With the jobs that were gotten rid of before Christmas, will that meet that target? Does that cover the target or are there more savings to be found?

Mr SCOTT: We would have to take that on notice. But, in a way—and the Minister has spoken of this often—yes, there is a focus in TAFE, there is a focus broadly in Education, to protect and support frontline services and to make sure that the back-office operations are operating as efficiently and effectively as possible. That is the focus of the efficiency savings.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: The government has stipulated that rural and regional jobs are not to go under the efficiency dividend. Does that mean that admin jobs in TAFEs in rural and regional areas have been exempt from savings as well?

Mr SCOTT: There is not a parsing, in my understanding of the State Government policy, in those terms between front line and back office that is applying to the geographical setting.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, correct, but overlaid over the top of that is a commitment around no net loss in rural or regional.

Mr SCOTT: As I understand, that overrides the efficiency operation.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So non-teaching jobs attached to TAFEs in regional areas have not been touched as a result of the efficiency saving?

Mr SCOTT: That is correct.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You are certain about that?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Given that the bulk of TAFE, as you rightly described, is front line, is there an expectation that there will be further cuts required to be found for 2020-21 in relation to the TAFE budget?

Mr SCOTT: That is a matter that is part of the budget processes, which are underway now. We cannot speculate on what the budget will hold for any part of government.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, there has been public reporting on this, though, that there is an expectation that there is going to be. I think every secretary, like yourself, is making some plans for that.

Mr SCOTT: I would suggest that there has been public speculation, but we will wait for the budget to know what is in the budget.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Faurby, in terms of your KPIs, is there some commitment around how many extra students you are going to have into TAFE over the period of your contract?

Mr FAURBY: There are no such formal KPIs but it is certainly a desire and aspiration that I lead an organisation that performs to such standards that it attracts further students, so we will certainly see that as something that is important to do.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: But you do not have a formal target in terms of—I am really trying to address how you are addressing the gap, that we have 125,000 fewer enrolments over the time that this Government has been in power?

Mr FAURBY: To answer your question, Ms Sharpe, there is no formal KPI on that basis but we are, through the various initiatives that government has rolled out, certainly using those as leverage. So the 100,000 fee-free TAFE and VET courses over the next four years, we have scholarships, we have traineeships, we have arrangements in place to attract further teaching staff, so the 525 training and assessment scholarships, and lots of initiatives that will attract further attention but also provide better capacity for TAFE to attract more students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Faurby, we might come back to that this afternoon. We have limited time left with the Minister. I want to come back to the question about privatisation. You were fairly emphatic earlier. Does that mean that you will rule out franchising TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And that means that you will guarantee that courses will continue to be delivered on TAFE campuses by TAFE?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, if the question is: Will TAFE teachers teach TAFE courses on TAFE campuses? Absolutely they will.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, my question was, will the courses that are offered on TAFE campuses continue to be TAFE courses?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Well, if a not-for-profit community college wants to come and teach on a campus and we have a vacancy on that campus, I will consider that proposal and recommendations from TAFE about whether that is appropriate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But, Minister, that is simply privatisation by stealth. That is purely contracting out—

Dr GEOFF LEE: Have you ever been to a community college?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am asking the questions here and you will be answering them.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! I am chairing the meeting. Ms Houssos, allow the Minister—

The Hon. WES FANG: Actually, Chair, I have a different point of order.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Is it in the standing orders? This will be good.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes. Chair, the Hon. Courtney Houssos is well aware that she is responsive to—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not have a point of order.

The Hon. WES FANG: —the motion that was moved in the House—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What is the standing order?

The Hon. WES FANG: —with regard to procedural fairness.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You should have written this down beforehand.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You need to explain what that means, please.

The Hon. WES FANG: The Hon. Courtney Houssos should speak to the Minister with a level of respect. I would ask her to withdraw her previous comment and ask questions in a decent and proper manner.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am not going to be directed by the Hon. Wes Fang about how to construct my questions. I will construct my questions as I see fit.

The Hon. WES FANG: You are responsive to procedural fairness—

The CHAIR: We have made the point repeatedly that there should be fewer interruptions of the Minister.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You do not even know what you are saying.

The CHAIR: With only eight minutes left of the Minister's time, Opposition members should stick to the questions.

Dr GEOFF LEE: If I can help you—and I apologise if I was trying to ask you a question—I think TAFEs are public assets. They are owned by the taxpayers in New South Wales, just like schools. If you think about it from the schools perspective, when schools are not in session, when they are not in term, they often lease out their hall to the local dance school or their oval—if they have one—to a sporting organisation to run extracurricular activities. We must utilise our assets for the benefit of the whole community.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So, Minister, you are prepared to limit this to not-for-profits only?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I did not say that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, exactly. Regional—

The CHAIR: Order! The Minister will answer the question.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Ms Sharpe, if you want to answer my question, that is fine. You just keep answering them as far as you go. I am happy with that.

The CHAIR: Okay. Next question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Are RTOs going to be given access to TAFEs?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Well, can I say that community colleges are RTOs, so if they come—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not talking about community colleges. I am talking about all RTOs.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Well, we will take it on a case-by-case basis if it makes sense for the community.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Great, excellent, privatisation by stealth. Thanks, Minister.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No—

The CHAIR: No, there must be a question.

The Hon. WES FANG: Was that a question, Ms Houssos?

The CHAIR: Order! There must be a question please. Next question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, do you accept the concerns that this sort of creeping non-TAFE utilisation of TAFE campuses is a pathway to the privatisation of TAFE? Do you accept that there are concerns about that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: It may be in some people's minds, but let me assure you that is certainly not the intention. The question I was asked was about TAFE assets, which are community assets owned by the taxpayers in New South Wales. If we can benefit the taxpayers in New South Wales, just like schools open up to the local dance school, I think it is a great idea. We do not teach all 52 weeks of the year, so when there is availability why not actually utilise them better? I cannot see a problem with that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, on one hand you say you are not willing to help out TAFE and give them special treatment under Smart and Skilled because you want to have market neutrality but, on the other hand, you are now saying to TAFE, "You have to allow your competitors onto campus. You have to allow your competitors onto your premises." So it is one rule for the private and non-TAFE players and it is a different rule for TAFE. Do you see how inconsistent that is?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, Mr Shoebridge, you are absolutely wrong. That is not what I was saying. If I gave that impression, I am sorry, but you are absolutely wrong on that to say that we are opening up the market to our competitors in the space.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, they are their competitors.

Dr GEOFF LEE: It is completely wrong. Your assertion is completely wrong—not a little bit wrong, completely wrong.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are going to allow other VET providers apart from TAFE to use TAFE facilities. You are inviting their competitors onto their campus. That is the exact opposite of market neutrality.

The CHAIR: Is there a question? It is not a debate. There must be a question please.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Your proposed reforms, Minister, are actually prejudicing TAFE. Do you accept that?

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, I do not. As I said to you, if there is a compelling case we will get advice from TAFE about what is in the best interests of TAFE, what is in the best interests of the community and look at those. I am just saying that we want to get the best use out of taxpayers' assets, just like schools try to get the best use out of assets. It is not about privatisation. We are committed to TAFE remaining the comprehensive public provider of skills and training and I will continue to give that commitment. I think to make any other assertion is clearly wrong and misleading.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, will individual TAFE campuses have a veto power to say they will not be allowing RTOs or other non-TAFE VET providers onto their campus? Would you give them that veto power?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Can I say that we will work with TAFE and its managing director and the staff at TAFE to make it in the best interests of TAFE, the community and what we need to do to get best value for the taxpayers and empower the community.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware of any non-TAFE providers that have opened up their campuses to TAFE? Are you going to make that a requirement?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Sorry?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware of any non-TAFE VET providers that have opened up their facilities or campuses to TAFE? Are you going to make it go both ways? Are you going to require non-TAFE providers to open up their campuses?

Dr GEOFF LEE: There is no requirement—there is no fixed rule in that. I am saying we are looking at a case-by-case basis. It is a wrong assertion. We do not control those non-TAFE providers. What I am saying is that we should have flexibility and get the best value for the community and the taxpayers of New South Wales. I think they deserve to have that ability to get some value for their money and the best value that we can possibly drive. I am sure you will agree that we want to give good value for the taxpayers and actually deliver VET as the gold standard in VET education, which will be TAFE.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I do not agree that your shackling of TAFE like this and providing the restrictions and the anti-competitive provisions against TAFE is in the best interests of VET. I disagree, if you ask me. What you are doing is not in the interests of—

The CHAIR: What is the question?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It was not a question to you, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, at the last round of estimates there was some discussion about getting some data involving the casualisation of the higher education sector. I think that was actually through you to Mr Scott. You may recall that discussion about the Victorian Government getting casualisation data and employment data for its university sector. Do you remember that, Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: Vaguely, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You said, "I am happy to say that our higher education team will look at what has taken place in Victoria." What did your higher education team find?

Mr SCOTT: Let me take that on notice and see if I can come back to you on that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I asked you questions earlier about the casualisation of the TAFE sector. Have you been in any discussions with universities in this State about what they are doing for their casual staff?

Dr GEOFF LEE: In terms of—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In terms of them having no work, no pay, if their courses are not run because of the coronavirus?

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes. Quite often I speak to the vice-chancellors, the vice-chancellors committee. Early on in the COVID-19 outbreak, we were in discussions and have since been in discussions about preparedness of different scenarios, different impacts upon universities. Clearly there will be impacts upon universities.

It happened, in fact, at the worst possible time to universities, as students were returning from overseas to universities. It could not have been a worse time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I accept it is a bad time but have you had discussions specifically about protecting the casual workforce so as they do not again suffer the no work, no pay—

Dr GEOFF LEE: Clearly there are implications that reduced numbers will have on universities. No-one can doubt that but can I say that universities are autonomous institutions. They are governed by their own governing boards. They have risk mitigation strategies in place. They are in constant discussion with Dan Tehan, looking at how they are managing their processes. Clearly the discussions will be ongoing and we will assist them in any way that we can.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It being 11.30 a.m., your time has expired. I thank you for your participation. You must have answered over 40 questions, fulfilling the requirements and public obligations of estimates. We appreciate your time here. To clarify, we will have a 10-minute break, after which, at 11.40 a.m. to 12.40 p.m., we will have questions of officials, then an hour's lunch break and we will ultimately go through until 4.20 p.m. I thank all the witnesses and I thank the Minister, in particular, who will be leaving us. We will see the officials after the 10-minute break.

(The Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: A quorum being present, I will call the meeting to order. We will go to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Faurby, what is the current status of the flammable cladding on Ultimo TAFE?

Mr FAURBY: Certainly. This is in regard to the buildings in Ultimo, I believe. There was a low amount of combustible material found in the product used in both buildings and they were deemed by the fire engineers to be at low risk. We are complying with the council's recommendations that were made in the report and removal is due for completion by July of this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: By July?

Mr FAURBY: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So it is underway at the moment?

Mr FAURBY: It well and truly is, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you advising students in the meantime?

Mr FAURBY: I am not aware whether there is any ongoing advice being provided.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Penton, are you aware of what advice is given to students?

Ms PENTON: When the review was undertaken the advice was taken from that review from the experts. When we determined the schedule for the work, subject to their advice, we did and continue to put in place several safeguards to ensure the safety of all of our staff and students and others who come onto the site. Our staff are aware of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What are those arrangements?

Ms PENTON: The arrangements that have been put in place for that particular site are—as with all of our sites, all of our campuses and buildings have no smoking, for obvious reasons—there are to be no barbecues or gas heaters, particularly on level 7 of that particular building, as well. We are undertaking regular maintenance, particularly of the plant equipment on level 7, which is the nearest to the area that you are speaking of. We also have additional provisions for fire equipment and those sorts of things. So it is undertaken on a regular basis.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If there is anything else? You can provide that on notice. That would be helpful.

Ms PENTON: Yes, we can provide that detail on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Particularly on whether there is advice given to students when they enrol, when they go into classrooms—what is the advice? How is it communicated when it is a new school year?

Ms PENTON: We have been managing the issue for some time but I will take the question on notice to get the specific detail for you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Faurby, this is probably directed to you: Do you have a list of proposed divestments for TAFE at the moment?

Mr FAURBY: I do not, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There was previously a list of proposed divestments, which included three sites in the Hunter Institute—well, no longer institute, so this is obviously a list that has been around for quite some time. Are there any plans or have you progressed the sale of Glendale TAFE?

Mr FAURBY: No, there are no current plans for any divestments at present. We have a 20-year infrastructure strategy being developed as we speak with an expectation to have that work done by the end of this calendar year. Following the finalisation of that report, we will have recommendations that would also relate to divestments. At this point in time there are no plans to divest any of the campuses that sit under TAFE NSW.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, when will that report be finalised?

Mr FAURBY: I believe it will be finalised by the end of this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: By the end of this year you will have an infrastructure plan that will say where you are planning on providing them in the future and if there is any surplus left?

Mr FAURBY: Yes, I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of the plan. Obviously, we should see what that plan recommends. Once we have that, we will certainly be happy to come back and talk about it.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My understanding is that departments have to identify parcels of land, which are then to be handed over to the land and property authorities. Is that correct?

Mr FAURBY: I am not aware of that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Scott may know this.

Mr SCOTT: Speaking broadly, yes, there is an asset sale for reinvestment of surplus property to the Government. That is broadly a strategy that has been underway and documented previously.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How does this divestment plan for TAFE fit with that? Is this additional or are there already ones in the—

Mr SCOTT: No, I think it is quite a separate process. As we have already heard from the Minister today, TAFE operates over 130 different campuses at the moment. What you can see in the modelling—and we talked about this last week at the school session, even in schools—200,000 extra students are coming into the system over the next two decades. Part of the work that TAFE is doing now is looking closely at the current footprint of colleges, looking at what the planning projections indicate where student growth will be—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: But isn't the problem that you are 175,000 students down?

Mr SCOTT: No, I heard the comment before the break. That, frankly, I think is quite a separate issue. The question that TAFE needs to look at, as any leading public sector institution would need to look at, is what the are models that exist for population, where that population is going to be, where the current capital asset base is, what the best informed assessments would be that could be made on student movement population movement and where investments need to be made now. Big investments currently being made at Meadowbank, recognising the growth that exists there—big joint development with schools and TAFE there, and planning around the aerotropolis and the extra million people who could go into that part of south-western Sydney. That is what this 20-year infrastructure strategy is all about.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So it is about new locations. But surely within a constrained budget environment that also looks at actually getting rid of some assets?

Mr SCOTT: It will look at the movement of students, the current provision and thoughts on what that student movement means to the provision of the asset base. But, as Mr Faurby said, best not to anticipate it. When it lands, I am sure it will be grounds for discussion.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Don't worry we will be looking closely at that, I am sure.

Mr SCOTT: I am sure of that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I want to go back then to the process you said is a separate process, which is the work of—is it the land and property authority? I do not know what its current name is.

Mr SCOTT: I am not sure.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You know what I am talking about, though?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Property NSW.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Property NSW—sorry, they've all had a range of different names. So there is a list of TAFE assets that has been given to that authority?

Mr SCOTT: There are no approved divestments for TAFE.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure. That is not what I am asking.

Mr SCOTT: Well, I think my understanding is—and I am happy to take it on notice—that what that process is really about is when sites have been identified that are surplus to requirements, they are then divested and that is the divestment process that the Government uses for—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It looks for forward planning, so your department has had to go through and say, "Look, we think this one is not going to be needed in the future." You may not currently have any plans to divest it but you have identified it.

Mr SCOTT: No, my understanding is that there are not divestment plans that have been developed for sites for TAFE NSW at the moment. Any of that work would be speculative, prior to the development of the 20-year infrastructure plan. That work is underway.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure, but prior to that, Mr Scott—my understanding is that the property authority has gone through with every department and agency to identify those and that there would be—are you saying to me that there are no properties that have been provided for any future planning for land for Property NSW.

Mr SCOTT: No, my understanding is that no current properties have been identified for part of that divestment process and that the engagement with TAFE waits for the delivery of the 20-year infrastructure strategy, which will be developed and completed, we think, by the end of this calendar year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will any of the infrastructure planning involve replacement of existing TAFE campuses with connected learning centres?

Mr FAURBY: What I will say to that is, first of all, what I said before: let us see what the report recommends as a general observation or general statement. In terms of connected learning centres, we are very pleased and very proud of the way they work within and along with our more conventional campuses and form part of the total product of services and training that we provide. Personally, in my first few weeks here in the organisation, I visited a number of them and I have seen the important role that they play. They supplement what we have in terms of campuses; they are not meant as a replacement for campuses.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am asking if that is a parameter of the study. Are you saying, "We are going to quarantine existing TAFE campuses and not replace them with connected learning centres?"

Mr FAURBY: I am not aware whether that premise has been articulated or specified, but I am happy to talk to that once we see the report come out and we have more to talk about at that time.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How much money in the financial year 2018-19 and now in 2019-20 was unspent training funds?

Mr FAURBY: Unless anyone has that number on record, we would like to take that question on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Does unspent money just go back into consolidated revenue or is TAFE able to keep it and carry it over?

Ms PENTON: TAFE NSW has revenue from a number of sources. The largest part obviously is the Smart and Skilled contract and funding allocations from government. Like any other government agency, and historically, those reconciliations are done from the end of that year. Taking into account where we are delivering training and we have got commitments for training, those funds are carried over, and we would certainly have

similar arrangements where we have got commercial arrangements where we are invoicing clients for commercial training that we deliver.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: But you do not get to retain unspent funds, leaving aside those contracted ones obviously.

Ms PENTON: Like all agencies, TAFE NSW optimises the use of its funds on an annual basis to ensure that we expend all of those funds for the needs of our students—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You will give me the figures?

Ms PENTON: We will provide the figures for certainty.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Terrific. How much did TAFE have to pay Red Rock to break the contract the develop the new IT system?

Mr FAURBY: I believe that is a matter that is in commercial confidence.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Commercial-in-confidence, right, but TAFE did have to pay out Red Rock as a result of the failure of that management system?

Mr FAURBY: It was a commercial settlement, so I would simply say it is a commercial-in-confidence matter.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Are you able to provide the Committee with how much up until that process was actually spent on the Red Rock IT system?

Mr FAURBY: Similarly I see that as commercial-in-confidence.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sorry, with respect, it is not; that is public money that had already been expended. What you had to spend to break the contract is a separate issue. I am asking what was the final cost, and I accept that you may not be able to give it to me now, but would you agree to take that on notice?

Mr FAURBY: Yes, we will take that on notice.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add that I think, yes, that contract was cancelled. The student enrolment system now is well underway. We have rolled out the first two stages of the program, including the integrated student and general inquiry form and a customer relationship management system, and made several improvements to the existing system, so—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Is that now all done in-house?

Mr SCOTT: The completion of the work I believe has been brought in-house, and I just think, if we are talking about cancellation of contracts, that was a decision that was made by TAFE management. They received advice on the progress. The feeling was that the program could be best delivered now in-House. Infrastructure was laid through that Red Rock engagement and now TAFE is bringing this project home, and there has been a lot of good progress made around that system.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Would you be able to provide the Committee with the costs to date on the new process?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we can provide detail on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That would be great. I want to return to the Boston Consulting Group review. It is quite old now, I accept that that was 2015.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you let us know how much the Government paid for that report?

Mr SCOTT: We will dig through the archives to 2015 and see what we can find. I do not have—

The CHAIR: You are taking it on notice?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, it is 2015.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is fine. Is it informing the work of the current review?

Mr SCOTT: Which review is that, the Shergold—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes.

Mr SCOTT: I think, as the Minister said today, the thing that both Mr Shergold and Mr Gonski bring through their expertise is to provide an overview in a sense of the integration opportunities that exist between TAFE, between schools, between private providers, and between higher education where they bring considerable expertise, so they are looking carefully at the linkages between those elements of it. We will make available to them, of course, any material that they seek, including the Boston Consulting review if that is of benefit to them, but I think these things, as we have said, have been moving quite quickly. Since Boston Consulting you have had a second review from Mr Gonski, Mr Shergold's report, further significant changes that have been taking place in higher education—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: There has been a review almost every year.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but it is a very fast-changing sector.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure. No-one here is disagreeing with the expertise of Professor Shergold and Mr Gonski, but surely the starting point would be to look at the reviews that have happened in the last five to six years and pull that together.

Mr SCOTT: Exactly, and as I have said—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: There are a lot of answers sitting on bookshelves, are there not?

Mr SCOTT: We will be pleased to provide the review with any previous work or any additional help, support or data that they need that can inform their advice to us but, as I outlined, even with the kinds of developments we are going to see around the aerotropolis, the kind of ambitions we have for projects like Meadowbank, the changes that you are seeing with a movement to a more modularised offering in technical education and higher education, and the changing demands of students and the changing demands of industries, it seemed very appropriate to have these two eminent gentlemen do the work and, of course, we will make available all materials that they want to support them in this effort.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I have read the Boston Consulting Group report. It is quite a disturbing report in terms of the challenges that TAFE faces. The reason we keep coming back to that is that it seems to have disappeared without a trace. It was previously available publicly; it has been taken off the website. Are you able to tell us why that is?

Mr SCOTT: No, I do not have information on that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It said that, without change, TAFE could see market share decrease and job losses similar to those experienced by other TAFEs following increased contestability.

Mr SCOTT: I will just say on that that it is noteworthy, I think, that under Smart and Skilled—and we referred to it this morning—TAFE has done well in a competitive setting. I think 80 per cent of the State skills budget still goes to TAFE and I think 60 per cent of the Smart and Skilled budget that TAFE contests on and delivers, so TAFE has done well in that context, but the kind of thing that the Boston Consulting Group is referring to there I think is reflected on around the country. The question is: What are the training needs of industry now? How do you best support students now? The kinds of things the Chair was referring—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Scott, thanks, my bookcase has got about six of those reports sitting on it. This is not new stuff. Can I move on because I am about to run out of time?

Mr SCOTT: Sure.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How many students with disabilities are currently enrolled in the TAFE system?

Mr FAURBY: Around 11 per cent of our student enrolments are enrolments by people who are identified with disabilities.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do you know how many of those have NDIS packages?

Mr FAURBY: No, but I can certainly take that question on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My understanding is that there has been a massive reduction in the number of people with disability being able to access TAFE. I am happy for you to take it on notice. If you could provide the enrolment figures for the last four years, that would be most appreciated.

Mr FAURBY: Yes, I would be happy to do that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you could also provide the numbers of the EFT for support workers employed within TAFE to support students with disabilities over that same period, that would be very useful.

Mr FAURBY: Yes, I would be happy to do that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am wanting to also understand how many staff within TAFE actually identify as having a disability. I suspect it may be in the annual report, but is it broken down? Are you able to provide that?

Ms GRUMMER: We can provide the overall number. It is highly dependent as well, as with any other government agency, on individuals identifying that they have a disability.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sure, but it is a priority. You are required to report about it in your annual report. I am also aware that the Government has now set a new target of 5.5 per cent of the workforce. I am very keen to understand how TAFE is tracking with that.

Ms GRUMMER: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: When you talk about your IT services, is Deloitte still providing IT services to TAFE? You said before that you have bought it all. Is it all in-house now?

Mr SCOTT: I was talking about the student management system.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Just the student management. What other—

Ms PENTON: We will take that question on notice because there are some specialist areas where we may not have the capability or the skills. We are happy to take that question on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If that is the case, would you also be able to break down for us what the cost for those additional services is?

Ms PENTON: We will take that question on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: If you have got it, will you provide how much money there is?

The Hon. WES FANG: The question was taken on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you have any data on the existing TAFE student loan process, the VET student loan numbers? Do you have any data on what the value of the current loan portfolio is? How many students undertake the current VET student loan scheme?

Ms PENTON: We obviously keep records of those enrolments. We will take that question on notice for accuracy purposes to provide.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You do not have any figures here at this estimates hearing for that?

Ms PENTON: If I can take that question on notice, we will get that information as we progress, with your agreement.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you could get it for this afternoon.

Ms PENTON: We will do our utmost to provide that accuracy for you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What I was looking for was the number and the value of those student loans for TAFE at least to 2015, but as far back as you can reasonably go would be useful. Please do not go beyond 2012 though—not that I think they existed. What is the difference between the proposed HECS model that has been talked about and the existing VET student loan scheme? What is the thinking behind the difference?

Mr SCOTT: Again, I think we need to wait for Mr Chapman to do his work. The Minister indicated this morning he has asked Mr Chapman to look at how HECS had operated for the higher education sector and see whether in fact there were linkages or opportunities that existed back for the skill sector in New South Wales. As I said, we are expecting his work in coming months and then we will come back and be able to speak to that further.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is it an expansion of the VET funding scheme?

Mr SCOTT: Ms O'Loughlin might be able to give more detail.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We have got that system in place, are we going to have parallel systems? What is the plan?

Ms O'LOUGHLIN: At the moment there is a loan scheme available but it is very restricted. It is only restricted to certain levels of courses and certain numbers of courses. It is a very contained opportunity for students to access. The idea for the review that is being undertaken by Professor Chapman is to look at an alternate model that was more aligned to what we have in universities. As the Minister mentioned this morning, his concern is that upfront fees is a barrier to young people or other adults accessing vocational education training. When they can access university courses that are free at point of entry there is an incentive potentially to access university courses when a VET course would be more appropriate.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is already how the VET student loan system works. It operates on the HECS model so that you get the loan upfront and then you pay your tuition fees when your income meets the threshold if you choose to, or you pay a proportion when your income meets the threshold. Is the proposal to have a separate system to the VET student loans or is the proposal to expand the VET student loan system?

Mr SCOTT: I think it is quite clear. There is no proposal. Professor Chapman is doing the work. As Ms O'Loughlin said, the current provision is limited. Are there more opportunities? We are worried about the distorting effect that has happened with the scheme set-up—and I appreciate the caveats that were made earlier about what the research shows and I appreciate what was said earlier about debt levels that can be incurred. But there is no doubt one of the reasons for a massive expansion of the higher education sector was a deregulation of that sector that allowed universities to enrol who they sought, but also the sense that in a way there were not those upfront costs. As Ms O'Loughlin has said, that is a limited provision in training at the moment. Professor Chapman is doing a review of how that operates. There are no proposals nor intent. We have gone to the architect of the HECS review to provide us with advice on this. When that advice is provided, government will consider changes if it feels changes are appropriate. Then we will have a proposal and then we will be able to discuss the proposal.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you able to provide a copy of the terms of reference for the Chapman review?

Mr SCOTT: Let me take that on notice and see.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Because some of this may be answered, do you agree, in the terms of reference?

Mr SCOTT: I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Faurby, I have some specific questions about the Bega and Moruya TAFE colleges. You may have this information to hand or you may not. Can you provide the Committee with details of the change in student enrolments at Bega and Moruya TAFE colleges over the last five years? It is either 2014 or 2015 and 2020. I will run you through the courses: all food and beverage courses; early childhood studies courses; metal fabrication courses; language, literacy and numeracy courses; community services courses; horticultural courses; tourism studies courses; and commercial cookery courses. If you have any current figures now, I would appreciate it, for the 2020 enrolment? I am assuming you do not have 2014 or 2015 figures. If you could provide that information on notice I would appreciate it. Do you have any current figures?

Mr FAURBY: What we would like to do is to provide that today, so that when we come back from lunch we will have those numbers readily available and presented.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I appreciate that. That is extremely helpful. What is the Government's plan for enrolments, pathways, access and equity programs, and ensuring that there are qualifications available through TAFE to meet skills shortages in that regard? Have you got a corporate strategy to ensure that TAFE courses are being offered in such a way that it promotes access and equity?

Ms PENTON: I am happy to take that question in the first instance, probably explaining to you how we develop our course provision and how we start to make decisions about the courses that we offer will help. Our course profile or service delivery plan is developed by our regional staff, so our head teachers on the ground that are closest to the communities in which they are working and the employers and understanding those skills. That is supplemented by broader information around economic data in order to ensure that those programs are fit for purpose and the right programs in the right place at the right time. The other area is the funding for things such as foundation skills, for instance and our staff that are experts in these areas who go out and work with communities, particularly at risk community groups around their training needs.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We might drill down to this a bit more in the afternoon. People have been curious about what the role of the TAFE service manager position is. What is that role designed to do?

Ms PENTON: There are two roles as part of our regional structure. There is the TAFE services manager.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And the coordinator.

Ms PENTON: And the TAFE services coordinator.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was my next question, so let us knock them off together.

Ms PENTON: That is the area that I supervise across the organisation. We have got our teaching teams and then we have also got teams that are specifically designed and created to ensure that we are engaging with our communities on the ground. Every campus across the State has a TAFE services coordinator. Some of those positions are identified positions, particularly in some of our regional and remote communities to ensure that we have the right capability and skills in those campuses. Part of their role is to go out and engage with community groups, engage with employer groups and business groups to understand what the needs of that community are, what the needs of those employers are, and then they feed that information directly to the teaching sections on the ground.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is the coordinator role?

Ms PENTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And can you provide the standard position descriptions for each of them?

Ms PENTON: There is a standard position description for that role.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You can provide that to the Committee?

Ms PENTON: Yes, we can. We will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am sorry—the service manager?

Ms PENTON: Yes. As you can imagine we have got 130 campuses across the State so we put in place a management structure to supervise these team members. There is a certain number of TAFE services coordinators. They report to a TAFE services manager. The TAFE services manager then looks at where we have got communities of interest and particularly where we have got larger employer groups and other agencies—particularly government—who we also interact with to support integrated services on the ground.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many of these new positions have been recruited?

Ms PENTON: Not all of them are new positions. These position titles, as they are now, were created as part of the One TAFE reforms. We took our 10 different ways of working across the State in our old institutes and we wanted one model across the State so we could give consistency across the State. Some staff members came through from the old model into these roles and then some areas across the State got additional positions in order to support their communities.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you give us the numbers?

Ms PENTON: Yes, we can provide that. We will take that on notice and provide that information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am not sure if you are familiar, Mr Faurby, but I am sure Ms Penton is familiar. I made a Standing Order 52 application—a call for papers—in the Legislative Council and one of the points asked for a list of all courses delivered through TAFE access points, which said that there was a nil response. Are there no longer any courses being delivered through TAFE access points? Is that correct?

Ms PENTON: I can answer that question. Specifically a TAFE access point is a location whereby, by its name, individuals can come and ask for information about TAFE courses. The access point also provides access to computers, particularly for some of our students who would be studying through TAFE Digital across the State and may not have access to their own computers at home. We have minimal across the State from that perspective, but it is really to be able to provide access to training and facilities more closely to where people live.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So there are no courses that are delivered through TAFE access points?

Ms PENTON: Not through an access point, through our campuses and our connected learning centres. That is where the provision of training is. The access point is for information. If someone wanted to access a counsellor we would make those provisions for them, but they do not generally offer courses as such.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But somebody could go to an access point who is—sorry, what is the difference between an access point and a SkillsPoint?

Ms PENTON: A SkillsPoint in our organisation develops our curriculum and also develops all of our course material.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So the only way that you can access a TAFE course is through TAFE Digital, Connected Learning Centres or on a TAFE campus. Is that correct?

Ms PENTON: Unless we are delivering the training in the workplace with an employer. Certainly we do provide training in collaboration with employers and we are contracted by employers to deliver workplace training as well.

Mr SCOTT: We do not offer courses there, right? That is the thing about the TAFE access point. We do not offer courses but it provides support for students.

Ms PENTON: And information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And how many of those access points are currently operating in New South Wales?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me a rough idea?

Ms PENTON: I would say a handful, to be honest, but I would take the question on notice for certainty.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can provide me with a list of the locations of the access points and what is offered at each of those access points, that would be helpful.

Ms PENTON: Certainly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to tell me what the total number of completions recorded for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 years were?

Mr FAURBY: We have percentage numbers in course completion. I am advised that these are the numbers from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER]. They actually demonstrate an increase in the projected completion rates compared to—this is 2016 versus 2017, which are the latest numbers that we have got. The projected rate for 2017 is 52.6 per cent, which is an improvement from the previous year, which was 48.1 per cent.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you do not actually have up-to-date figures on how many completions of TAFE courses are being undertaken?

Mr FAURBY: These are the latest numbers that I have on file.

Ms PENTON: The official enrolment numbers and completion numbers across the sector are reported through NCVER. They are the figures that are published nationally and are available.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And the latest figures that are available are 2016-17?

Ms PENTON: That is correct.

Mr SCOTT: School year 2017.

The CHAIR: We had that number last time. Six months ago that was the number. There is nothing new?

Ms PENTON: Yes, because the data collection is at the end of March each year. That is where the cycle comes through and it has been the reporting framework for the sector for a number of years.

The CHAIR: We are coming up to a data collection period.

Ms PENTON: It is a national reporting framework.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We are coming up to March 2020 and you do not have the information for March 2019 or March 2018 yet. Is that correct?

Ms PENTON: As we have indicated the reports are national reporting. They are the published reports across the sector. We are required as a registered training organisation to provide our data. That is the provision that is provided right across the sector nationally.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you are providing the data to the national body then surely you have some way of collecting the data internally?

Ms PENTON: Internally we track and monitor our data, and we do that for internal purposes to look at things like course completions and student progression as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is what I am asking you. Do you have the information internally about how many people are completing courses?

Ms PENTON: We will take that question on notice and ensure that we provide the accurate information. But as I said they are national records and therefore it has been the tradition of the sector to provide the statistics in this way. It is a national framework that we are subject to and party to.

Mr FAURBY: It is also worth mentioning that since the question is how come we present data that goes back to 2017—it is the completion rates for courses that were commenced in those years. Courses that were commenced in those years but have run past those years will be included in these numbers.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And when do you expect have the updated data?

Ms PENTON: Our reporting is in March each year and we can certainly give you the dates for the next round of reporting.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are currently collating the data?

Ms PENTON: We would be meeting the requirements of NCVER under the national reporting arrangements. We can provide the information around the schedule for that as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When you say you have got the completion dates for courses commenced in 2017, irrespective of whether they are one-year, two-year or three-year courses, you only have the data for 2017? Mr Faurby, surely as a newcomer to this you are as shocked by this as I am?

Mr FAURBY: All I can say that this is the information we have on file. As Ms Penton has agreed we will happily provide information as soon as we can and provide the further details that we discussed.

Mr SCOTT: I think it is fair to say that there is this national currency of national comparable data that is released by the national agency. As I understand it this national agency gives you completion rates for the courses that started in the year. And so when people talk about completion rates of TAFE they use this nationally released data which provides comparability around all the States and Territories. We are giving you the latest data that we have got. Of course TAFE collects data on completion rates and has analysis on that.

I think it is worth noting that the completion rate in New South Wales ticked up significantly from those who started in 2016 to those who started in 2017, so the trendline is positive on it. We provide data into that, they collect it across States and Territories and then they release the national report. We await the report on 2018 completions at the same time as we are providing them with data on 2020 enrolments, which is the data that we will be providing now. It may not be as elegantly presented as you might like; such are the joys of Federation. We are in the process of providing them with 2020 data and we will get 2018 commencement completion rates from them and that will be publicly made available.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Faurby, given your publicly pronounced experience as a change management agent perhaps, this is something that you could look at within the organisation releasing more information. We are talking about outcome-based budgeting. Are you looking at providing more information for the public about completion rates? Is this something that you can undertake to look at because looking at two-year-old data is surely inadequate?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We do not want you to do ice core analysis of TAFE.

Mr FAURBY: I would certainly say that information is as important to us as I would imagine it is to the public and, therefore the ways which we can provide accurate and reliable data for our own decision-making because it is indeed a focus for us to lift involvement as well as completions. The further we can go in accuracy and timing—and that we will certainly have to take on board the suggestion that we should seek to become more agile in that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to provide how many students have enrolled in each of the Connected Learning Centres [CLCs]? I think 13 are now operating, is that correct?

Mr FAURBY: There is 14.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In what locations?

Mr FAURBY: The location of the CLCs that are currently operational are Quirindi, Glen Innes, Tenterfield, Coonabarabran, Bega, Narrandera, Deniliquin, Corowa, Bourke, Grenfell, Singleton, Yamba, Murwillumbah and Scone.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I go back to completion rates. The mechanism is that there is currently published data federally for 2017, and you provided that data to the Federal agencies in March 2018. You went through the records of 2017, provided that data to the Federal agency in March 2018, and that is what has been published in the most current data. Is that right?

Ms PENTON: That is correct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: For the 2018 year you went through your data and you provided that to the Federal agency in March 2019 and we are still awaiting the publication federally.

Ms PENTON: Yes, that is correct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And again for the 2019 year, we are currently in March so you have either completed or you are just about to complete your analysis of the enrolment numbers for 2019 and are about to provide them to the Federal regulator. Is that right?

Ms PENTON: Yes, that is a requirement.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think we may have got there but I was not sure—

Mr SCOTT: Data on enrolments and completions. There is a lagging effect on the completion rates, which the data is trying to collect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand that. We know the numbers are on hand for 2019 and you could provide that, as well of completion rates?

Ms PENTON: Yes, we will take the question on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And for enrolment numbers. Do you have any current data for 2020 on enrolments to hand? Obviously that is a question we will be asking: What are the enrolment numbers right now?

Ms PENTON: We will take that question on notice. For accuracy purpose we are obviously still at the beginning of the year, it has been an unsettled year across the State with the commencement of bushfires and now other environmental issues. We are working with our students.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We are all anxious to see what the enrolment numbers are now to see how they have responded to issues like the bushfire crisis and the coronavirus.

Ms PENTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you have any kind of indicative handle on what it has done?

Ms PENTON: Certainly from a statewide perspective my sense is that we are on par. It does vary across the State, depending on the circumstances of the community. As we were talking early with the Minister this morning, the northern part of the State had a different impact. It was towards the end of an academic year—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Does that impact on completion rates up in the north?

Ms PENTON: Again I think the figures that we are looking at now will give us an indication. But we went to extensive lengths to adjust the assessment pathways for the students who were impacted by the fires, also understanding that our staff are part of our communities as well. So we had to adjust where we had adjustments to staffing. Some staff needed to take leave. So we have got an individual path for each of those students around their assessment requirements, and we are continuing to support them in that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Those students whose study was seriously impacted by the fires have been dealt with individually?

Ms PENTON: That is correct, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Was there a mass communication to students saying if they have been impacted by fires these are the kinds of provisions available?

Ms PENTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Will you provide on notice an example of that communication that went out to students?

Ms PENTON: We will provide those examples for you, yes, on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You answered questions earlier about the TAFE service manager and coordinator positions. How does the coordinator position differ from the kind of work that the outreach programs were doing? Those outreach programs used to employ staff with educational and community expertise. Is the coordinator position mirroring what was done with outreach or is it different?

Ms PENTON: There are differences between the two. The historical outreach programs that you are indicating are still delivered by TAFE NSW. That provision is under our career pathways program. We have head teachers that are across the State that are specifically around career pathways, and also around those access programs and outreach type programs to which you referred.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do they cut across the coordinator positions?

Ms PENTON: I believe they complement each other. Certainly the TAFE services coordinators do not have an educational qualification as part of their role. So if they are out interacting with a community group, for example, that community group indicates that they would like some support; the TAFE Services Coordinator will work in conjunction with the head teachers who do have that educational expertise.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is there a clear set of policy provisions that indicate how the CSO funding is expended?

Ms PENTON: Yes, there is a policy framework for CSO.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There is concern raised with my office that Community Service Obligation [CSO] funding is being used for a range of programs and funding impositions rather than being targeted effectively to address community need. Can you provide a breakdown on where the CSO funding has gone?

Ms PENTON: We will take that question on notice to provide the information.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was not expecting to you to just sprout it, Ms Penton.

Ms PENTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But that is the concern: What positions and what programs are being funded. Are you going to give the policy details on notice?

Ms PENTON: Yes, we will provide that on notice. It is a range of, obviously, teaching programs to respond to and support those communities and a range of other positions. We have disability coordinators and Aboriginal student support officers. Those are positions that are directly there to support communities and students.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There is an enormous amount of work that is required to be done following these bushfires, whether it is fencing or civil works or even just rebuilding the 2,400-odd homes that have been destroyed, let alone sheds. Has TAFE done a mapping of the skills that are going to be required and the training that is going to be required to support the workforce to do this?

Ms PENTON: Yes. The work that TAFE NSW has undertaken to date has happened at a few levels. There is an immediate response around the students who were enrolled in courses that we had already advertised for the beginning of the academic year. As noted earlier by the Minister, the majority of those courses have started, albeit with small numbers. We have made a commitment to those students.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Penton, it is not about just ensuring that courses with low enrolments continue. It is actually about trying to reach out to young people or mature-aged students and say, "Actually, there is an opportunity here for you to get upskilled in the residential construction sector, in rural skills for farm work and fencing work. There is an opportunity here." That is what I am asking you about.

Ms PENTON: Yes, we have undertaken that analysis with the communities and with the other government agencies, for example, Training Services NSW, where there have been meetings with communities, talking to them about those sorts of skills. We are currently enrolling in over 300 short courses between the south of New South Wales and the north of New South Wales in the sorts of short courses that you are talking about. I think in the longer term we have a range of impacted industries, for example, the forestry industry in Tumut. It is an interesting situation where there is a glut of a need for workers now to fell the forests while they are still able to be felled. What we will find in about 12 months' time is that many of those people who work in those areas will need reskilling. We are working with the industries and the communities and meeting with them on the ground to look at the needs today and also over the next two, three and potentially four years.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: One of the skills shortages that has been raised with my office is skills in actual tree planting, which, hopefully, follows the tree-felling operations. It has been repeatedly raised with my office that there is the lack of trained skills for tree planting, both managing projects and doing the work itself. Can you provide any detail about the training numbers or the course numbers for those kinds of skills in the forestry industry?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice in order to calibrate that. I do not think we would have expected a couple of months ago that we would need a lot of tree planters. We will be then responding to that. Where the courses are available, where the training courses are, we will scale up depending on those needs.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Penton, it has been raised with my office that, in fact, there has been a longstanding absence of skilled workers doing that kind of work and that there are significant numbers of workers being brought in from Canada and the United States with tree-planting skills. It has been a historical absence of skills. Are you aware of that at all?

Ms PENTON: I am not aware of that specific issue for that specific industry.

Mr FAURBY: I will add, Mr Shoebidge, that we actually already offer a wide range of courses that are relevant to the Australian forest industry, with Certificate IV in Forest Operations added as a new course offering here in 2020.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And we will get some enrolment numbers?

Ms PENTON: Yes.

The CHAIR: With the permission of the Committee, we will go to lunch at this point and reconvene at 1.40 p.m. I thank the witnesses and the Committee.

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: I reopen the budget estimates and again thank our witnesses for being here, and the Committee members. The Hon. Wes Fang had something he wanted to raise.

The Hon. WES FANG: In the previous session, I just wanted to raise the issue that I think, Mr Faurby, you were reading through a list of the Connected Learning Centres.

Mr FAURBY: That is correct.

The Hon. WES FANG: I just wanted to give the Hon. Courtney Houssos the opportunity to apologise to you, noting that in the procedural fairness resolution of the House, section 19 says that "witnesses will be treated with courtesy at all times". Obviously, some of those names are quite localised and I think that repeating them in the local pronunciation was probably not an appropriate thing to do. I just wanted to give her an opportunity to apologise to you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will not take my advice from the Hon. Wes Fang. I am sure Mr Faurby appreciated the opportunity.

The CHAIR: The point has been made and the opportunity has been declined. We can move on to the questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I just wanted to come back quickly to the issue of the cladding at Ultimo TAFE. Perhaps, Ms Penton, are you able to provide today or on notice the total cost of that rectification?

Ms PENTON: On notice, if I can.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Of course. I wanted to come to the questions of student central hubs. Is that a question for you, Mr Faurby?

Mr FAURBY: Why do you not ask us the question and then we will see how we best respond to it?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do all TAFE campuses in New South Wales have one?

Mr FAURBY: Have what, sorry?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: A student central hub.

Mr FAURBY: A student central hub?

Ms PENTON: I will be pleased to answer the question. As we have talked about earlier this morning, TAFE NSW was previously 10 institutes. Those institutes had different structures and different ways of working.

All of them have customer service areas and support services. Naming conventions, however, were different across the State. So in some parts of the State they are referred to as student central hubs and other parts of the State they are referred to as customer access centres or customer service centres.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide me—and I am happy for you to take it on notice—with how many campuses have each one and what are they called in each location?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me how many staff members are employed in each?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And where they are located?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: For example, if they are located in a library, if they are located in the administration building, if they are somewhere else on the site.

Ms PENTON: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I ask you some specifics then? Do you know if the student central has been moved into the library at Kempsey TAFE? Are you familiar with that one?

Ms PENTON: I am not familiar with the Kempsey TAFE layout, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can take that one on notice and tell me if any staff members were made redundant as a result of the move?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And if you can tell me how many students were enrolled at the TAFE that would also be helpful.

Ms PENTON: At Kempsey?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

Ms PENTON: On notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will move on to Ultimo TAFE. Do you have figures about how many were enrolled there? Do you have any specific location figures here today or are you going to take all those on notice?

Mr FAURBY: All the questions that relate to enrolments specific to locations in campuses and so on we would like to take on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. If you can tell me how many were enrolled at Ultimo TAFE from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 because Ultimo TAFE did have the highest number of permanent employees that were sacked just before Christmas last year. That was before your time, Mr Faurby. Ms Penton, is that correct?

Ms PENTON: I will take that question on notice, unless Ms Grummer can add anything.

Ms GRUMMER: As it relates to the specific locations we will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Ms Grummer, are you the best one to talk to about the sackings that occurred before Christmas, the redundancies or the—

Mr SCOTT: The voluntary redundancies.

Ms GRUMMER: The voluntary redundancies, yes—myself and Ms Penton as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who is picking up the workload? There were nearly 200 jobs lost there.

Ms GRUMMER: Just to put it into some context, the 200 individuals that exited the organisation—and some are still in the process of exiting the organisation—was a mix of contractors and then permanent and temporary staff. A number of those contractors were at the end of their assignment as well as those that were on fixed-term contracts, and then we have 76 permanent individuals that were impacted through the managing exit employee policy in government. As it relates to the workload, it depends, because those roles that left those

positions, that left the organisation, were across a variety of branches in TAFE NSW—they were not isolated to one particular area.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Does every campus have IT support staff?

Ms GRUMMER: We are in the process of implementing a new delivery model within ICT. One of the things that we recently implemented was a single service help desk in ICT, which allows ICT to function in an organisation to service IT calls across the whole State. In some areas where there was a specific person onsite, now we are able to provide services regardless of where those individuals sit.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a count today on how many full-time permanent teachers are employed in TAFE NSW?

Ms GRUMMER: I will take that question on notice. We do have that, but I would like to make sure we provide the accurate number.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me a rough idea?

Ms GRUMMER: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And you might need to take all of these on notice: How many are in permanent positions, permanent part-time positions?

Ms GRUMMER: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Casual teachers?

Ms GRUMMER: Casual teachers as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Temporary contracts?

Ms GRUMMER: We can provide that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Non-teaching positions?

Ms GRUMMER: We can provide that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The 2018-19 annual report shows there are 244 less employees in education support and services. What is the reason for that reduction?

Ms GRUMMER: Those numbers that we produce in the annual report are on an FTE basis, full-time equivalent basis, and so year on year those numbers can change based on our workforce mix to deliver the courses that we have across the State in that given year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, but there are 244 less.

Ms GRUMMER: Yes. That could be a function of the number of courses that we have, where the courses occurred and the workforce mix that was required. As we stated earlier this morning, one of the key components of our workforce mix is casual teachers who teach on the side in addition to other work that they do. So it is not a headcount number, it is a full-time equivalent number based on hours worked.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Were any of them replaced with casual staff?

Ms GRUMMER: The teachers?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The full-time equivalents; the 244 less.

Ms GRUMMER: That is a little bit of a difficult question to answer because a full-time equivalent is based on hours worked divided by hours worked per year. So it does not always equate to a one-to-one like you would with a headcount number.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me then, have any redundancies been offered this year, apart from the ones that were offered before Christmas? Have any been offered this year?

Ms GRUMMER: I will have to take that question on notice. There could be maybe one or two, but none that I have signed off on.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can provide me with a list of any that have been offered that would be helpful. You are not aware of any?

Ms GRUMMER: No. According to our delegation framework I do not always have to sign-off on every voluntary redundancy, but we can take that question on notice to make sure that we provide accurate numbers.

Mr FAURBY: But I think we should say, just to your point, Ms Grummer, that the latest round of voluntary redundancies were the ones that were activated in November this year and since then there have been no rounds of voluntary redundancies offered.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But there still could be people—

Mr FAURBY: There could be the odd single one, which Ms Grummer refers to, that we do not have awareness of or information on. But I think the point that I would like to make is that the last time the organisation made decisions that related to voluntary redundancies was back in November last year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask you, Mr Faurby, about the organisational health survey. It says that 15 per cent of staff agree with the statement that TAFE NSW has effective plans for developing and retaining its people. What do you say to that?

Mr FAURBY: First of all, the organisational health survey is something that we take incredibly seriously and I personally take incredibly seriously, and it is certainly something that I have looked into very carefully since I joined the organisation. The most important thing for me is that we as an organisation invest the time in understanding and engaging in the workforce and allowing them a voice and an opportunity to express this, not just in a survey—which is a snapshot; an important snapshot—but also, more importantly, that we take the time and go out, sit down with staff, let them talk and let them explain.

So we have done that. We have gone to every single one of the 130 campuses as executives. We had at least one executive in each of these locations. Since we have got the results, I personally have taken part in a number of those conversations and found very, very valuable information and feedback provided to us as to what staff experienced and saw. Therefore, that informed us to the decisions we want to make in order to address the issues that were raised in that survey. Absolutely it is a very, very important point for me and a very important point for us as executives.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So what are you going to do to change it?

Mr FAURBY: There are a number of things that we already have done and there are even more things that we will continue to do. First of all, as I mentioned, we went through the onsite discussions with them. We compiled that information into a number of themes that were the most important things for staff to address and we determined that there were, in particular, two priority areas that we would want to focus on. With staff engagement and organisational health it is, as you would appreciate, a lot of information that we get back but the key for us is to condense this into actions and specific themes that we believe and we deem to be particularly powerful and effective when we are dealing with staff engagement in general.

The two areas that we chose to focus on—the first one is around developing and supporting our people and the second one is around enabling team leadership and effectiveness. Those were two themes that came up pretty much across the entire organisation in all the campuses that we visited. We have taken a lot of initiatives in that space. Some of those initiatives, I should say, are initiatives that are ongoing and in fact were activated before time or earlier on. But we also launched initiatives such as leader toolkit resource and the coaching for performance program that will be launched in this semester. For people, this obviously addresses the first point that I made around developing and supporting our people.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am sorry, can you give me the name of that one again?

Mr FAURBY: The leader toolkit resource and the coaching for performance program.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What are they designed to do?

Mr FAURBY: They are designed to address the first of the two points I mentioned around developing and supporting our people. There are a number of other things that we are doing. We are hosting toolbox talks. We are having a TAFE academy for leadership that has and runs at least three targeted programs per year to drive improvements in organisational health. So these are academy programs focused on developing individual leadership capabilities and are quite sought after, by the way, by teachers and support staff.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many people have gone through the TAFE academy for leadership?

Mr FAURBY: I would have to take that number on notice.

Ms GRUMMER: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When was that established?

Ms GRUMMER: I believe it was established in 2018.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me the numbers for each financial year—2018, 2019, 2020?

Ms GRUMMER: Sure, yes.

Mr FAURBY: Another point I want to make—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So far in 2020, I should say.

Mr FAURBY: Another point that was raised as part of the organisational health survey was staff typically, or most predominantly in regional campuses, felt that from time to time their capacity to influence the local decisions on the ground was somewhat restricted through a somewhat centralised decision process. We have addressed that in a couple of ways, among others, to emphasise and further enforce local campuses' and regions' capacity to make those decisions locally. These things can be decisions around advertisements of new roles; it can be engagement of a local industry in focus areas, such as for instance, bushfire-affected regions or any other local matter that happens anywhere in and among the 130 campuses that we operate. But, essentially, it is simply to enforce and make sure that the great people we have on the ground at these campuses are able to do their job without running into unnecessary delay in decision-making because they have got to go to a corporate office to seek approval. I think that was a point that was made—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Faurby, you would agree that it is pretty damning figures when only 15 per cent of your staff think that you have effective plans for developing and retaining people. Fifteen per cent say that TAFE NSW is committed to ensuring the right people get promoted and only 21 per cent say "Our systems enable us to serve our customers well." That is a pretty damning indictment on an organisation that has been characterised as having great people—you are exactly right—but they are pretty fed up with the way that they are being treated.

Mr FAURBY: We have absolutely a role to play in making sure that we improve the area of staff engagement. I do not want to suggest otherwise; hence our focus and hence also my personal focus. I have spent a fair part of my time since I joined visiting campuses, talking to both teaching staff and non-teaching staff. It is important with these things to allow the time to stay locally and be local when you have these conversations. It is not a matter of whiffing through a number of campuses in no time only to say that you have been there, but actually take the time to sit down and discuss and talk.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I totally agree with that, Mr Faurby, but if you have got a situation where the feedback is that people do not feel that TAFE is necessarily investing in them or that their systems are going to serve customers well—and I am not sure that we would use the terminology "customers"—and their main concern is with centralised decision-making, given the key reform has been around One TAFE, are you taking any steps to roll it back? What are you doing?

Mr FAURBY: Absolutely not. We are totally determined to continue the rollout of One TAFE. That is an important part of TAFE NSW—to make sure that we continue the process towards full completion of the rollout of One TAFE. Interestingly enough, in the countless number of conversations I have had with staff in those sessions that I just talked about and with staff in general I have yet to come across one single individual within my organisation who does not fully support the idea and the purpose of One TAFE.

So there is strong support for that. I am not suggesting that every one of our 17,000 employees would have that view, but I have yet to come across the first person who would express any concern about One TAFE. I think what they from time to time remind us, and remind me, is that it will be nice if we could get on with it and get the implementation completed so that there is—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: One TAFE.

Mr FAURBY: One TAFE—so there is One TAFE, exactly. I think it is a fair point. It is a fair observation and certainly one that I would support that the sooner we can do that the better. Hence the focus that we have on change. Hence the focus that we have on making sure that we make the best possible use of people and generate the best possible outcomes for students. That is why we are here. We are here to provide vocational training for students but we are also here to provide and make TAFE NSW the best place to work, certainly within

vocational training. I am totally determined, and so is my executive team, to address these issues one by one and in a way that resonates with staff.

We have forums also both with teaching staff and non-teaching staff where we invite them to take further part, not just in telling us what we do not do well enough but actually help us devise and put together those activities that are required in order to improve. So it is not a campaign that just is designed to deal with an issue here and now. It is an ongoing commitment by us and from us to staff, to unions and to the wider community to take the idea of engagement of staff very, very seriously.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me how many TAFE NSW employees have taken stress leave in the past 12 months?

Mr FAURBY: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many have accessed Employee Assistance Program [EAP] services in the last financial year?

Mr FAURBY: They all have access to it, if you mean—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many have accessed?

Mr FAURBY: How many have accessed.

Ms GRUMMER: Yes, we will take it on notice.

Mr FAURBY: We will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many numbers of people—workers compensation claims in the previous financial year?

Mr FAURBY: Yes, we will take that on notice.

Mr SCOTT: Can I just add—I can see the line of questioning, of course—but I make the point that EAP is a service that is provided by TAFE. There are not restraints on reasons that staff members may have for accessing EAP. So it is not necessarily an indicator of pressure within the organisation. Staff members who are having personal issues, issues at home, issues with broader family, dealing with a range of issues can access and utilise EAP.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I take your point, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: We just need to note that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But if there are spikes, there is a large population. You would imagine many of those, given the large population of people with access, those problems would even out over time. If there is a spike, that is what you look for.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but it can also reflect broader issues taking place in society. There are more heightened—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I take your point, Mr Scott. How many incident reports were made by TAFE NSW staff in the last year and how many bullying and harassment claims were made by staff in the previous financial year? I presume you do not have any of that information today.

Ms GRUMMER: No, not those specific details. Plus I would want to make sure that you have the accurate numbers, so we will take that question—

Mr FAURBY: Just as a point of clarification, when you talk about incident reports, are we talking work health and safety reports?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

Mr FAURBY: I would make two points: The first one is that we strongly encourage staff to come forward with observations and any concerns they have about matters that relate to the health and safety of them and their workmates. So therefore to see an increase in reported incidents is not necessarily a bad thing. I mean this not because we want incidents but because we want to create a culture whereby people are absolutely comfortable to come forward with their observations. That is point number one. Point number two I want to make is that when you look at injury frequency rates in TAFE NSW—the number of employees that get injured at work that leads to things such as lost time—we have seen a very positive decline over the last three or four years and

are absolutely determined to see that continue to further decline. That includes, of course, injuries that are physical as well as mental.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that a decline in raw figures or in percentages?

Mr FAURBY: It is in percentages. What we talk about there is—and you may be familiar with the lost time incident frequency rate, which is a normalisation so you can compare one year to the next. You basically do it per million hours worked year on year, so it is a true representation and a normalisation of numbers that is widely recognised across the world, basically. It takes away the disturbance or skewness that you otherwise might have if you report specific incident year on year where your workforce and the number of hours have changed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. And given that your teaching workforce has declined by nearly one-fifth over the last 10 years then that is a pretty significant decline.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You were going to get some numbers over lunch. Did you have any luck getting that data?

Mr FAURBY: We made an attempt to look at enrolment numbers. I think that was what was asked. What we do have is numbers for 2019. These are enrolment numbers for government-funded student courses for the first nine months of 2019, so from January to September of 2019 versus the same period last year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry, 2018?

Mr FAURBY: So 2019 versus 2018.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Okay.

Mr FAURBY: What we have seen there is that there has been an increase in government-funded enrolments of 6.7 per cent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What are the numbers?

Mr FAURBY: The number for 2019—and again I emphasise this is from January through to September—is 322,530. I do not have the number for the year before but that would be the 6.7 per cent less than that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you do not have January to December figures? You have January to September.

Mr FAURBY: No, we only have numbers from January through to September. That is the latest numbers that we have been able to provide. If there is any—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: All right. Did you manage to find the data that you had previously provided to the Federal Government for the completion rates?

Ms PENTON: No. We have not gathered all of the data yet. We will take that question on notice and provide it out of session for the Committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I appreciate that. I am loath to go down the history of the IT experience in TAFE but I suppose we need to get to where we are now. Do you have a figure for what the accumulated expenditure has been on what was initially the learning management and business reform [LMBR], then went to Red Rock and now has been brought in-house. Have you got the accumulated cost of what that IT project has been?

Mr FAURBY: I do not have that here but I will take it on notice and provide it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: As I understand it, 2014 was when the LMBR system was first contracted for. That went to about \$500 million in the red. Was that a Tribal-based platform? Is that what it was described as—a Tribal-based platform?

Ms PENTON: It is known as ebs. That program was run by the Department of Education, actually, if Mr Scott would like to add anything.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: For TAFE?

Mr SCOTT: Well before my time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: All right.

Mr SCOTT: It was part of the same department.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My understanding is that then that Tribal platform was dropped and then Red Rock was brought in in September 2017 to try to take that project forward, is that right?

Mr SCOTT: This is the student management system [SMS], which is a subset of LMBR. My understanding is Red Rock was engaged to do it and Red Rock have pushed it ahead but that contract has now been terminated and TAFE is delivering the final end solution.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was originally an \$80 million contract, is that right?

Mr SCOTT: I would have to check that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you check if it was? If it was not, what was the original contract? And how much has been paid to Red Rock under the contract?

Mr SCOTT: Sure, we will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And I think you might have been asked if there was a termination fee payable.

Mr SCOTT: I will take that on notice too.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was originally going to have a project completed in May 2019, is that right? The Red Rock Oracle project was going to be completed in May 2019.

Mr SCOTT: Do you want to talk to this, Ms Penton?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will ask again, Ms Penton. The Red Rock IT project, which I think has variously been described as an Oracle-based project, was originally going to be completed in May 2019. Is that right?

Ms PENTON: That is the approximate date for the original contract.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was the contracted date, was it not?

Ms PENTON: Yes, but I will take the question on notice to ensure that we provide the exact dates for you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We agree it was not completed in May 2019.

Ms PENTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The contract with Red Rock was terminated in October of last year, is that right?

Ms PENTON: There were negotiations to cease the contract at that time, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Did those negotiations lead to the termination of the contract in October 2019?

Ms PENTON: We brought the contract in-house at that time. So the contract ceased at that time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You terminated the contract. I do not know why we are having this fencing argument about language. There may be something I am missing. The contract was terminated in October 2019 with Red Rock, was it not?

Ms PENTON: That is correct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And it was terminated at the initiative of TAFE.

Ms PENTON: As we indicated this morning, obviously those negotiations are commercial-in-confidence.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you if TAFE decided—I do not need to know the details of the various email exchanges—to terminate that contract in October.

Ms PENTON: That is correct.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. It is before Mr Faurby's time. The decision was made that TAFE was in the best position to bring home and complete the contract. Quite a lot of work had been done. A number of stages were ready to roll out. But on the final completion there was strong confidence that TAFE could deliver that and so that decision was made and those contractual arrangements were triggered with Red Rock.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Was it, in part, the Auditor-General's criticism of the project at the end of 2018 that led to TAFE taking the decision to terminate the contract?

Mr SCOTT: There was advice that came through but I think it is fair to say the IT team and the leadership team in TAFE reviewed the project, reviewed progress on the project and had a determination to see that work through and deliver the student management system, which is quite important for the data that it provides to TAFE. There was a feeling that the TAFE IT team could bring that home and so that was the decision that was made.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, just for the very clear record, I am never going to criticise you for bringing the work in-house. That is not the angle from which I will be approaching. In answer to some questions from my colleague Ms Houssos, you indicated there has been a reduction in IT staff. How does a reduction in IT staff sit with bringing that additional work in-house? If you would address these questions in one answer, has the reduction in the IT staff had any impact upon the delivery of that project?

Ms PENTON: I will answer that second question first. It has not had any impact on the delivery of the student management system project. That project is being managed under the leadership of our chief information officer.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add—and again this is before Mr Faurby's time in the chair—for a lot of those IT decisions, this was the next stage of the rolling out of One TAFE. Part of the model for One TAFE is rather than having a strongly devolved model of service delivery with people everywhere—what we see constantly in the IT industry is the ability to be able to streamline and centralise and to be able to service many different locations from one centre which has the capability to deliver. It is quite a different question, I must say, how you best deploy your IT resources to support an organisation as vast as TAFE with 130 campuses and, in a sense, the programming decisions that need to be made and the work that needs to be done to roll out a software solution like the enrolment platform.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am not in any way questioning the scale of the project. But, Mr Scott, you are not defending what has happened, are you, on the basis of scale? This has been a disaster since 2014 and is still not implemented.

Mr SCOTT: No, but what I am saying is let us not confuse the two. One is a capability to finish a major software program, and TAFE took a view that it was in a position to deliver that best in-house. They have made excellent progress around that and that is tracking well. The other one is how does an organisation like TAFE best provide support to its students, its teachers and its colleges operating in 130 different locations. That is the One TAFE model and that is separate.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We will come to that in due course. The original Oracle project, the original \$80 million project, which has at some point been rebranded as a \$90 million project, was originally scheduled to be completed in May 2019. It is my understanding it has still not been completed. What is the date for the completion of that project?

Ms PENTON: Certainly you would see on a project of this size the strong commitment that we have made to our staff. We have informed our staff that the delivery of the program is taking longer than initially expected. But we have made a very strong commitment to our staff and students to get it right. We are working with our staff to ensure that they can test the development of the program and the system before it is deployed so that we can scale. We have already delivered two major component parts of that. We are working with our staff across the State with the existing system to bring it across to one system to make the transition from the current system to the new system more streamlined.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am sorry but I just asked for what the date is for the completion of it. That answer did not address the date for completion. If you do not know, please say you do not know.

Ms PENTON: Mr Shoebridge—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The witnesses are providing an answer. It is obviously multifaceted and quite complex.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I asked for a date.

The Hon. WES FANG: For Mr David Shoebridge to minimise it down to, "I just asked for a date" sometimes does not clarify what it is that the witnesses are trying to tell us. I would ask him to listen to the answer and then seek further clarification, if that is what is required.

The CHAIR: I think the point of order has some strength. Would the witnesses like to answer the question?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the date?

Mr FAURBY: Yes. I will answer it, I think, to your satisfaction if you allow me to say a few things. First of all, there are a number of phases yet to be delivered. Ms Penton has already talked about those that we have delivered, so I do not want to talk about those again. But I do think it is important to make the point that the system is well and truly in the process of being delivered on a phased basis. What we delivered, for instance, last week or the week before last is what we call the IDM, the identity management platform, which is an example and a milestone, quite an important milestone for us, that went live for all our contractors. To give you an example of what that means, the on-boarding processes for contractors have been reduced from taking multiple days to now taking 20 minutes. The next phase that we have is a similar IDM for staff. We will then have four phases left for delivery, which are the SMS, student management systems, phases one through four. To distil it down to a final date, which I think is what you are looking for, Mr Shoebridge, is that we will be ready with the system prior to semester one of 2022.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: All right. This entire project, the SMS reform, started in 2014 and we now have a completion date of 2022. I have to say I would characterise that as an unbelievably long period of time. I am happy for you to challenge that.

The CHAIR: We will take that as a comment and move on with other questions. Before I come to the Labor Opposition, it is good to know that some people watch these proceedings online. In the name of direct democracy, I want to ask a question that has been sent in from a constituent who obviously attends TAFE. They are asking, "For an older student, is there a process to finish TAFE earlier?" Is there a process for someone who wants to get cracking to finish their course and make good use of it?

Ms PENTON: Our courses are based on national training packages, which are competency based, and students move through those programs and achieve their competencies and are signed off as being competent. Some students will move through faster than others; others will study full-time and others will study part-time, depending on their work commitments.

The CHAIR: So the constituent should see their TAFE administrative office and make some arrangements to go through faster.

Ms PENTON: And the teachers.

The CHAIR: That is good news indeed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I only have a few questions left and you might want to take some of them on notice. We talked a lot about the Boston Consulting Group report from 2015 that used to be on the website and is now off the website. If you can provide a reason as to why it has been removed and when it was removed.

Mr FAURBY: We will do that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to tell me in terms of your cleaning staff, your security staff, your maintenance staff, is that all done through a contract or do you have permanent staff to undertake that work?

Mr FAURBY: The cleaning contract is part of a government-wide centralisation that was—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Broadspectrum.

Mr FAURBY: —I think it would have been sometime last year we entered into that contract as government. TAFE NSW enjoys the same benefits of that as any other organisation under the government umbrella. Similarly, for security we have a centralised contract, which I believe is also a whole-of-government contract and which, I think, took effect sometime before Christmas, so that would have been sometime in 2019.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can provide those exact dates on notice that would be helpful.

Mr FAURBY: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What about maintenance?

Mr FAURBY: For maintenance it depends, I would say is the answer to that because we have a relatively sizable capital budget for maintenance of the 130 campuses we operate. That breaks down into different categories, such as preventative maintenance but also responding to current matters that might arise for maintenance. In doing that, we will always take the focus of making sure that we take safety and security as first priority, classroom availability and readiness as a second priority. In doing so, we from time to time rely upon contractors to do the work. In fact, we very often rely upon contractors. But we also have in-house, as part of the TAFE NSW organisation, our own infrastructure team that oversees the overall management of infrastructure and facilities. They decide what is the best way to address and to deal with those maintenance matters on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can give me on notice a rough breakdown of how many staff you have to do that maintenance and the contractors.

Mr FAURBY: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many apprenticeships and traineeships do you have within TAFE head office and on your campuses?

Mr FAURBY: I will certainly have to take that question on notice and provide you with an accurate answer. I am very happy to do that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have a final question. In the financial audit internal controls and governance report, which was released by the NSW Audit Office, it reported that \$176 million was spent on contingent labour in 2019. Do you have a figure on how much was spent within TAFE on that?

Mr FAURBY: On contingent labour, we can take that question on notice, unless Ms Grummer has the figure.

Ms GRUMMER: No, I will have to take the question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much. Can you provide us with the most recent budget broken down into staffing, capital, maintenance and resources? I will lodge that one on notice.

Mr FAURBY: If you would not mind because we want to make sure that we give you the answer that you would like there please.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is all from me, thank you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The completion date for the SMS part, the student-related IT project, is the first term of 2022? Is that where we got to?

Mr FAURBY: Before first term. Ready for first term.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many CEOs has TAFE had in the last three years? Do we know? Mr Scott, can you remember?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Faurby will be the third permanent CEO.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Third permanent?

Mr SCOTT: Ms Penton was acting for a period of time after Ms McLiesh took her appointment to be Secretary of Treasury, New Zealand.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So we have had three permanent, one acting?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Faurby, I wish TAFE well and I wish the project well.

Mr FAURBY: Thank you, Mr Shoebidge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But to bed down these kinds of reforms requires long-term stability and leadership.

Mr FAURBY: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And the IT project is a case in point. Without long-term stability and leadership these things can be rudderless and go for years. What commitment have you given to actually see this through so as we do not have CEO number four next year, CEO number five the year after that? What commitment have you given and what will you give today to see these projects through?

Mr FAURBY: I can certainly give you the commitment that me signing up to becoming part of TAFE NSW is a long-term commitment. My employment is long term. It is not inevitable, as in there is an end date to when my contract expires, and it is in five years' time. My personal desire and aspiration is to become part of, and remain part of, TAFE NSW for as long as that. I find it to be a phenomenal organisation to work for. I am two months in, so it is early days for me, but I can say that if I was excited about this before I joined, I am even more excited now when I have gotten to know the people who I work with, the organisation that I represent and the challenges that we have. One of them is the student management system and I do not know that any one of us here would ever try to call it any different than it has been a challenge. It has taken too long for us.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I would call it something other than a challenge.

Mr FAURBY: But I would say that we have taken control of it and I am absolutely confident that the process of taking the management of this in-house allows us to deliver it on time and this will be, according to those revised time lines, on time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could I ask you, on notice, to give us the schedule for the implementation? I think you said four elements of the SMS project are going to be implemented.

Mr FAURBY: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you have those implementation dates with you now, please do.

Mr FAURBY: I would be very happy to provide that now if I could?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes.

Mr FAURBY: Phase number one we expect to deliver in Q4 of 2020. Phase two we expect to deliver in Q1 of 2021. Phase three we expect to deliver during Q2 of 2021 and phase four we expect to deliver by the end of the calendar year so we are ready for the enrolments in early 2022.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: All right. They will be the dates we hold you to account on—is that right, Mr Faurby?

Mr FAURBY: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given that that is still not in place, how are you going to be working with students across the State online if you are forced to go to more remote delivery, more IT-based service provision and teaching if the coronavirus hits, as we suspect it will? Are these things related in any way?

Mr FAURBY: I would not say they are but I would caution or perhaps not categorically rule out that there is a relationship. But I would like to answer the question in a somewhat different way if I may?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Answer it as you see fit, Mr Faurby.

Mr FAURBY: TAFE NSW and, more importantly, our students are actually quite privileged because of the set-up that we have, providing training both in class, blended, as well as digital online. I think we are well placed to have and put arrangements in place whereby we can adjust the training provision such that we cater for those challenges that we might run into as a consequence of coronavirus. We have stood up our crisis management team that meets daily at the present time to monitor and manage the situation. We have interaction and engagement with all campuses to discuss what can be done and what should be done in order for us to address and approach those situations as they emerge. We have released a response plan for the COVID-19 or coronavirus situation, should that emerge into something or develop into something more than it is now. So we are well placed to use our IT infrastructure as a platform for providing training.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you sure you have the bandwidth—if I could describe it in those layperson's terms—to deal with a large expansion of people accessing their learning online?

Mr FAURBY: We are comfortable that we do, yes. It is anybody's guess to project the exact magnitude of a crisis like this one and therefore, also, the exact pressure that it might put on any network. We are as dependent and reliant upon a consistent and reliable data transmission as any other organisation is and any other private person is.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is your own capacity at the TAFE end that is probably going to be most under pressure.

Mr SCOTT: Are you talking about metaphorical bandwidth or literal bandwidth?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Literal bandwidth, yes, and the capacity to deal with a large number of people logging on remotely, multiple courses being run remotely. I assume you are looking at the same issue at a school level too.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we are. It is a challenge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I say it in this context: IT professionals whom I have spoken with are saying that at the moment the phone is running hot, people are constantly looking for IT professionals. Everyone is asking the same question right now.

Mr SCOTT: Let us be clear about it. TAFE Digital provides a great service. We have set up in our school system—there are multiple applications that allow this to take place. Neither TAFE nor the school system has been designed to have 400,000 students, 800,000 students, online simultaneously. This is going to be the same with every business and every department in every operation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Which is why I am raising it.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, so that is the work we are doing now. I think just as TAFE does not have all students in classes at all times, nor will it have all students online and engaged at one time. We are, similarly, looking at how you prioritise and sequence services in the school system and we are having good work with our IT providers to help support us in it. They appreciate the importance.

Mr FAURBY: But I also think, if I may just add, that the nature of our business is one that is very decentralised. We operate at 130 campuses plus 14 connected learning centres, and we are soon to have eight more of those. Again, no-one can predict, exactly, the magnitude of this but if I were to offer my view that would be to expect the implications of this virus to hit certain areas more than others. Therefore we would not, and would never expect—I certainly would not—that we would come to the point where we would rely upon having 400,000 students online at the same time. We will consider this on a case-by-case basis and, on the basis of and as part of our response plan, we are considering whether or not the ICT capabilities are adequate and sufficient to deal with the worst-case situations that we believe we could ever get into.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My last question on this is: In terms of remote delivery of courses, there may well be many students who have signed up for a course but do not have a laptop or a home computer that is adequate for the job. Is there some kind of arrangement that TAFE can enter into if there is going to be remote learning for the provision of a laptop or an iPad—or whatever is required—to do that remote learning?

Mr FAURBY: I will certainly say that there are no current—if the question is: Are we, as a training provider, providing hardware for people to take home or—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question is whether you have plans to do that in the event it becomes necessary to address the coronavirus, in response, and the increase in remote learning?

Mr FAURBY: The plan that we do have is to make sure that we make optimal use of the facilities that we have, including the connected learning centres, including the campuses that will not be impacted by this, so that we fully utilise and optimise that. We do not have any plans to go beyond that at this point in time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The last thing I will put on the record is this. I have literally just had a note sent to me—it seems to be the flavour of the day—indicating gratitude about the classes that have been retained at Bega TAFE. I finish by noting the gratitude for the retention of classes at Bega TAFE.

Mr FAURBY: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: A very good, positive note on which to conclude the budget estimates.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They wonder where the money is coming from, though.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: David, do not ruin it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Maybe you could provide, on notice, where the funding is coming from.

The CHAIR: The Greens can never be fully positive. Come on, change that mindset, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is a good question.

The CHAIR: Great job at Bega TAFE. Thank you, everyone, the Committee and the witnesses, in particular, for their time in answering so many questions. I declare the meeting closed.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.