



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Proof Committee Hansard

## SENATE

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

**Estimates**

(Public)

THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022

CANBERRA

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**EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 10 November 2022**

**Members in attendance:** Senators Allman-Payne, Antic, Colbeck, Davey, Faruqi, Grogan, Liddle, McKenzie, Nampijinpa Price, O'Sullivan, Payman, David Pocock and Sheldon

## EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

### In Attendance

Senator Chisholm, Assistant Minister for Education, Assistant Minister for Regional Development

#### Department of Education

Dr Michele Bruniges, Secretary

#### Corporate and Enabling Services

#### Cross-Portfolio Matters

Mr Marcus Markovic, Deputy Secretary

Mr David Pattie, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Gemma Smith, Assistant Secretary

Mr Craig Boyd, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Adi Smith, Assistant Secretary

#### Early Childhood and Youth

Mr Brenton Philp, Deputy Secretary

Mr Tristan Reed, First Assistant Secretary

Mrs Anne Twyman, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Michele Arcaro, Assistant Secretary

Ms Jacinda Still, Assistant Secretary

#### Schools

Dr Ros Baxter, Deputy Secretary

Ms Julie Birmingham, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Pablo Carpay, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Fabian Harding, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Bruce Edwards, Assistant Secretary

Ms Rachel O'Connor, Assistant Secretary

Mr Felix Donovan, Assistant Secretary

Ms Jessica Mohr, Assistant Secretary

#### Higher Education, Research and International

Mr Tony Cook, Deputy Secretary

Ms Kelly Pearce, First Assistant Secretary

Mr Dom English, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Karen Sandercock, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Kate Chipperfield, Assistant Secretary

Mr Damian Coburn, Assistant Secretary

Mr Nicholas Post, Assistant Secretary

#### Portfolio Entities

#### Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Mr David De Carvalho, Chief Executive Officer

Ms Sharon Foster, Executive Director, Curriculum

Mr Russell Dyer, Executive Director, Assessment and Reporting

#### Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited

Mr Mark Grant, Chief Executive Officer

Mr Edmund Misson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Ms Lisa Molloy, General Counsel and Company Secretary

#### Australian Research Council

Ms Judi Zielke, Chief Executive Officer  
Dr Richard Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer  
Ms Sarah Howard, Branch Manager  
Dr Mel Southwell-Lee, Branch Manager

**Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency**

Emeritus Professor Peter Coaldrake, Chief Commissioner  
Mr Alistair Maclean, Chief Executive Officer  
Mr Nicholas Riordan, General Counsel

**Committee met at 09:00**

**CHAIR (Senator Sheldon):** I declare open this meeting of the Education and Employment Legislation Committee on Thursday 10 November 2022. I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and paying my respects to their elders, past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today. The committee is due to report to the Senate on Tuesday 29 November 2022 and has fixed Friday 16 December 2022 as the date for the return of answers to questions taken on notice. The committee has resolved that written questions on notice should be received from senators by close of business on Friday 18 November 2022.

Under standing order 26, the committee must take evidence in public session. This includes answers to questions on notice. I remind all witnesses that, in giving evidence to the committee, they are protected by parliamentary privilege. It is unlawful for anyone to threaten or disadvantage a witness on account of evidence given to a committee. Such action may be treated by the Senate as a contempt. It is also a contempt to give false or misleading evidence. The Senate has endorsed the following test of relevance for questions at estimates hearings: any question going to the operation or financial positions of departments and agencies which are seeking funds in estimates are relevant questions for the purpose of estimates hearings. I remind officers that the Senate has resolved that there are no areas in connection with the expenditure of public funds where any person has a discretion to withhold details or explanations from the parliament or its committees unless the parliament has expressly provided otherwise.

The Senate has resolved also that an officer of a department of the Commonwealth shall be not asked to give opinions on matters of policy and shall be given reasonable opportunity to refer questions asked of the officer to superior officers or to a minister. This resolution does not preclude questions asking for explanations of policy or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted. Witnesses are reminded of the Senate order specifying the process by which a claim of public interest immunity should be raised. I incorporate the public interest immunity statement into *Hansard*.

*The extract read as follows—*

**Public interest immunity claims**

That the Senate—

(a) notes that ministers and officers have continued to refuse to provide information to Senate committees without properly raising claims of public interest immunity as required by past resolutions of the Senate;

(b) reaffirms the principles of past resolutions of the Senate by this order, to provide ministers and officers with guidance as to the proper process for raising public interest immunity claims and to consolidate those past resolutions of the Senate;

(c) orders that the following operate as an order of continuing effect:

(1) If:

(a) a Senate committee, or a senator in the course of proceedings of a committee, requests information or a document from a Commonwealth department or agency; and

(b) an officer of the department or agency to whom the request is directed believes that it may not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, the officer shall state to the committee the ground on which the officer believes that it may not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, and specify the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document.

(2) If, after receiving the officer's statement under paragraph (1), the committee or the senator requests the officer to refer the question of the disclosure of the information or document to a responsible minister, the officer shall refer that question to the minister.

(3) If a minister, on a reference by an officer under paragraph (2), concludes that it would not be in the public interest to disclose the information or document to the committee, the minister shall provide to the committee a statement of the ground

for that conclusion, specifying the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document.

(4) A minister, in a statement under paragraph (3), shall indicate whether the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document to the committee could result only from the publication of the information or document by the committee, or could result, equally or in part, from the disclosure of the information or document to the committee as in camera evidence.

(5) If, after considering a statement by a minister provided under paragraph (3), the committee concludes that the statement does not sufficiently justify the withholding of the information or document from the committee, the committee shall report the matter to the Senate.

(6) A decision by a committee not to report a matter to the Senate under paragraph (5) does not prevent a senator from raising the matter in the Senate in accordance with other procedures of the Senate.

(7) A statement that information or a document is not published, or is confidential, or consists of advice to, or internal deliberations of, government, in the absence of specification of the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information or document, is not a statement that meets the requirements of paragraph (1) or (4).

(8) If a minister concludes that a statement under paragraph (3) should more appropriately be made by the head of an agency, by reason of the independence of that agency from ministerial direction or control, the minister shall inform the committee of that conclusion and the reason for that conclusion, and shall refer the matter to the head of the agency, who shall then be required to provide a statement in accordance with paragraph (3).

(d) requires the Procedure Committee to review the operation of this order and report to the Senate by 20 August 2009.

*(13 May 2009 J.1941)*

(Extract, Senate Standing Orders)

**CHAIR:** An officer called to answer a question for the first time should state their full name and the capacity in which they appear. Senators, departments and agencies have been provided with advice on the arrangements in place to ensure that the budget estimates 2022-23 hearings are conducted in a safe environment. This guidance is also available from the secretariat. The committee appreciates the cooperation of all attendees in adhering to these arrangements.

Today the committee will be hearing evidence from the Education portfolio. I welcome Senator the Hon. Anthony Chisholm, Assistant Minister for Education and Assistant Minister for Regional Development, representing the Minister for Education. Minister Chisholm, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Senator Chisholm:** No, thank you, but it's good to be with you.

#### **Department of Education**

[09:03]

**CHAIR:** I now call officers of the department in relation to outcome 1, Schools. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Dr Bruniges:** No, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Senator Liddle.

**Senator LIDDLE:** School funding over the forward estimates under the coalition was set to increase by 12.6 per cent. The budget presented by Labor slightly increases that to 15.3 per cent. Can you please detail for the committee the increase and what additional elements of that have actually been increased?

**Dr Baxter:** There are a number of areas where the forward projections indicate increases over the forward years. The first is in relation to generally recurrent funding. As you know, recurrent funding is based on the population of students at the school at any given time, the characteristics of those students, and the application of indexation. So, these forward estimates that have been presented do represent a shift in some of those numbers for schools across-the-board, both the non-government and the government sector, and that does increase the amount of recurrent funding that's projected to be paid over the forward estimates. I'm not sure whether you're also referring to the broader range of schools' measures that have been included in this particular PBS, but as you know there are some very significant payments which are going out to schools, again both in the government and non-government system, paid out by the states. They include the School Upgrade Fund, which was an election commitment of this government, the Student Wellbeing Boost, and a range of other smaller measures. Both the School Upgrade Fund and the Student Wellbeing Boost are \$200 million approximately each, and there are a range of smaller measures. If you would like, I can detail each of those in turn.

**Senator LIDDLE:** As to those funds, which are specifically for the school upgrades, is it already identified where those funds will go, or are they part of a competitive bid round?

**Dr Baxter:** The School Upgrade Fund has a number of components to it. There is a component for projects that have already been identified through the election commitment process. Then there is a component that is for an open round, a competitive open round. Those applications will open in November. We're still hoping that they will happen in November. We're expecting them to close in February, and schools from both the government sector and the non-government sector will be able to apply for small-scale capital grants. Then there is a component of that School Upgrade Fund election commitment that relates to matching the capital grants provided to the non-government sector. That component, \$215 million approximately, is earmarked for the public sector in order to equalise capital funding that goes out to the two sectors in 2023.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Do you have a number that will explain any of the distribution of those funds under that component of funding for public schools verses independent schools?

**Dr Baxter:** Can I just check that you are definitely talking about the \$215 million component?

**Senator LIDDLE:** Yes.

**Dr Baxter:** Yes, we do.

**Senator LIDDLE:** That component will be paid out by Treasury, through Treasury, under a national partnership. I'll just get the numbers for you or you might have them there already, Mr Harding?

**Mr Harding:** At this stage we're working through how that will be distributed. It's likely to be distributed in a similar way to which the non-government capital grants are distributed. We will be using a similar thing, which is based on enrolments in the sectors, and the split down the sectors itself.

**Dr Baxter:** There are two components that drive that, as Mr Harding was saying. The first is how many schools there are in that particular area and, secondly, the split of recurrent funding. Recurrent funding gives you an idea of the need for each school, because it's based not just on the base but also on those loadings that indicate need. We have a formula. As Mr Harding said, it's the same approach we take to non-government capital grants. It's not just a direct count of how many children and how many schools; it also includes this component of need by looking at how much recurrent funding goes to each of those.

**Senator LIDDLE:** How much does each state and territory receive in regional loading for schools?

**Dr Baxter:** I have that number here.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I'm interested in that breakdown over 10 years and over the forwards.

**Dr Baxter:** So, you're looking for the amount paid in the loading? Of the \$318.9 billion the Australian government is providing to schools over 2018 to 2029, \$71.5 billion is to students in regional and remote schools. That includes an estimated \$5.7 billion in 2022. I have the loading as well. Not all of the \$71.5 million is the loading. The location loading is approximately \$539 million, in 2022. That is an increase. The \$5.7 billion to regional and remote students in 2022 is up from \$4.4 billion in 2018. We're estimating that will go out to \$7.3 billion in 2029. I think you asked for the 10-year figure?

**Senator LIDDLE:** Yes.

**Dr Baxter:** That will go out to \$7.3 billion in 2029. That's an increase of about two-thirds, about 67.4 per cent, since that original \$4.4 billion in 2018 figure.

**Senator LIDDLE:** The distribution when you talk about remote, is that based on postcode or are there other elements? In the Northern Territory and South Australia you have some communities that would be classified, I guess, as those in greatest need, but they are right alongside a bitumen road that's serviced quite regularly, compared to another community in the same postcode that's a lot further away, and having a lot more cost pressures on getting teachers, resourcing it and getting provisions to it.

**Dr Baxter:** That's a really good point you make. I think it's where the interplay of some of the loadings comes in. Many of the schools and the students who attract the location loading also attract other loadings, for example, the Indigenous loading, and also the low socioeconomic loading, and in some cases the language background other than English loading. Just to go specifically to your question, we use the remoteness classification that's based on the Australian Education Act 2013. It's a measure of both remoteness and accessibility. It looks at the ARIA score, it turns that into a remoteness classification for the purpose of the Education Act—major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. Just to give you a sense of what you might be talking about, cities are fairly obvious. Sydney or Melbourne for major city. Inner regional might be North Rockhampton. Our team particularly use that one because that's where I went to school.

Outer regional might be something like Coffs Harbour, smaller outer regional towns. Remote could be Swan Hill in Victoria, and then very remote might be Mount Gambier and also some of our locations in the Northern Territory.

**Senator LIDDLE:** This question relates to each state and territory, how much they receive in disability loading for schools over that last 10 years and over the forwards. Could you provide that? Also, in South Australia we have information and we've heard that teachers are doing a lot of work around administration rather than actually teaching. We're hearing more and more that teachers are getting involved in securing NDIS funding for some of their students. I'm wanting to know whether you're also hearing that and how teachers might be better supported to respond, if that's what they're doing?

**Dr Baxter:** I am not sure that we have the disability broken down by state. I will come to that. But, just to go to the issue, we certainly have seen featured recently in some reporting about the NCDD loading in the press the disability loading. I think it's a good moment to clear it up. There does seem to be this sense that getting access to the disability loading is something that requires an enormous amount of extra paperwork. We have heard a discussion that it's easier for non-government schools to get that because they have more resources. In fact, there is no separate process or paperwork that is required for you to be able to say that a student needs to attract the disability loading. It's about the normal processes of teaching that student. It's about teacher observations, which they are doing for their usual lesson planning, anyway. They observe them over a period of weeks, and the teacher is able to say, 'This student requires adjustments', whether that be at the 1, 2, 3 or 4 level.

**Senator LIDDLE:** But in those remote communities, you're more likely to find a higher proportion of people that were probably likely to be able to go through that process and make applications. Are you giving consideration to the additional support that those teachers might need, who are already teaching children in a high-needs complex category, to go through that process? If you have 15 kids in a classroom that are undiagnosed and yet clearly have FASD, that's a significant workload that's distracting you from the important work that you should be doing in the classroom.

**Dr Bruniges:** The move to use a functional definition for students with a disability was important, because it puts teachers in the driving seat for making judgements that they do every day. They are the closest. It used to be that a medical diagnosis was required to attract the disability loading, but in the last little while we've moved to a functional definition so that teachers make those judgments in the place of their everyday work, and that's been significant. They're dealing with the children. They make the assessment based on their judgement, and that's what we use. We also have a moderation process across teaching at different sites. In fact, the government has an injection of about \$20 million—correct me if I'm wrong—to ensure that we get comparability of data on functional definitions of disability. We'll probably have another conversation later today about teacher workload, and anything we can do to support them. There's the moderation exercise to help them, putting them in the driving seat to ensure that they exercise their judgements around students with disability, and that will then trigger the loading that the school attracts for students with a disability.

**Dr Baxter:** You're absolutely right. Some teachers do feel like they need more guidance. The secretary has mentioned the budget measure, the NQIM, that has been working with teachers and also with systems to try to improve the resources they have to try to work through what this means, what it looks like, and how you provide this assistance. Some of the things that we are doing to try to help all teachers, including recognising the special situation for those in particular regional areas, include that we are implementing the recommendations of the 2019 National Schools Resourcing Board report for the students with disability loading. This is about really trying to have a strong evidence base for that loading. We have also developed a portal that teachers can use which explains how the loading works and what is and is not required. Schools are certainly not required to create new or additional evidence for the purposes of the NCCD, and it sets that out. We've also developed new materials that are specifically aimed at teachers, and we've tailored that to the various sectors. I think we've had the independent sector at one point approach us. Is this the fact sheet here? You might like to talk to that, Mr Harding. He has an example of the sorts of things that are covered in the fact sheet for teachers. We've also done projects within that program on things like the impact of trauma. Many of these students with disability that we know experience trauma. Especially, as you rightly point out, in some areas there might be children who have multiple trauma, trauma on top of disability, on top of other things that have happened to them. We've also been developing a targeted assurance process for the NCCD. Our senior executive who works on this, Ms Butel, has been working very closely with each of the sectors on those resources.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Is there anything you would like to add to the fact sheet?

**Mr Harding:** Only that the department strongly encourages school staff responsible for gathering evidence not to create unnecessary documentation. The fact sheet is designed to work out what is required and what's not required. A lot of stuff that schools were doing was in excess of those requirements, which relates to workload, as you were referring to earlier.

**Senator LIDDLE:** On 15 October the Prime Minister said that his government has inherited cuts to schools. The speech was to the New South Wales ALP conference. Can you please advise who provided that advice to the Prime Minister, or PM&C, and who prepared his draft speech that would have advised that there were cuts to funding? Have there been cuts to funding?

**Dr Baxter:** I think that may be a question best directed to PM&C. I'm not aware of where that advice came from for PM&C.

**Senator LIDDLE:** But it didn't come from you?

**Dr Baxter:** Not that particular piece that you're talking about that I'm aware of, no.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Has the department provided advice to any of the portfolio ministers in relation to so-called cuts statements made by the Prime Minister either before or after the speech?

**Dr Baxter:** I would have to take that on notice. Obviously, we have a significant group in Schools Group and we do have broad and deep relationships across the other agencies. I'll take that one on notice for you. Certainly, I'm not aware of advice, but that doesn't mean that we may not have been asked either directly through our departmental colleagues about funding information or that we may not have had an approach via the minister's office. It's not one that I've been aware of.

**Senator LIDDLE:** But certainly you've not had conversations to either correct or seek more information about that speech?

**Dr Baxter:** Not me personally, but I'll take on notice whether we've provided anything.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Anybody in the department?

**Dr Bruniges:** No, not to my knowledge.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Does the minister concur with the statement that the Prime Minister made in his speech?

**Senator Chisholm:** I haven't seen it. Sorry. I would have to get a copy of it. I wasn't at the New South Wales conference.

**CHAIR:** Senator Grogan.

**Senator GROGAN:** I'd like to go to the teacher shortages. We know that there are shortages. Could you step out for us what that looks like, and how long we've been experiencing this. Is there an event that's taken us here or has this been brewing for some time?

**Dr Bruniges:** Already in the media this morning we see another report from the independent schools sector indicating that the shortages in teaching have probably been over at least the last decade, if not longer. There's no doubt that there have been pockets of shortages, and some of those areas have been particularly in subject-specific areas. You would have heard of STEM, and the shortage of physics, science and maths teachers in secondary schools. While probably a number of years ago we had an oversupply of primary teachers—

**Senator GROGAN:** An oversupply?

**Dr Bruniges:** an oversupply of primary teachers—we don't see that in its current shape and form today. I think we have some numbers that the team have got, which we've been looking at, in terms of what we see in increased entries into teaching and where we are moving.

**Senator LIDDLE:** That would be very helpful.

**Dr Baxter:** You would be aware that, as a part of the teacher roundtable and the work that the secretary is currently leading with the Teacher Workforce Action Group, there was an issues paper prepared that canvassed some of this. But I'll just touch on some of the key pieces of data.

**Senator GROGAN:** Is that the Teacher Workforce Action Plan?

**Dr Baxter:** That's correct.

**Senator GROGAN:** There was an issues paper, and then you released a draft plan, or are you conflating those two?

**Dr Baxter:** That's correct. In the leadup to the draft plan there was an issues paper released. We also had a teacher roundtable that each of the Australian education ministers attended alongside teachers, peak bodies and unions back on 12 August. Out of that meeting the ministers issued a communique saying that they would ask the secretary to chair a Teacher Workforce Action Group that would look at this issue of teacher shortages. That group has worked at a cracking pace over the last couple of months to really examine the data, to undertake targeted consultation in their own areas and to come up with a draft action plan. So, it's an initial list of actions



that are focused on some of these drivers that I'll talk about in a moment. The issues paper was a feeder for that first discussion for the roundtable.

**Senator GROGAN:** That's very helpful. Do you have the numbers for that 10-year period you're talking about?

**Dr Baxter:** There are issues that have led to the teacher shortages. We have increases in student growth between 2021 and 2031. We expect primary school enrolments to grow by 11 per cent, secondary school enrolments to grow by 10 per cent, and feeding into the picture we have then got reduced ITE, which is shorthand for our initial teacher education/teacher training. We have reduced ITE commencements and completions. Some of the windows of the data are a bit different from each other, but it's all over that 10-year period. Between 2017 and 2020, commencements—people starting those teacher training courses—declined by about 8 per cent, but completions declined even further, by about 17 per cent. In fact, our six-year completion rate—the number of people who finish a teaching qualification in six years—has declined between 2010 and 2015. It declined eight per cent. It now is only at 48 per cent. We basically only see half of those who are starting a teaching qualification finish it within six years. So, that is one of the drivers.

**Senator GROGAN:** Do we know why?

**Senator DAVEY:** Can we get a copy of that?

**Dr Baxter:** Absolutely. We can probably even do that while we're in session. It's on the public record.

**Senator GROGAN:** Obviously, that's quite a challenging scenario. But you're saying the planning for the next step in terms of how you're going to address the teacher shortage and workforce challenge is work that you're undertaking now, Secretary?

**Dr Bruniges:** That's correct. We've worked very hard. We have had representatives from principals groups, every state and territory, independent, Teachers Union; the AEU convened in a task force of 20-odd people who have volunteered their expertise and time to work with us on that task force. What has been the outcome is the draft action plan that we now have out for consultation, and the major areas in that plan that we've agreed, and are trying and seek feedback about how we elevate the status of the profession, which is incredibly important. How do we improve the teacher supply, or increase the number of students entering but also completing. As Dr Baxter has pointed out, starting doesn't mean that they're completing. We're thinking about how we might strengthen initial teacher education. We have to make sure that we support teachers. Maximising the time to teach; that's kind of related to how do you actually focus on teachers doing what they're trained to do, and that is to teach, and to maximise their time in classroom and face to face, and how do we look at alleviating some of the admin burden and the different strategies in states and territories. How do we understand the future needs of the workforce?

**Senator GROGAN:** That one is of particular interest to me. Have we not looked at that previously? Given you have said we've had this decline, and we all know that there's a shortage out there, and it's been going on for a number of years, have we tried anything before?

**Dr Bruniges:** I'd have to say that's probably done at a jurisdictional level. Each state and territory is the employer of teachers, and there would be some workforce planning there. They would be aware of retention strategies, and having a look at that. At the national level, this is the first time we've come together nationally as a group to have a look at what we might be able to do in a national sense. I think that's really important, to have a look at supply and demand. So, for us, at the Commonwealth level, we have universities and we're having a look at the profile of universities in ITE. The states and territories will know their demands data. They will have their populations. So, bringing those two things together is critically important so that we can work together at a national level. Also, the jurisdictions work very hard at putting in different strategies to do that.

The last area that we decided to put in the draft action plan was about better career pathways to support and retrain teachers. So, you have probably got a new body of teachers coming in through ITE, and you have the existing workforce. How do you retain them? You've probably to some degree got a returning workforce, or people who are prepared to work two and three days a week in part-time roles, but not a full-time job. There is great expertise with people who have finished their full-time teaching career who are actually prepared to come back and work but not in a full-time capacity. How do we understand how those things come together in the jurisdiction and what support can we give, particularly to our beginning teachers coming through? With our existing workforce, it's probably the 80/20 rule; you have 80 per cent of the existing workforce. It's incredibly important that we support the existing workforce as well.

**Dr Baxter:** I might just add on the ITE, which you were just asking about and which the secretary touched upon, that the panel the secretary chairs is not the only body of work we have going on that the government has commissioned in this regard. The other is the Teacher Education Expert Panel, which Professor Mark Scott, who

is the Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, is chairing. I could hear you were starting to go, 'That's an interesting picture of commencements and completions.' That's one of the things that panel is very interested in looking at. What is it about initial teacher education training? From our point of view, as the secretary said, one of the things that we'll examine is that the Commonwealth holds some of those funding levers. I know you're talking to higher education later in the day, but what is it that works or doesn't work to get excellence out of those funding levers? It's also looking at things like how does the prac work? Students go into classrooms and do a prac. Could that be more effective? Middle-career entrants are a very important source of new teachers coming into teaching, not just because they're often excellent and already have skills in a wide range of areas but of course they take less time to train. They can generally have a truncated teaching masters.

Each of those things means that they're very important as well. Professor Scott and his team will be looking at that. We have the secretary's process, which is looking broadly at this issue of teacher shortages, and then we have Professor Scott's panel really zeroing in on this picture of training and university and what works and what doesn't work.

**Senator GROGAN:** After watching this challenge of teacher shortages just get worse and worse over a number of years, it's great to see something actually happening, and the whole idea about having a national plan sounds great. Thank you so much.

**CHAIR:** Senator Allman-Payne.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I might start with my questions about the draft workforce plan document. As somebody who comes from Central Queensland, where at least seven schools are already at crisis level for teacher staffing, I think this is something that's important to get right. There's a significant number of factors. In elevating the profession, we're talking about awards, encouraging people to nominate people for Members of the Order of Australia. I'd like to suggest to you that, if anyone can see through giving people a gold star for good work it's teachers; we invented it and it really loses its effectiveness at about Year 6. I would like to suggest to you that teachers are not in this—as a teacher myself of 30 years—to get awards, and that's probably not where we should be focussing our time.

**Senator Chisholm:** I think that's one recommendation out of 28.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I understand that. Thank you. In relation to increasing HAT and lead teachers to about 10,000 by 2025, I note that really addresses only less than five per cent of the teacher workforce. I'm interested to know what the plan is, I guess, to increase salaries and pathways for the other 95 per cent of teachers? Is work being done on that?

**Dr Bruniges:** I might start, and we might have data on the HAT process, the highly accomplished teachers process. There's no doubt, if you look at the numbers of highly accomplished teachers, we don't have very many.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** It's very onerous.

**Dr Bruniges:** There's no doubt, working with AITSL, we need to streamline that process, because it is an onerous task, as you rightly point out, with the paperwork required and portfolios. We're looking at how AITSL might do some work around streamlining that process, which is important. In terms of pay and conditions, they'll fall into the enterprise or industrial agreements in each of the jurisdictions, as you'd be aware, in terms of that being an important element. In some jurisdictions there's the traditional incremental scales, where teachers every year go up, and there's a ceiling effect at year 8, and then nowhere you can go beyond that unless you go into an admin role or deputy or assistant principal role. In other jurisdictions—

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I guess what my question is going to is: what is the federal government looking at doing to assist with that? Is the federal government looking at putting more money into particularly the public sector so that states have the ability to increase salaries across-the-board? I know that individual states are doing individual things. I'm really interested in what you're doing.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, the National Schools Reform Agreement is the primary driver for additionality that goes in. Some states already use that recurrent source in terms of enterprise agreements. We'll be looking forward as we go to the next agreement, which will be struck in 2023, to ensure that states are in a position, if they choose—and some already choose to do that—to use the recurrent funding flow to support different things within the teaching profession.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I note that in the improving teacher supply section there's a suggestion for 1,500 more places in the high achieving teachers program. I'm presuming this is Teach For Australia and the Monash Nexus program? Is that what we're talking about here?

**Dr Baxter:** La Trobe; that's correct.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I note that Monash program is only in trial and hasn't gone through a full cycle. In relation to the Teach For Australia program, the report by dandolopartners that was commissioned by the then Department of Education and Training shows that, within a year of completing their two-year placement, more than a third of TFA associates have already stopped teaching, and that after three years less than half of them are still employed as teachers. In Australia the estimated cost of training each teacher alumnus who remains in the profession for at least three years is over \$100,000. My first question is: are you aware of the report, and how much money will be going to the Teacher For Australia program as well as this new Nexus program? The outcomes aren't really that great.

**Dr Baxter:** Thank you. I'll call on Ms Mohr in a moment to talk specifically about evaluation of Teach For Australia and Nexus, the two programs. This document refers to 2,260 new places for people who are coming in as mid-career entrants. Some 760 of those are places that are matching a commitment around TFA, Teach For Australia and La Trobe. They're an important pipeline, and many schools, particularly in our regional areas, have really valued teachers who have been placed there who are quite high performing, recognising the issues that you've mentioned. As to the other 1,500 places—the action that comes after the action I think you're referring to, which is number 7, action 8 refers to using that pool to really try to commission new ways of looking at what works. We are not bound that those 1,500 places would be provided by TFA, Nexus and other current programs. In fact, what we really want to do is innovate with the money for those places. We want to work out what works. Is it about getting teacher aides, for example, trained up to become teachers? What's the right pathway there? It might be that there's a range of institutions that have ideas about how to do this better.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** My concern is that there is evidence that shows that the less skilled a teacher is the less benefit there is for students, and what we're seeing, particularly in the TFA program, is they specifically say that they are designed to put teachers into disadvantaged schools. We're effectively compounding disadvantage by putting the least trained teachers into areas of high need. If there's anything that we know it's that the disadvantage gap is growing, particularly in our public sector. I guess it's of concern to me that we'd still be putting money into a program that's effectively compounding disadvantage and isn't seeing people who have a really long-term commitment to the profession and are staying. I might move on in relation to visas.

Another component of the program is increasing the number of skilled migrants that we bring in. My research tells me from checking that 70 per cent of teachers in the UK have considered quitting recently, because they have high workload and low pay. They're looking at recruiting in Australia. In the USA they have a shortage of 112,000 teachers, and 75 per cent of principals are having difficulty covering absences. In Canada they're trying to get retired teachers back into classrooms. They're estimating that 40 per cent of their teachers will leave in the next five years, and they're introducing 30-hour courses to get untrained people into the classroom. I'm interested to know: where do we think these skilled migrants are going to come from?

**Dr Baxter:** Certainly, this is just one component of a multipronged strategy. As I mentioned, we're looking at what we do with our ITE graduates domestically. Some of this goes to how we keep our existing teachers in the classroom. This is one prong of that. You're right that teacher supply and teacher shortage issues do seem to be a bit of a phenomenon, certainly across some of the partner countries that you've mentioned at the moment. But we do also know that our Skilled Migration Program does attract a lot of people who are interested in coming to Australia as teachers. We are working with the Department of Home Affairs at the moment to really try to get a handle on those numbers. The secretary herself did some work a number of months ago to sit with the Home Affairs processing people and really try to understand what were some of the drivers of those delays and work through and short-circuit some of those and expedite submissions from trained teachers who are waiting to come to Australia. You'll see from the material that's in here that we now have a commitment for allocation times of two business days in the education sector, and we are starting to see those flow through.

I think the team do not have any more current data than that, because we are working with Home Affairs on that, but a really critical piece of this action plan is the data piece. In some ways, it's the least sexy bit of the plan, but it's actually the bit that we're most excited about in some ways in the department because it's actually been quite hard to get a handle on some of these supply and demand issues. There are some real commitments now from the states and territories and the non-government sector to really help us to understand what their demand is. Once we have that, it's a critical ingredient, then, to ask Home Affairs or DFAT, in doing that work overseas, to identify the lucrative markets for potential teachers. Australia has a lot going for it in terms of people wanting to come here. If we can just target those potential pockets of supply with what we know about demand—

**Dr Bruniges:** We already have some states and territories, and we've had some bilateral discussions with counterparts in Ireland. We know that WA has already struck a memorandum of understanding. In fact, with their

teacher training there I think there's an oversupply in some areas. You're right; we are going to have to work really hard across a number of elements to do what we need to do.

**Dr Baxter:** I should have said that we don't underestimate the scale of the challenge.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I also want to go to the part of the document that talks about maximising the time to teach. I say this as somebody who left the teaching profession in April this year. I've taught for 30 years. I thought it was interesting that a Monash survey found recently that 90 per cent of teachers feel that the group of people that gives them the least respect is actually politicians. Some 90 per cent of teachers think that politicians have a lack of respect for and trust in the profession. I note that, as we've said, teachers have been saying for over a decade that we have a shortage of teachers and we have workload issues. I think it's reasonable for them to feel like they haven't been listened to. Particularly when I look at this document—and this section is called 'Maximising time to teach'—I'm interested in why there's a repeated focus on this idea of maximising time spent teaching rather than meaningfully reducing workload. I'm assuming that you're aware that Australia is at the top of the OECD in terms of time spent in front of students. When I look at this, a lot of the stuff in here is really focused on newer teachers and retaining newer teachers. I'm interested to know why there doesn't seem to be a significant focus on retaining the teachers that we have and getting back the ones we've lost.

We know that the bulk of teachers who are leaving are actually the ones in that six- to 10-year bracket who are drowning under workload. I note from the conversation around NCCD that I think you'd have to accept, wouldn't you, that the burden now of making those functional assessments for kids has been put on teachers when that previously wasn't a job that they had. What I'm not seeing in this document is the three key things that I think teachers have been calling for over a decade. One of them is lowering class sizes to reduce workload, increasing non-contact time so that teachers have time to plan and collaboratively do what they need to do to address the needs of the diverse students they have in front of them, and increase teacher pay. What I want to know is: why are we going ahead with all of these pilot studies for microreforms when we have the evidence that we need, it's been the same evidence for over a decade, and teachers have been saying it repeatedly? When are we going to increase funding, particularly to public schools, to lower class sizes, increase the amount of non-contact time they need to plan properly, and increase the pay for teachers across-the-board? I'm not seeing that in this plan.

**Senator Chisholm:** I want to respond to the first point, about respect for teachers. I can absolutely assure you that Minister Clare, every chance he gets, talks about his respect for teachers and the role they play.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** But we need to see it in actions. Our teachers aren't seeing that.

**Senator Chisholm:** Let me finish, please. The Prime Minister is the same, and the government as well. I'll try not to be too political, but I think the previous government was more than happy to pick a fight rather than actually elevate the role teachers play in the community. I'm happy for the department to add more, but one of the key focuses of the draft plan was actually what work the government can do to help elevate the role of teachers in the community. That's something that I know Minister Clare is very passionate about. I've heard him talk about it on regular occasions, but I also understand the practical elements you talk about, which I know are important. I'm happy for the department to add more to that.

**Dr Bruniges:** I might just talk to two things there. We certainly began this conversation in the working group. We looked at the nature and distribution of work in school and ask: what is the nature of teaching and teachers teaching and what are the other things they're expected to do, and how do you get that distribution so teachers who are trained in the art of teaching and learning and supporting students focus on their main game and are not distracted by a whole lot of other things? When we talk about maximising time to teach, that was really saying: how do we get teachers to focus and use their expertise and skills in understanding how the learning process occurs? What might we build around that to support teachers to do that? We've seen in some jurisdictions a reduction in face-to-face teaching time. Victoria has already put in place a reduction of two hours weekly, and our Victorian counterparts shared what they had done in terms of reducing face-to-face time for their teachers to plan and prepare.

Most importantly, I think as to your point on collaboration, there is absolutely clear research from the OECD that talks about the important part of collaborating, both in terms of planning and assessing and talking about students' needs. Being professionally isolated in a classroom or on your own isn't where we want the teaching profession to be. It's about a relationship, and making sure of the time for collaboration. I wholeheartedly support your term about the importance of collaboration within the profession. It's been done a number of times, but now the evidence base is in, places are turning to say, 'How do we get that time and space for teachers to collaborate, plan, do preparation and assessment and all of the things you need to do.'

When we focused on maximising time to teach, our conversation was a very rich one in terms of the working group that brought in all of those things about reduction of face-to-face, which Victoria has already put in place in their enterprise agreement recently. Also, how do we actually look at taking some of the admin burden to give teachers time to teach? That really went to the nature and distribution of work in a school and who's best to do what role. That's incredibly important.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I have one more question on this line. Can I just ask that one last question?

**CHAIR:** If it's a quick one.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Yes, it is. Finally, I note one of the other parts of this plan is examining this idea of implementing essentially lesson plan banks or the like. It's No. 16. It uses the example of curriculum into the classroom in Queensland as one example where that's been done. I have a couple of questions. Firstly, are you aware that's been in place for over a decade now in Queensland and it hasn't reduced teacher workload at all? Secondly, if there is going to be this idea of creating a bank of staff, are they going to have at least three levels of differentiation, which is what teachers are being asked to do for all of their classes and is actually at the core of teachers' work? Are they going to include reasonable adjustments that take into account the needs of all the students that teachers have in front of them in the classroom? I'd suggest to you that, actually, this isn't something that's going to reduce workload.

**Dr Bruniges:** I think the forefront is teacher judgement. I'm a strong believer in teacher judgement, and having a core resource there which you adapt. Look at the students in the classroom. I come from a teaching background as well. When you look at students in your classroom you pull from the repertoire of skills and things that you know and resources you have and you best match to what it is that you need to focus on with individual or groups of students within the classroom. The cry, what we heard through the taskforce, was teachers actually saying, 'We don't have enough of that base material. Can you give us a good stock of base material?' But I don't think that should ever take away from the importance of teachers' judgement and the context that they're working in. That is a really important part of the craft of teaching and the profession, and that's the bit we have to elevate. That's where the collaboration comes in. Yes, I understand the importance of that.

**CHAIR:** Senator O'Sullivan.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Firstly, my mum is a teacher. It would be very remiss of me if I didn't put my respect on the table. It's very disappointing to hear that teachers do feel that politicians don't respect them. I certainly do. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for teachers like Mr Vasquez, Mrs Burdekin and others who had a profound impact on me. I'm now seeing it with my children, and the support they're provided. Teachers are my heroes and heroes in our society. I will go to Senator Perin Davey in a minute, but I just want to clarify something the secretary said before in evidence with regard to boosting teacher retention and the ITE review. He said that this is the first time this has been done at a national level. Can we just get a picture of the time line when you say 'first time'? My understanding is that this work started under the coalition with the ITE review by Lisa Paul, and that these recommendations out of that have actually been lifted and carried forward?

**Dr Bruniges:** Sorry if I wasn't clear. I was referring to the first national action plan. We haven't had one before. But you're right; the ITE review fed into that, and Ms Paul's work has certainly been a critical component in our consideration and the workgroup's consideration. But I was referring to the first national; I can't recall a national action plan. The teaching profession has been reviewed I can't tell you how many times, and reports. If you Google reviews of the teaching profession there's probably a long list. I think it hasn't been in the same context as we're operating in now. But you are right; that review did lead as input.

**Senator DAVEY:** Is the department aware of reports that have been highly publicised that around 7,000 school-age students in New South Wales are not enrolled in any form of formal education?

**Dr Bruniges:** Do you have the name of the report? Do you have a reference for me?

**Senator DAVEY:** There's been quite a range of media coverage about the report. I'll try to get the actual name.

**Dr Bruniges:** Is this the New South Wales one that you're referring to?

**Senator DAVEY:** It is about New South Wales, but I'm interested to understand basically if you're aware of it, and also whether you've spoken to other states to see if there are similar numbers? I think it's quite incredible that so many school-aged children aren't enrolled in some form of education.

**Dr Baxter:** We are certainly aware of the reports, and we're aware of the issue. You do see various estimates and projections. One of the areas we've been mostly talking about and really have had some very significant efforts to try to deal with this issue has been in our development of the USI, the unique student identifier national

priority initiative under the National Schools Reform Agreement. One of the real focus areas of trying to develop a USI, a unique student identifier, is so that we know we are able to compare 'do you have students who are not enrolled in school'? For example, in our discussions one particular state anecdotally told us that they observed that from year to year they could lose up to 20 per cent of some of their First Nations students out of schools and not be able to track where they had gone. The Commonwealth has been very instrumental in piloting a USI over the last year. We've done that in partnership with the Northern Territory, South Australia, New South Wales and the non-government sector, and we expect education ministers to be having a conversation about the USI and where that's got to in December.

We also know that allied to this issue of non-enrolment is this issue of concerns about attendance, and we are very focused on that as well. Yes, certainly both of those issues are issues that we have discussions about with states and territories. As you would know and as the secretary would no doubt point out, we don't run schools and we don't run school systems. We don't necessarily hold those levers that enable us to make sure each child is enrolled, which is why at the national level initiatives like the USI, initiatives like the work that we are doing around student wellbeing, are particularly significant. The government has committed to a student wellbeing boost, in excess of \$200 million, to ensure that each school has money to look at wellbeing for students and those who surround them in the community. There are a number of things we can do nationally, but unfortunately we don't hold all of those levers. We certainly discuss it when we get together with our state and territory colleagues.

**Senator DAVEY:** My understanding is with the USI the target was to have all students assigned a USI by 2023?

**Dr Baxter:** By the end of 2023; that's correct.

**Senator DAVEY:** By the end? Okay. Do you have an indication yet of actually how it's tracking?

**Dr Baxter:** From our point of view, it's not an easy process. There are things about developing a USI, especially in the current climate. When you're talking about children's data, in the current climate there's a great concern about privacy and data. It's complex and very sensitive. But I feel like we have made very good traction on the USI. The Commonwealth developed, ran and paid for the pilot of the USI, which proves that the things we want a USI to do, which is to be able to successfully identify a student, assign them a unique identifier and run a record to try and understand if a student is missing, which is at the sort of a unique student identifier, were all able to be done. We are working up proposals to take to education ministers to say, 'Here's what it would take us to get to a unique student identifier.' I feel from the Commonwealth point of view we have hit those deadlines. I want to say we've spent \$14 million—will you check that for me, please, Ms Birmingham?—in the Commonwealth in the development of this measure. We've also paid for or will be paying for states' participation and non-government participation, and the costs of entering that trial. But, again, it's something that does require the cooperation of each of the states and territories to implement.

**Senator DAVEY:** Are there any penalties for the states if they don't get on board?

**Dr Baxter:** A series of things is built into the National Schools Reform Agreement that relates to powers of the Commonwealth Education Minister. However, I think you'd understand really the Commonwealth power rests around funding. So, it's essentially not funding but delaying the funding, in a context where we've had schools go through a really rough couple of years. I would say that some of the reticence there might have been from some states to participate in the pilot or do other things around a USI. It's not out of sheer obtuseness, it's about the fact that they've had a pretty terrible couple of years where they've really been focused on their key role of getting children to school and getting children educated. In that context, yes, there are levers the Commonwealth minister can bring to bear, but they are fairly significant in terms of what the implications of those would be for schools and students. It's an issue I think that we will look at as we develop the next NSRA. How do we do work collectively that doesn't rely on a Commonwealth stick, the impact of which is to potentially make life more difficult for schools and students?

**Senator DAVEY:** Just to look at it from a practical angle and what it means for parents—for example, I live close to a border. There are a lot of families in my region who might go to primary school in New South Wales and then they go to high school in Victoria. Does this mean that, if I enrol my children into a New South Wales school, they get their student identifier, and when they go to Victoria that number goes with them, and it's a way of just tracking them? Today, without the identifier, they go to Victoria and they've disappeared off the New South system. This report about 7,000 kids in New South Wales might not actually mean 7,000 children are not going to school, but it's just that somewhere along the line they've disappeared off the records?

**Dr Baxter:** Correct.

**Dr Bruniges:** As to the interstate students transfer note, there's a way in which different jurisdictions communicate with transfers. Information normally travels cross-border, with a number of students. You're right; the number of 7,000 could be the transfers interstate. There's also things that reside, if my memory is correct, in the New South Wales Education Act around enrolment and penalties where students actually aren't enrolled. There's a mechanism within the New South Wales jurisdiction to deal with that, inside the Education Act, but what we want to see is every child accessing good-quality education as early as possible.

**Senator DAVEY:** I agree. In your annual report, under outcome 1, your performance measure—I think it's performance measure 59—calls for increasing 'the proportion of students attending school to 90 per cent or more of the time'. Is that for attendance or enrolment? There are different targets. Often, there's a target for a certain percentage of students to attend school, but the actual data collection is based on enrolments rather than actually attending every day of the school year. You have certain jurisdictions that say, 'Yes, we've got 80 per cent of children going to school,' but that's 80 per cent of children enrolled and half of the children aren't actually attending school on a regular basis.

**Dr Bruniges:** School attendance has been quite a fraught issue in measuring that. As a teacher, when you mark the roll in the morning, someone can be attending and, by lunchtime, they may not be there. Some schools have moved to checking each of the periods for attendance. But, on the measure, we've got the increased proportion of students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time. That is actually attendance; that's not about enrolment. Indeed, in each jurisdiction's annual report, they'll have an attendance figure. I know that, in your case, if you look up the New South Wales annual report, you'll see an attendance figure at a lower level, so you can actually see the districts or areas in which students are attending and what the proportion is.

**Senator DAVEY:** Is it possible for the department to provide the committee with a breakdown of those attendance rates in the states or territories and indicate whether they're metro, rural or regional, and whether you also track the socioeconomic demographics of those regions?

**Dr Bruniges:** ACARA, on the National Report on Schooling in Australia webpage, have a data portal. On that portal, you can access information about attendance. As to whether or not you can actually do it—I'd have to check for you—by particular regions or areas of interest, I'm sure that you can.

**Dr Baxter:** Yes, the secretary is right. The *National report on schooling in Australia*, which is the ACARA document, not only gives you a sense of the proportion who are at that 90 per cent or more but also tracks actual full-time enrolment student days as a percentage, which is interesting. The department publish on our site fact sheets around attendance. We can probably table them for the committee because they are public; we also have copies of them here. Yes, they go to attendance by band, so 90 per cent and above—85 to 95 per cent—and who's in those categories by state. They also have some really interesting reflections on breaking it down by sector, breaking it down by remoteness and breaking it down by education level.

**Senator DAVEY:** That's great.

**Dr Baxter:** We could even give you the link, and make sure that you have that. They do that each year. The latest year is 2021. I recently had a look at 2019 compared to 2021. I would say that some of our data is missing. Tell me whether this is correct, Mr Donovan. I think there was one year—it was either 2020 or 2021—where one of the reporting periods is missing.

**Mr Donovan:** Some of the 2020 data is missing.

**Dr Baxter:** That is because of the COVID period. It was very difficult during that period to get reliable estimates of attendance, and ACARA and the states—

**Senator DAVEY:** I can tell you that I know of at least two children who were meant to be attending school during COVID who weren't, but that's beside the point.

**CHAIR:** I want to put a quick question to the minister before I go to Senator Payman. What has been the minister's attitude to pay increases? I'm very mindful of attracting teachers, as part of the mix. A number of issues are critical to maintaining and growing the teaching profession. Since we're all giving our honesty about our teacher engagement, I can only say that I have a sister and brother-in-law who are fantastic teachers. I'd better say that on the record; otherwise they'll ask why I didn't say it. It will be the one time they listen to estimates. Importantly, what is the government's attitude to pay for teachers?

**Senator Chisholm:** The minister has been very clear on this; he thinks that all teachers should be paid more. When you consider the work that he's prioritised since he became minister, obviously, fitting into his role as federal minister, he has been focused on the areas where he can have the most significant impact. I think we've seen that with the draft plan that was released last week. He is certainly of the view that he values the role that teachers play in the community. I remember his first visit was back to his old school and one of his former

teachers was still there. I have no doubt that will continue to be a focus of his as minister. Also, more importantly, it will motivate the work that he does to try and fix this challenge that we face across the country, with a teacher shortage that is so widespread.

**CHAIR:** On the question of workloads, what are the challenges and initiatives there on not only workloads but also encouraging some of our youngest and brightest, both from many areas that we've talked about and from our schooling system, to enter the profession?

**Senator Chisholm:** That was a substantial feature of the draft plan that was put forward and released last week. Obviously, that is open for consultation now; and I'm happy for the department to add more on that. One of the significant things that we were focused on, in terms of ensuring that we can attract people to the teaching profession and those who can go on to make a significant contribution in that area, was \$56 million in the October budget, which goes to bursaries to get the best and brightest year 12 students into initial teacher education. As a department—as I think we've talked about this morning—there are so many facets to this challenge that there are many planks to what the government needs to be doing. We're providing that national leadership, but we're also working cohesively with the states so that we can ensure that we're doing our part; but we're co-opting the states to be doing what they can to help fix this because of the nature of education across the country.

**Senator PAYMAN:** I would like to turn to consent and respectful relationships education. Would you agree that's an important issue in all of our schools?

**Dr Baxter:** Certainly.

**Senator PAYMAN:** When in government, the opposition launched the Respect Matters program. Is the Good Society website part of that program?

**Dr Bruniges:** That's correct.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Moving on, there was the so-called 'milkshake and taco video'. Do you recall that?

**Dr Bruniges:** I certainly do.

**Senator PAYMAN:** The opposition released it while in government. I'm curious to know whether those videos were funded as part of the Good Society website.

**Dr Bruniges:** That's correct; they were funded as part of that website.

**Senator PAYMAN:** What process did they follow in developing those videos, in particular the milkshake and taco one? Was there any consultation or approval by consent and respectful relationships experts?

**Dr Bruniges:** That was a contract that the department let. There was an advisory group. I'm on the public record as saying that the department failed to listen to the voice of experts. That group of experts did provide some feedback on a range of things over a long period of time. The contract was originally signed in 2015, if my memory is right, regarding previous testimony here. As a result of that, we've had a review and we've decommissioned the website.

**Senator PAYMAN:** When you say that the department failed to listen to the feedback from experts, what were their responses to these videos?

**Dr Bruniges:** There were a range of responses over a period of time; some were very positive. There were pilots in schools done of the videos. You'd have to say that the feedback was there. In particular, if my memory is correct, Our Watch was particularly critical of some of those videos. The suite was developed and launched. On the day that it was drawn to my attention, I removed those videos from the website. Since then, we've had an expert review, with experts in the field looking at it, and we've decommissioned the website.

**Senator PAYMAN:** I recall an article in which the Director of End Rape on Campus, Sharna Bremner, warned that the videos 'failed to meet national standards for prevention of sexual assault through education'; rather, she called the videos 'bizarre', 'really trivialising an incredibly serious issue' and 'undermining the intelligence of young people'. In essence, would you say that the Good Society website was a successful initiative; and what are its future prospects?

**Dr Bruniges:** It's been decommissioned, and that's been on the advice of experts; it was us working very closely with experts to have a look at everything, and we made the decision to decommission it.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Being aware of the *Respect@Work* report completed by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins—obviously, the current government has committed to implementing the recommendations in full—what budget measures have been included to implement the recommendations of the report through the Education portfolio? Perhaps the minister can add to this as well.



**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, it's an incredibly important report. As a department, internally, within our organisation, we've taken steps to implement the recommendations. In particular, from memory, in recommendation 10, the government has committed significant resources in order to implement the recommendation, and I'll ask Dr Baxter to give you the details.

**Dr Baxter:** Yes, it is recommendation 10. Ms Jenkins recommended that states and the Commonwealth, and all schools, should implement respectful relationships education in schools. That was part of the decision around decommissioning the website, which is in the process of happening at the moment. The government, in response to that recommendation, had an election commitment which, you would have seen in the budget papers, is \$83.5 million over the next six years. It's quite a change in tack. It goes to working in partnership with the states and territories, and the non-government system, as recommendation 10 said, to get that education into schools rather than having it as a standalone website.

There is a lot in that commitment. There's a commitment around establishing the expert group this year and using that expert group to drive a review. We've had a number of other reviews, but this one will look at the 'how' of how you do respectful relationships education well—what that needs to look like, who needs to provide it, and what kind of program and content it should have—and to have that piece of work then drive the development of an accreditation framework. There will be almost a kind of Heart Foundation tick for respectful relationships education so that, when programs are being purchased, schools know that they are appropriate.

The two bywords of the recommendation and of the government, when they've been talking about this commitment, have been 'age appropriate' and 'evidence based', and that's what we're looking to do here. Also, once we have done that work—once we've worked out how this should be done and have developed the accreditation framework—we'll be looking at a number of grant rounds over five years that will be available to states and territories and the non-government systems, to make, for the first few years, about \$20 million available and, in the tail years, about \$8 million or \$9 million in each of those last couple of years, to try to effectively get the boots on the ground with these resources in schools.

**Dr Bruniges:** Senator, could I be clear: we're in the process of decommissioning that website. I think I said that it was decommissioned. I should be very clear: we've made the decision to decommission it and we're in the process of decommissioning.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Minister, would you like to add anything?

**Senator Chisholm:** Thanks, Senator Payman. This is a very important issue, as you rightly highlight. The government is committed to implementing the Respect@Work inquiry in full, and the department has given a good account of their responsibilities in that regard. Broadly speaking, the government is committed to ensuring that respectful relationships and consent education is done in an age-appropriate way, and that it's evidence based and developed by experts. That will be the focus of what the government delivers, and the support was in the budget for that to occur as well.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Can I now move on to the impacts of COVID on students? We know that COVID impacted and had widespread effects across the nation, but I'm interested in how schools were impacted and, in particular, school students.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, it's a really big issue. While the team are looking up the information that they have, I'd have to say that we saw different things occurring in different states and territories. Teachers did an absolutely amazing job, in terms of the shift that they needed to do, as well as balancing their personal life, online delivery and online resources. States and territories collaborated a lot to be able to do that. But I don't think we can underestimate, and I'm not quite sure that at this point we fully understand, the tail effect of what it meant for students. There's the isolation factor. We hear anecdotal reports, but we're actually looking at the evidence base about the impact of what that has meant. We need to not only look at the short term, and we hear anecdotes of behavioural issues, and coming back to school and socialising. There's even the fact of mask wearing and not being able to tell the verbal cues from teachers. That face-to-face interaction is incredibly important, particularly in the primary setting.

We all know that there's been a variety of impacts. As for actually quantifying and describing the nature of those impacts for secondary students, primary students and early years students, research to come will bear a better light. There's no doubt that mental health has been one aspect, and we've got a very strong response from government around mental health and wellbeing. Dr Baxter spoke about that briefly before: the importance of measures in terms of mental health and student wellbeing. I'd add to that 'teacher wellbeing' as well. With that relationship you have as a teacher and a student, we can't underestimate the impact of COVID, in terms of teacher wellbeing and student wellbeing. Dr Baxter, do you want to talk to some of that?

**Dr Baxter:** You've covered the key issues. The impacts that we saw on students were around mental health. With the government's piece of work around helping our students to bounce back and, in particular, the Student Wellbeing Boost, much of that is a response to the concerns about COVID. We've also seen very real infrastructure impacts in schools. The Schools Upgrade Fund, for example, has, as one of its focus areas—a \$200-ish million school upgrade fund—ventilation and air quality in schools, and that's a response to some of the things that we saw there as well. On the mental health side, the Student Wellbeing Boost is a response to that. In terms of what impact it had on student learning, we were all very keenly watching with interest this year's NAPLAN results, the 2022 NAPLAN results. Interestingly, there's a real story of stability there, so absolute kudos to students, teachers, families and everybody who helped students through this period, but, in particular, teachers who taught online during that period and taught in schools, often under great difficulties themselves. I know that ACARA is appearing later today and can talk about some more of that detail.

Another impact that we saw was around all of us having to pause and think about digital learning and what it means. There are some real opportunities in digital learning; there are also real concerns about students being driven online and some of the links of that with their mental health. There's great concern there.

The last one that I would add is students with disability. It's probably an area where we don't know as much as we do in other areas. The government has an election commitment around undertaking an urgent review to understand the impact of COVID-19 on students with disability, and we expect that piece of work to go out for consultation with the community within the next couple of months. We're doing some preliminary work on that at the moment, but I think it's a real area for us to understand some more. Ms Birmingham, do you have anything that you want to add around teachers or remote learning during COVID-19?

**Ms Birmingham:** The other thing to add is that it's an ongoing body of research. There's already, as we know, a lot of research going on in the academic community in this area, but governments are also working together to commission research. The Australian Education Senior Officials Committee has commissioned work from AERO, the Australian Education Research Organisation, to look at exactly those things about digital education: what did we learn from the experience of being online and what were some of the shortcomings? Hopefully, that will be made available soon.

**Dr Bruniges:** Globally, recently I was talking to a US counterpart, and they've seen a massive decline in student outcomes through their results during COVID. For us, I think we have to watch our outcomes. We've got NAPLAN; it's very promising, but I wonder about the lag effect here. Certainly, in Australia, our teachers, families and communities have done a terrific job, for us to have that set of results that we have now.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Definitely; thank you.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I have some questions around transparency of funding. I have a whole bunch on the SRS, but I'll put them as questions on notice and get that information later. A 2017 report from the Auditor-General, and its subsequent follow-up report from 2021, found that, amongst other things, the department 'does not yet effectively support the transparency of Australian government funding allocation and does not analyse school funding allocation data to ensure that funding is distributed in accordance with need'. It also found that the department 'does not always ensure that non-government representative bodies which allocate public funding to the private schools sector fulfil their transparency requirements'. Are you familiar with the findings of those Audit Office reports?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, I am.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** In previous estimates sessions, the department has said that 'approved authorities for non-government schools are required to provide an annual acquittal certificate from an independent qualified accountant' and that 'approved authorities must provide assurance that the financial assistance paid to the approved authority during the year was spent appropriately'. It has then gone on to say that the department 'then verifies the accountant credentials on a sample of these submissions and, if required, conducts further analysis and investigation'. I'm interested in knowing whether this is still the department policy; that is, in effect, the only oversight that you have over public money going out to private schools is checking whether they used a reputable accounting firm to validate it.

**Dr Bruniges:** Let me check that. I know that we do sample audits, and I think it was a joint public accounts committee report, that follow-on report. We've put in more steps. I think that the most significant one is the publication of an annual report each year. We've introduced a report that comes into place and gives you full public transparency of that funding. I will ask the team to look at other measures.

**Dr Baxter:** I will hand over to Mr Harding to answer specific questions about that process, but it is certainly not the only piece of the puzzle, either for individual approved authorities and their money or the bigger picture.

As the secretary said, on 23 November 2021, the Australian government tabled the first section 127 report, called the *Australian government schools funding* report on financial assistance paid to the schools sector. Did it cover the period 2014-20?

**Mr Harding:** Yes, to 2020.

**Dr Baxter:** So 2014-20, and it detailed the money that had been provided to each of the approved authorities during that period. That was a very significant step forward and it responded to one of the ANAO recommendations that you've referred to.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Does it indicate how the money is spent or just the money that's been given to the authority? My understanding is that we don't get oversight as to whether that's actually going to the schools that have the highest need, which is a bit of a problem in the way that they're allowed to distribute funds.

**Dr Baxter:** It is also at that approved authority level rather than at the level of the individual school. Mr Harding?

**Mr Harding:** There are a couple of elements to what you're talking about there. One of the elements relates to the ability for approved authorities to allocate the money as they see fit inside their approved system and also other ones who use our model that we calculate it with. Is your question about how we follow the money through where the system redistributes? A system can redistribute the funds as they see fit. Basically, states and territories have their own needs-based models. They're very close to the need. For example, we have a base and six loadings. They may have several loadings that they split it into because they see need closer to where it's happening and they allocate it more effectively, based on their systems. Systems can redistribute, and sometimes they actually have a better understanding of where the need is and then will target where that money goes.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Essentially, if I have this right, there is no requirement whatsoever on the independent and Catholic sector to distribute their funding according to need?

**Dr Baxter:** There absolutely is. They are each required to distribute the funding according to a needs-based model.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Do we have evidence that they're doing that?

**Dr Baxter:** Yes.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I'm hearing that they can distribute it as they see fit.

**Dr Baxter:** No, we do, and I'll talk to you about how that happens. We draw the cheque, if you like, based on our base SRS funding and each of the loadings in relation to census data: how many children are there and what are their characteristics? We do that and we distribute that to the approved authorities. Under the legislation, they must have a needs-based arrangement for distributing that money, but they are able to calculate what that needs-based arrangement is. We make sure that we—

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Can I clarify something?

**Dr Baxter:** Yes.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** There's no requirement. There's an SRS funding model and it determines how much each student needs as a base rate. There are only six loadings, based on need and location. That's what the government uses to determine how much money goes to those two sectors?

**Dr Baxter:** To the approved authorities, yes.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Those sectors are then allowed to distribute that money on their own model of need, which is not necessarily the same model that the government uses; is that correct?

**Dr Baxter:** That is not just the case for the non-government sector; that is the case for all sectors. The states, the territories and the non-government sector look at how that need looks because, obviously, the SRS and the loadings are still a reasonably blunt instrument because they're happening at that national level. The principle is that they are closest to the need, they understand that and they must publish. We now have each of those needs-based funding models published.

**Mr Harding:** Yes, on 5 March, I think, last year; there's a link on our website to all of the needs-based funding arrangements.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** What I'm hearing is that we have a model, but the funding is not necessarily being applied in that way in all jurisdictions.

**Dr Bruniges:** There are two aspects. Dr Baxter talked about the way in which the Commonwealth draws the cheques, so to speak, so that's the SRS, and there are the factors that we do at the national level. In the public sector, it would go from treasury to treasury. For example, there would be a resource allocation model in a public

school system. For example, one of the changes in loadings, I know from some jurisdictions, would be that they take into account distance; they load for distance and isolation a little bit more. In other places, for a high level of disability needs, the funding follows the student, so you have targeted funding. That flexibility is there, both in public and in non-government schools. We don't actually have a clear line of sight from the way we draw the cheque to the way it's distributed. In that respect, Senator, you're right. But there are very good reasons why, in the middle, jurisdictions will do it slightly differently.

**Dr Baxter:** Could I also add, on the actual compliance regarding the money, and making sure that the money is acquitted and spent in the way that it is supposed to be spent, we do have a number of steps. I know that you referred to one of those steps. I'm happy to put that on notice for you.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** That would be great. I'm interested, too, to know what has changed since the Auditor-General's report and their findings about where the deficiencies are, just to get a clear understanding of what the department has put in place to address those deficiencies.

**Dr Baxter:** We can do that. We can also show you what we have done and improved on, in terms of compliance certificates, post-census enumeration—each of those steps that we undertake.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** That would be great.

**Dr Baxter:** On notice is probably the best way to do that.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Thank you. I note that the King's School in New South Wales, which charges around \$40,000 per year 12 student per year, in 2020 received \$17 million from the Australian government, according to My School, and it also spent \$7 million on capital works. It's obviously been in the media recently because it wanted to spend money on plunge pools for principals and sending senior staff to England to watch a rowing race. The New South Wales government has launched an inquiry into how that money is being spent, and I'm interested in knowing whether the federal government is doing the same.

**Dr Baxter:** Senator, where there are those inquiries, we work closely with the state, given that they are the regulator who is closest to the ground. We also wrote to the approved authority for the King's School, seeking an explanation of the issues that have been raised in the media. We have received information, which we are currently reviewing, so it's probably not appropriate to talk about that here. But be assured that we did take action upon learning of that issue.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Will the department be adopting any additional transparency and accountability measures to ensure that taxpayer money is being spent responsibly, or will it continue to use the same method that it's currently using?

**Dr Baxter:** Senator, in the material that we put on notice for you, we will describe our ongoing efforts to continuously improve this compliance process. Ms Beutel runs that particular area of my group; her group are continually improving and undertaking ways to make sure that they are able to track what's happening, that they are able to understand areas of risk and respond, and they have a continuously improving rate in doing that. We can detail some of that for you when we go through the processes that we undertake with schools. Certainly, we are ever-vigilant, and it's not an area where we take our eye off the ball for a single moment.

**Senator Chisholm:** I can assure you that the minister wants to make increased transparency and accessibility to data a key focus of the next agreement as well.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Given that we are giving that sector \$1.7 billion, taxpayers have every right to know that it's being spent properly. In relation to the student wellbeing program, which is welcome, it says that there are a number of potential spending programs contained in the announcement. The budget mentions mental health professionals, as well as sport and social events. I am happy for you to take some of this on notice, if necessary. I am interested in a breakdown of what the Student Wellbeing Boost entails and how much money will be spent on each aspect of the program, particularly whether it's around professional mental health support staff. I am also interested in knowing what will happen to the programs, and particularly to any mental health professionals that are hired as a result, once it ceases to exist in mid-2023; and particularly whether kids will have access to mental health professionals withdrawn. That's obviously of some concern.

**Dr Baxter:** Yes, thank you.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** I might put a few more questions on notice, too, around that program. I'll also have some questions on notice around consent education. In particular, I'm interested to know how the funding will be directed between schools and external providers, with the funding due to drop after the forward estimates, and the sorts of impacts it will have on delivering consent education going forward. Again, I'm looking at whether external providers will be used as a major part of that rollout. I'll put those on notice.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** My questions are around the non-government schools national support. I want to highlight that the former coalition government made a large investment in the Northern Territory education system, understanding that, to effectively engage our young Indigenous students, they need specified wraparound support, flexibility in curriculum, as well as location-specific ways to be educated. A lot of our children are dealing with domestic violence, alcohol abuse and trauma in the home—health challenges that affect their learning and ability to learn. There are schools such as the Yipirinya School, which is an independent school. It supports town camp students around Alice Springs. There is the Dhupuma Barker school as well. They are providing some of these solutions.

In the lead-up to the election, I secured a commitment of \$8 million specifically for the Yipirinya School to be able to develop infrastructure for staff and students to support their needs. Yesterday, the Minister for Territory Families stated that the children on our streets at night will now be removed from their families. This particular piece of infrastructure is important because it speaks to the needs of those children who are on our streets at night. Is the government committed to honouring this commitment of \$8 million towards staff and student accommodation at Yipirinya School?

**Senator Chisholm:** Was it an election commitment that your party made?

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** It was, and it was outlined in the regional educational infrastructure.

**Senator Chisholm:** I am happy for the department to provide some evidence. Generally speaking, when you have an election, we deliver on the promises we made during the election campaign. I don't think we matched that one, did we?

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** That's what I'm asking about.

**Dr Baxter:** I will call Mr Harding to the table, so that I can check whether that's on our list of the school upgrade fund commitments that were made, and whether it was matched. I don't recall it. I would say, Senator, that we're always happy to take information directly to the department about particular needs in a school and look at what we can do. We obviously have a range of conversations, measures and programs where we work with some of our First Nations schools and communities. I'm always very happy to take direct approaches, if there are areas where there's a funding concern, there's a program concern or there are concerns about particular students. Sometimes this is quite a useful forum for us to learn about some of these things. Certainly, we have in the past.

No, they are not on the list that is being matched at the moment. I am very happy to look at the funding they have and come back to you on that, if you would like, on notice.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I would very much appreciate that.

**Dr Baxter:** Certainly, Dhupuma Barker is one that's on the front of my radar, but I'm not as familiar with Yipirinya.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I know that Minister Burney visited the school last Friday, so I'm hoping that will be a priority going forward. It's pretty urgent, considering the circumstances that the children are faced with in Alice Springs. Is there any reasoning as to why it may not have been a consideration? I know that there are other commitments that we've made, leading up to the election, that have been honoured across other portfolios. Why was it that this one may not have been considered going forward?

**Dr Baxter:** In general, Senator, we didn't have a process for reviewing the now opposition's commitments. There was certainly a process for reviewing and considering the commitments that had been made in the March 2022-23 budget. I can tell you that they have been honoured. They have been matched and honoured. Where there was that commitment that had been made, for the most part, apart from a couple of tiny ones around the edges, they were honoured in full. We did not so much have a process for considering—it would not generally be part of the suite of what we would do—opposition election commitments. As I said, it just may not have come to our attention. If there is material that you would like to forward about a particular need in a school, we're very happy to come back regarding whether there is something we can do, and whether there is an existing source of funding that might be appropriate.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Are you able to indicate what sort of support for children and educators in remote parts of Australia does exist?

**Dr Baxter:** We've talked to some of these today, Senator. We've talked to what I would think of as the big structural pieces. We have the regional and remote loading that makes up part of the SRS. That's a very substantial amount of money. We also have a loading that Indigenous students attract. That's also a very substantial amount of money. We have a number of other infrastructure and educational support programs that support children not only in remote areas but also in majority Indigenous schools. To name a few examples, we

have the Building Boarding Schools on Country measure, which is around \$75 million, to build Studio Schools of Australia campuses on country, so that children can stay on country but still get the benefits of boarding school. In fact, the secretary recently visited for the opening of one of those, Yiramalay. We are closely supporting that. Others are being built, and we are working very closely with Studio Schools of Australia to look at some of the challenges they're facing at the moment, with rising costs of building and those sorts of things.

We have a suite of literacy and numeracy programs that we fund, including Good to Great Schools, MultiLit, and support for the Kimberley Schools Project. I'm very happy to put the full list on notice, if that would be useful. I've certainly got the list here.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** If you could put that on notice, that would be great. Also, of that \$75 million, how much of that is committed so far, and what exists in terms of applications for that money, if there is an application for it?

**Dr Baxter:** That \$75 million was committed for specific schools. It was provided for the establishment—I will call the relevant officer to the table—of three new schools and the upgrade of one school, and that continues. There was also an accompanying amount of \$26 million for the City-Country Partnerships program, which is effectively building on some of those great organic partnerships we've seen between big city schools and remote schools. Barker College—which was mentioned before—is one that has done that very successfully. This is something that's happened effectively off the backs of particular schools, and it's about trying to supercharge that a bit. We are working on that one as well.

Mr Carpay, can you remind me how many schools the Studio Schools of Australia commitment was for? It is three new on-country residential middle-year boarding schools, years 7 to 9. They are the studio schools—Bandilngan Windjana, in Kimberley, WA, Dhupuma studio school in East Arnhem, and the Pilbara region as well. It's upgrading the existing Indigenous boarding facility for years 10 to 12 at Yiramalay, in the Kimberley. It's also to establish an Indigenous education research centre near one of the school sites. I can put the full list on notice for you.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** That \$75 million is already committed. Is there any opportunity going forward within the budget for other projects to be considered?

**Dr Baxter:** There is certainly also a measure around supporting boarding students. There was \$17 million, which had previously been through the NIAA budget and is now through our budget, to support students who are having to move away from their home area to go to boarding school. That money goes to boarding providers to help with the extra costs of children who are schooling away from home, and those extra needs that they might have, including things like keeping families engaged with the student and the school, and providing the extra supports that they may need. That is one that is still being worked through. That is money that is still being worked through. In terms of open capital, no, there is not, although the Schools Upgrade Fund is open to all government and non-government schools for small-scale capital projects. I would note that the government school capital grants component that I mentioned before, the approximately \$215 million, will, of course, also be available to government schools.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Thank you. You can take this on notice, if you like, in the interests of time. I want to understand what the intersect is between the education department providing funding for boarding schools and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd, which has specific responsibility for some Aboriginal boarding schools, and has been doing so for a very long time. I'm also interested in—and I've seen over the years—boarding schools that have been set up that have no students in them. I want to understand not just what's been built but the utilisation. In particular, I would like you to look at, and provide information on, Nyangatjatjara College.

**Dr Baxter:** That may be one that we have to take on notice. I'm not familiar with that, from my notes. We can come back to you on that. In terms of what this money does that the Aboriginal Hostels money doesn't do, the \$17 million a year recognises that some of the costs that go into the boarding system currently are not sufficient for those extra needs that a student going to boarding school might have. It might not necessarily be the cost, literally and practically, of their boarding; it might be those things around the edge that help keep them at school, that keep them away from family, while still being connected and supported in the way that they need to.

Going to your point about whether this is NIAA or us, and where this belongs, part of what we are doing here is having a look at what is the boarding landscape and what it costs to keep a child at boarding school and to provide that provision. Our department, the NIAA and the Department of Social Services, who have Abstudy, are looking collectively at this as a longer term piece.

**Dr Bruniges:** Under the Closing the Gap strategy, there's lots of work. Senator, last night we talked about Connected Beginnings and so forth. That assists in closing the gap as well. I am happy to take it on notice.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Thank you.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I'd like to ask about the Student Wellbeing Boost. I see there's \$200 million for this program. Will this be given to all schools in 2022, as promised?

**Dr Baxter:** The Student Wellbeing Boost comprises two elements. Schools will share in about \$192 million of the additional funds to support students' health and wellbeing with extra funding. There is also a piece that the department will manage, which is the \$10.75 million new voluntary mental health check tool. The additional funds will be paid to states and territories to distribute in December 2022, and they will then distribute it for use in the 2023 school year. It's actually money for 2023.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** How many students are expected to benefit from the program?

**Dr Baxter:** It is money that is available for all schools. I think we have 9,600 schools and we have approximately four million students. The most recent census number is 4.025 million students. We would expect that this is a measure that's designed to benefit each of those schools and students in some way.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** If I deduct the \$10.8 million, it gives me \$192 million. On four million students, roughly, that's about \$48 per student.

**Dr Baxter:** It's probably more about looking at what it provides for the school. In the government's election commitment, they talked about working it out on an average of around \$20,000 a school, which is roughly comparable with what the chaplaincy program provides to schools. It's material for some of the mental health professionals' time; alternatively, schools may elect to use it for camps and other student wellbeing activity. It has been worked out on what that costs. We know a little bit about that from the School Chaplaincy Program.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is this diverting it away from the School Chaplaincy Program?

**Dr Baxter:** No. It's separate money—additional.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Will all schools receive equal funding?

**Dr Baxter:** Some of that is still being worked through at the moment. As part of the process of developing regulations of this nature, under the act we're required to go out and consult with states and territories, and with the non-government sector. That's a standing requirement. We're in that process at the moment. We've been out to talk to them. We're having a look at what some of that means for the regulation. As I said, the government commitment was around an approximate amount per school being the full pool. Obviously, in the implementation, we want to think about things like, 'Does a three-child school require the same as a 1,500-child school may require?' They're some of the things that the department is working through. Once we finalise that, and better understand the feedback that we've had from states and territories and non-government schools, we'll provide that advice through the minister for finalisation.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That's where you will determine what the criteria are for the schools?

**Dr Baxter:** Yes, that's right; or how that will be distributed through the states. It's certainly money that will be distributed through the states. That's the mechanism, both to the state sector and to the non-government sector. But we'll provide them with the guide rails.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I appreciate that it's still being worked through. Do you have a breakdown of what will be allocated to government schools, Catholic schools and independent schools? Is there a ratio there?

**Dr Bruniges:** That would depend on whether or not the enrolment statistic is used.

**Dr Baxter:** That's right.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Enrolment, did you say?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. Dr Baxter's example was the size of the school, the number of enrolments.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So it will be more based on the enrolment?

**Dr Bruniges:** It could. They're the things we're working through at the moment—what the proportion is, and how we might allocate that money, based on the size of the school.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Will non-government schools be eligible?

**Dr Baxter:** Yes. We have a notional profile, which is just about where the schools are, where the numbers of schools are. As the secretary said, those implementation considerations are still being worked through.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is there any consideration for regional and remote loading at all?

**Dr Baxter:** Again this goes to the advice that we are trying to work through with the states and territories and the non-government schools. They may like to have consideration in their thinking about some of that tyranny of distance and what that means for costs. We're getting that advice from the people who are closest to it.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Do you envisage that schools will have to report back to the department as to how it was expended?

**Dr Baxter:** There will certainly be a process of acquittal and reporting through the states, yes.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Will the minister receive this information?

**Dr Baxter:** We would provide information through the minister about how it's been expended.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Who would be responsible in the school for reporting back?

**Dr Baxter:** Senator, we're probably going down to a level of detail that I don't quite have with me here. As this program and its guidelines develop—obviously, some of those key considerations we've just mentioned are being worked through—I'll be able to come back to you on some of that. Normally, it's not an uncommon process for Commonwealth recurrent funding of all types, and other funding, to go out through states, for us then to receive some assurance about how that money has been acquitted, and they will have their reporting processes in place at a state or non-government level.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Will those reports be independently assessed? Obviously, there's the expenditure; I get that. You're well-equipped to determine whether money was spent appropriately. In terms of the impact of that program on lifting wellbeing, will there be any independent analysis?

**Dr Baxter:** In general, when we allocate money through the states, we do try to avoid the Commonwealth being the holder of the shoebox of receipts, because we aren't close enough to understand some of that. But we do ensure that there are sufficiently robust reporting mechanisms so that we can understand how money has been spent, that we can assure ourselves that it has been spent for the purposes intended, and that we can do any public reporting about the outcomes of this money that might be appropriate.

**Dr Bruniges:** Senator, it might be the case, with the rich information from the diversity of schools across the country, that we may be able to develop and look at case studies where we are able to collaborate and share across different school settings the initiatives that schools have put in place. It would be valuable for teachers in one school to understand what teachers in another school have done as well.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Are you working to any particular methodology with regard to the mental health monitoring and reporting metrics?

**Dr Bruniges:** With the metrics in wellbeing, the framework that I'm most familiar with is the OECD framework for measuring wellbeing, and we see that as an incredibly important, multifactor measure. Students' attitudes towards learning, their satisfaction, are instruments that can be used. We're not at a stage yet where we'll put in one measure. I think it varies. At this point teachers focusing on building the wellbeing of students is the main thing. There's no doubt that there's a question about how you know that it has happened, whether it has been successful and how to share what works in the wellbeing to boost student wellbeing. Hopefully, this will be a rich source of information that we'll be able to look at and use, and to be able to share across settings, as well as looking at the traditional measurement of how to quantify and describe the nature of wellbeing.

**Dr Baxter:** On the side of the mental health check tool, we will work with mental health experts, state and territory authorities and the non-peak bodies, parent bodies, to make sure we get that right.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is any of the overall \$200 million going towards any departmental costs of the administration of the program?

**Mr Carpay:** There is in the order of a million dollars to the department. Part of that relates to the systems and processes to actually get the money out of our systems and paid. But that is the only component, with a little bit of money just for staff.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That's encompassed within the—

**Mr Carpay:** That's within that overall—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Are you able to provide—I am happy for you to take it on notice—a breakdown of those costs?

**Mr Carpay:** We should be able to do that.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What's the definition of success for this program?

**Dr Baxter:** Senator, are you talking about the program as a whole?

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Yes, the wellbeing program.

**Dr Baxter:** I think it's twofold, really. Certainly, the aim of the program has been, firstly, around supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students in the recovery from COVID period; and, secondly, through the tool,



providing an early check mechanism. The tool is not pretending to be a clinical tool per se. It's something that can be used to give an early flag if there might be a concern about students in a school. They are the two things that we will be looking to achieve with this program.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Okay. I look forward to following its progress. I have a whole heap of questions on curriculum, most of which I'll put on notice. We're certainly seeing a lot, and hearing a lot, from teachers about the disrupted classrooms. I know that the OECD, through the PISA index, measure the disciplinary climate in schools. Australia ranks 70 out of 77 when it comes to disruptive classrooms. The reports of teachers being harassed and even assaulted are disturbing. Could you comment on what the government is doing?

**Dr Bruniges:** Any assaults on teachers are very disturbing. It goes to the nature of the value that we put on the profession and the interaction with parents. There are probably two aspects there, Senator. One is around teaching; the other is around the classroom. When I think about the OECD measure on the disciplinary climate, that's true. Seventy out of 78; I think that is correct for Australia.

We have to consider our context. There's no doubt that we encourage interaction between the students more so in the Australian context than some of our OECD counterparts. But in terms of teachers, disruptive behaviour in classrooms and the mechanisms that are used by different systems to manage that, the behavioural management of classrooms, how we look at the pre-service education for teachers on classroom management, and what support we give teachers in terms of disruptions in the classroom are really important aspects.

When you look internationally and see Australia there, you have to unpack that in terms of the context that we're working in. We would not want silent classrooms, in any shape or form. We would want to encourage interaction. But the nature and type of interaction, about being positive versus disruptive, is really important.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** All too often, we see that on television and social media.

**Dr Bruniges:** Some of the initiatives that a number of states and territories have taken, on taking mobile phones out of classrooms, have been incredibly important. The previous government had a very strong stance on that, and this government does as well.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** This could be a good reference inquiry, Chair, to look into this issue. There was \$7.2 million that was committed in previous budgets by the former government to implement measures that would support inclusive, respectful classrooms. Has that carried over?

**Dr Baxter:** Yes, we are continuing to develop the component of that measure that involves professional learning resources for teachers and school leaders. That one is going ahead. We're working with our education research organisation at the moment in the development of that. As we've been doing the work that we've been talking about this morning, working closely with sectors, teachers, peaks and unions about what it is that really matters, they have focused on this component of that measure—the component that's the practical support for teachers.

There were one or two other components of the measure. I think one was around summits and one was around a report card. As we've been working, it's become apparent that they are not as practical in the current context. For example, in a context where you have teacher shortages and it's very hard for us to take teachers out of the classroom, we think at this point that summits are not the most effective use. It is really this focus on practical support for teachers and those resources that is important. That element is certainly going ahead.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I will put this on notice. According to the department's annual report, under the agreement, all initial teacher education providers endorse teacher performance assessment to be in place by late 2021. All pre-service teachers must complete this assessment before they graduate. How many pre-service teachers have completed this assessment? How are they marked? Is it pass or fail or a grade? What is the success rate? What occurs if a teacher fails the assessment? I would like that on notice in the short time we've got left.

**Dr Baxter:** I'm happy to take it on notice.

**CHAIR:** Senator Davey, you can go quickly.

**Senator DAVEY:** Really quickly. You mentioned two programs that I am interested in. You said that everything committed to in the May budget was being honoured. Does that include the boarding schools scholarship program?

**Dr Baxter:** It does, yes.

**Senator DAVEY:** How many scholarships will be available in 2023?

**Dr Baxter:** The regional scholarships program is currently being worked through with advice from the Regional Education Commissioner. So our team is working very closely with the Regional Education

Commissioner. I will hand over to Mr Donovan, who has joined us at the table, to provide you with a little update on where some of that work is up to.

**Mr Donovan:** We're continuing to work on the implementation of that program. The measure was confirmed in the October budget. We're working very closely with the Regional Education Commissioner and other stakeholders to determine the final implementation arrangements, which will be confirmed shortly.

**Senator DAVEY:** Will it be ready to go in 2023?

**Mr Donovan:** The timing of the scholarships is one of the details that we're working through currently. That obviously is affected by a number of factors that we're working through to make sure that the program achieves optimal outcomes for the students involved.

**Senator DAVEY:** It's running rather late if people were hoping to be able to access one for the 2023 school year.

**Dr Baxter:** I guess that one of the issues we've had here is that the process of election and government forming has caused that. We have worked very expeditiously since we've had confirmation of the measure, including with the Regional Education Commissioner, who has been really generous with her time.

**Senator DAVEY:** Just quickly, you also mentioned the City-Country Partnerships. There is \$24 million, I believe.

**Dr Bruniges:** It is \$24.991 million in administered funding.

**Senator DAVEY:** I understand that it was open for grants. The grant has closed.

**CHAIR:** Senator Davey, I appreciate your saying it was a quick question. By all means, I will let you continue to ask this question. We are really running tight on time.

**Senator DAVEY:** This will be my last question. I appreciate that the election meant that grants couldn't be announced. That's fine. When will it open or close again? What will the process be now to deliver that?

**Dr Baxter:** You've already mentioned that we have the open grant round to select the delivery organisation. That's the Yadha Muru Foundation. They will now undertake a selection process to inform decisions on which partnerships are going to be supported through that process. We are still expecting that partnerships will commence from 2023.

**Senator LIDDLE:** This should require a quick yes or no. In relation to teaching performance assessments, your annual report says that they will be in place by late 2021. Did it happen?

**Dr Bruniges:** Teacher performance assessments in literacy and the LAN types?

**Senator LIDDLE:** Yes.

**Dr Baxter:** I'm just not sure whether you're talking about the TPAs, because the TPAs were one of the national priority initiatives under the NSRA, or if you're talking about the LAN types, the literacy and numeracy tests for students? Can you confirm?

**Senator LIDDLE:** I'm pretty sure that it's the teacher performance assessment that was referred to in the annual report. I'm assuming it will be the earlier. You might want to give me a yes or no for both.

**Ms Birmingham:** Yes, they are in place. I can answer that question. It's a requirement for all IT degrees—so teacher training courses—to have an assessment of teachers at the end of their course. That's what that TPA is about. So every IT provider in Australia now has that in place.

**Senator LIDDLE:** And the other one you will provide information on?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. That is in place too. There has been quite a bit of discussion and debate about when LAN time is actually held in pre-service. Yes, it is in place.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Students who are looking to go into education who don't pass are not considered for employment?

**Dr Bruniges:** That's right.

**CHAIR:** Senator Allman-Payne assures me that these are very short.

**Senator ALLMAN-PAYNE:** Absolutely. Every year since 2011, the OECD and Education International organise the international summit on the teaching profession. It brings together ministers and unions from the top 20 performing countries around the world in education to collaborate on the teaching profession and issues within that profession and how we can do it better. Australia has been invited to these summits since 2011 and we haven't attended a single one. So a decade of collaboration and working with the top performing countries has been lost. Given that we've talked about the complexities that we have with the profession at the moment,

particularly retaining, attracting and keeping teachers, I'm interested to know whether it's the education minister's intention to accept the invitation in 2023.

**Senator Chisholm:** The department might have something to add. I would have to take it on notice and come back to you.

**Dr Bruniges:** I think I would have to take it on notice too. I know there has been a welcome invitation there for him to attend, but I'm not sure of the outcome.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, everyone. That is the conclusion of outcome 1. We'll come back on outcome 2, Higher education, research and international.

#### Proceedings suspended from 11:07 to 11:22

**CHAIR:** I now call officers from the department in relation to outcome 2, Higher education, research and international.

**Senator GROGAN:** I will start with asking you about how far you got with the detail on the 20,000 university places. What is that distribution going to look like? What courses are going to be prioritised?

**Dr Bruniges:** As you would be aware, the government is providing \$485.5 million over 2022-23 to 2025-26 to deliver that one-off boost of 20,000. So these Commonwealth supported places are for commencement in 2023 and 2024 only, really to increase the opportunities for students from under-represented groups to access higher education. The places can be delivered for both subbachelor and bachelor level courses. I might hand over to the team who have been doing the detailed work under the CSPs.

**Mr Cook:** As you are aware, the government committed to the 20,000 additional places. That is 2023 and 2024. We went out several months ago and sought expressions of interest from higher education providers. Those providers then were required to apply against criteria that we set. The criteria was around two things particularly. One was around supporting under-represented groups or students from under-represented groups in higher education, which traditionally have a history of not being well represented in higher education, and around skill shortages. We used the National Skills Commission at the time, their shortage list, and we used that to inform the selection process in relation to those 20,000 places. Those 20,000 places, as you are aware, were announced a few weeks ago. In terms of the priority areas, five particular themes out of the National Skills Commission were identified as being particularly significant. I will go through, to assist the committee, with the numbers we allocated in these areas. They were education; nursing; information technology; health professions, such as pharmacy, health science, some mental health and psychology; and engineering. In terms of the allocation, there were 4,036 places in education, which included 1,469 places for early education teachers. They are a mixture of both bachelor and subbachelor. They will be initial teacher education courses. There will also be some diploma courses, particularly for some of our early childhood teachers, at the diploma level as opposed to a degree level. So we're supporting both of those areas. There are 2,600 places in nursing. There are 2,275 places in information technology. There are 2,740 places in health professions and 1,738 places in engineering. The remainder of the places, which I think is about 5,000 or so, are in a range of skill shortages areas that have been identified, again through our National Skills Commission colleagues, across what we would define as being the various clusters in higher education. There is something called cluster 1, cluster 2, cluster 3 and cluster 4. In cluster 1 are some of those business courses that are seen as being short, such as auditors, believe it or not. There is an allocation of places for universities in some of those areas as well.

**Senator GROGAN:** Thank you. So the whole idea is to have some form of impact on the skills shortage we're seeing. Is there any distribution from state to state of these places?

**Mr Cook:** So every provider who applied—and there were 42 providers who applied—out of 51 that were eligible, the providers were what we call table A universities, so public universities. Private universities were able to apply as well. There were also some VET providers. Traditionally, they are providers such as some TAFEs that have historically offered nursing and teaching courses as part of their program. They were the eligible group. Forty-two providers actually applied. We were able to give an allocation to all 42 providers. Not everyone got what they wanted because we were oversubscribed, which we were pleased about.

In terms of the state breakdown, every state got an allocation in relation to the provision of the places that I just outlined. In terms of the numbers I just gave to you a minute ago, in education, effectively every state got a component of that other than Tasmania. There is only one university in Tasmania, as you would appreciate. Would you like me to go through a breakdown by state?

**Senator GROGAN:** No. I just wanted to know that there was a distribution across every state.

**Mr Cook:** Absolutely. There was a distribution across every state. It is broadly, not totally, representative of the number of higher education students in those states. Some states, however, got slightly higher than that because of what they actually applied for. That is across all states and territories, and, importantly, across regional and metropolitan universities as well. It's probably known to the committee that there were some concerns from regional universities about whether these places would be predominantly taken up by larger metropolitan universities. I'm pleased with the selection process. It was a merit selection process. The selection guidelines are actually online and publicly available. I'm pleased that through the selection process and the types of courses that universities applied for we were able to actually give a very fair distribution across all universities. Charles Sturt, for example, in New South Wales, a regional university, received \$27 million in funding out of the total funding pool, which is one of the highest levels of allocations, because of the sort of courses that they applied for as a regional university.

**Senator GROGAN:** Thank you. I want to very quickly ask you to explain the rationale behind the end of the 10 per cent upfront fee discount.

**Mr Cook:** As you are aware, there is an election commitment by the government in relation to ending that 10 per cent. That measure has been on and off and on and off over the last decade or so. The data that we have available to us would indicate that there's very little change in relation to the take-up of the upfront fee whether there's a discount or not.

**Senator GROGAN:** You wouldn't say it was an attraction mechanism, more of a useful bonus along the way if you happen to be wealthy enough to pay upfront?

**Mr Cook:** Potentially if you have the means to make that payment, then you took advantage of that discount. But we haven't seen any longitudinal data that would demonstrate that people who were able to make that upfront discount chose not to do so if the discount wasn't there.

**Senator GROGAN:** Yes.

**Mr Cook:** So there's no behavioural influence as a result of that particular measure being in place. It's about 54,000 students.

**Senator GROGAN:** As a percentage of all students who were taking it up, what would that be?

**Mr Cook:** So there are 1.2 million domestic students in the sector. I should be able to work out my percentage, but someone who is much more numerical than me will know what that is. As you would appreciate, it's a very low percentage of students who are taking that up.

**Senator GROGAN:** So it would be a couple of per cent?

**Mr Cook:** That's right. It's a very low amount. It is about three per cent of students each year. I've got the data in my folder here now.

**Senator GROGAN:** That will obviously provide a saving, I would have thought.

**Mr Cook:** That's right.

**Senator GROGAN:** What is the value of that saving to the budget going forward from stopping this measure?

**Mr Cook:** Over the forward estimates, the saving as a result of that measure is \$144.1 million.

**Senator GROGAN:** Thank you very much.

**Senator PAYMAN:** I would like to talk about international students. We've just covered domestic. I know that it was a sector hit quite hard. I presume you would agree, of course, that international students are a vital part of Australian society. What are some of the many economic, cultural and social benefits that international education brings to our communities and businesses?

**Dr Bruniges:** Thank you for the question. I think we've got our expert in international here with us.

**Ms Sandercock:** It's well acknowledged that international students make a very substantial contribution to our economy, community and our society. I think the economic impact tends to attract a lot of focus and has been very much in focus with the decline in international student numbers during the pandemic. However, what we see is the ongoing cultural foreign policy and what is often termed soft power benefits from international education. The government is very focused on how they can be expanded, if you like, as international students increasingly start to return to our shores. That's outlined a little in the government's foreign policy statement. Of course, it's part and parcel of the objectives that we have around international education.

**Senator PAYMAN:** I definitely acknowledge that. In 2020, at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, as you alluded to, the former Prime Minister told the international students it was time to go home. Did the Prime

Minister or minister for education or anyone from the ministerial offices seek your advice—as in the department's advice—before making a statement on national television like that?

**Mr Cook:** Not to my recollection.

**Ms Sandercock:** Not to my knowledge.

**Senator PAYMAN:** You mentioned how there was a massive reduction in the numbers of international students. How badly was the sector hit, essentially? Are there any numerical values of what the sector was bringing in and what happened after the pandemic and after the international students were told to go home?

**Ms Sandercock:** I can probably talk you through the changes in numbers and then the change in export revenue that occurred during the pandemic. What we've seen is an international student enrolment decline on pre-COVID levels of 25 per cent. What that has translated into is a reduction in export earnings. Prior to the pandemic, international education was the third largest export sector, generating around \$40 billion in export benefits to the economy. The current preliminary figures—bear with me whilst I check my notes—put that at around \$20.2 billion. I note that there would be an additional amount of revenue that is delivered from students who are studying offshore at about \$4 billion.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Essentially, it was halved in value?

**Mr Cook:** That's correct.

**Ms Sandercock:** By and large.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Acknowledging that the previous government's recklessness did some damage, can you talk to us about what the impact of this comment was on the reputation and emotional wellbeing of the students?

**Mr Cook:** We have anecdotal data from us speaking to universities and deputy vice chancellors international. It's probably fair to say that anecdotal data would indicate that students indicated that they didn't feel welcomed and didn't feel supported. We had anecdotal data from education agents as well that the view of the international student market was that other countries were more welcoming than Australia as a result of the strict border control rules in place. There was evidence through, I think, some of the providers' surveys that indicated that countries such as Canada, the UK and America experienced an initial drift of students to those countries. I'm pleased to say that recent data seems to indicate that drift is now starting to change. We've had record visa applications. In fact, I think it's the highest level of visa applications that we've ever seen in Australia. International students are certainly coming back, which is great. In that period, we certainly had information conveyed to us by students themselves and providers that Australia was not seen in the same positive light, potentially, as it might have been in the past.

**Senator PAYMAN:** That goes to my next question. What are we doing as the new government to ensure that we have international students come back? What are some of the steps to improve our reputation back on the international stage with our competitors out there?

**Mr Cook:** Minister Clare, in one of the first speeches he gave—I think it was the Universities Australia speech—made it very clear and said publicly that we welcomed international students to Australia. I actually have the speech here somewhere. I'm trying to find the wording itself. He made it very clear that international students are welcome in Australia. He also makes it very clear in his statement that this is not about an economic position. This is about the points that you raised—about the importance of international students from a cultural perspective as well as the work we can do, particularly in the South Pacific, to support some of our neighbours regarding their aspirations for their own people and countries. He has subsequently spoken, I know, at a number of events, including a prerecord—unfortunately, he couldn't make the international conference—he made for the Australian International Education Conference a few weeks ago around, again, reinforcing that message that the government has a very strong focus on welcoming international students. We as a department are working with our providers. Ms Sandercock can probably talk to that as well. The minister met with what is called the expert members of the International Education Council several weeks ago and spoke to them about what we could do in this area.

As you may be aware, out of the Jobs and Skills Summit, we're also looking at some of the issues around post-study work rights. Ms Sandercock can talk about that in detail. That's about extending the amount of time an international student can stay in Australia and work in Australia as a result of their study in Australia, which has been very warmly welcomed by both international students and providers. Ms Sandercock, you might want to add to those comments.

**Ms Sandercock:** I would probably add that the government has been at pains to reassure sector stakeholders of its focus on encouraging students to return through practical measures, such as visa processing, and addressing

some of the visa processing delays that stakeholders have raised as barriers to the return of international students and the regrowth of the sector. He has also spoken with the sector about seeking their views on what else needs to be done to drive offshore delivery, to expand our offerings and expand our attractiveness and potential reach to students. He has met with a number of international counterparts to demonstrate his commitment to working closely with other countries, India in particular. Early in the government being formed, Minister Clare met with his Indian counterpart, hosted an Australia India Education Council event and talked through all the opportunities for Australian education providers and Indian education providers to do more practically to expand education offerings to both our students. He similarly engaged with other counterparts and likewise has put forward a range of initiatives that we are taking forward in the department that are aimed at regrowing, if you like, the sector and diversifying what is offered. I can talk you through the details of those initiatives, if that's helpful.

**Senator PAYMAN:** That is all from me.

**CHAIR:** I have a couple of very brief questions on the same subject. Minister, the international students were told to go home—I'm not putting aside the humanity of what was said; you may want to make some comments about that—when other countries were supporting their students, particularly countries that we're in high competition with, such as Canada and others. The impact on the pick-up rates in those countries in comparison with Australia has now played out. We saw a devastation of the university sector during COVID. Part of that recuperation is to have a system that is welcoming, not just transactional. Unfortunately, publications such as *Times Higher Education* as far back as 3 April 2020 were saying:

...exasperating perceptions of a transactional focus in Australia's educational exchange.

With the challenges that we have now and the competition we have across the market, there is an impact on getting our brightest teaching and tutoring. Thousands upon thousands of teachers and higher education professionals have been laid off from universities. What is the impact? What do you see as the devastation of that? What is the government's determination to overcome that devastation?

**Senator Chisholm:** Thanks, Chair. I know the impact was particularly acute in Sydney. I still have vivid memories of people queuing for help with food just to survive at that time. You really feel for those students who were left in the lurch. Obviously, that has to have an impact on our international reputation at the same time. One of the things I have enjoyed most about being the Assistant Minister for Education is getting around to some of the university campuses and meeting with a lot of the vice chancellors and other officials. One thing I always bring up is international students. The overwhelming feedback about it has been the lack of vibrancy on campus as a result of them not being around. I think that just shows you—and it probably goes to Senator Payman's questions—that this isn't economic; it's actually about the contribution they make on campus. Maybe we can get some of these post-study work rights ongoing to the community when you think about the economic challenges that we face as well. I was at the Universities Australia dinner that Minister Clare spoke at. The overwhelming sense I got from the minister's words at that was that the sector knows they have a government and a minister that wants to work with them. We don't want to pick fights for the sake of it. We actually want to work with these universities to try to get some of that market share back that we lost—the department might have some figures, I think—particularly in Britain and Canada. That work is going to be ongoing. I think we've made a good start.

Another thing I will mention is that this has been a focus of the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tim Watts, in his role working to the foreign minister. When he is representing Australia overseas, he also makes it a focus of some of his efforts to encourage people to come study in Australia.

**CHAIR:** The National Tertiary Education Union president Alison Barnes, the National Union of Students and the various international student unions around the country have also pointed out the exploitation of students when they are here doing work to sustain their studies and their living expenses. Seventy-six per cent of workers in the food delivery area are from overseas. The vast majority are international students studying here. How important is it to build our reputation back so that you can study here, there's appropriate work for you to be done—we've got a shortage of workers—and, by heck, we're going to make sure you're paid correctly? I've been in inquiries where at the time the assistant minister for employment, Amanda Stoker, was giving evidence that people were getting paid as little as \$6.70 an hour with no workers comp, no sick leave, no annual leave and no rights. That was the contract they entered into. They literally had a choice between starvation and starvation wages because they couldn't get on top of that during COVID any support from the federal government. How important is it that we actually create a working environment to sustain that important industry of international education?

**Senator Chisholm:** Thanks, Chair. I certainly appreciate your passion for, and knowledge of, this area. I know it has been a longstanding issue for you. I admire the work you have done on it. It's absolutely vital for us to get those settings right. We operate in a global environment where once upon a time those stories may have been

sidelined and not highlighted. They do have reverberations now around the world. So if we aren't treating visitors to our country in an appropriate way, that is going to impact on our ability to attract students. So we certainly can't look at it as getting these students in as cheap labour to fix our problem. This needs to be about, as I think Senator Payman was going to, building long-term relationships with international students and countries so that they are attracted to come and study here. We are only going to rebuild our reputation in that regard if we treat these students appropriately. The working arrangement of that is an absolutely key component.

**Mr Cook:** As a department, we've also been working with Fair Work Australia, the Fair Work Ombudsman, the Council of International Students and providers in relation to ensuring that providers provide clear advice to international students about issues about their work rights and workplace exploitation. We wrote to providers again earlier this year quite explicitly outlining what their requirements were in relation to that and discussed the student materials that we have to support international students to understand their work rights more broadly. I also understand this issue was raised in the post-study work rights discussions that Ms Sandercock chaired. I think there is some commentary potentially in relation to some advice we provided to government recently in this space as well.

**Ms Sandercock:** That's right. This has been an ongoing focus of the department's work in terms of providing accurate information to international students so they know how to access the support and protections that are available to them. It is making sure that education providers and those who support students are putting that information into students' hands so that students don't face increased risk of exploitation. That has been an ongoing concern. We regularly engage with the sector on this point, update materials and ask for assistance in communicating that to student groups as well as work in partnership with the Fair Work Ombudsman, as Mr Cook outlined.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for the hard work you are doing on that front. I will make this comment before I pass over. As it stands at the moment, many thousands of international students have no work rights. If you are a gig worker, you don't have work rights in this country. That is undermining our capacity to attract and retain students and to make it a place of destination for students when they need that supportive income whilst they are doing their studies. I'm very aware that the government has made a commitment on changes there. I will be looking forward to the opposition's support.

**Senator FARUQI:** Budget Paper No. 1 on page 186 shows that the Job-ready Graduates program is largely responsible for a pretty significant increase in the total value of HELP loans between 2022-23 and 2025-26. This year, it's \$4.4 billion. By 2025-26, it is projected to be \$6 billion. So students are being burdened with more and more debt at a time when the cost of living crisis is really biting. Young people, as you know, are disproportionately impacted. Minister, you might also be aware that student debt has grown rapidly over the last decade from \$25 billion in 2012 to more than \$68.7 billion in 2021. More than three million people in Australia owe a total of around \$70 billion in study debt. More than 1.3 million of these people have debts greater than \$23,000. This problem has really exploded. If it were up to me, I would wipe all student debt. Minister, is the government considering some sort of student debt forgiveness measure, as we've seen recently in the United States?

**Senator Chisholm:** What I would say about HECS, or HELP, as it's known now, is that when HECS was first introduced in 1989, 7.9 per cent of Australian adults had a university degree. Now it's at almost 33 per cent. So you can see the significant impact it has had on Australians to obtain a degree and the benefit that it has been. In terms of the broader issue around debt that you talk about now, my understanding is that the universities accord process is due to be announced soon with terms of reference. I expect that the broader affordability discussion will be part of that universities accord process and the panel I appointed to look at that.

**Senator FARUQI:** According to the budget, there has been two years of funding, I think, allocated to the accord process. Does that mean that for two years nothing will change for students? I ask this question because indexation resulted in student debts increasing by 3.9 per cent this June due to higher rates of inflation. It has added \$1,000 on to an average debt of \$23,685. I guess it's a bit difficult that students will have to suffer for another two to three years. I want to ask the department: do you have any projections for what indexation will be next year and what average student debt will rise by?

**Mr Cook:** I don't believe we have those figures. We had a discussion at our last hearing about the actuary. We looked at some of the future projections. I think, unfortunately as a question on notice, we said that the actuary actually didn't project those figures. Unless Mr Coburn tells me otherwise, I don't believe we have that data available to us at the moment.

**Senator FARUQI:** There is an article today in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that states that, under some projections, the debt will rise by \$2,000 by next year. That will be another round of sky-high indexation that students will be hit by. If that happens, will the government provide some relief?

**Senator Chisholm:** I think I have given you an answer, Senator Faruqi.

**Senator FARUQI:** So no relief for another few years?

**Senator Chisholm:** What we are talking about is the universities accord process, which the department can probably give an update on. We are expecting that the broader affordability question will be part of that discussion. They can report on where timelines are potentially at.

**Senator FARUQI:** Can you quickly tell us what the timelines are for that?

**Mr Cook:** As the assistant minister indicated, the minister has said publicly he will make an announcement this month in relation to the accord. The data you saw in the budget papers was for the operation of the panel. That panel will operate predominantly for next year, but it will start its work this year. As the minister said, and, again, Minister Clare has said this publicly, the accord will look at everything from funding and access to affordability, to pick up the issue that you have raised there. There is also transparency, regulation and employment conditions. I know we've often talked about the employment conditions of university staff as well. The accord will cover those things off as well. It will be a decision of the accord panel. It's not unusual for an accord panel to give interim recommendations to governments at various times. I can't imagine that they'll wait until the end of a year before they deliver views. They'll engage with the minister. They'll engage with the government as they progress in relation to their consideration. They'll certainly be asked to look at the issues around affordability.

**Senator FARUQI:** Do we know who will be on the panel? At the moment, it says it will be made up of eminent Australians.

**Mr Cook:** I anticipate that will be part of the announcement that the minister will make this month.

**Senator FARUQI:** What is the process of selecting the panel?

**Mr Cook:** That was part of a cabinet process. The department provided some advice to the minister, but the process was part of the cabinet process.

**Senator FARUQI:** Will students be on that panel?

**Mr Cook:** Again, I probably can't say at this point. It's wrapped in a cabinet process. I would prefer not to say. I can assure you that the minister will make announcements in relation to the panel this month.

**Senator FARUQI:** I am sure you will. My concern is that the people who are impacted by the accord and the decisions made, which are the students and the unions and their members—

**Mr Cook:** I can say that we have had discussions.

**Senator FARUQI:** You've had discussions with students and unions?

**Mr Cook:** I'm comfortable to say that we've had discussions with student unions and educator unions as well in relation to the formulation and sought their advice in relation to the terms of reference for the panel.

**Senator FARUQI:** That's good to know. Minister, during the inquiry into the Job-ready Graduates package, Labor's dissenting report concluded that the bill attacked the core research purpose of universities, would result in inequitable levels of student debt, especially for women, would have a significantly worse impact on women and First Nations people and would undermine the quality of university teaching. It was so deeply flawed, it could not be repaired with amendments. When are you going to reverse the funding cuts and fee hikes of the Job-ready Graduates package?

**Senator Chisholm:** I'm happy for the department to add more to this. My understanding is that this will be a significant part of the review that we're setting up. I expect it to be a key focus on that. I know that, as I've been getting around the country meeting with universities, it has been a topic that I don't have to bring up. The vice chancellors and other staff have brought it up with me. I do believe that the minister has already said it will be a significant part of the universities accord.

**Mr Cook:** That's correct. The minister has publicly said that. The review of Job-ready Graduates—as you are aware, there was a proposed review of Job-ready Graduates—will be a part of the accord process.

**Senator FARUQI:** Now it has become part of the accord process?

**Mr Cook:** The minister has been upfront about that from day one.



**Senator FARUQI:** That means that could be an early decision as well, or will we have to wait two to three years for these marginalised groups to be further impacted?

**Mr Cook:** That will be a matter for the accord in terms of their process, as you are aware. The accord is an independent process. It will be a matter for government in relation to any recommendations that come out of that accord.

**Senator FARUQI:** In October last year, the Senate Select Committee on Job Security, which was chaired by the chair of this committee, Senator Sheldon, made several excellent recommendations in relation to universities. They included the requirement for all universities to provide more detailed reporting of their staffing composition and, as a condition of receiving public funding, to set publicly available targets for increasing permanent employment and reducing casualisation. There were some other recommendations. I guess that you're going to tell me that the new Labor government will implement these as part of the accord? Are these things on the table in the accord? Could we look forward to having these recommendations implemented before two years or three years?

**Mr Cook:** I have the recommendations here in front of me. I know them well. You and I talked about them a few times. As I said, the—

**CHAIR:** Well, they are very good recommendations!

**Senator FARUQI:** Yes.

**Mr Cook:** The minister has said publicly again—a point I raised earlier—that employment conditions will be very important in relation to the accord process. These recommendations will absolutely be fed into the consideration of the accord. Again, I can't pre-empt when the accord might respond or have a position in relation to these. I can assure you that these recommendations will be a consideration as part of that process.

**Senator FARUQI:** I will move to another topic. Recommendation 12 of the *Respect@Work* report calls for the government to support smaller higher education providers to deliver information and training on sexual harassment for staff and students that addresses the drivers of gender based violence and includes content on workplace rights. What progress has the department made in implementing this recommendation?

**Dr Bruniges:** While our team are looking up the information, I will say that I know you are aware of the significant work of Universities Australia in the area around this really important topic. We work closely with Universities Australia to support that. On the explicit recommendation 12, I might hand to the team.

**Mr Cook:** Thank you, Secretary. Senator, thank you for the question. TEQSA will be here a little later. They might be able to provide a bit more detail. I'm not sure whether you are able to come to the TEQSA session. They have been explicitly working with the Australian Human Rights Commission to implement both recommendations 11 and 12. They are developing programs in relation to that and resources in relation to sexual harassment. Those resources should be available in the next month or so.

**Senator FARUQI:** Thank you. We had the Fair Work Ombudsman appear at Senate estimates yesterday. Ms Parker stated that wage theft in universities was a cultural problem linked to poor governance. She has also previously acknowledged that the problem is systemic. Given the federal government has this role in funding universities, do you also consider yourself having a role in fixing the problem of wage theft at universities?

**Mr Cook:** I watched the hearing yesterday and I saw the discussions you had with Ms Parker. Ms Parker and I have met in relation to some of the issues that she has raised. Obviously, in terms of her limitations around any particular action, we couldn't go into too much detail. Again, particularly TEQSA, from a regulatory perspective, have a significant role in relation to this. TEQSA put out a statement in relation to effectively wage theft earlier this year. They identified that they had been working with 15 higher education providers in relation to this issue. They outlined that there are four, I think, higher education standards which a university would be breaking if they are not able to show that they are seriously responding to the issues that have come as part of this. TEQSA have the authority to put conditions in relation to universities, as you are aware. Depending on the response of those universities to those conditions, through the HESA, the Higher Education Support Act, in relation to quality and accountability, there could be some measures that the department itself could look at, particularly the application of the provider to those particular standards. So we talked to TEQSA in relation to that. We would rely on TEQSA providing us that level of advice as to whether that level of action needs to be taken. Again, later today, TEQSA can give more detail on this. At the moment, TEQSA, from my understanding of their statement, is satisfied with the majority, but they are saying that for a small number of universities they would like them to lift their game in this space.

**Senator FARUQI:** I am presuming that TEQSA works with the Fair Work Ombudsman as well?

**Mr Cook:** That's right. They meet bimonthly, is my understanding, about each of these cases.

**Dr Bruniges:** The Department of Social Services has provided \$1.5 million to Universities Australia to roll out a sexual violence prevention campaign in 2023. So there will be other departments working on this as well.

**Senator FARUQI:** That is part of that recommendation 12?

**Dr Bruniges:** That's correct.

**Senator FARUQI:** I have a couple more questions. Is the department or the minister aware that the average salary of vice-chancellors at Australia's 37 public universities is more than \$1 million annually, not counting other fringe benefits and perks of the office?

**Mr Cook:** We are aware of the salary levels of vice-chancellors. That information, as you're aware, is publicly available through their annual reports.

**Senator FARUQI:** My next question is for the minister. Minister, do you think it's fair that a vast majority of staff at universities are overworked and underpaid while vice-chancellors pocket this humongous amount of salary? It seems very disproportionate to me.

**Senator Chisholm:** I very much accept the point you are making, Senator Faruqi. I met recently with the National Tertiary Education Union and some of the workers they brought to Canberra. I heard some of the stories about how they've been treated and about the casualisation and the impact it has. Broadly speaking, I think the impact of casualisation across the workforce in general is one that has a negative impact on people and the ability for them to plan and get ahead in life. I am uncomfortable with some of the salaries that vice-chancellors are earning. I think you want to be broadly in line with community expectations. I understand that they are running often significant businesses that go with it. I also think there's a balance in how they operate, given how significantly they are publicly funded. So I would certainly urge—I'm sure Minister Clare would as well—that those remunerations be set at a level that doesn't exceed community expectation.

**Senator FARUQI:** That is really great to know. It is time to cap those salaries. This is my last question. My understanding is that there is very limited transparency around the top pay levels at the Group of Eight universities. We know through an FOI that the 50 best-paid employees at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and the universities of Sydney and Queensland all receive more than \$350,000 per year. That is not counting superannuation and other benefits. However, some universities, such as Monash University and Melbourne universities, have refused to release that data. Is the government prepared to require universities to make this data public, as is the case in the United Kingdom and in state run universities in the USA?

**Dr Bruniges:** We haven't had conversations around that. Certainly I know that some of the senior staff in universities during the last couple of years actually took pay cuts. I take your point. I will take that away and have a look at what we might be able to do. I know that, for departmental officers, ours are in the annual report.

**Senator FARUQI:** Exactly right. There is transparency there.

**Dr Bruniges:** There is transparency. I'm happy to take that away and have a discussion with my staff around that.

**Senator FARUQI:** That would be great. It's public money and so it should be transparent. Thank you very much.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I want to go to my experience of having sat on two university boards. I focused on the issue of not just courses but also those cohorts that your 20,000 new places are majority targeting. It isn't always possible when you offer courses that students will choose to go to the courses that you want them to go to. If you are going to offer courses to students that might come from backgrounds with additional barriers, you can't just offer the places; you have to offer the supports. My questions go to what supports are actually available in addition to an announcement about places. That includes targeting those regional hubs that actually support people in regional areas to participate in tertiary study. How much money has gone to them?

**Dr Bruniges:** You are referring to the regional study hubs. We might do that bit first. There are many mechanisms, I'm sure that you are aware, in universities to do wraparound support services. We'll go through what we've got at a Commonwealth level. That is your explicit question?

**Senator LIDDLE:** I don't want to know what is there already. I want to know what is going to be put in place in addition to what is already there, given we're talking about 20,000 new places.

**Mr Cook:** I will just start on the 20,000 new places. As part of the selection process for them, each university had to demonstrate what policies and procedures they had in place to support students from underrepresented groups effectively. They were then scored on that. If they were not able to show demonstrated policies that they had in place to support students to enable them to not just start their course but complete their course, those universities were marked down lower. The selection criteria and the scoring of that is actually in the selection

guidelines or the guidelines, which are public. We also then bolstered that with actual data. We had data on universities and basically their completion rates in relation to underrepresented groups. We used that data to also inform the scoring. We were very focused on not just saying, 'Here's a position and someone can apply.' It was, 'Here is a position and you need to demonstrate that you have a process in place to be able to support students who may not have some of the support mechanisms that they've got in their own personal life or at their home to enable them to be successful in some of their courses.' That is the first thing we did in relation to that.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I would be very careful about the language here. Explaining that you have already got these programs in place to support people doesn't answer the question about additional funding for the additional places to support those people.

**Mr Cook:** That is part of the additional funding. The 20,000 places, as you know, is the \$485 million in relation to that. Universities going forward continue to get additional funding in relation to specific funding for regional and Indigenous students and students from low SES backgrounds. That was part of the Job-ready Graduates package. It was part of repackaging that. Previously, there was funding available effectively for low SES students only. That was repackaged as part of the Napthine review to include Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas. There's also enabling funding. Enabling funding enables universities to provide courses that assist students that might not have met some of the criteria to access those courses going forward. You are probably aware of that, having been on university boards before. Those enabling courses are really important to provide some students a step-up in relation to ensuring that they are successful in their ongoing course more broadly. There's a number of things specifically. You asked about regional education. Regional universities will continue to get higher levels of indexation than other universities, such as metropolitan universities. That is a recognition of some of the cost drivers that impact on regional universities as well. In terms of the study, were you talking about the regional university centres or were you talking about something else in relation to those study centres?

**Senator LIDDLE:** One that I'm quite familiar with is the regional hub in the Spencer Gulf that supports Roxby Downs, Port Lincoln, Port Pirie and Whyalla. That is an example that I know directly.

**Mr Cook:** I'm pretty sure that Roxby Downs is a regional university centre. As you know, there were announcements, again as part of the review into regional education, about regional university centres. The former government announced six new centres, I think it was, just before the election. The current government has finalised that to be eight new centres. Those two new centres were advised, I think, in the last several weeks in relation to that. That program continues as part of the budget measure to support those regional university centres across most states and territories in Australia.

**Senator LIDDLE:** To further inform me, can you please provide in a computer readable spreadsheet the total number of applicants and the offers and acceptances from 2018 to 2022 across universities?

**Mr Cook:** That is not regional university centres that you are asking me about?

**Senator LIDDLE:** No. This is general universities.

**Mr Cook:** You are after applications and offers?

**Senator LIDDLE:** That's right.

**Mr Cook:** I can give you some high-level figures for some initial data in 2022. We're happy to take that on notice as well. If you want some high-level data, I'm happy to give that to you now.

**Senator LIDDLE:** No. Provide that. Can you provide that by higher education institution, course and course type? Obviously, there is engineering, teaching, medicine and the arts. I'm also really interested in mental health and the courses around psychology because there are not a lot of them. There is also fee status.

**Mr Cook:** Fee status in terms of Commonwealth supported places or the amount of fees?

**Senator LIDDLE:** Well, whether they are CSP or full fee or international or under an Indigenous payment program. Is that okay?

**Mr Cook:** We're happy to take that on notice. I'm pretty sure we can do most of that, but my data gurus are behind me, so I will rely on them on the question on notice.

**Senator LIDDLE:** And the breakdown of the 20,000 university places for this year and next year.

**Mr Cook:** We're happy to take that on notice in terms of the allocation of what that looks like as well. As we would normally do, we have then gone back to those universities just to confirm the application that they put through. So we're in the process of doing that at the moment.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I acknowledge that Minister Clare's release on 24 October talked about 13,399 places. Are you able to provide some detail about the split between universities and what criteria was used to actually identify what that split would be? I am assuming that it relates to what you explained earlier.

**Mr Cook:** The 13,000?

**Senator LIDDLE:** It is 13,399 places. This was in a media release on 24 October.

**Mr Cook:** Around 20,000 places?

**Senator LIDDLE:** Well, it is specifically about 13,000 places.

**Mr Cook:** I don't have that release with me. I'm not sure what reference you have there.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I might provide that on notice.

**Mr Cook:** That would be helpful for us.

**Senator LIDDLE:** You might be able to wrap this up in this as well. What monitoring and assessment—this is about another section—will the department have against the measure related to those 13,399 places? Can you provide information about the completion and dropout rates that you are anticipating based on historical data?

**Mr Cook:** In our historical data—this is successive governments—we allocate a completion of about 75 per cent. That is a historical figure that we've had built into the funding model for many years now. I will provide any updated information as part of the response around that. The 13,000 might relate to a state based media release. I'm not sure if it is part of the 20,000.

**Senator LIDDLE:** It is Minister Clare's. I can provide it anyway.

**Mr Cook:** That would be useful for us to help us assist you with the response.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I want to ask a question that relates to this but could also relate to some of the discussion earlier. Are education departments able to provide sponsorship for international teachers to come over and teach in universities and schools where there is a demand that is unmet or where there is market failure in teacher numbers?

**Mr Cook:** The secretary might want to add to this as well. From my time when I was heading up education in Queensland, we did quite a bit of work in my department on finding teachers overseas. There is a state based visa process—I should know what it is called—where states can sponsor particular workers in relation to state based need. We, for example, identified a number of teachers from South Africa. We had South African teachers sponsored. They certainly got their visa, and there was support from the Queensland government in relation to that. I think there are mechanisms in relation to that. I understand that New South Wales made some announcements around that recently as well.

**Dr Bruniges:** I formerly headed New South Wales education. They would have a similar thing. It is slightly different to the Queensland one. There would be recruitment drives and an advertisement for teachers in particular areas. They would go out and recruit.

**Senator McKENZIE:** I have a couple of questions. I have just come from community affairs, where we've been talking about the rural doctor shortage and the need to actually have facilities in regional communities to train local kids, which means they'll end up practising locally. I can't find whether the money from the March budget out of the Regional Accelerator Program that was to fund the Southern Cross University health precinct in Coffs Harbour has been cut by the Labor government.

**Mr Cook:** As you are aware, the Regional Accelerator Program was actually in the infrastructure department, not our department.

**Senator McKENZIE:** I am well aware. But it drew moneys from a range of other portfolio areas.

**Mr Cook:** I don't have knowledge about that being an explicit government decision at the time. Help me understand. Was it a decision or an election commitment?

**Senator McKENZIE:** My question, Mr Cook, is: is the Labor government going to be funding in this budget the Southern Cross University health precinct, which was to deliver clinical training and clinical services to that regional community?

**Mr Cook:** I'm not aware of that and certainly not in our budget. I'm sorry, but I don't know whether it is in the infrastructure budget. That might be a question for them.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Well, that is why I'm here. I asked infrastructure. I asked health. I'm now asking you.

**Mr Cook:** As a result of that being in the infrastructure budget previously, it wouldn't have been a measure in our budget. I haven't seen that in our budget.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Do you have any advice around the partnership between La Trobe University and Goulburn Valley Health to build a facility in Shepparton to train an allied health professional workforce particularly focused on nursing over coming years? Do you know if that measure has been cut from the budget?

**Mr Cook:** I'm not aware of that being an explicit measure in the previous budget. I'm aware the accelerator was, but I'm not sure that particular one—

**Senator McKENZIE:** I understand what you are saying, Mr Cook. My question isn't about the previous budget. My question is to you. Do you know if that project is going to be funded in this budget?

**Mr Cook:** Sorry. I thought I heard you say 'measures', so I immediately went to the formal understanding of measures in relation to the budget. Again, I would anticipate that would be funded out of Infrastructure rather than our department. I'm not aware of that particular initiative in this budget.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Finally, there is a wet lab in Mildura to have facilities on the ground for La Trobe University specifically to train nurses regionally. Has the Labor Party cut that in this budget?

**Mr Cook:** My understanding is that was an election commitment of the former government. I don't believe that is a measure in—

**Senator McKENZIE:** The finance minister has been very clear in the Senate over recent weeks about the Labor Party going line by line, project by project, to identify waste and things that they are going to keep and things that they are not going to keep. That is why I am asking very specifically about these particular projects. It seems that some are in and some are out. There doesn't seem to be any clarity.

**Dr Bruniges:** It's not in the education budget.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Thank you, Secretary. Minister, would you define facilities such as Southern Cross University's health precinct being built or the partnership between La Trobe University and Goulburn Valley Health to train the next generation of rural nurses as wasteful spending?

**Senator Chisholm:** Thanks for the question. What I would describe as wasteful spending is—

**Senator McKENZIE:** No. That's not my question.

**Senator Chisholm:** National Party ministers going around the country randomly doling out money for their pet projects without doing it in a systematic way—

**Senator McKENZIE:** Chair.

**Senator Chisholm:** or in a way that takes in—

**Senator McKENZIE:** Relevancy.

**Senator Chisholm:** what is actually in the best interests of the country. That was what we identified with the waste and rorts audit. We said that we would go through things in a line-by-line sense.

**Senator McKENZIE:** My question was very simple, Minister. Are you defining as wasteful the three projects that I have outlined to you?

**Senator Chisholm:** I have given you an answer on our approach to the budget.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Are health facilities that are going to train the next generation of allied health professionals—

**Senator Chisholm:** I have—

**CHAIR:** Just so I can keep track of what people are saying, back to you, Senator McKenzie. Ask your question.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Thank you, Chair. It's quite a simple question, Assistant Minister. Southern Cross University was earmarked for over \$27 million to actually assist that university build facilities that will train an allied health workforce for decades to come. It was a clinical facility so that the actual local community could have access to real-time GPs and allied health professionals. It's a very simple question. I'm only talking about that project. It happens to be in a seat held by the National Party. Is that wasteful spending? Yes or no?

**Senator Chisholm:** It's a very simple answer. What we identified—

**Senator McKENZIE:** You can't answer it, can you?

**Senator Chisholm:** through our waste and rorts audit—

**Senator McKENZIE:** You're refusing to answer the question.

**Senator Chisholm:** is the way the previous government—

**Senator McKENZIE:** Don't be afraid to say no.

**Senator Chisholm:** went around spending money. It was not an appropriate use of taxpayers' money.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Don't be afraid to say it was not wasteful spending.

**Senator Chisholm:** There were never any guidelines and there was never any transparency—

**Senator McKENZIE:** That's actually not true.

**Senator Chisholm:** and never any accountability. You of all people—

**Senator McKENZIE:** That is absolutely not true.

**Senator Chisholm:** are more responsible for that than anyone in this country.

**Senator McKENZIE:** I'm happy to give you the programs I oversaw.

**Senator Chisholm:** Even this week, we saw the report released—

**Senator McKENZIE:** They are publicly released.

**Senator Chisholm:** from the former secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet about your behaviour as a minister—

**Senator DAVEY:** Point of order, Chair.

**Senator Chisholm:** and so we are not going to be lectured about spending by you, of all people.

**CHAIR:** There is a point of order.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Point of order.

**Senator Chisholm:** It's outrageous.

**CHAIR:** Minister, there's a point of order.

**Senator DAVEY:** Yes. The point of order is on direct relevance. It was a very simple question. Unless the assistant minister is trying to imply that, as opposed to what is actually on the public record, these very specific questions are somehow pet projects, we would like an answer to the question and not some thin-skinned defensive response trying to drag totally irrelevant aspects into this committee.

**CHAIR:** I have your point. If it is a highly political question that is asked, there is an expectation to have an appropriate response. However, the question is being asked about something of a specific nature and the nature of funding and whether it was in the budget. The minister can say it more broadly in the answer. If we let him give his answer, you can ask the question again in whatever fashion you would like to ask it, within reason.

**Senator McKENZIE:** With that advice under my belt, Chair, in the least political way possible, I will ask as someone who represents rural and regional people. We have a health crisis on our hands in the regions. Assistant Minister, do you see the funding of Southern Cross University's health precinct in Coffs Harbour as waste?

**Senator Chisholm:** What I do see, Senator McKenzie, is that it is important to fund regional and rural infrastructure in an accountable and transparent way. That is why we have set up a fund. I'm going back to infrastructure. We've already dealt with Senate estimates there. There is a \$500 million fund that will actually be open at regular times. It will be open for people to apply to.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Chair, I raise a point of order.

**Senator Chisholm:** It will actually be about building important regional infrastructure that changes the dynamics of those regional communities.

**Senator McKENZIE:** I did sit through the infrastructure estimates. I am here in the higher education section.

**Senator Chisholm:** I would certainly encourage people who are interested in applying for these funds to do so, because they can apply knowing they will be dealt with in a fair and transparent manner. When it comes to regional health, I'm sure the department can talk you through this as part of our 20,000 additional places at university. A lot of them were available in regional higher education institutions as well. So there is going to be that training component that we think is vital to solving the skills challenge that we face. A lot of that is in the health area.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Minister, close to \$25 million was put aside for the partnership between La Trobe University and Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton to build a facility to ensure the next generation of allied health professionals, particularly nurses, for rural and regional Australia's health needs going forward. Do you think it was a waste?

**Senator Chisholm:** What I think is that investment in regional health is really important. I talked about the fund we've set up through the department of infrastructure that will be available for universities and regional communities to bid for. Again, I encourage people who are interested in doing it because they know that those

applications will be treated in a fair and transparent way. The decisions made by government will be understood by local communities at the same time. Again, I reinforce that a lot of the 20,000 additional places we have at universities are dedicated to the skills that we need. A lot of regional universities have also benefitted from that decision.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Minister, do you see spending money on a wet lab facility in a regional capital like Mildura a waste of the spending?

**Senator Chisholm:** Again, I think that spending government money in regional and rural communities is vital. That is why we've set up that fund through the department of infrastructure, which will be used in a transparent way. It will help guide regional communities and build their capacity. I would encourage any regional communities or regional universities that are interested in applying to do so when that fund opens; I think it is early next year.

**Senator McKENZIE:** Thank you for refusing to answer my actual questions.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I want to go to HELP loans. How many students, both as a number and as a percentage of eligible students, choose to take up the option of the student assist HELP loan to pay their student and amenities fee?

**Mr Cook:** Mr Coburn might be able to help you with that. I know we have the numbers somewhere. The question you are asking is about the number of students who take up the student assist HELP loan, SA-HELP. Is that the question you asked?

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Yes. And how many take up that option and then use it to pay their student and amenities fee? That is essentially the union's fee.

**Mr Cook:** We'll just see whether we have that data available for you. If not, we may need to take that on notice. It is quite detailed. As you know, there are four components of the HELP loan process. We might need to take that on notice and come back to you on that.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** You have taken it on notice?

**Mr Cook:** Yes.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I will move to HECS-HELP. It's my understanding that these loans do not have interest applied to them. Is that correct?

**Mr Coburn:** They don't have real interest. They are indexed on a formula that is based on the CPI.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is that rate?

**Mr Coburn:** The most recent indexation was 3.9 per cent. There is a formula in the Higher Education Support Act 2003 that determines the indexation rate from quarterly indexation rates or quarterly growth in the consumer price index over the previous year. That has a smoothing effect. So it's not exactly the same as the CPI, but it's calculated from CPI.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** You acknowledge, though, that the CPI is obviously rapidly increasing. So we will see the big jump next year?

**Mr Coburn:** We expect that there will be some kind of increase next year, but we're not in a position to calculate it yet.

**Mr Cook:** I finally found the figure I was looking for. I knew it was somewhere today. In terms of student assistance HELP, it is a projected number from our model. For 2022, it is 577,165.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So we're talking about SA-HELP?

**Mr Cook:** That's right. I can give you the HECS-HELP, the FEE-HELP, the OS-HELP, which is the overseas HELP, and that one as well.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Hold that figure. I'll come back to it. How many would have used that funding to pay for their student fees and amenities?

**Mr Cook:** I am assuming all of them do because that is the purpose of that particular line.

**Mr Coburn:** That is what that number is. That is the student amenities fee.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I will go back to HECS. It is smooth, but we're expecting a jump over the next 12 months.

**Mr Coburn:** There will be some increase.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Yes. If inflation is as high as it is, there will. What are Treasury projections in terms of debt?

**Mr Coburn:** The debt is actually projected by the Australian Government Actuary. I was thinking of a different thing. We don't actually have projections of the amount of future debt. We have projections of the expenses but not directly of the debt itself.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So the budget doesn't contain those assumptions?

**Mr Coburn:** No. It doesn't. That's because the HELP asset is treated as an asset on the balance sheet of the government rather than a cash outlay. So the expense is the relevant number for future projections.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Would this, then, affect the amount that will never be repaid?

**Mr Coburn:** The increasing interest rates? It depends on a combination of both the interest rates or, more specifically, the discount rate, which is related to the interest rates, and what is happening to inflation. The relevant number in terms of the effect of those economic indicators is the concessional discount rate, which is roughly the difference between the government's borrowing rate and the indexation rate that is applied. In normal circumstances, and as it is at the moment, the bond rate is higher than the indexation rate. At the moment, there is a reasonably wide gap. The concessional discount rate is larger than the inflation rate. I should point out also that technically the DNER doesn't take into account indexation. DNER is just a raw calculation of the nominal value that is being lent and how much of that is going to be repaid. That is primarily influenced by assumptions about future incomes.

**Mr Cook:** And we may also see more students choosing to pay than we perhaps have seen in the past because they are looking at what is happening in relation to inflation. You would have seen that debt not expected to be repaid went from about 15 per cent to about 11 per cent in the last 12 months. We think that's a combination of students choosing to pay where traditionally they may not because they've seen some of the impact of inflation and also the strong job market, where potentially graduate salaries are higher as a result. Therefore, the threshold payment has kicked in and they're making that payment as well.

**Mr Coburn:** The primary driver of that change in the DNER was actually a rebasing of income expectations. The Australian Government Actuary received a new dataset from the ATO which had improved future income expectations and, therefore, increased likelihood of repayment of loans.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Do you have available the average HELP amount per person?

**Mr Cook:** Yes, we do. We've got the number here. It's three million HELP debtors as at 30 June.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** As in individuals?

**Mr Cook:** That's correct, yes.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is the average per person?

**Mr Cook:** I might take that on notice. I might be able to come back to you in this hearing.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is the total? We can work that out.

**Mr Cook:** At the moment, with regard to the total of the higher education HELP debt, the fair value is \$47.2 billion. The fair value is basically the nominal value plus the consideration of debt not expected to be repaid. So the nominal value is \$67.7 billion. That is as at 30 June this year. The fair value, which basically takes away the amount not expected to be repaid, is \$47.2 billion.

**Mr Coburn:** Someone in the office just did the calculation for me. It's about \$23,500.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That includes the combination of the fair and the nominal?

**Mr Coburn:** That is the face value of the debt. The actual receivable that the Commonwealth expects to receive from that is reduced both by DNER and the concessional loan discount.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is the average repayment period?

**Mr Cook:** I think the information I have with me here at the moment says nine and a half years. At the end of June, the average time taken to repay HELP debts was 9.5 years. That's obviously going to be totally different depending on the courses that you've taken, your income and all the bits and pieces. That's your average since June this year.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What has been the average CPI index amount that has been applied to each debt?

**Mr Cook:** I might need to take that one on notice. Mr Coburn may know the average over a particular period of time.

**Mr Coburn:** Given that it lags behind actual indexation, it's broadly similar to—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** It's got some of that smoothing, I suppose.



**Mr Coburn:** It's broadly similar to the CPI. The last couple of years, it has been around—I will have to take the exact numbers on notice—one and one and a bit per cent. I think it might have been less than one per cent two years ago. Actually, it was 0.6 per cent.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** You gave me the figure you are expecting to be repaid.

**Mr Coburn:** If you are talking about the fair value of the receivable, that's \$49.7 billion as at June 2022 for the HELP receivable. Because there are some things that are not actually higher education in there for historical reasons—there is a small amount of VET FEE-HELP and, pre 2019, VET student loans—the fair value of the receivable at the moment is \$47.2 billion for higher education. I should say that is not the amount expected to be repaid. That is the discount at net present value of the current asset.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is the number of loans and average cost of loans that are written off due to death or for any other reason?

**Mr Coburn:** I would need to take that on notice.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I will put the rest of these on notice. They are getting quite technical. I will go to the universities accord. The budget included a \$2.7 million commitment to deliver the universities accord. What are the components of this funding?

**Mr Cook:** Sure. I'm happy to take that on. I can tell you in terms of the actual cash flow. Ms Chipperfield is probably going to be helping me with this. It is \$2.1 million in 2022-23 and \$0.6 million in 2023-24 to maybe a total of \$2.7 million. The allocation of that \$2.7 million is for costs such as panel fees, for sitting fees for the panel; it will be research. It will be the sort of costs that we pay for consultations, say, for people to travel around Australia. It is the costs that we have for putting on consultations and roundtables. There are no departmental costs in that money. The department is funding the operations of the accord in terms of our own operations.

**Ms Chipperfield:** As Mr Cook said, there are three components to that \$2.7 million. Over the two years, what has been provided through the budget is \$1.57 million for the panel expenses. That is including remuneration and the travel expenses. A second component of around \$300,000 is consultation costs. That is a notional allocation for venue hire and facilitators. There is around \$800,000 for commissioned research.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What was that last one?

**Ms Chipperfield:** Around \$800,000 for commissioned research. Again, as Mr Cook said, this funding doesn't include any additional departmental or ASL. We're sourcing all of that through the department.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I don't want to take too much time up with it. What is each of those components? What are they? What do they do? What does the panel do?

**Ms Chipperfield:** For the panel expenses, each of our panel members will be eligible for a daily sitting fee, which is set out in the Remuneration Tribunal. That's obviously a sitting fee for the work that they undertake and travel expenses. We will be covering their travel and accommodation costs and allowances for food et cetera. There are consultation costs. If we are sourcing venue hires and paying for catering, it's likely that we will be engaging facilitators to help undertake a number of these consultations. I think it has been very clear that this is an extensive and wide-ranging review. We will be engaging with a range of stakeholders, students, unions, the sector, staff, parents and communities. We will be looking to go across the country. The panel will have a big job. It is supporting them to undertake their job as efficiently and effectively as possible. There is commissioned research. Again, in setting a long-term plan for the higher education sector, we need to understand where future skills need to be and how we might think about allocating CSPs or funding. There is a lot of complexity in that too. We will need to bring different datasets and experts together.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So have the terms been set for the accord?

**Ms Chipperfield:** Again, as Mr Cook said earlier today, it was a matter for cabinet process. The terms of reference were determined by the government. The department did undertake targeted consultation with a range of stakeholders to test the drafting of those TORs. That was undertaken—I will look at the dates—in late August to September.

**Mr Cook:** It is a cabinet process. We anticipate that the minister will make announcements in relation to the terms of reference this month.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That will be announced. That will be put on the website, will it?

**Mr Cook:** It will be a matter for the minister and the government. As I said, he has indicated publicly that it will be done in this period.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** It's usual that would be published. Right?

**Mr Cook:** Ministers would normally put out press releases and the department would normally have things around that, as we did around our 20,000 places. That is a normal practice.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I appreciate what you have just said. Will the accord include the non-university sector, as has been advocated for by ITECA and their members?

**Mr Cook:** We consulted with ITECA and IHEA in relation to the terms of reference. Certainly I understand that the minister has had discussions with them. I meet with both of those groups every six weeks or so. There's a strong level of involvement from the non-university sector in relation to some of that work going forward. I would have no doubt that they would be engaged in some of the discussions going forward.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you. I will change the subject to the freedom of speech model.

**Mr Cook:** You were just asking about indexation rates on HELP previously. We got some answers in relation to that for the last 10 years. In 2013, the CPI was two per cent. Then we've gone 2.6 per cent, 2.1 per cent, 1.5 per cent, 1.5 per cent, 1.9 per cent, 1.8 per cent, 1.8 per cent, 0.6 per cent, which is what we indicated just earlier, and 3.9 per cent, which was the latest in 2022.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That is that smoothing that we would expect. It is quite a jump. I want to go to the model code for freedom of speech. Have all universities complied with full implementation of the model code?

**Mr Cook:** My understanding is that all universities have provided assurance that they have done that.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** They've all done that. So there aren't any that haven't done it?

**Mr Cook:** Not to my understanding.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** How do you keep tabs of that?

**Mr Coburn:** I want to make a clarifying point. It's not a matter of complying with the model code. The model code is voluntary. In conversations with Mr French himself, he was very keen that it not be legislated as such. There was an arrangement that the previous minister, Mr Tudge, asked all the universities to adopt it substantially in one way or another. It might be in, say, one single policy or it might be across several single policies. The method of assessing whether or not freedom of speech policies were aligned with the French model code was done first by Professor Sally Walker in her report to government on the implementation of the code and then by the department using Professor Walker's methodology. The standard was to be substantially similar or substantially aligned. Not necessarily every single part was, because it's not a mandatory part. As I said, it was done by the department as a one-off process.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** But there has been legislation on this, though, hasn't there?

**Mr Coburn:** Yes, there has been in relation to the standards and the Higher Education Support Act, both in terms of the form of wording of the requirement. So in the higher education—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Signing up to it is a voluntary thing that universities do?

**Mr Coburn:** It's compulsory both under the threshold standards and the Higher Education Support Act that those policies exist. Exactly what form they take is up to the individual universities.

**Mr Cook:** The point we're making is that the model code itself is not mandatory. But in relation to policies around freedom of speech, that's mandatory. That's what is measured through TEQSA and through the higher education standards.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Thanks.

**Mr Coburn:** And because it is part of the standards, it is part of the reregistration process for TEQSA.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** My understanding is that when the legislation was introduced to parliament, the current government supported that legislation. But they noted that their belief was that the bill did not go far enough to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom. Is the government proposing to make amendments to freedom of speech at all?

**Mr Cook:** Amendments to freedom of speech? Sorry, Senator?

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** On that legislation, are there any proposed amendments to it?

**Dr Bruniges:** We would normally provide advice to government. There's nothing to date that we have provided advice to government on about that issue.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Minister, do you know?

**Senator Chisholm:** The former minister did ask the higher education standards panel for advice about whether the model code itself should be included in the threshold standards. The higher education standards panel, which is made up of vice chancellors and other people in the non-university sector, considered the issue

that the former government sought advice on. They provided advice that the model code should not form part of the threshold standards. That is their independent advice in relation to their role to provide advice to ministers. They have done that now.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** We are seeing—I make this as a comment—an eroding of standards of freedom of speech across various sectors, and certainly within the university sector. Researchers and students are more and more finding that they are being curtailed in their speech. I think this is about anything we can do to strengthen that to make sure that—obviously there's responsibility that comes with that—individuals are not curtailed at all. I would certainly urge the government to do everything to protect freedom of speech on campuses. I want to go to an issue in relation to the Research Training Program—PhD funding. The RTP, the Research Training Program, provides block grants on a calendar year basis to higher education providers to support both domestic and overseas students undertaking research, doctoral and research master's degrees, known as higher degrees by research. The government spends over \$1 billion on RTP, but it's only available to table A universities in HESA. My understanding is that table A is, I guess—

**Mr Cook:** Generally, your public universities.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** This means that a university college that runs PhDs accredited by TEQSA to the same standard as table A universities is ineligible for these grants. Some estimates I've heard are that, without these subsidies, stipends and living support, a PhD student at a university college will pay up to \$100,000 more over the lifetime of their degree. Do you accept that there might be a bit of an inequality issue here?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think you are asking for a matter of opinion.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is there an inequality here? It could just be an anomaly. My understanding is that university colleges are a relatively new system.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, it is.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is it possible that some of those requirements that were more traditionally for a table A university just haven't been carried forward and it is something that needs to be looked at?

**Mr Cook:** I will ask Mr English to speak about the actual program for a moment. Again, in terms of the accord process, in the sector, both public universities and non-public universities, including university colleges, are very interested in what some of the outcomes about research funding might be into the future and the equitable nature and distribution of that research funding. I will ask Mr English to speak about the detail of the actual program and some of the things that have happened in that program in recent times.

**Mr English:** You are correct that the university colleges are not currently eligible for research block grant support. This is a question that we do expect will be addressed as part of the accord process. It is thinking about the right structure of offerings across the system and how the relatively new category, as you say, of university colleges should be supported to engage with the same opportunities, where relevant, as table A and table B providers. That said, it has been open to providers for some time to seek the ability to be registered as PhD providers. They do that knowing what the current funding arrangements are.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Help me to understand it. I don't have a doctorate, clearly. There's no difference in standard, is there, between someone who does a PhD in a table A university and one at a college?

**Dr Bruniges:** You can do a PhD by research or by coursework. There's actually, within the degree, coursework or research work or a combination of both. When you are awarded a PhD, you are awarded a PhD. The methodology by which you do it can be a combination of coursework and research, totally research or longitudinal. There's a range of things. Once you have the award, it's still titled the PhD award.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I'll most certainly take your word for it, Doctor. It does seem to be an anomaly. I encourage the government to look at it as part of this process with the accord. It does seem to be a bit of an inequality there.

**Senator DAVEY:** I have a couple of things I want to follow up. Earlier, the Napthine review, which was undertaken in 2019, was mentioned. It highlighted a clear imbalance between city kids and regional kids. Several recommendations were made at the time. Can you provide an update on the implementation of each of the recommendations from the review, particularly any that weren't delivered under the previous government, and what the new government's plans are for delivering on those recommendations?

**Mr Cook:** Sure. Thank you, Senator. I have Ms Pearce here as well, who might be able to assist me if I get lost in this. As you know, there were a number of recommendations made under Napthine. About \$400 million in regional measures were allocated as part of an announcement the former government made in 2020. I will go through these relatively quickly—I hope that's okay—

**Senator DAVEY:** Yes.

**Mr Cook:** just because there's quite a few.

**Senator DAVEY:** If we need any more detail, we can always ask for it to come on notice.

**Mr Cook:** I will pick out the major ones.

**Senator DAVEY:** The headlines would be good, yes.

**Mr Cook:** There is about \$178 million for tertiary access payments. As you are aware, that is a payment that regional students can apply for to assist them in terms of study.

**Senator DAVEY:** They are ongoing?

**Mr Cook:** They are ongoing; that's correct. In 2021, 8,140 payments were available for eligible students from out in regional and remote areas. There has been a slight change in terms of how we distribute that funding. Previously, we had allocated some money to universities and some money to Services Australia. What we did find as part of our learnings was that the allocation to universities was quite difficult and there was an administrative burden. Now students only apply through the Services Australia portal for that. So that is a program that continues. There is what was called the regional university campus funding, which is the additional higher level of indexation because they are a regional campus and there are additional costs as a result of that. There is 3.5 per cent growth in terms of the indexation for regional campuses. That is being phased in with that full amount to be applied as of 2024.

There was the demand driven funding for First Nations students. It was actually demand driven for First Nation students who live in regional and remote Australia. There was about \$17 million in relation to that. Based on our estimates this year, in 2022, we think it will provide a total of about \$45 million for approximately 3,937 equivalent full time study load regional and remote First Nations students. That allocates what that looks like in relation to that program.

There was also the funding for the regional university centres. So there was \$21 million to establish the eight additional regional university centres. Those eight additional regional university centres have now been decided and announced. The other one I will quickly finish up with is the money allocated for the establishment of the Regional Education Commissioner, Fiona Nash, as you would be aware. That role continues. Ms Nash and I meet regularly in relation to her work.

**Senator DAVEY:** This is a question for future estimates. Can the Regional Education Commissioner be called?

**Mr Cook:** She is actually a contractor. She is not a public servant per se.

**Senator DAVEY:** Could we get the rural health commissioner in?

**CHAIR:** What I would suggest is that Senator O'Sullivan and I have a chat offline and see what can and can't happen.

**Senator DAVEY:** It's irrelevant today. It's good to know that she is working hard and that you are in constant communication. Thank you very much. The former government also had a research commercialisation package that included Australia's economic accelerator, the expansion of CSIRO's Main Sequence ventures program, the Trailblazer Universities Program and industry PhDs and fellowships. How is that going? Is that package ongoing? Can you give us a quick update on them?

**Dr Bruniges:** I might begin here. The May budget had the money for the regional accelerator in it. You are asking about trailblazers, Senator?

**Senator DAVEY:** Trailblazers and the economic accelerator.

**Dr Bruniges:** I will hand over to my team. I will return to that other issue before the break, if I can.

**Mr Cook:** The short answer is yes. The measures for those particular programs continue. The measure you will find in the infrastructure departure will be for two regional trailblazers. I think it is about \$118 million off the top of my head, but Mr English can correct me if I am wrong. For those six trailblazer programs we're working through the deeds of agreement, I think they're called, or the deeds of contract. What are they called, Mr English?

**Mr English:** Conditions of grant.

**Mr Cook:** Conditions of grant, which we will sign off, we anticipate, in the next several months. The Australian economic accelerator—just to clarify that is different to the regional accelerator, which the secretary was about to talk about—has been confirmed in the budget as well. That will begin from, we think, July next year, depending on legislation. That is my understanding.

**Mr English:** We are working towards the accelerator having a pilot phase between now and 1 July next year. But the substantive program subject to the legislation will be from 1 July.

**Senator DAVEY:** So the pilot can occur without the requirement for the legislation?

**Mr English:** That's correct.

**Senator DAVEY:** That's good to know so we can watch that. There is the trailblazer, and I'm also interested in the expansion of CSIRO's main sequence.

**Mr Cook:** They're probably questions for CSIRO. That measure has been confirmed in the budget, I understand.

**Mr English:** I am aware that the CSIRO is working towards starting to fundraise the partnership money that they will use to establish round 3 of the MSV with the funding that was provided in those previous measures.

**Senator DAVEY:** And they're coming in this afternoon, so I can ask them questions about it too. And with regard to the Trailblazer Universities Program, have lead universities been identified? Can you provide a list of the universities that are also their partner organisations?

**Mr Cook:** That might be publicly available. That was announced before the election. I think six were announced.

**Mr English:** The six lead universities for the projects is Curtin University, which is leading the resources, technology and critical minerals trailblazer in partnership with the University of Queensland and James Cook University and 36 industry partners. I will save you from that list. Deakin University is leading the recycling and renewable energies commercialisation hub, or REACH, initiative in partnership with RMIT, the University of Southern Queensland and Federation University and about \$160 million worth of industry partnerships. I don't have the number of industry partners; my apologies. The University of Adelaide is leading the defence trailblazer for the concept to sovereign capability project in partnership with the University of New South Wales. That has about 52 industry partners attached to it. The University of Queensland is delivering the accelerating growth in Australia's food and beverage manufacturing, or FaBA, project in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Southern Queensland. The University of New South Wales is delivering the Australian trailblazer for recycling and clean energy in partnership with the University of Newcastle. The University of Southern Queensland is delivering the innovative launch, automation, novel materials, communications and hypersonics hub, or iLAUNCH, project in partnership with the University of South Australia and the Australian National University. They have 23 industry partners that they are working with.

**Senator DAVEY:** I think that is it from me.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I have a question about the quality indicators for learning and teaching, QILT. You would know that there was a significant fall of about nine percentage points in one year from 2019 to 2020. Is that drop raising any concern for the department? If it is, are you working with the universities to address that decline so that students might be better informed about what is going on?

**Mr Cook:** Just to assist me, are you talking about a particular survey? There are a number of surveys. There is the student experience survey. There's the graduate outcomes survey. There's a satisfaction survey.

**Senator LIDDLE:** This is the student experience.

**Mr Cook:** That's right. The 2020 result was 69 per cent. The 2021 result was 73 per cent. That is my understanding based on the data that I have.

**Senator LIDDLE:** It's still a drop.

**Mr Cook:** Obviously, we anticipate that some of that is COVID, of course. Of course we work with universities. Each university has this data at a university level. We meet weekly with an individual university. It's called a compact discussion. In each of those discussions, we talk to them about student experience and what they're doing to actually improve their data and improve their results. We continue to be engaged in that conversation with them. The 2022 results I think will come out potentially early next year, I would imagine, as they would traditionally do.

**Mr English:** I would need to confirm.

**Mr Cook:** It will be interesting to see what the difference has been in relation to that. I can assure you we speak regularly to the sector around their student experience data and what they are doing in terms of returning to campus and all the sort of issues that have impacted on that particular dataset.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I think student expectations are really important. I know in the conversations I've had with senior people within a couple of the universities what COVID has done is forced a lot of students away who

probably will never return back to a big lecture theatre. So it has changed the nature of certainly the size of the universities and how they might deliver. What I am really interested in is the transparency and the communication of information to students so that they can determine whether they want to go to a university in a town or a city that has three universities and whether they want to go to a university that remains focused on classroom tutorial structures rather than everything being online. That's what I'm really interested in in terms of the transparency, not the trend.

**Mr Cook:** Thank you. I am aware that Mr Tudge raised this issue as well and made, I think, a tweet about it recently. I think he wrote to the minister. I think the minister did reply to Mr Tudge and indicate that he also considered the impact of COVID and issues around transparency to be really important and that he would particularly like that to be looked at in relation to the accord as well. There were two components of that. One component was that of the impact of COVID on the university sector and for the accord to actually spend time focusing on that and seeing both the benefits and the disadvantages in relation to that. In terms of transparency and accountability, I can assure you again that will be a component of the accord process.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Do you think that proposal actually has some validity in terms of publishing that information?

**Mr Cook:** I think you are asking for an opinion. Having said that, what I can say is that the minister has indicated that it is an area that he would like unpacked further by the accord process.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Thank you. The other question I have—I find myself asking this across a range of areas—is around the definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. My own view is that those measures are put in place to intervene and provide some equity and fairness. I'm just wanting to understand. The University of Sydney has recently said that it plans to crack down on students and staff self-identifying. I've raised the issue about self-identification. You raised before about the three-part definition. I am interested in understanding whether the department has engaged with that university about what it might be doing to try to crack down on people self-identifying and, therefore, there being issues about whether those people are the right people to be using what should be an equitable and fair process, not an identity process.

**Mr Cook:** I'm aware of the issue that you have raised. I certainly haven't had a conversation with the university. We have met with them through the mission based process, I think maybe earlier. At this stage, no, we haven't had a direct conversation with them, but we're happy to do that as part of our regular conversations with them.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Is this something that you have heard before from Aboriginal organisations, such as land councils or individuals? I know I hear it regularly from people around this concern about the definition.

**Dr Bruniges:** I think there's a variety of definitions used, to be frank, across the states and territories and the Commonwealth. It is something that I have heard of. It has been raised with me in the Indigenous education consultative group that I have had over the last six years.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Will the department be considering that there is a fundamental difference between somebody just identifying as such who might receive a benefit as a result of some agreement they struck under a native title agreement as opposed to an equity and fairness mechanism that is used to ensure that those people who face the greatest barriers, which aren't just about identity or culture, actually receive the benefits available to help them to be successful?

**Dr Bruniges:** It's a substantial issue. Within our own department and working with other agencies, we consider it particularly in NIAA and the work that we're doing there on closing the gap. It's something much bigger than just education. We need to work through that very important issue.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I will be looking forward to some progress and further discussions.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** You would be aware that the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, the PJCIS, held an inquiry into national security risks affecting the Australian higher education and research sector. They had 27 recommendations in their report. I want to get a bit of a status update on that, please. Can we expect the government to publish their response to this report?

**Mr Cook:** Thank you for the question. Ms Sandercock has joined me as well. Certainly we're well aware of the report. We have been working across a number of government agencies as well as the foreign interference taskforce, which is made up of universities, to consider those recommendations and develop responses. We have briefed both Minister O'Neil and Minister Clare in relation to that. I know we are reaching a stage of finalising a government response in relation to that. As you know, the committee has only last month—maybe September or October—formed its membership. Obviously, the process that would normally happen is that would then be signed off by the Prime Minister. Again, I can assure you that we have canvassed widely the proposed responses

to those recommendations. It's a matter for government, but I anticipate it won't be too far down the track in relation to the response.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** How long is too far?

**Mr Cook:** That's a matter for government. All I can say to you as a public servant is that we have worked extensively over the last several months to formulate a response in relation to each of those recommendations.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Minister, can you take on notice and maybe come back to the committee with when we could expect that report back. I will try these questions. You might have to take them on notice in the same way. Are you able to provide a status update on the implementation of each of the 27 recommendations?

**Mr Cook:** I don't think there will be implementation of the recommendations because the recommendations have only just been made. We've got implementation in relation to the guidelines. Ms Sandercock knows that very well in terms of the countering foreign interference guidelines for higher education providers and universities. We're very happy to do that. But there wouldn't be implementation of the recommendations as such because those recommendations—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Which department is actually taking carriage of it?

**Mr Cook:** Home affairs is predominantly taking carriage in relation to that. But we work very closely with home affairs. We've got membership on that committee, which is chaired by home affairs and the vice chancellor of the University of Queensland in terms of—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What other departments and agencies are contributing to the government's response?

**Mr Cook:** We're happy to give the membership.

**Ms Sandercock:** There is a range of agencies involved. Most of them overlap with the University Foreign Interference Taskforce. Other agencies that are engaged in that are the Attorney-General's Department, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ASIO and the Defence Science and Technology Office. When it comes to the recommendations, the 27 recommendations span most of those agencies and a range of others. I think one that jumps to mind is the Australian Research Council.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Okay.

**Mr Cook:** You've also got Universities Australia on this group. They are involved in the discussions with the Group of Eight. We've got the vice chancellors from the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Western Sydney University and the Australian National University. As Ms Sandercock said, we've got the head of the Australian Cyber Security Centre, the Attorney-General's Department, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the Chief Defence Scientist from the Department of Defence. So it's a very broad group. I have to say they have worked very collaboratively together to look at the very serious issue of foreign interference in the higher education sector.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What did you say the name of that group is?

**Mr Cook:** That is the University Foreign Interference Taskforce.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** In terms of government departments or agencies that are putting input into the government's response, the universities wouldn't be involved, so it would only be those agencies?

**Mr Cook:** Those agencies are predominantly the agencies.

**Ms Sandercock:** That's right. It's home affairs, our agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Attorney-General's, by and large. There have been discussions with the university that manages the taskforce.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Yes. They are consulting with them to feed into the government's response.

**Ms Sandercock:** Indeed.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I understand. That is it for me and the coalition.

**Dr Bruniges:** I want to clarify some evidence in relation to Senator McKenzie's question. The former government committed \$2 billion for individual programs under the Regional Accelerator Program in the March 2022-23 budget. The three projects explicitly outlined by Senator McKenzie were election commitments and weren't explicit in the budget announcement. I just want to make it clear. I think at one point I referred to those three projects. They were three projects that were election commitments that were taken from that fund.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Just to clarify, you are saying they were not in the budget from March?

**Dr Bruniges:** That's correct. The three projects that were mentioned by Senator McKenzie were election commitments. There was a \$2 billion amount of funding in the March budget allocated for the Regional Accelerator Program but no explicit reference to those projects.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I'm sure she is listening.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We will now release the higher education research international staff.

### **Proceedings suspended from 13:18 to 14:21**

#### **Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency**

**CHAIR:** I now call officers from the department in relation to outcome 2, Higher education, research and international.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I have some questions related to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. What is the agency's role in reporting, recording and responding to allegations of sexual assault on Australian university campuses?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Thank you for the question. We've actually had a pretty active role for about four years because the issue is such a very large and pernicious one in the higher education sector. The issue of SASH, of course, is related to other activities—respect at work, the national survey of students and so on. Indeed, issues come up at QILT. I think what has been disappointing and sometimes bewildering has been the very slow progress that the sector has been making in dealing with the issues. So our role goes to providing advice and materials and establishing communities of practice to ensure that there's greater knowledge of the issues. We also have an obligation in terms of our regular work to ensure that governing bodies and the elements below them are taking the matter seriously. I think that there has been a rising tide of concern both at the level of concern and issues as well as how effectively we've all been able to deal with them. The progress has been slow.

**Senator LIDDLE:** You mentioned four years. How many complaints of that nature have been received in the last year and over the last four years?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** The number of complaints we've had, at least in 2021—I don't have the latest figures—was 34. TEQSA itself is not a complaints based agency. We've had 34 overall. There are 32 in the universities and two in other entities.

**Senator LIDDLE:** In relation to those figures, there are obviously figures that might relate to allegations because universities have quite open spaces. Some might be reported to the police. Some might be reported to the university because of the nature of them. When you say 34, are you just talking about that are reported to the universities?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** These are matters that have come to TEQSA as opposed to the hundreds of matters which have been dealt with by individual providers. As I said, we are, as it were, not a complaints body. It is those that have nevertheless been raised with us. Of course, the usual course is to refer them back to the providers or to work with providers, depending on the nature of the concern.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Is there a central portal of information where you have a collective grouping of data that relates to incidents on campus? Is there anything that exists like that? You are talking about complaints to you rather than complaints to the university.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** I don't know if the CEO knows. I don't know the answer to the question. I would just say that the communities of practice and other initiatives we've taken mean that there's a pretty good knowledge of the level of activity across different institutions.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Your organisation investigates some of those matters. Is that your role? Of the ones that are reported to you, at least?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** If they are relevant to our remit. As I said, most of them would be related to the providers and the providers' responsibilities. The providers, in turn, will deal with the police and other authorities as relevant.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Would these examples fall under your remit reports of staff members at, say, a university last year over allegations of sexual misconduct?

**Mr Maclean:** The bulk of the complaints or concerns that we've received have been in relation to the manner in which a provider or a university has responded to allegations. Our focus has been on the systems, policies and procedures for handling complaints within an institution. Specific allegations of sexual harassment or sexual assault are not dealt with or investigated by TEQSA. They would be referred to relevant agencies. Our focus is on the institutional response, not a specific or a criminal matter in itself.

**Senator LIDDLE:** There was a report of six staff members being forced to leave Monash University last year over allegations of sexual misconduct. Would that be something that you would consider needed to be looked at from a broader policy, procedural response type context?



**Mr Maclean:** If that were the matter that was brought to our attention, I imagine, yes, we would be looking at the institution's response and the adequacy thereof.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** If this is helpful—I'm not sure—I think we've dealt with about 60 providers out of the 190 on matters of this nature over that period of time.

**Senator LIDDLE:** TEQSA registers the Australian College of Theology as a university college. How many institutions have been approved under the new university college status?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Five. Three initially. The Moore, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and NIDA. Since that time, there has been Alphacrucis and ACT, as we call it.

**Senator LIDDLE:** What is the legislative purpose of the new university college category in higher education?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** The purpose is to recognise very good and mature providers of higher education that are not universities and that, indeed, may not have any intention to become universities. It's a means of recognising their excellence, as it were. The proposal to have university colleges derived, really, from a view that when people think of Australian higher education, they only think of the universities. I think there is an interest in developing different models of excellence. Different models of excellence can be recognised by greater diversity. One response to that is the formation of the university colleges. We've got five of them now.

**Senator LIDDLE:** The standards for research were raised significantly for universities as part of the provider category changes. Do you anticipate that any of the current universities will transfer categories into the new university college category within the next decade that would enable more teaching focused institutions that aren't inhibited by the demand for high-end research?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** That is an interesting question. All current universities have transitioned to universities under the new arrangements. The key difference between a university college and a university relates to the research requirement, which I think your question is implying, because the requirement for excellence that needs to be demonstrated by a university college is termed scholarship. 'Scholarship' is a term that can embrace teaching, research and learning and practice and a variety of other things, thus supporting a broader model of excellence, as I said. The research requirements under the previous standards were seen to be—I was the reviewer of the category, so I have to fess up here—not sufficiently demanding. So there was a deliberate stiffening up of the requirements for registration as a university in terms of research. I will make one more sentence on it. Under the previous standards, there wasn't really a difference between a university college and university in respect of the research requirement. There is now.

**Senator LIDDLE:** You mentioned before that five institutions were approved under the new college status. How many actually applied, though?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** More than double that. The process occurred between April and June 2021. Applications were sought from eligible institutions. The eligibility was determined by whether they had self-accrediting status or whatever. As I recall it, about a dozen—it might have been 13—applied. We made a decision in respect of three initially. As a result of other actions that occurred, two have come into the system. That is good. We seek to build a cache around the university college brand.

**Mr Maclean:** There were 12 applicants.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** There were 12 applicants. Three initially and two subsequently.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Have you denied any of them application? If so, why?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Those that weren't successful were not seen to meet the requirement for entry to university college status. They might not have all agreed with that position, but that was the decision made.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Will those institutions that have been approved be provided Commonwealth supported places now that they've been approved?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** That's well above my pay grade. That's a matter of government policy. There are no funding implications under current settings for entities that enter university college.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Senator Chisholm, are you able to tell me whether there are any plans or discussions underway currently for those colleges to be given some of those Commonwealth supported places?

**Senator Chisholm:** I'm happy for Mr Cook to provide an update.

**Mr Cook:** Some of those colleges have received some of the 20,000 additional places, additional CSPs. Again, broadly, the issue about funding into the future for the higher education sector across all higher education providers, or the 190 or so that Professor Coaldrake mentioned before, will be something that will be discussed and considered as part of the accord process next year.

**Senator LIDDLE:** If they've been given CSP, what categories do they fall under in terms of their key area of interest?

**Mr Cook:** Alphacrucis, for example, is one of the ones that got some additional Commonwealth supported places for the purposes of teaching, which is historical. It is what Alphacrucis has received funding for in the past.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Did any of those organisations that weren't successful actually appeal? Is there any appeal process?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Yes, they have. There is continuing engagement with them and through the AAT. Some of them, not necessarily all.

**Senator LIDDLE:** As part of that process, did they bring legal representation with them or anything like that? How complex is that process of appeal?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** To a non-lawyer, it certainly seems quite complex to me. It would be fair to say that providers are well aware of their rights and have sought to exercise them with the professional assistance that they can summon. They've done so.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Has there been any consideration of compensation for that process?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** My own view would be that compensation is not a relevant consideration. People are applying for inclusion in a category which is a privilege. I don't know that the question of compensation arises in respect of unsuccessful applications.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I want to go to the cost recovery implementation. Firstly, what is intended by the cost recovery implementation?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Perhaps I will start and throw to the CEO in a moment. What is behind cost recovery is the notion that there is a cost attached to doing business and being registered in the higher education sector in Australia. That is a position that I think is appropriate in terms of a system that aspires to be a very strong one by international standards. It is the entry costs and the business costs associated with being a member of the higher education community, of which, as I said, there are 192 providers.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Do you want to add anything?

**Mr Maclean:** Well the CRIS is the implementation statement for cost recovery. Under the general cost recovery framework and guidelines, which have bipartisan support, an entity is required to develop an implementation statement. That's what we've been developing over the last couple of years. We consulted the sector in 2021 on a draft or proposed implementation statement for cost recovery for TEQSA. That model was further developed and put to then new government after the election.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** My understanding is that it is meant to be scaled so it doesn't disproportionately impact the smaller institutions. Is that right? It is scalable with the size of the institution.

**Mr Maclean:** One of the guiding principles for cost recovery is that the cost that you attribute to a particular entity needs to reflect regulatory effort. One of the other very strong guiding rules in the framework and guidelines is that there can be no form of cross-subsidisation in cost recovery. So to the extent that there's any scalability within the current model, it really relates to the reasonably narrow spectrum of accrediting courses. So the cost recovery implementation statement that has been approved now and is due for implementation from 1 January provides for discounts on the accreditation of courses contingent on provider size. It is up to a 70 per cent discount depending on how large you are or, more accurately, how small you are as a provider. That is linked to your effective full-time student load, or EFTSL, number for the provider.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** And the new arrangements are being phased in over three years. It is 20, 50 and 90.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I remember that. You mentioned consultation. Can you talk through the consultation that you have had with providers in the sector?

**Mr Maclean:** In 2021, the agency, in consultation with the department of education and the Department of Finance, arrived at a proposed cost recovery implementation statement. That was quite a number of years in development because the original decision to move to cost recovery was in 2018-19. There had been consultations with the sector during that period. We went to the sector with a further formal consultation on the draft CRIS, as we call it, in mid-2021. There was some feedback given to us. We provided that feedback to then minister. That became the basis for a further iteration, which was that agreed to by this government or approved by this government in late August.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** There was a lot of—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** August 2021?

**Mr Maclean:** The eventual CRIS, or the now CRIS, was approved in August 2022.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So when was the last consultation you held?

**Mr Maclean:** In August 2021.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** There were two major sets of changes. One related to hourly charges and one related to the matter that the CEO has referred to in terms of the tiering of costs according to intensity of action.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What were the matters raised through the consultation?

**Mr Maclean:** A number. One was then model had provision for hourly billing or hourly charging against various activities, such as compliance assessment or the monitoring of conditions that we impose upon providers in some instances. So there was feedback that hourly charging raised a significant uncertainty both for providers and potential administrative challenges for TEQSA, as the regulator. That is one example. Another example was the extent and depth of the proposed discounts on accreditation fees and their adequacy. At the time, there was also quite strong feedback on the proposed annual registration charge, which is the flat fee or flat charge applied across a sector to every provider regardless of size. That is reflective of our sector-wide activity that we can't attribute to any single provider. It is things like our website, our guidance notes, our interactions with the sector and our trends and risks analysis. So that component of our cost recovery is applied essentially equally to each provider regardless of size. So there was certainly feedback on that element.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Sure. That feedback was provided last year, I think you said. You've presented it to the minister. What information did you present to the minister and when?

**Mr Maclean:** We presented the feedback to then minister, if I recall, in October last year. The decision was subsequently taken, in view of the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on the sector, to further defer the implementation of cost recovery. At that stage, it was due for implementation on 1 January this year. So the decision was taken under the previous government to defer until 1 January 2023.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** And the implementation now that's underway, is it incorporating the feedback that you received? Were there changes made? I presume you had presented a model that deviated from that.

**Mr Maclean:** The substantive change and further amendment to the CRIS as a result of the consultation last year and then minister's response was to, in effect, do away with charging for certain activities on an hourly basis and to replace that with structured set charges for each of those activities. For example, TEQSA undertakes compliance assessments. Where it develops a concern for a range of reasons about the conduct of a provider with respect to the standards, we can choose to undertake a compliance assessment of that provider. The original CRIS, or the previous CRIS, provided for hourly charging against that. Instead, what we have taken is an average of the number of compliance assessments and the average of the time taken for a compliance assessment and developed that into a single fee for a compliance assessment. So that is an example of where we have amended the model.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Did you go back out and consult again before it's implemented? Was it just taken on board?

**Mr Maclean:** We took on board the feedback last year. We worked with the department of education and the Department of Finance to make what were relatively minor amendments to then CRIS. Then, of course, the election was announced et cetera, so we had to await the outcome of the election and put it to this government for consideration.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** But there wasn't any further consultation?

**Mr Maclean:** There was no further formal consultation with the sector.

**Senator Chisholm:** Probably the relevant thing, Senator O'Sullivan, is that the previous government made no provision to fund TEQSA beyond the current financial year. So cost recovery was what was available, basically.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I understand that. I guess you've made some changes. You've just implemented them. You've taken on feedback but you didn't go back out to get feedback on those changes?

**Mr Maclean:** No.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Wouldn't it be best practice to go back out again before you actually implement it or before it was implemented?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** I think most people in the sector, particularly the leaders in the sector, had an understanding that the matter was settled and an—'keen' is the wrong word—understanding that the matter needed to be got on with. That is probably the attitude that has been taken. I don't know what further changes might have resulted from a further process of consultation.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Professor Coaldrake and Mr Maclean. This was raised a bit earlier. I want to set the atmosphere a bit more on this. It is the question of safety on campus. The 2021 national student safety survey found that 16.1 per cent of students had been sexually harassed and 4.5 per cent of students had been sexually assaulted during their time at university, which of course is extremely concerning. I note that in that survey at various universities, Bond University, which participated in the national student safety survey, had 13.2 per cent of students that were sexually assaulted, which is three times the national average of 4.5 per cent. That is extremely disturbing. As we know, TEQSA's role is to monitor university compliance in the higher education standards framework. Student wellbeing and safety is an incredibly important element. Of course, not in light of this but because of the 2020 respect at work inquiry and the sorts of pressures that happen at workplaces being exposed, it was on the radar of lots of people. More importantly, we have been implementing strategies to overcome particularly these sorts of horrific figures that we're finding at universities. What has been done? This is an incredibly important aspect of compliance. There is that example of Bond University, which has unfortunately a very high figure. What is being done to actually deal with this sort of horrendous proliferation of sexual assault and abuse across our universities?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** We'll probably both have a go at it. I guess an escalating set of things. The issue really became publicly ventilated around 2018 and in the period since with the various reports and initiatives you referred to. I think at the end of the day, we've got a responsibility to look at the effectiveness of systems and so on inside institutions and to build capacity. A critical element here is to make sure that the institutions themselves are seriously engaging and at what level they are engaging with the issues. Are the governing boards aware of the issues? Are the audit and risk committees? Have they got health and safety committees and student wellbeing committees that they are actually hearing from and are providing useful and credible information? A lot of the things we've done earlier have been around the ventilation of issues—if you like, spreading the word—seeking to build the capacity of institutions to respond and sharing the experience of different places. Of course, when there are initiatives by the Human Rights Commission or other national surveys, such as QILT or whatever, we ensure that they are being properly ventilated. As part of our regulatory work, we engage with the sector in drawing matters to their attention specifically as well as generally. I don't think there's any shortage now of recognition of just how seriously the issues are being taken. They are profoundly concerning and concerning to the higher education sector and educational environment. I don't think there's now a shortfall in terms of accepting the issues. There will always be some unevenness in how quickly they are being taken up and responded to.

**CHAIR:** With regard to the Australian Human Rights Commission and the discussions with the Department of Education on the working document, how far is that off from being settled? We have a few questions more broadly on that subject. Where are we up to?

**Mr Maclean:** I'm assuming we're referring to the recommendations from the *Respect at work* report.

**CHAIR:** That's right, yes.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Is that the report that has 55 recommendations, of which two specifically referred to higher education?

**Mr Maclean:** Two specifically refer to the higher education sector. Number 11 made recommendations around providers ensuring that there was training to staff and students around the threat of sexual assault and sexual harassment. We've been working with the Australian Human Rights Commission and the department of education. Deputy Secretary Cook referred earlier to materials that were being developed by TEQSA in concert with the department and the commission. We've actually already released them. We have a dedicated part of our website with materials on it. There is a dedicated web page. There is a sector update. There's a number of resources available and training packages and presentations outlining the kind of practices, policies and measures that should be taken by providers with respect to sexual assault and sexual harassment. That also includes the work that the Fair Work Ombudsman has been doing around this issue. So there is now a dedicated website. We also now use those materials in concert with communities of practice that have been facilitated by TEQSA with peak bodies. There's something called the HEPQN, the higher education providers quality network, which includes small providers and Independent Higher Education Australia, which covers the private sector for providers. We've been working both with those peak bodies on a communities of practice to disseminate and communicate to small providers in particular. That relates to recommendation 12 of the *Respect at work* report, which is for the government, through TEQSA and other agencies, to facilitate the same sort of work that goes on at the larger providers, the well-resourced ones, at smaller providers. So that has been the focus of that work.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** And there has been another one with the Go8 as well.

**CHAIR:** Professor Coaldrake and Mr Maclean, as you rightly pointed out, this has been a public issue for a considerable time. It has certainly been a highly public issue since 2018. What engagement has there been with

the National Union of Students and the National Tertiary Education Union to see the strengths of the systems that are being put in place? There are broader discussions that you have been having with independent and other universities.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** The answer is I don't know specifically. Providers will be dealing in their own workplaces with the relevant unions.

**CHAIR:** What is important is asking the people who are supposed to be implementing it and failed to implement it properly since at least 2018, if not obviously earlier before some of the reports came forward, to actually properly test it. It would be prudent to talk to the National Tertiary Education Union and the National Union of Students. I raise this, importantly, because in March this year, on the ABC's Triple J Hack program, Angie McCormack, the presenter, spoke to Ms Georgie Beatty, who is the president of the National Union of Students. She called for transparent and accessible survivor-centric responses to sexual harassment and sexual assault at universities. I will quote her in this media article:

"We want survivor-centric responses. We don't want PR machines," she said.

"I think we want [universities] to really stop announcing 'consent modules'. I think we've seen that they don't work."

That, to me, is somebody who is at the frontline of seeing the assaults that are occurring and trying to deal with that with both her student colleagues and others at the university. I can go on with the list of comments. Alison Barnes from the National Tertiary Education Union has raised very similar concerns about the systems in place at the moment. As a matter of urgency, I strongly expect that those organisations at some point would like to get feedback about how those discussions are taking place. This is an extremely serious matter. It is affecting our universities. It's affecting our students. It's affecting our community. Unfortunately, our universities seem to be at the forefront of some of the worst behaviour.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Point taken.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I want to follow up on the discussion you were having with my colleague Senator Liddle regarding university colleges. You said that there are now five university colleges. Is there one new university as well?

**Mr Maclean:** Avondale University a year or so ago. It was admitted under the old standards before they were changed. It met the requirements of the old standards.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Have these category changes been updated in the HES Act, particularly in connection to being added to table A, B or C?

**Mr Cook:** We're in the process of briefing the government about particularly Avondale, which you might be referring to in relation to that. We are in the process of briefing the government in relation to that.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That, of course, links to funding and opportunities.

**Mr Cook:** Sorry?

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Of course, that's important for funding for universities.

**Mr Cook:** Going forward.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** When, Professor Coaldrake, you wrote your final report on the new provider category standards, you acknowledged that any changes to the provider category standards would need to entertain the possibility of future changes in policy settings, including funding implications. Has there been any review of funding policy that has occurred in light of the new provider category standards?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** I will respond by saying that I think it's quite well known that the recently elected government has made a commitment to have a serious review process of the higher education system, including, I think, all of its elements. Deputy Secretary Cook might be in a better position to respond. I do think that those sorts of matters will undoubtedly come before the accord process.

**Mr Cook:** As I indicated to Senator Liddle just before, the issue about Commonwealth supported places, and financial support more broadly for all 193, I think at the moment, providers of higher education, that will be a consideration of the accord process as well next year.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I think you've just answered my next question. I have one last question on that. Will university college representatives be included as one of the voices around the table when it comes to the accord?

**Mr Cook:** Around the table? Can you define 'around the table' for me?

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Will they be included in the university accord? Previously, we were provided with a list. Were there any university college representatives?

**Mr Cook:** In terms of ITECA and IHEA, which are bodies that represent higher education providers, university colleges will be part of one or either of those groups so will be part of the consultations. In terms of the discussion that will happen through the accord process, it will be a very broad discussion. It won't be just limited to public universities. It will be open to the public. We have university colleges on the higher education standards panel, for example. University colleges are still a part of the work that we do. I meet with them as well. Again, I am confident that, with the breadth of the higher education sector, including university colleges and non-university higher education providers, they will be part of the consultation that will happen around the accord process.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I put this to you very respectfully. I am not doubting how you would go about it at all. I am just interested in understanding. How do you make sure in that sort of environment that the university colleges, which are obviously smaller in stature compared to public universities, are not overshadowed in the deliberations? How do you make sure that their voices are adequately represented?

**Mr Cook:** To some degree, that will be the purpose of the accord panel. The panel is independent from the department. They will be responsible for the consultation process. I can have a similar argument around a small public university or a small regional public university as opposed to a big metro university. I am confident that the accord process will be inclusive. There will be roundtables. There will be online submissions. There will be all the bits and pieces that go around that. Again, I'm confident that panel will consider the inputs from the range of providers, be they university colleges, public universities or business, because business no doubt will be engaged in this process as well, and that feedback will be considered as part of the process.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I don't know that my questioning is for this group. My questioning is along the lines of the Indigenous languages and arts.

**Mr Cook:** That will be ACARA. It is part of the next item.

**CHAIR:** Thanks for your time. I want to ask one question. I'm sorry about my lack of understanding of the penalties. There are breaches of wellbeing and issues for students. Of course, in this serious matter of sexual assault, universities aren't up to scratch, and they continue not being up to scratch. I'm not saying Bond University hasn't made changes. But if Bond University is still up there on the top of the pile, what options does the authority have when it gets to that point where they are just not moving fast enough to your satisfaction?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Apart from the ventilation related issues that we've discussed, when institutions are up for registration, those matters are going to be dealt with because they are part of the standards framework. As the CEO also mentioned, we have the capacity for, and do, compliance assessments from time to time. Where issues have come forward, that can result in a compliance activity. Those are serious engagements that are likely to last us a period of time. With regard to the greater sanctions around reregistration and conditions and so on, if there are conditions attached to the registration, they are public documents. That would be amongst them.

**CHAIR:** So in a financial sense, and particularly when universities are profit driven, either you lose registration or you get a report that says you're doing the wrong thing?

**Prof. Coaldrake:** I don't think we have any financial penalties, but I would say this: reputational issues are profoundly important to all institutions.

**CHAIR:** You would hope so.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** I'm sure they are.

**CHAIR:** I'm not suggesting they are not. It seems to be one extreme. Obviously to have that extreme means there are a number of steps in making that decision. The other thing is a partially worded, potentially public, if not private conversation about what is going wrong. I'm not discrediting the work you are doing at all. I'm trying to get clear about the framework.

**Mr Maclean:** We must reregister providers at least once every seven years. In preparing for a reregistration process, we'll look at the regulatory history of that provider and the extent of concerns or complaints that have been made regarding that provider. This is across the board, not necessarily with respect to this one particular issue. We will look at trends and risks that we have been identifying ourselves through our analyses. We'll focus our assessment for that reregistration process for that provider on that range of potential risks. So in respect of a provider that we have concerns about, for example, in that reregistration process, we would have a particular focus on the extent to which they have instituted and responded to concerns about sexual assault and sexual harassment. It may result in a shortened registration period and/or conditions attached to that registration which could go to issues such as the university or an institute of higher education's policies, procedures and training of

staff and student awareness, wellbeing et cetera. That is where we have significant discretion, if you like, that can have a real impact on a provider. As the chief commissioner mentioned, that decision around registration period and the imposition of conditions is a public document.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Prof. Coaldrake:** Can I circle back to my earlier answer regarding consultation with the unions to make one sentence? I will simply say that I have been advised—and I should have known this and didn't—that we did co-design the materials and resources in respect of the SASH initiatives with both the department and the Human Rights Commission. We did consult with the NTEU and advocate groups. I'm not for a moment dismissing the point you made. The point you made is utterly taken. But, for clarification, I should have known that and I didn't and I'm learning it now.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Professor Coaldrake. I'll be very interested in how this is developing. Thank you for your time. You are excused from the hearing. We'll go to the next group. Thank you. Have a good afternoon.

#### **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority**

[15:07]

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Thank you for joining us.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** My first line of questioning is about NAPLAN testing. There are increasing numbers of students not participating in NAPLAN. What steps have ACARA put in place to identify schools with consistently low participation rates in NAPLAN? Can ACARA identify any jurisdictions with record low participation rates? Has this matter been discussed in education ministers' meetings?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Yes, you are correct. There has been a decrease in participation in NAPLAN testing. That has been a steady trend over a number of years, but it was particularly marked this year. We saw for perhaps a variety of reasons a more precipitous fall in participation this year than in previous years. In terms of particular jurisdictions where participation rates were low or fell further, I will ask Mr Dyer to confirm. There are concerns in the Northern Territory about the overall level of participation. In certain year levels, Queensland is another jurisdiction where in recent years there have been historically lower participation rates in NAPLAN. In terms of measures that ACARA takes, these are things that are really beyond the scope of our authority. We can do as much urging as we can to jurisdictions to ensure that participation remains high. It's very important that participation remains high in NAPLAN. It is the only national objective measure of how students are progressing in terms of their literacy and numeracy achievement. Therefore, the more students that we have participating, the better. So it is a concern if participation rates continue to fall. As I said, we can do as much urging as we can for jurisdictions to do what they can to keep their participation rates up. That is a matter for jurisdictions and could well be a matter for discussion at ministers meetings.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Has ACARA collected any data to inform the reasons why this has occurred.

**Mr de Carvalho:** In terms of the non-participation?

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Yes. In 2022.

**Mr de Carvalho:** We do record information around students who do not participate into two broad categories. I will defer to Mr Dyer here in terms of students who are exempt. But they are not counted as participants. Those students may be exempt for one of two reasons—either because of disability or because they recently arrived in the country and perhaps don't have an English language background. If they have arrived in the country in the previous 12 months, obviously, they would be given an opportunity to participate. But there is not necessarily an expectation. In terms of students who are absent, which is probably the category you're talking about, there are a range of reasons why students might be absent. They could be either sick on the day or they might be withdrawn by their parents and carers. That's another reason. We do have data on those categories. I will defer to Mr Dyer to make sure that I'm correct on that.

**Mr Dyer:** Yes.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** What, then, are the risks should the participation rates continue to decline? What kind of risks are involved in terms of the level of education?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Because we are trying to get a population wide assessment of how the country is going and how jurisdictions are going, it's very important that we try to get as many students participating. When the number of students participating falls, we actually have to impute what the statisticians refer to as plausible values for the students who don't turn up. We have a statistical method for doing that. It does involve us checking very thoroughly all the student background information about the missing students—what schools they go to, parental

education, parental employment and whether they are from a student language background other than English. The issue is that the bigger that group of non-participants gets, the more difficult it is to check all that data in a timely manner. I might defer to Mr Dyer.

**Mr Dyer:** I suppose that what we're after is quality data. We need the whole population. When we look at participation, we're trying to get the maximum participation that we can such that we don't have to determine plausible values based on those students who were absent for whatever reason. So I think it's really important that jurisdictions try and maximise their participation rates in NAPLAN. The processes that we use, as Mr De Carvalho has outlined, are basically there using the background data that we collect. The accuracy of that is important in determining those plausible values. So it's all intertwined.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** There have been many media reports about the 2022 NAPLAN test results. Recently, they've highlighted the literacy gap for boys in high school. Is this an issue that ACARA has briefed education ministers on, or does ACARA believe it has done enough to highlight this area of educational underperformance?

**Mr de Carvalho:** We have released the national report for 2022. In our media release, we did call attention to the fact that this year we have record numbers or a percentage of students in year 9 boys who have not demonstrated that they are achieving the national minimum standard in reading, for example. There may be other domains as well. That was the one that we highlighted in our media release. We expect that this will be the subject of potentially some discussion at the next education ministers meeting. But all jurisdictions have been briefed by us on the results.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** That is certainly alarming. I do have a son in year 9. On student achievement in writing, the Australian Education Research Organisation recently published a report on students' writing achievement. It identified that most year 9 students have the expected punctuation of year 3 students. That's also very alarming, obviously. It also strikes me as surprising that this research was published by AERO, a relatively new organisation, but not from ACARA, which has been around and has had access to such data for many years. Has ACARA briefed the education ministers of such results? Does ACARA agree with AERO's conclusions on writing achievements?

**Mr de Carvalho:** It's very important to note the fact that AERO's research took 2018 data as its last year of data. They are absolutely right to point out that there had been, leading up to that year, a steady downward trend in terms of writing results, which had been the subject during those years of some commentary. When the 2019 results came out, the pattern of the results seemed to suggest that decline had ceased or was flattening out. At the time, ACARA made a comment in its media release to say, 'We can't get too excited about this. We need to see further additional years' data before we can say that this flattening is actually going to result in a turnaround.' What we have seen subsequently in 2019—of course we didn't have NAPLAN in 2020—2021 and 2022 is results that do confirm that we are now starting to see an upward trajectory, what we refer to as a U-shaped trajectory, which is a good thing. But it is not a cause for complacency at all. What goes up can come down again if we are not vigilant in embedding the improvements that we've seen over the last few years. What I do think, however, is a possible explanation for that upward shift is that teachers, principals and systems have taken account of the NAPLAN data and asked themselves what to do about this and have made some changes in the teaching of writing. That is a possible explanation for why we're seeing the turnaround potentially and why NAPLAN data is so important. It actually signals these patterns and calls attention to them and gets people thinking about how to address them.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Absolutely. On COVID learning loss, has ACARA conducted any specific analysis or research to determine if there are schools or particular student subgroups who seem to have achieved better or worse during the home based learning period? As far as I can see, the aggregate data doesn't show much of any effect on overall achievement. Surely ACARA has used its resources to take a closer look at this?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Yes. We have conducted some additional analyses, which we are going to build on now that we've got a second year of data in the COVID era, if we could put it that way. When we released the NAPLAN report last year, people were pleasantly surprised, I think, as they were again this year, that overall at the national level the mean scores or the average scores in most domains and year levels had remained relatively stable. In other words, we hadn't seen the drastic drop that people were predicting between 2019 and 2021. We did say, however, that averages at a national level can sometimes mask differences at the disaggregated equity groups. So we have undertaken some preliminary research on that, looking at the 2021 data and the difference between going back to 2016 and 2019 comparing. But we want to have another look using a second year of COVID era data, the 2022 data, to look at whether there are any COVID related increases in gaps between equity groups. For example, there has been some commentary recently about the growing gap between the NAPLAN results between students



from families who are highly educated compared with the results of students who come from less well-educated families. What we would like to be able to do—and we are in the process of conducting this analysis at the moment—is assess whether over the period 2019 to 2022 any of that growing gap could be attributed to a COVID effect or whether it is part of a longer term pattern of educational inequity.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I have a few more questions to get through. I hope you don't mind.

**CHAIR:** That's fine, Senator. Keep going with it. On the curriculum, ACARA's website states:

The Australian Curriculum: Mathematics aims to be relevant and applicable to the 21st century.

It's my understanding that mathematics has been around since 3,000 BC, so I'm not sure how it's unique to the 21st century. It sounds to me that it's more to do with the debunked idea of so-called 21st century skills, perhaps. The website also promotes the work of Peter Sullivan, who is a clear advocate for so-called inquiry based learning in mathematics, which I understand to not be evidence based. I refer to ACARA's strategic plan 2022-25 that states its priority to conduct, commission and disseminate research on curriculum, assessment and reporting. Can ACARA advise how it is ensuring that its research priorities in mathematics are aligned toward evidence based practices?

**Mr de Carvalho:** There's a lot in that question. Thank you very much for that. With regard to the reference to 21st century skills, as you've alluded to, the term is used quite a lot in education debates more broadly. I think there is general recognition that the way the world is developing means that jobs in the future are likely going to be ones that rely much more on non-manual skills, if I can put it that way. They will rely on understanding mathematics, science, technology, engineering—the so-called STEM subjects. As a proportion of the jobs available, those subjects are going to be very important for future years. We're seeing that it's very important that we engage students effectively in their learning of mathematics in that context. The issues that you have referred to in relation to pedagogy around different modes of pedagogy are not matters that ACARA specifically deals with in terms of teaching practice. Our focus is on the content of the curriculum. We try to leave as much space as possible for teachers to make decisions about the appropriate methods for teaching that, given the students they have in front of them. There is, as you have also alluded to, a vast amount of academic literature in relation to appropriate pedagogies for mathematics. I could refer, for example, to the work by Professor John Hattie, the chair of AITSL, in his book *Visible learning for mathematics*, which does make the point that there are a variety of pedagogical approaches that teachers can select from. It is important that they understand when the right approach is appropriate. I will defer to Ms Foster to see if she has anything to add in that respect.

**Ms Foster:** I think that you are referring to the version 8.4 curriculum, which is the current curriculum with reference to Professor Sullivan. We've certainly looked at all of the new research in doing the review of the Australian curriculum, which we've just finalised. We've aligned that with, and benchmarked it against, other countries. We've also been working with the OECD on the 2030 report, particularly in mathematics, where they independently reviewed our curriculum against all the other countries of the OECD. They found that, in fact, the revised and reviewed new Australian curriculum was very well placed, had high standards and covered areas that some other curriculums had not had time or hadn't got to putting in, including computational thinking, in recognising, I agree, the 21st century. I think that is also on the website from about 2010, which is version 8.4. I think we've moved another 11 years into this 21st century. We are very mindful and do continue to look at all of the research along the way, including the outcomes of PISA and TIMSS, especially TIMSS, which is looking at how they are actually structuring what is important learning in mathematics.

**CHAIR:** If you have another question, it's definitely fine to go. It is a bit over the time. If you have a few questions, I might go to Senator Payman and then come back to you.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Sure.

**Senator PAYMAN:** I remember sitting NAPLAN when I was in school. How long has it been going for?

**Mr de Carvalho:** So 2008 was the first year of NAPLAN. Most jurisdictions prior to NAPLAN had their own equivalent basic skills test. The process goes back quite a long way—probably a decade before—where education ministers started thinking about how we come up with a process whereby we can harmonise these different jurisdictional approaches to measuring basic skills into a single national approach. It took a while to get there. The first step was to get a single national scale to which all the jurisdictional test results could then be mapped to. The next logical step was, 'Well, now that we've got a national scale, why don't we have a national assessment?' So that was 2008 for four of the domains. The basic one, or writing, is 2011.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Amazing. What have the results been like over time with NAPLAN? Has there been a steady trajectory or a pattern that you guys have noticed?

**Mr de Carvalho:** It differs slightly from domain to domain and year level to year level. What we can say is that over the long term we have seen in primary years the results are either generally positive or stable. For example, in year 3 numeracy over the long term, the results have been fairly stable whereas in year 5 numeracy, year 3 and 5 reading, year 3 and 5 spelling and year 3 grammar, the results have all been showing an upward trajectory. With the year 3 grammar, it's starting to flatten out a bit. With year 5 writing, as I described to Senator Price, we started going down and now we're coming back up again. In secondary, it's a bit of a different story. The positive trajectories that we see more or less consistently in primary years are not as evident in the secondary years. Year 7 and year 9 numeracy and reading have been relatively stable over the whole time. Writing, as I indicated before, showed an initial dip, and it's now coming back up. Spelling in year 7 has a positive trajectory. Spelling in year 9 is an inverted U. It is initially good and not so good now. In grammar, year 5, year 7 and year 9, it is stable. It is a mixed bag depending on which year level and which domain. On the whole, it is either stable or positive.

**Senator PAYMAN:** With that sort of review and data that you have, would you attribute any particular common factors to the difference between primary and secondary results?

**Mr de Carvalho:** This is an international phenomenon with the learning gain that takes place in primary. It tends to flatten out over time. The amount of learning gain does decrease in secondary, so you get this kind of flattening trajectory. As I say, that is not a situation unique to Australia. But that is not to say there aren't opportunities with further research to address that flattening in the secondary years. I'm sure our colleagues at AERO, for example, and many other people have been turning their minds to what could be done to address these kinds of patterns.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Knowing these results, how would that shape the development of interventions or changes in curriculum?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Well, in terms of interventions, these are things which are in the hands of the schools and systems themselves to a large extent. Our role at ACARA is to present the data as best we can in a way that is meaningful. We disaggregate it by various equity subgroups. There may be some insights that schools and teachers can draw upon by looking at their own situation. What we also do is provide every year a report to schools called the school and students summary report, which gives them an idea of where they went well and where they didn't go so well as a school. What we have found in some research we did a couple of years ago was that schools that tend to punch above their weight, if I can put it that way, in terms of learning gain, taking into account the socioeconomic educational status of the school community and their starting score, tend to have a number of things in common. They all do things slightly differently. Having a good close look at the data that NAPLAN generates or the other assessments that they do, such as the ACERs, the progressive assessment test, these data sources are ones that these schools tend to look at and ask themselves, 'What can we do?' So it's that school level practice. Yes, we have provided a number of case studies of such schools on our website and identified some of these common themes.

**Senator PAYMAN:** Thank you very much. That is all for me.

**Senator ANTIC:** I have a couple of questions about the standards. We heard earlier that the standards among year 9 students in terms of grammar and apostrophes was reported to be around the level of year 3. We heard a bit about your views about what might be doing that. Is there a particular reason why there isn't a focus on the English language—grammar, apostrophes—and why that's dropped off?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I couldn't necessarily speculate, Senator. We do have a new Australian curriculum, which does include these aspects of literacy in the curriculum. There has been, as you would also be aware, a strong and rigorous debate over the last 10 years, if not longer, about the best pedagogical approaches to reading as well. Those research reports are making their way into schools and systems. For example, a number of jurisdictions now have introduced a phonics screening check in year 1 as an approach to identifying students who might need additional support with their literacy learning.

**Senator ANTIC:** It doesn't seem to be working, though, does it, at this stage?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Well, as I indicated with the previous long-term trends in relation to literacy in particular, at the primary level, the long-term trends are very positive. Again, the long-term trend is a mean of looking at all students. Where the problem is is at the tail end of achievement, I guess, with students who are really struggling. That's where, I guess, systems really need to focus their attention—on how to ensure that those students who have been identified early on in their schooling career through NAPLAN results get the support they need.

**Senator ANTIC:** It's been suggested to me that there's now more than ever a focus on subjects such as Indigenous languages over the English language. ACARA doesn't consider the English language and the teaching thereof to be racist?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Sorry?

**Senator ANTIC:** ACARA doesn't consider the teaching of the English language to be racist?

**Mr de Carvalho:** No.

**Senator ANTIC:** There are themes of critical race theory throughout the curriculum, including, I think, the health and physical education syllabus, which specifically mentions systemic racism. Is it ACARA's view that Australia is a systemically racist country?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I would have to ask you if you could provide us with the precise examples that you are referring to in the curriculum.

**Senator ANTIC:** There are many. One of them is in the health and physical education syllabus, which uses the phrase, I'm told, 'systemic racism'.

**Mr de Carvalho:** I will have to defer to Ms Foster. She is familiar with that term.

**CHAIR:** It might be helpful if you have the page.

**Senator ANTIC:** No. I don't, I'm sorry.

**Mr de Carvalho:** We can take it on notice.

**Senator ANTIC:** There is also the history syllabus that teaches that Indigenous Australians would have seen the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 as an invasion. Was the arrival of the First Fleet an invasion?

**Mr de Carvalho:** What the new organising ideas for the cross-curriculum priorities for Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people does is indicate that if you are looking at different perspectives, you need to try to put yourself in the shoes of those people and interpret or look at those perspectives and try to understand people's reactions to them. So I'm sure that when all ministers signed off on the curriculum on 1 April this year those matters had been considered by them.

**Senator ANTIC:** So that is a no?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I'm saying that when all ministers signed off on that at the start of this year in April, those matters would have been considered by them.

**Senator ANTIC:** You don't want to answer it?

**Mr de Carvalho:** You might have to repeat the question.

**CHAIR:** I think you are straying into asking for an opinion.

**Senator ANTIC:** My question is whether or not ACARA considers that the arrival of the First Fleet was an invasion for the purposes of the curriculum and whether that is being taught.

**Mr de Carvalho:** The curriculum signed off by all ministers on 1 April this year included references to the different perspectives of different people in response to the arrival of the First Fleet. ACARA doesn't have a specific view on that matter.

**Senator ANTIC:** Finally, what is being done to improve on the results? Australia's education standards are clearly slipping for a first world country. What is being done to improve that?

**Mr de Carvalho:** As I indicated earlier, our role is to be the messenger, if you like, to highlight and to throw some light on our performance. Our performance in terms of NAPLAN, as I've gone through in some detail, is actually not the horror story that is often portrayed in some quarters. Generally, the results are either positive or steady. You may be referring, however, to the PISA results in particular, which is a different assessment. It looks at science, mathematics and reading every three years. It's conducted by the OECD with a sample of 15-year-old students, mostly probably year 9 and some year 10 students. Those results certainly indicate that there is a concerning decline when measured against that particular test construct. It is a different kind of assessment even though it's looking at the same domains as NAPLAN. Again, there is no cause for complacency off the back of those results. What is then done about that is a matter for system authorities and the schools themselves to ask, 'How do we learn from that data? How do we learn from the best practice of other countries and what the international research tells us?' They are things that might work to turn those things around.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** On the curriculum review process, the former education minister, Alan Tudge, going through that process, came to the conclusion that there seemed to be a lack of balanced perspectives

arising from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group. Can ACARA tell us how this particular advisory group was selected and what attempts were made to ensure that a range of perspectives was reflected?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I think the basic membership of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group, which has had its membership recently refreshed, went back to about 2017. The selection process was undertaken by the previous CEO. I'm not familiar exactly with the selection criteria. But they are all recognised as respected educators in the Indigenous community. That was the basis, I'm sure, on which they were invited to join the discussion. I should also, of course, indicate that we undertook a range of discussions on the curriculum as a whole, including with a number of other Indigenous leaders as well, in the course of the process. We had a series of reference groups across all the learning areas. I could ask Ms Foster to describe the process in a bit more detail.

**Ms Foster:** For every one of the learning areas, there was a curriculum reference group set up which contained representatives from all of the jurisdictions giving their input as all the curriculum learning areas were being developed. We also had teacher reference groups because we did want to hear different voices from that process. They fed into this process as development and work was going through. The First Nations group—it was then called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group—is an advisory group. They were giving advice. They weren't in the process of making every final decision, but we took their advice. We also went out to public consultations for 10 weeks. Interestingly, after getting about 6,100 survey responses during that time, the highest response was actually to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures cross-curriculum priority. It was also the most positive. So that was with an open process with anyone being able to contribute and their voices being heard. We also had a number of email submissions during that time. Again, they were of a positive nature to what we actually had in the curriculum with regard to First Nations Australians.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** With regard to Aboriginal history and culture, this is the advisory group that develops the curriculum?

**Mr de Carvalho:** The advisory group did not develop the curriculum.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** How does the national curriculum come about in terms of Aboriginal history and culture? What is concerning is when curriculum becomes ideologically based and not evidence based, such as Bruce Pascoe's *Dark emu*, for example. That becomes part of the curriculum. Therefore, how does that process come about? Are there measures in place to ensure that there are evidence based, as opposed to ideologically based, elements of curriculum?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Again, I'm not sure on what basis you are saying that Bruce Pascoe's book is part of the curriculum. It's not.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** It is part of—

**Mr de Carvalho:** It's not in the Australian curriculum.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Okay. Can you clarify for me that ACARA has no oversight when texts like that enter the education space?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I will again defer to Ms Foster to describe the nature of the Australian curriculum and how it's implemented at a jurisdictional level.

**Ms Foster:** Obviously, the jurisdictions and the sectors within the jurisdictions are the people that implement the curriculum. They make decisions and local schools make decisions about what books are referenced and what is used at the school level. The Australian curriculum makes no recommendations about any textbooks or materials specifically that are published or made available. That is not our remit. Our remit is actually to explain what we expect to be taught and the standards that we expect students to gain. We're not actually making text lists and references to what they should all be using. The curriculum is designed to give the opportunity for the material that is delivered in the classroom to be contextualised. That is controlled by the school and the jurisdiction sector. ACARA doesn't get to control that.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I have a few questions on Indigenous languages and First Languages Australia.

**CHAIR:** Before you start—I don't want to break your string—how long do you think you might be? Just give me an indication.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Five or 10 minutes. I'll try to keep it as brief as possible. What support and resourcing is being given to language communities with people who still speak their language today?

**Ms Foster:** Again, that is actually how the schools and the jurisdictions deal with that. There is certainly the capacity, as I understand in their funding models, to provide additional support for students who are entering the

school where English is not their first language; it is their second language. We have a wide range. It is really at the school level that they can actually resource that with additional support.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Does that also speak to the decision-making on languages that receive funding?

**Ms Foster:** Yes.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Perhaps some of these questions I may table to the appropriate place.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I'm going to move to some questions on analysis and methodology. A question that was asked previously by Senator Nampijinpa Price was around the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group. On your website, when you go and click on that link, it gives you a list from 2017. Are you able to update that list and provide the new updated list to us at the earliest opportunity, please?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Certainly.

**Senator LIDDLE:** On 26 August, ACARA announced the delay of the release of this year's data. A closer analysis suggests that there's a lower than usual student participation rate. We've heard some reasons for that—pandemic flu and floods. If that was the reason, what was the actual outcome of an analysis of what more detail was required?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I might refer to Mr Dyer. I will explain the difference between how the summary report or the preliminary data is put together compared to the final report. You may have heard us refer earlier to imputed plausible values for the achievement of students who did not actually participate in the test. When we put the summary report together, we use a summary dataset on each student. We really only look at what school they went to. That tells us what sector they are in, what state they are in and what school they are at. We're able to look at what all the other students in that school who actually sat the test went. We use that as a kind of basis. Of course, that's not the full dataset that eventually becomes available to us. When you've got a higher than anticipated level of missing students, the potential for those imputed values to be not quite right gets higher. What we found as we were starting to finalise the summary report was that there were a couple of jurisdictions and a couple of domains that looked to us as if the low participation rate was going to have a skewing effect on the results to be reported. In that context, it's our responsibility to put out data that is accurate. The board took the view that it was highly likely that a number of long-term trends in particular and jurisdictional averages were going to need to be corrected in the final report once all the data was put into the model. But by then, of course, the inaccurate reporting is already in the public domain. It's not good that is the case. I might defer to Mr Dyer to see if he has any further detail he would like to add as an explanation.

**Mr Dyer:** I think the term 'preliminary' means that we are using data that we have available from jurisdictions. That dataset that we do get early has always been used to produce the preliminary report. Once we get the clean data, which is data that has actually been scrutinised by the jurisdictions, that data goes towards the national report. In the past, there hasn't been much difference between the results published in the preliminary report compared to the national report. But, this year, we decided to take a cautionary approach. We were concerned because of the reduced participation rates that may have skewed the data. So it was really just a cautionary process.

**Senator LIDDLE:** So you can confirm for me and give every confidence that the actual methodology hasn't changed at all? It's just the events that led to that?

**Mr Dyer:** That's correct, yes.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Are you able to provide the student participation rates by state for NAPLAN since it commenced by states and territories?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Yes. We could do that. If you like, Senator, we could do it now. We could also provide it to you on notice.

**Senator LIDDLE:** That's fine. You can do that. We heard before about some of the reasons that you were thinking could have caused the ongoing decline in the NAPLAN participation. Have you got to the point where, if you have identified some of those things, you've actually prioritised how you will address them?

**Mr de Carvalho:** In terms of the decline or how to arrest it?

**Senator LIDDLE:** No.

**Mr de Carvalho:** No. As I may have alluded to before, while we would like to urge strong participation, the levers for getting the participation up to where we would like it are not ours to pull.

**Senator LIDDLE:** So who has the levers?

**Mr de Carvalho:** They would be jurisdictional authorities and schools themselves, state education departments, Catholic education offices and test administration agencies.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I will put this in really simple terms for me. If that is the DNA of telling us where we're heading and what our make-up is in terms of the education and the strength of knowledge of the people that we're putting through our education system, how on earth do you actually put in any interventions, whether you're in a state or territory, if you don't have an accurate baseline?

**Mr de Carvalho:** That's a very good question and a very pertinent question. You need the best possible data available to you, and the best possible data available to you will come with the highest possible participation.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Senator Chisholm, I am assuming, then, that given that some of the money from the Commonwealth goes to the states, do you have the levers that might be able to help that arrest of the decline in the NAPLAN?

**Senator Chisholm:** Thanks, Senator Liddle. I think we had a bit of a discussion with some of the questions we had before. I think from our point of view—and Dr Baxter might be able to add to this—with the new school funding agreement up for discussion next year, we anticipate that the data and transparency but also the focus of what we want to achieve through that school funding agreement will be informed by the NAPLAN results. Minister Clare is on the record as highlighting some of those issues already. I don't know if there is anything Dr Baxter can add to that.

**Dr Baxter:** I think the minister has nailed it. NSRA, the next school reform agreement, is our vehicle. Minister Clare, in response to Productivity Commission's recent review, is on the record saying that he is particularly pleased by these results but is also looking with interest at areas where the results are declining and a range of other areas as well. He expects to pick that conversation up with ministers in the context of the next national schools reform agreement. In the meantime, there are a range of things we fund in the Commonwealth that do go to outcomes for students and the participation of students. We've canvassed some of them this morning. Again, we're happy to canvass them, if that is useful. While most of this happens at a jurisdictional level, there are some Commonwealth programs that we fund that aim to support that work.

**Senator LIDDLE:** One of the things that recently was obvious to me in some remote travel was that schools sometimes are not the centre of everything in these communities. If you have, as in my experience, Aboriginal kids with ear problems from communities, why wouldn't the community controlled health service on day one be checking the ears of every single kid in that school to make sure that whatever the teachers were teaching them could be heard and learned? If people are participating by providing the data, the data might actually not be a reflection of the teaching quality. It could. It could be a whole range of other factors. I am suggesting that getting that participation is really crucial so that all of those solutions can be canvassed. It might not actually have anything to do with teaching.

**Dr Baxter:** Some of our programs do go to that. It doesn't sit in my space to talk to, but the Connected Beginnings program that we fund in the department, which is an early childhood program, doesn't just look at early school readiness and learning. It also looks at related health and family issues that really go to a student's ability to learn. They've been very successful to date.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I want to go to something that the Queensland minister for education, Grace, said in an article on 31 October. She said she was concerned with the 'the washing of data'. What do you think the minister was referring to?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I think she referring to the processes that Mr Dyer has just outlined, which are the processes required to ensure that the data is complete and accurate. Mr Dyer might like to elaborate.

**Mr Dyer:** I can.

**Senator LIDDLE:** It's an unusual term to use, though, if that is the case.

**Mr Dyer:** It is. We use the term 'data cleaning'. Data cleaning is a process that jurisdictions take responsibility for. ACARA provides the boundaries, the data dictionary and the exception rules, that they need to apply to their own jurisdictional data. This means that they apply those rules and go through the data and make sure that it is so-called clean, which means that it is accurate and representative of the sit students within that jurisdiction. This is to make sure that things such as duplicate records are removed, that records are matched between a student who actually sat the test and that there is a registration in our platform. So all of that linking of data has to be looked at very carefully to make sure there are no records that are left unmatched. That process takes time. As I said, it's the responsibility of the test administration authorities in each jurisdiction. So 'washing' is not really the term we would use.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Have you spoken to Minister Grace to make sure that you are talking about washing and cleaning and that you are talking about the same thing?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I think in the first instance that we would provide the opportunity for her officials to do that.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Well, you haven't actually spoken to them to make sure that you are talking about the same thing.

**Mr de Carvalho:** I don't know if those conversations have taken place since the publication of the article.

**Senator LIDDLE:** At the education ministers meeting later this year, what will be the top of what you would like to have discussed, from your agency perspective? Is it the same? Has something changed?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Well, I'm not quite sure if we're at liberty to reveal the agenda of the education ministers meeting. I will defer to Dr Baxter.

**Dr Baxter:** I am trying to work out what it is that you are trying to—

**Senator LIDDLE:** I'm just trying to understand ACARA. We have been operating in a period of floods, fire, COVID and declining numbers in people participating in NAPLAN. What is at the top of the agenda to make sure that the issues relevant to your agency are actually covered? Maybe they might not appear. What are the things?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Well, I think there are a few things that are in the public domain which we can refer to. For example, Minister Clare last week released the draft teacher workforce action plan, which made reference to the potential decision by the education ministers meeting that it may commission ACARA to work with our colleagues at AERO to look at the issue of what additional supports might be able to be developed for teachers to support them to implement the curriculum. We anticipate that, since that is in the draft action plan and listed as a possible next step, that may well be something that we would look forward to having some engagement with in that conversation and helping frame it. There is also, based on previous decisions of the education ministers meeting, a number of well-known reforms to the national assessment program, including the fact that NAPLAN will be held in term 1 next year. There are a range of issues associated with that which will presumably get canvassed. We are also introducing from 2024 the opportunity for schools to opt in to undertake assessments in the three NAP sample domains. We refer to the national assessment program as sample assessments. We have a three-year cycle of sample assessments in science, literacy, civics and citizenship, and digital literacy. To date, we have just selected a sample of students from around the country to undertake those tests. What ministers have agreed to is that, from 2024, progressively any school that wants to undertake that assessment that is not chosen in the sample would be able to undertake that assessment and get their results back to benchmark themselves against the national standards in those areas. We also anticipate that there will be some discussion around one aspect of the current national school reform agreement, which is the introduction of proficiency standards in NAPLAN. That is also in the public domain as an issue that is yet to be concluded from the current national agreement. So that is a range of things that we would expect may be discussed.

**Senator LIDDLE:** So this may be as simple as a currency of website issue. On your website, you've got curriculum version 8.4 rather than version 9. Is that just a refresh issue?

**Mr de Carvalho:** I will defer to Ms Foster to explain why we have both.

**Ms Foster:** Version 8.4 is what schools are currently using. As we've been through the review, we've released the new curriculum, which is version 9. Because schools and jurisdictions are going to be implementing at different stages and phases, we need to keep version 8.4 current for all schools who continue to use that and have the version 9 curriculum available for those who want to start implementing the newly revised curriculum. So, yes, it's two websites.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I am assuming that everybody is expected to move to the revised curriculum?

**Ms Foster:** They will. We do expect that decisions made by jurisdictions are about the timing for the implementation of the new version of the curriculum—version 9. At that stage, we will then actually shut down the version 8.4 website and there will only be one.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Typically, when there is a change, how long does it take? What is the average time?

**Ms Foster:** It varies significantly.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Between jurisdictions?

**Ms Foster:** It can be within jurisdictions and between sectors. In some jurisdictions, Catholic schools may start to implement earlier than government schools. There is variation among the jurisdictions as well. What we do know is that Tasmania is the first state to implement the new curriculum starting next year.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I don't want to get in a situation of telling tales in school; excuse the pun. Are there any particular laggards, typically, in terms of jurisdictions?

**CHAIR:** Just for the record, I found that funny.

**Mr de Carvalho:** We wouldn't describe any jurisdiction as a laggard.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I won't use such pejorative terms. Does it take some jurisdictions a bit longer than others?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Each jurisdiction has a slightly different approach to adopting and adapting the Australian curriculum. You may have heard that term. Some jurisdictions pretty much take the Australian curriculum as written and implement it. Other jurisdictions, as I said, adopt it and adapt it according to their own circumstances. For example, a jurisdiction that I know well, New South Wales, had their own curriculum in place 20 years before the Australian curriculum came along. They have a well-established set of routines that they go through to refresh their own syllabuses, which are now closely linked to the Australian curriculum. They will have their own rhythm as well in terms of when they introduce and implement. Likewise, Victoria also have had a slightly different approach. WA, again, has had a slightly different approach given the history in that jurisdiction. So they are all fully supportive of the new Australian curriculum. It's just a question of how they integrate it and implement it given where they are in the current cycle.

**Senator Chisholm:** The beauty of federation.

**Mr de Carvalho:** The beauties of federation. I should also point out that this is the first time that the Australian curriculum has been reviewed in its entirety with all learning areas at the same time. So there's actually no precedent. You asked how long it normally takes. This is the first time this implementation approach has actually been adopted. Previously, the four main learning areas of English, science, maths and history were all developed on slightly different timeframes. Part of it created a whole lot of problems in terms of a lack of coherence across the learning areas, which we used the review process to address.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you.

**Senator LIDDLE:** This is my last question, but it's in two parts. The Grattan Institute report entitled *Ending the lesson lottery* talks about creating a central bank of best leading practice lesson plans. Has ACARA considered whether such resources could be produced by you to support the teaching profession?

**Mr de Carvalho:** Well, there's a lot of resources already available to teachers. In fact, we have a mechanism which directs teachers currently from the current Australian curriculum to a range of teaching resources. I might ask Ms Foster to elaborate.

**Ms Foster:** ESA, Education Services Australia, is actually responsible for keeping a repository of resources for teachers which they quality assure. That's called Scootle—just another name to learn. It contains a very large number of resources that teachers can access and use. Lots of the jurisdictions also develop quite an extensive bank of resources to support teachers.

**Mr de Carvalho:** I should point out that the kinds of resources that are available to teachers through Scootle are not the kinds of things that the Grattan Institute is referring to, which is more structured lesson plans or units of work. The kinds of resources that are available to Scootle might be particular texts or particular activities that could be put together by a professional teacher when constructing a lesson or a unit of work. It's a slightly different concept. If such an initiative were to get support—again, I refer to action 16 in the draft teacher workforce action plan, which, without mentioning the Grattan report, alludes to the same issue around the development of a national bank of resources—whether we develop them or not, we would see ourselves at least as having a role in assuring that whatever resources are developed are curriculum linked.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** We will release you. Thank you very much for coming and joining us this afternoon and for your answers.

#### **Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited**

[16:18]

**CHAIR:** I now call on representatives from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Welcome, Mr Grant, and your team.

**Mr Grant:** Thanks very much.

**CHAIR:** Do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr Grant:** No, thank you, Chair.



**Senator LIDDLE:** Thank you for your appearance today. I want to ask a question about whether the institute keeps a breakdown of teachers by metropolitan, regional and rural, by postcode and local government area. If so, could you provide it?

**Mr Grant:** I'll let Mr Misson answer the question. If we do, the Australian teacher workforce dataset, which he leads, is the repository for that. But I'm not sure that the deidentified nature of the data goes to all of those characteristics.

**Mr Misson:** We wouldn't go down as far as postcode. We will provide what we can on notice. That is probably the easiest answer.

**Senator LIDDLE:** That is because you wouldn't see any value in providing that level of detail around your teachers and who is participating in them?

**Mr Grant:** I might just very quickly give a context to that. The Australian teachers workforce dataset is governed by an oversight board led by a director-general delegate of AESOC. That board determines things like the questions that go in the survey and some of those elements. Equally, as I think we heard in the previous session, jurisdictions make timing decisions about when they will participate in elements associated with that project, which means different states come on board with their data at different times. So the answer to some of those questions will be very much jurisdiction only as opposed to national. But we'll certainly get you on notice what we can related to your question.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Thank you. I mentioned before—I'm not sure whether you were in the room—the Grattan report. I'm interested in whether you have given any consideration to two of the recommendations. They are updating the teacher standards to clarify that teachers are not expected to develop curriculum materials individually and to recognise the importance of subject specific curriculum expertise.

**Mr Grant:** We have a lot of sympathy for all of the recs in the Grattan report. To the two that you mentioned, we have for some time been working with stakeholders around what was termed a stocktake of the standards as they are, given that they are a decade to 11 years old. Again, that is not in all jurisdictions because they come on board with implementation windows according to enterprise bargaining agreements and such. Within that, some of the elements in the Grattan report fit within the feedback we have in the stocktake. We would be happy to have that conversation with ministers if they wanted to open up, given they own the standards, those elements and potentially some others.

**Senator LIDDLE:** So the principal standard—to emphasise the role of school leaders in establishing a whole-school approach to curriculum—you wouldn't have any difficulty with that?

**Mr Grant:** No. Not at all.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Is there anything in those recommendations that you immediately saw wouldn't work and wouldn't consider?

**Mr Grant:** The two that you mentioned are obviously more AITSL focused. I would probably keep the comments to those. We would be happy to have that conversation with stakeholders, AESOC members and ministers around one or both of those recommendations. But the broader thrust—and I did hear the conversation you had earlier, to go to your opening remark—is good stimulus for elements within the national teacher workforce action plan that ministers will consider finalising some time next month.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Could you outline the work being done at a federal level with the states and territories to work through the nation's teacher shortage and the focus to date?

**Mr Grant:** Already there are a couple of answers there. I might let Dr Baxter know that I will give her a chance to talk about demand data in this answer. The Australian teacher workforce data was commissioned by ministers in 2018-19. They foresaw the need for data to inform their policy decisions at that time. That really is on the supply side of what we might call workforce demand and supply. The missing piece is the demand side. I will ask Dr Baxter if she wants to make any comment in relation to that at the moment. The supply side of that is being more informed every time the data is put into the public domain, the next of which is due at the end of this month, because of what I mentioned earlier, where jurisdictions come on board more and more as each day passes, effectively. The dataset therefore represents more of an Australian context. We know that we've got about 400,000 teachers. The more data that is in there, the more we get that very big national picture. But the demand side, which really goes to shortages and other things like that, has been led by the department, I think, for about a year or so. That's probably a good segue if Dr Baxter wants to comment.

**Dr Baxter:** Thanks very much, Mr Grant. Thanks, Senator. I would say that while there was some provisional modelling done by the department almost a couple of years ago now, we absolutely would consider that

modelling to be out of date. It used pre-pandemic data. It was really done because at the time we were having some challenge getting demand data from the states. It really is the states that are in control of their demand needs and what supply is going to look like in their area. I would say that the draft national teacher workforce action plan is out for consultation at the moment. I mentioned this morning that the part we're quite excited about is that part that goes to commitment to build that national picture of demand data. There are some quite specific actions in there. There are some reasonably fast timeframes around those actions. It's under the better understanding future teacher workforce needs. It's under that area. There are a number of actions. Each of them has a really quick time frame to try to build that demand picture, which then, superimposed against the supply picture, will give us a much more forensic sense of what we're looking at going forward.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I did raise this issue earlier around immigration changes that might support the employment of more foreign teachers and what arrangements are in place or being worked on to fast-track visa applications to enable this. The reason I'm particularly interested is that the demand for teachers was quite obvious in some of those more regional and remote areas. There is also a demand for teachers who would be prepared to go and work in those regional and very remote areas.

**Dr Baxter:** Thank you, Senator. I did mention this morning that we are trying to work on getting a more reliable stream of some of that data through our home affairs colleagues. I mentioned that what we do know is that applications that are coming through now are being dealt with in a couple of days, which is fantastic as one of the outcomes from the Jobs and Skills Summit. There's also a commitment to money to keep that prioritisation of the processing timeframes, so that's encouraging as well. In terms of migration and what we do know to date, historically, migration hasn't necessarily been a major source of teacher supply. So, for the first six months of 2022, our issues paper, which I mentioned this morning, that fed into the teacher roundtable noted that there were 600 early childhood, 107 primary and 517 secondary teacher visa applications that were found suitable. Of course, during COVID, we had a bit of suppression of some of those numbers as well. Nevertheless, there is a sense from our DFAT and home affairs colleagues and from us, and certainly from the states and territories and the non-government systems, that there might be some international markets which haven't necessarily been approached and marketed well enough regarding the Australian opportunity. I think this morning the secretary mentioned Ireland as a potential area that has been raised with us. I think one of the jurisdictional non-government sectors is looking at it. We think there are opportunities there. That is why it's included in the teacher action plan.

**Senator LIDDLE:** From the work I've been involved in in the health field and encouraging medical people into the regions, I know that there are some programs that are designed to encourage teachers into the regions and incentivise them, in fact.

**Dr Baxter:** Yes.

**Senator LIDDLE:** How is that going? Do you think further incentives will get more out there? Do you reckon we've reached the limit?

**Dr Baxter:** I wouldn't be able to give you data about how those specific medical programs go. We are certainly aware of them.

**Senator LIDDLE:** The teaching ones is what I'm interested in.

**Dr Baxter:** There are some run by the jurisdictions. Again, it's probably not data that I have to hand. I do know, though, that is one of the things that is being looked at—the suite of incentives that might work. I would note that, out of the currently 160,000 moving to 195,000 skilled migration places, a number of those—it is in the action plan for 30,000—are allocated to states and another 31,000 to the regions. So part of what the action plan is pointing to is the need for the states to think about their priority skills needs within that 30,000 for states and 31,000 for regional areas. They really need to look, again, at where those areas of supply and demand mismatch are. That's one of the things that they've committed to through this draft, at least, of the teacher action plan.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Just in terms of that workforce issue, are there other things being looked at, such as rehiring retired teachers to try get them to come back to the workforce?

**Dr Baxter:** It was a very broad-ranging discussion. Most of them nest under one of those areas that is in the draft action plan out for consultation. Discussed were things such as the range of incentives for people who might have otherwise been considering retirement to not retire. They are things like what kinds of arrangements might be more attractive. Might someone who is about to retire be more incentivised to stay if they are able to work fewer hours, for example? That is one of the conversations that was had. There were also discussions about people who have entered retirement and whether there are things that might coax them back into the workforce. Is it around some of the rules of localised retirement or superannuation schemes, where people might be worried

about the impact on that scheme of them taking up work? There were some discussions about having a look at AESOC for senior officials. These were all parts of the conversation that fed into that plan. There's also an action in the national action plan draft that looks at how we access people as mentors if they don't necessarily want to continue being a classroom teacher.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I want to ask a question about dropout rates in the universities in relation to the teaching profession. I know that, depending on which jurisdiction you are in, you can either do early childhood, middle school or high school. What is the dropout rate? Are you able to provide a sense of what the dropout rate in teaching is in the universities?

**Dr Baxter:** I don't know whether Mr Grant has any more specific data here. I have the headline number that I mentioned this morning when we were having the conversation, which is around commencements declining by eight per cent, completions declining by 17 per cent and the six-year completion figure being at about 48 per cent. So only about half of people who enter initial teacher education training finish within six years. Mr Grant may have more specific information around particular primary, secondary and other.

**Mr Grant:** Just before I answer that question, can I just say that Mr Misson has told me it was July 2017 when the Australian teacher workforce data project started. Thanks for correcting the record. The headline figures are the same because they are no doubt drawn from the Australian teacher workforce dataset in terms of completions. Mr Misson, do we have jurisdictional data or in any way lower level?

**Mr Misson:** Only by graduate, postgraduate and the level of school that people are preparing to teach—primary, secondary or early childhood. That is available on our website. We can also provide it on notice, of course.

**Senator LIDDLE:** What strikes me from what you've just said is a 48 per cent completion rate is extraordinarily low for somebody who has invested. Then you have the other way of doing it, which is taking students who already have a degree in a field and then doing the extra year. I think it differs. Some do two and some do one; is that right? Is it all two?

**Mr Grant:** It's a master's, effectively.

**Senator LIDDLE:** Is that a two-year master's or a one-year master's?

**Mr Grant:** It's a master's. How long it takes often depends on the nature of the design of the programs. Some can be a shorter period. In fact, that has spurred another element on the table with the draft of the national teacher workforce action plan, which is those we might call mid-career changers. People who do have a degree in something else may be interested in teaching as a secondary field. But the undergraduate and postgraduate rates are quite different. We can provide that to you on notice.

**Senator LIDDLE:** The university sector has told me that the way things are taught, be it education of their lecturers in ongoing education or their students has changed. What is on for students? Is there likely to be in the future more live streaming than face-to-face education, particularly in those specialist areas?

**Mr Grant:** I'm not sure we could help you to answer that. There are 47 institutions that provide initial teacher education. They do have a variety of mixed modes in the delivery. COVID has probably forced a lot more to that streaming option, as you said. Equally, I'm aware anecdotally from both a university perspective and students that the demand for onsite, the physical participation, is strong in some locations. Some are looking at mixed modes. I think each institution would probably, most rightly, make the decision that it's theirs to decide what the mode is and students with their enrolment choices.

**Senator LIDDLE:** I know that in some regional and remote areas the predicted increases in populations are higher generally because of the younger population in those areas. What modelling has been done to identify the number of teachers you're going to require in those newly developing areas in regional and remote areas?

**Mr Grant:** It really goes to a point Dr Baxter made. The education employers in each of the jurisdictions are the ones who have a sense of shifting demographic patterns. The implication of those shifts for likely teacher need—in fact, for other school staff need as well—may be greater in some locations where populations were previously lower but now, postcoded, may well be higher. The ABS does have a 21 per cent increase in students starting school in 2030 compared to last year. Again, the workforce planners in states and territories would be well across these types of large datasets available from other sources. Hopefully, as Dr Baxter said, they would be feeding that into the demand modelling information that we're looking for and bringing it together with supply modelling that we have in the ATWD to be able to have the conversation about implications.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** The highly accomplished and lead teacher accreditation status is called HALT. What evidence can AITSL share that demonstrates the teachers awarded the HALT status are more effective in the classroom than peer teachers?

**Mr Grant:** Thanks for the question. Very quickly, there are four levels of certification. The top two levels have been referenced in the question—highly accomplished and lead teacher. The answer to the question is the process itself, which is a national process implemented under the federated model in the eight states and territories through the work between the teacher, the school principal employer and the teacher regulatory authority, or whatever the teacher accreditation authority is in the state or territory that actually does the verification process. That teacher's evidence is set against the 37 standards to meet the requirements of highly accomplished or lead.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** Has AITSL produced any research that shows that learning outcomes are better for students who have HALT teachers?

**Mr Grant:** In fact, I would probably turn the question around the other way. In order to get the status, those teachers have to be able to show evidence that the results from their students are at their exceptional level. It's not so much the reverse. It's that evidence of student impact is high. It's part of that evidence set. However, I can provide you on notice some university reviews of public domain jurisdictional approaches to highly accomplished and lead teacher certification where the particular employer—I am thinking of the independent sector in Queensland as one—has engaged the university to do a proper review of that process. I will ask Mr Misson, who has been in this field longer than me, whether we are aware of any other information or evidence sets that go to the senator's question.

**Mr Misson:** The only other thing I would mention is that there is a very similar process in the United States. I'm aware of quite a rigorous study there where they basically compared the people who got the certification with teachers who had similar characteristics and hadn't got the certification. The results were better for those with the certification. So it's obviously in a different country, but it relates to a similar process.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** So AITSL can be confident that HALT is actually working effectively?

**Mr Grant:** I would like to answer that question differently. Only 1,054 teachers out of 400,000 have highly accomplished or lead teacher certification. I'm not at all here to say that is how many high quality teachers we've got. What we do actually have is the need to look at our processes nationally. They need to be rigorous, not onerous. Equally, at the jurisdictional level, the teacher regulatory authorities and any processes that the employer might have in the Catholic, independent or government sector or even school-based processes are either an enabler or a barrier to teachers being able to get that recognition for their skill set. I actually think we have a fair bit of work to do here, Senator. It is referenced in the draft national teacher workforce action plan. I'm really pleased to see it. By way of background, ministers decided on 12 August to have five action plans. I now see that we have No. 6, and it's No. 6 that I'm referencing—better pathways for teachers. That better pathway recognises the expertise of teachers in a way that I hope will see that 1,054 rise. I hope to see some efforts made to give 400,000 teachers a better voice to champion their own skill set.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** On the governance of the Australian teacher workforce data, the ATWD appears to be an important opportunity to bring evidence to the issues of the teacher workforce. I was surprised to find that the ATWD oversight board is made up entirely of bureaucrats, teacher regulatory authorities and teacher education providers, the same people who basically have access to this data already and have done nothing with it. It seems to me that the opportunity of the ATWD is to see that competent people actually use the data to make evidence informed analysis. Why has the ATWD oversight board not included independent researchers who could surely help guide the use of the data for smarter purposes?

**Mr Grant:** Thanks for the question. The ATWD itself is now digital online. All of us could do exactly what you have said. Any researcher can get to that dataset and do whatever they might wish to do. Mr Misson might wish to comment. He is the senior officer from AITSL on the ATWD. It may well be that for some this is still fairly new across Australia. Workforce planners looking at teacher shortages and other workforce pressures have had only in the last six months or so the ability to get into the portal itself and do all the analyses without any interference whatsoever. Instead of waiting for an AITSL analysis or waiting for someone else to do analysis, they can do it in their own time. So it is a very transparent dataset now.

**Mr Misson:** I would reinforce that point. We are building that out over time. More and more data will be more and more freely available. I think basically it will be up to the point where it would cause privacy issues if it were any more granular, if you like. Another point, though, is that it's not about people who have had access to this data in this form in the past. The power of it is in the linked data. So it's true that we have published for, I think, a decade now a report on initial teacher education data. What we can begin to do now is link that to the workforce

so we can understand transitions into the workforce. We can understand who goes on to register as a teacher, who is employed and so on. That will happen over time because it is a longitudinal dataset. There is a lot of power in the linkage of the data that tells us much more than the individual datasets, which—probably you're right—haven't been used to their full effect anyway. They can tell us in isolation.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I refer to AITSL's culturally responsive teaching guide. The June 2022 report is entitled *Building a culturally responsive Australian teaching workforce: Final report for Indigenous cultural competency project*. I was struck by the following extract:

Australian education systems were never designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The legacy of colonisation—including its policies, systems and structures—still exists today and continues to undermine the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to a fair and just education as any student in this nation.

Can you please elaborate specifically on how colonisation is undermining Indigenous students' education?

**Mr Grant:** I don't know if Mr Misson has any background to that. I will take it on notice. The reason I take it on notice is there is a very significant group called AGATSIE, which some people may or may not know, that is the partner in our writing work. I would not like to reference incorrectly the answer to that question, so I'll take it on notice and give you a written reply.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I'm also surprised by the extensive work that has been carried out around cultural competency and cultural safety. I can't see it as being of great educational benefit to students. It seems to make life difficult for teachers at the same time. I guess I would like to see AITSL use its resources to give teachers pedagogical competency rather than fixate on this separatist idea of cultural competency, which I think seems to imply that Indigenous students don't learn the same as non-Indigenous peers. To me, that sounds a bit like racism. I would like to understand why AITSL places such a high carriage on cultural safety and cultural competency rather than pedagogical competency.

**Mr Grant:** The truthful and very clear short answer is that the scope commissioned by then federal education minister in early 2019 was to exactly the remit that we were to deliver to. The matters you are raising now and the other matters that have been raised in the course of that work are the subject of what you might potentially called a part two to the cultural competency work that is better received as cultural responsiveness, or a label similar to that. There is no work in that field at this point, but I note the points that you have made and some other points that have been raised along the way. The scope was set when it was originally commissioned. That is what we had the obligation to deliver back to ministers.

**Senator NAMPIJINPA PRICE:** I guess it's not just the education sector that has to deal with this. It's been thrust on to all of us, this ideological thinking. Thank you. That's all from me.

**CHAIR:** Thanks very much for joining us this afternoon. Have a wonderful afternoon. I now call representatives from the Australian Research Council.

#### Australian Research Council

[16:45]

**CHAIR:** Welcome, Ms Zielke. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Ms Zielke:** No. Thanks, Chair.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I want to start with the Sheil review. Can you please update us on the status of that review? Where is it up to?

**Mr Cook:** That's probably more appropriate for the department than the ARC because the department is actually working with that review process. As you would be aware, it was in late August that the minister announced the independent review. Just to be clear, it is an independent review. The department itself provides secretariat services to that review, but we aren't writing papers or anything like that. That is the purpose of the review panel. You mentioned Professor Margaret Sheil. She is the vice chancellor of the Queensland University of Technology. She is chairing that panel. It also has Professor Susan Dodds on it, who is the senior deputy vice chancellor and vice-president of La Trobe University, and Professor Mark Hutchinson, who is the director of the Centre for Nanoscale BioPhotonics at the University of Adelaide. The panel has, over the last several weeks, met a number of times. They've also been discussing and talking with the higher education sector, which has led to a discussion paper or consultation paper. I think it went up on the department website on their behalf yesterday. That is now out for public consultation. That paper is publicly available. The closing date for that is around 10 or 11 December. The terms of reference for that panel indicates that they are to provide an interim report to the minister by the end of this year. A final report is due on 31 March 2023.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Will the interim report be made available publicly?

**Mr Cook:** That will be a matter for government.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Minister?

**Senator Chisholm:** We'll take that on notice.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** The final report is due in March?

**Mr Cook:** March 2023; that's right.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is there a particular date in March?

**Mr Cook:** It is 31 March.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you. What is the status of the ARC's led LED review on internal processes being undertaken by the ARC and how this is intersecting with the review done by Professor Sheil?

**Ms Zielke:** I think you might be referring to the excellence in research for Australia, or ERA, as it is mentioned.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I've got here LED. Someone might ping me if I have that wrong. The LED review.

**Ms Zielke:** I'm sorry, but it's not our review.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I might skip over that. What were you going to tell me? It might be a typo in my notes. Someone will correct me if I am wrong.

**Ms Zielke:** Whilst the review of the ARC is going on, and as you heard from Mr Cook, it's a review of our legislation, roles and functions et cetera. We are also continuing with work on our various activities. We have had some questions about the role of the review when it comes to ERA and the role of ourselves in the activities that we continue in the ERA at the same time. That is why I thought that might have been what you were referring to. Basically, the difference is looking at our roles and functions at a strategic level and what we are responsible for versus the work that we do day to day.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So it is intersecting, though, with the Sheil review? You are having input into that?

**Ms Zielke:** No. What we've done is clarified the two activities that are going on. We've actually made sure that people understood the difference.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What are the findings to date, then, with what you are doing?

**Ms Zielke:** On that activity, the minister issued a statement of expectations to the ARC on 30 August. In that statement, he asked that we discontinue arrangements for ERA 2023, which was the next round of ERA.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is it just ERA?

**Ms Zielke:** It is ERA. It stands for excellence in research for Australia. He also asked that we undertake a process to provide him with a transition plan for what ERA might transition to in the future.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I want to ask you about grants. What rounds have been presented to the minister?

**Ms Zielke:** In what time frame?

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I guess since the last budget. Let's put it that way. Since March.

**Ms Zielke:** I know I have at hand since May, if that's convenient.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Yes.

**Ms Zielke:** We had a linkage project round finalised on 24 August. 'Finalised' means announced. We've also had rounds of our linkage infrastructure equipment and facilities program almost completed. We've completed a Discovery Indigenous round, which was finalised in October, and an Australian laureate fellowships round in late August, and Discovery early career researcher award round in mid-September. We've done future fellowships in September as well and industrial transformation research hubs in July. We've just announced the outcomes for our centres of excellence program, which only occurs every three years and is one of our biggest programs. We're very proud of it. We just announced that on 2 November.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is that?

**Ms Zielke:** That is where grants are provided to establish collaborative centres of excellence in particular areas. Those centres of excellence are undertaking foundational and applied research. They are also training opportunities for our researchers. So they not only improve their skill sets; they are entering into whole new areas and fields of research. A great example of centres of excellence is Quantum Computer. We also just announced a centre of excellence in relation to violence against women, for example. They are very varied. They achieve some great outcomes.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Typically, how is that delivered? It goes to an institution, or is it a cooperative between institutions?

**Ms Zielke:** It is led by a single institution. A lot of them, for example, will be eight or nine universities. It could possibly include international universities as well in the majority of them. It will often have a large range of industry and government agencies involved as well. It is that collaboration that achieves the great outcomes. That is why you are also able to have it start at the beginning of the research pipeline with foundational research, build on that with applied research and then achieve impact, which might be your typical commercialisation and jobs, new companies and spinouts et cetera. It could just as well be improvements to social policy or improved environmental outcomes as well. So they are very varied. That variety gets us a range of impact for the country.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Does it interface at all with the cooperative research centres? I think that is through industry.

**Ms Zielke:** It is. Generally, the cooperative research centres program is also built on collaborations. But they are more industry focused. They generally cover only science and technology outcomes.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Thank you. I will go back to the rounds. You gave us a number of programs and dates. For each of them, when was the brief submitted to the minister's office? When was the brief signed?

**Ms Zielke:** We provide—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Hang on. I'm particularly interested if all recommendations were accepted in their original form by the minister.

**Ms Zielke:** Since the new government came into place, yes, all recommendations have been accepted by the minister.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Any changes requested by the minister?

**Ms Zielke:** No.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Are grant rounds being administered in a timely manner to the predetermined timeframes?

**Ms Zielke:** We've had one program not meet its timelines since March this year. That is the Linkage Program. We're approximately 12 days late in announcing the outcome of that program.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** May I ask why? Was there an election in between or something?

**Ms Zielke:** No. Yes, there was. No, that wasn't the reason for it at all. It was administrative. We have been undertaking reform work on our improvements to our processes to make sure that we can deliver sooner. An example I will give you is the Industry Fellowships Program that was launched in August. Through that process review and that additional work, we've managed to cut our time line for delivery of a round of that program from what would have been eight months down to five months. That is our challenge to deliver against that new time frame.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What sort of changes did you make to reduce that time frame?

**Ms Zielke:** We've moved to do a number of activities in parallel rather than doing them end to end. We have also designed that program in consultation with the sector to work out what it is that we really need to be able to deliver an efficient and effective program and to ensure impact as a result of the program without unnecessary burden in there as well. We've also worked with our college of experts and a broader group of assessors who undertake the assessment of that. The peer review process is the biggest part of the process. They've helped us identify various steps that we can improve on as well.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Have you taken any steps to reduce the administrative burden on researchers?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes. That is a very good example, again in the Industry Fellowships Program. I will try to give you an indication of scale. In our previous fellowship programs, an application form was about 35 pages. The application form for the new programs is 15. So we're only asking for information that we need for the purposes of applying. We did previously ask for information that was used if they were successful. Then it was used in the agreement process. We don't need that beforehand. We can ask for that later and only request it of those who are proceeding.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Have you got a grant round in process at the moment?

**Ms Zielke:** We have several.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** You have several?

**Ms Zielke:** For example, at the moment, we have the linkage infrastructure and equipment round about to be completed and we have a Discovery projects round about to be completed.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Has there been any contact between the minister's office and the council about upcoming rounds?

**Ms Zielke:** The ARC has an advisory committee. That advisory committee provides me with advice as CEO on strategic issues and arrangements. I meet regularly with the committee. We have another meeting coming up in a fortnight. Most recently, though, I don't believe the minister has met with the committee.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** And you? You would interface with the minister, though, wouldn't you?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes, I do. I most recently met with the minister about four weeks ago.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What is the nature of that contact? Obviously don't go into private discussions. You keep him across these grant rounds?

**Ms Zielke:** We discuss a range of issues in the statement of expectations.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I will go to the advisory committee. How many times has this new committee met?

**Ms Zielke:** It was established as recently as May with its latest membership and, I think, seven times. Its membership changed slightly. It had an additional member appointed in May. Since then, it has met three times.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** What work is undertaken by the committee at the moment?

**Ms Zielke:** The committee has provided a great deal of input to the ARC strategy that we've been developing and we issued in August this year. That was a substantial activity for us to undertake. The committee is made up of people from academia, industry and other relevant bodies. Therefore, the lens they can bring to that conversation is really important. That is their most significant activity. They've commented on the design of the Industry Fellowships Programs, the national interest test arrangements and the process review work. They are the key ones that come to mind for me.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Any other key actions that have been undertaken by the committee?

**Ms Zielke:** They continue to provide advice, so, no, no key actions.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I want to ask about the university research action plan. The university research commercialisation action plan was announced by the coalition as part of the industry research fellowship program. I understand we have an early career industry fellowship, a mid-career industry fellowship and an industry laureate fellowship. Are you able to tell us about the status of these programs?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes. They are in, effect, three separate schemes within the Industry Fellowships Program. So they are the ones I was just recently talking about in relation to having designed them with the sector et cetera in that regard. We've closed two of those schemes out of the three. The mid-career and the early career schemes have both just closed to applications. The industry laureate one will close on 17 November. To date, we've received over 300 applications for mid-career and early career.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** How do you apply?

**Ms Zielke:** Researchers are advised of the opening of a round. They go into the system. The majority of our activity is online. They complete that. They engage, then, with their university. The university is responsible for the application. They lodge the application on behalf of the researcher.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That is put in their business case and the justification for it?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes. They are then assessed through a peer review process.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I was just about to ask for that. How are they assessed?

**Ms Zielke:** They are assessed through a range of steps on the first occasion. All applications are assessed by general assessors. They are slowly graduated so that the best then go forward to a selection advisory committee, where they finalise their recommendations in relation to what should be approved. The programs are highly competitive.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** How long does it take to do that assessment?

**Ms Zielke:** The peer review process is approximately four months of the process.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** So my understanding of the fellowships is that the idea was to reduce the length of time to less than six months. Is that right? Was that one of the principles of the fellowships?

**Ms Zielke:** Very much so.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** You say four months. Could we be aiming higher in terms of reducing it?



**Ms Zielke:** Apologies. The previous fellowship programs took about eight months to deliver. We expect to be able to achieve five months for delivery of those schemes going forward. The peer review process goes for about four months of that five months.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** This is my last question. Is there anything you can do to fast-track it? Can we make it more expeditious?

**Ms Zielke:** We've tried to make sure that we are providing appropriate periods of time for the assessors to to review the applications. What we've done is, by taking that three months out, take activities we would do—as in the ARC—and do them in parallel with the peer review process rather than at the end of them.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** That is where the biggest efficiency is. I do have more questions, but I will come back.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Thank you, Senator Faruqi, for swapping with me. I appreciate it. Thanks for your time. What is the usual funding tenure of the ARC grants? How long are most ARC grants for?

**Ms Zielke:** It depends. We have some programs that run for three years. Some of them run for seven years. So it is about size and scale in relation to the funding and the activity that is being undertaken.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Is it your understanding that most researchers and their support staff would be on fixed term contracts for that grant to their university?

**Ms Zielke:** I understand that a number of researchers are employed for the period of the project, if that's what you are asking me.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Yes. This is still on the grants but a different question. How many research grants have been awarded for climate science studies in the past three years?

**Ms Zielke:** I don't know that I could give you the past three years. I know I have some figures in relation to the breakdown of applications by research area. No. Do you mind if I take that on notice?

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Sure.

**Ms Zielke:** I thought it was in my brief. I am sorry. I can't recall the details. It's one of our highest areas of funding.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** I noted in the recent announcement of the 100 ARC feature fellowships that only one was in the area of environmental science. Is there a reason for that, given we're global leaders in that space?

**Ms Zielke:** The figures that come to me is that climate change is the eighth most frequent discipline area or research area that we fund. My response in relation to that particular round would be it is most likely the range of applications we receive and then the quality of those applications. They are peer reviewed. The assessors judge the quality of them. That impacts what is ultimately funded.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Do you know how many grants have been vetoed over the last decade?

**Ms Zielke:** I'm happy to come back to you on notice with that. I think it's in the last five years that we've seen applications rejected by ministers. It is about 33, off the top of my head, over that period.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Was there a common theme with those vetoed projects?

**Ms Zielke:** I'm sorry, Senator. I didn't hear that. They are rejected, not vetoed.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Was there a common theme with those projects?

**Ms Zielke:** No.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** They were wide-ranging?

**Ms Zielke:** There's often a comment made about more humanities, for example, being in them. A range of applications have been rejected.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** Thanks very much.

**Senator Chisholm:** Ms Zielke gave evidence before that since the election, the minister has accepted all the recommendations. I want to be clear about that.

**Senator DAVID POCOCK:** I understand that. Thank you.

**Senator FARUQI:** Good afternoon, everyone. There has obviously been a lot of public interest in the ARC over the last year or so. We also had that inquiry into my bill to remove ministerial veto. The ARC has now had two ministers write letters of expectation to the CEO in the last nine months or so. My first question is whether Minister Clare's letter—I think it is in August 2022—to you essentially replaces former minister Robert's letter to your predecessor or whether former minister Robert's letter is still guiding the ARC's work?

**Ms Zielke:** The directions from the new minister are what we are following.

**Senator FARUQI:** So the demand in former minister Robert's letter about national manufacturing priorities being a primary focus of funding in the Linkage Program has been dismissed?

**Ms Zielke:** And been replaced by Minister Clare's request in relation to the National Reconstruction Fund.

**Senator FARUQI:** And the component on prioritising the extension and enhancement of the national interest test has also been dismissed?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes. Minister Clare has given us advice for a clearer, simpler and easier to understand NIT.

**Senator FARUQI:** I have a few questions about the national interest test, in particular because there has been significant concern about its operation, as you would be aware. Following the change of government around July and August, there was reportedly a substantial uptake in revision requests to the national interest test statements. In the OPD, the orders for production of documents, tabled on 13 September this year, the response to my motion revealed that you requested revisions to the national interest test in 322 applications. That is about 13 per cent of all applications at that time. Was this a significant increase in requested revisions compared to previous years?

**Ms Zielke:** In looking at the figures, I see that I have requested more revisions than the former CEO.

**Senator FARUQI:** Could you provide us on notice, because you will not have them, for last year, for instance, how many revisions there were and in the year before?

**Ms Zielke:** I'm comfortable to take on notice the difference between the two years.

**Senator FARUQI:** That would be good. Ordinarily, would a national interest test statement be sent back for revisions only if the applications had effectively reached the last stages of consideration before being recommended or not for funding?

**Ms Zielke:** I'm afraid there are different circumstances depending on the scheme rounds. When I arrived at the ARC in February, the sector had made it very clear that they were looking for more advice on how to better complete the NIT. They were looking for detail. We provided the sector with a series of four considerations or questions, if you like, and said, 'Address each of those four questions in 150 words in plain English so it can be understood by a member of the public.'

**Senator FARUQI:** Sure. That would be at the start of the application process that you provided that information?

**Ms Zielke:** The issue with that is that, therefore, there was a change in March as a result of the sector responding to those questions that they were looking for in relation to that. You have, therefore, a difference between their four program rounds and the previous ones. Subsequently, I have been consulting with the sector in relation to how to continue to improve that process. Most recently, I agreed to limit it to two reviews of the NIT, for example, for the current Discovery round that is on. The improvements that are occurring have been great both in the quality of what is coming in and if there is a revision in that way. That is having a huge impact on reducing the burden as well in that regard. We are still consulting to deliver on Minister Clare's request in the statement of expectations and hope to have the outcome of that review available shortly for announcement.

**Senator FARUQI:** I will clarify. My understanding is that the NIT is considered by the CEO and is not part of the peer review process undertaken by assessors. Right?

**Ms Zielke:** It is a separate assessment, yes.

**Senator FARUQI:** So you get an application after it has been peer reviewed, eligibility tested and had due diligence done. That is when you look at the application and look at the NIT? What you are saying is that you would do that before as well?

**Ms Zielke:** Sorry, I missed part of your question. In trying to shorten the period of time for which we are assessing applications, we are assessing NITs earlier in the process. You made the point about whether we are only doing an NIT assessment on those that are recommended. No. We are now doing an NIT assessment on more because we don't know what we will end up in the final recommended group. The only way we can deliver a shorter outcome at the end is to do more in the middle.

**Senator FARUQI:** You are doing more. Is that part of the reason why there have been more revisions requested? Is that why?

**Ms Zielke:** No. I would suggest that the revisions are because of the new process that came in in March.

**Senator FARUQI:** The OPD that we received shows that 10 out of 27 Discovery Indigenous applications had revisions requested. That was according to the selection report. Ten applications ended up being approved for

funding. Are you able to confirm whether those were the same 10 applications? You can take that on notice as well, if you like.

**Ms Zielke:** Can I just check? Were you talking about the Indigenous applications?

**Senator FARUQI:** Yes. So 10 out of 27 Discovery Indigenous applications had revisions requested to the NIT test and 10 were approved as well.

**Ms Zielke:** My apologies.

**Senator FARUQI:** That's alright. Were they the same 10?

**Ms Zielke:** There were 17 that were ultimately funded for the round. So in 10 of that 17, in effect, we sought revisions.

**Senator FARUQI:** So 17 were funded?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes. There were, therefore, seven applications that we didn't seek a revision for.

**Senator FARUQI:** At the time of the OPD document release, Discovery projects 2023 and linkage infrastructure, equipment and facilities projects 2023 had not progressed to a point where revisions to the NIT were being requested. If they have progressed now, could you provide how many Discovery project applications and LIEF applications you have requested NIT revisions for?

**Ms Zielke:** They haven't been completed, so I'm not able to give that yet.

**Senator FARUQI:** When will they be completed?

**Ms Zielke:** Hopefully by the end of the month.

**Senator FARUQI:** You said with the 322 applications that there were revisions in the NIT tests. That was because of the change in process?

**Ms Zielke:** I appreciate that researchers have had to get used to the new format for the NIT.

**Senator FARUQI:** That was my question. They've had to spend a lot of time doing this. I guess you and your staff have had to spend a lot of time doing it as well.

**Ms Zielke:** The burden applies to all of us.

**Senator FARUQI:** I also understand that some universities have engaged external help to rewrite NIT statements multiple times. Have you engaged with universities on how much time and resourcing this is taking?

**Ms Zielke:** No. I haven't asked that question.

**Senator FARUQI:** Do you expect the same process to happen with the Discovery projects and the LIEF 2023? The same back and forth?

**Ms Zielke:** We are just about complete on both of them, noting that, as I said earlier, for the Discovery projects round, we are only doing two reviews. We're only allowing two reviews of the NIT.

**Senator FARUQI:** Do you think this is a good use of your staff's time and researchers' time, given that this test is becoming so onerous, it is quite unnecessary and it is creating so many problems for researchers?

**Ms Zielke:** Obviously, the requirements for the program are a consideration for government. But there is true benefit in researchers understanding the ultimate benefit that they are providing the country.

**Senator FARUQI:** That is already captured. The national benefit is already captured without the NIT test within the applications.

**Ms Zielke:** It is in a technical way—you're right—under benefits in the peer review, but not in a form that the average person, a taxpayer who actually provides the funding for the grants, can actually understand. This is the key point that a number of the universities and the researchers continue to make to me; there is value in the researchers learning how to do this so that they can get to highlight the value of the research.

**Senator FARUQI:** You must be talking to different researchers than me. Have you recommended against funding any projects based on the national interest test statement?

**Ms Zielke:** Not to date.

**Senator FARUQI:** I was looking at the ARC's annual report. There are two performance measures identified as not achieved for the past financial year. One was that the National Competitive Grants Program applications and assessment processes be conducted in a timely manner. That was not achieved. The other performance measure was that the ARC manage National Competitive Grants Program application and assessment processes fairly and in accordance with grant guidelines. That was not achieved as well. The report acknowledges that there have been serious issues with timelines and processes. We've discussed them in these estimate hearings before.

Are you confident that this year you will have achieved next to these measures? If you are, what gives you that confidence?

**Ms Zielke:** I really appreciate the question. We have done extensive work in looking at our processes and looking at consistency of our processes across various schemes within the NCGP. We have talked to researchers, university research offices, our peer assessors and peer reviewers and spent a lot of time with the college of experts that actually does that work, which is our core group, to improve the way in which we are functioning and the questions we are asking. The Industry Fellowships Program was our first opportunity to really highlight what we could do as a result of that and show that we had listened and what we could deliver as a result of that. We've subsequently been reviewing the Linkage Program guidelines. We hope to deliver those new guidelines in coming weeks, which will show improvements there. Subsequently, we will go to Discovery in the new year. What has been one of the great outcomes so far in that regard is that the grants calendar that had historically been issued said that a program would generally have an outcome in a quarter of the year. Three months is a long period of time to be waiting. What we've been able to achieve in issuing our latest calendar is a period of two weeks that we believe the announcement will be made in. It is a much shorter, more focused period of time. Of course, there is the challenge of, having issued that, delivering against that. I've also given an undertaking to the universities that if we are not able to deliver on time, they will know about it in advance. We are really looking to try to improve the engagement and understanding so that researchers aren't sitting there on tenterhooks waiting for an answer. They have an idea in relation to time.

**Senator FARUQI:** That is good to know. I have a few questions on the ARC review. I know that the ARC itself isn't conducting the review. I am hoping that we might be able to canvass a few issues in these questions. I know the consultation paper was released yesterday. There are certainly some very interesting options canvassed. Will the ARC be making a submission to the review?

**Ms Zielke:** Having only received it yesterday, I am still considering whether we can add value by responding to it or not. We have been providing information to the review.

**Senator FARUQI:** Already? So you're working with the review?

**Ms Zielke:** Mr Cook made the point earlier that it is an independent review, but they have made requests of us and we have provided information as well. You also have three very informed members on that panel.

**CHAIR:** Senator Faruqi, we are getting close to the 15-minute mark. I want to give you a heads-up.

**Senator FARUQI:** I have a few questions and then I will finish.

**CHAIR:** By all means.

**Senator FARUQI:** Thank you. One of the questions the paper poses is whether the ARC act should be amended to consolidate the pre-eminence or importance of peer review. Does the ARC have a particular view at this stage on this question?

**Ms Zielke:** As I say, I haven't really had a chance to look at it and consider. The only comment I would make is that peer review is fundamental to our process.

**Senator FARUQI:** The terms of reference state that the review will undertake consultation with universities, publicly funded research organisations, peak bodies, researchers and research end users and collaborators. Is it expected that the review will consult with researchers who are at all stages of their careers—early career, mid-career as well as established researchers? As you can appreciate, a lot of early career researchers do depend on the success or failure of ARC grant applications and their input is important.

**Mr Cook:** Firstly, as you are aware, being public now, anyone can make a submission.

**Senator FARUQI:** Sure.

**Mr Cook:** I'm certainly happy to take that forward to the chair of the committee and pass that view on as part of the process. As we said, they are independent, but I'm happy to take that view on. I haven't spoken to the chair about the level of researchers that she is engaging with. I'm very happy to take that feedback on.

**Senator FARUQI:** That would be great. I note that the interim report is due to the minister by 31 December.

**Mr Cook:** That's correct.

**Senator FARUQI:** Do you feel, given your expertise and knowledge of this, that it is going to happen so everything is on track for that?

**Mr Cook:** Yes. Absolutely.

**Senator FARUQI:** The consultation paper is clear that funding levels are not within the remit of the review. Clearly, though, this does need to be addressed. Are you communicating to the government that Australian

research funding is inadequate and it should be boosted so that more of our researchers can do their fantastic work?

**Mr Cook:** As I mentioned this morning, the issue about research and sustainability of the research funding is an issue that will be part of the accord process so we haven't provided any advice about increasing research. We know that there is an indexation level in the budget paper. You will see, for example, that the ARC grants are going up slightly. It is our view that in the accord process and when those terms of reference are released, you will see a reflection in there about the importance of research.

**Senator FARUQI:** Thank you very much.

**Senator DAVEY:** Thanks very much for appearing before us. I want to find out about the national interest test. What work is being done to strengthen the national interest test at the moment? What consultation is being done in those efforts?

**Ms Zielke:** We are consulting with the sector in relation to the minister's request to make it clearer, simpler and easier to understand. That relates to the processes by which the national interest test is collected and the way in which it is relayed.

**Senator DAVEY:** Who will sign off on changes when they are finalised?

**Ms Zielke:** The minister has asked us to provide that information to him.

**Senator DAVEY:** The minister will sign off on the final version of the national interest test?

**Ms Zielke:** Take a decision in relation to how we move forward.

**Senator DAVEY:** Is part of this work going to lead to a national interest test that will have regular reviews built into it?

**Ms Zielke:** I can't answer that question. We're still under the current process.

**Senator DAVEY:** In this process, have there been any programs or applications for grants that have been reviewed as part of strengthening the guidelines?

**Ms Zielke:** As CEO, I am considering NITs regularly and the input to thinking. That applies to the team with us and those involved in the process from the sector. I suppose yes. What we are doing is very much an input to the way in which we are considering the process.

**Senator DAVEY:** Has it led to any delay or changes in the current applications process pre-empting the outcomes? Have any applications been questioned or denied under this process?

**Ms Zielke:** No.

**Senator DAVEY:** That's good. I understand that on 26 August, consistent with the practice of past ministers, Minister Clare issued the ARC with his new statement of expectations. Are there any directives that will lead to a delay in the delivery of current programs or significant changes against these new expectations?

**Ms Zielke:** No. Definitely nothing that will lead to a delay. Senator Faruqi raised this earlier. We are moving to include in the guidelines a link between Linkage and the national manufacturing priorities. The new government has asked that be the National Reconstruction Fund priorities.

**Senator DAVEY:** So potentially just a change by name rather than process?

**Ms Zielke:** That the applications address government policies is already part of the process and ensuring that we highlight that is important.

**Senator DAVEY:** The new statement of expectations is really just introducing the new government's priority areas? Some of the existing applications may already fit under those priority areas anyway?

**Ms Zielke:** As might have been the case in the former situation as well.

**Senator DAVEY:** That's right. I now want to turn to the issue regarding what steps are being taken to counter foreign interference. I know the former government introduced guidelines to counter foreign interference in the higher education sector. Are these guidelines ongoing? Are they now embedded into the assessment of your programs?

**Ms Zielke:** Senator, I will just look to my colleague, Mr Cook, to see whether he would like to address this.

**Mr Cook:** There are two parts to this. The guidelines themselves we dealt with in the higher education outcome. If you're asking specifically what the ARC does around issues of national security, Ms Zielke can probably talk about the ARC component as part of the grant assessment.

**Ms Zielke:** In relation to the process we then use, we work with the UFIT guidelines and the universities in applying and ensure that they are working in compliance with those guidelines. There are certain questions in our

application forms that align with what is in the UFIT guidelines, and there is an assessment undertaken of various risks and how they're being mitigated as part of that process.

**Senator DAVEY:** Are you in a position—you might have to take it on notice—to indicate how many applications may have had to go back and address questions relating to the foreign interference guidelines or how many applications didn't proceed because they didn't fit in with those guidelines?

**Ms Zielke:** In relation to the second half of your question—those that didn't fit in—some former ministers have rejected applications because of foreign interference concerns, so I think it's probably best we take that part on notice. I will just check to see whether Dr Southwell-Lee would like to provide any further advice. Very few that are assessed have a need to be assessed.

**Dr Southwell-Lee:** As Ms Zielke outlined, we have a process that's publicly available; the information is there in terms of how the process works. We take the parameters set out in the guidelines to counter foreign interference in universities, and we take the approach that's outlined there. So we take a risk based approach. We focus on anything in the critical technologies list, which was published in November by the then Prime Minister. And we ask all applicants, as part of the routine process of applying, to declare any conflicts of interest, and we use the questions that are the standard questions in the UFIT guidelines. If there is a project that has a critical technology component and a person who has indicated that they do have a potential conflict of interest, that's when we have a look, and we go back to the universities and we provide them with an opportunity to comment on the mitigations they have in place under the foreign interference guidelines.

**Senator DAVEY:** So there is a due process and a way that people can actually provide more information if there are questions that arise. With the new government, have there been any amendments to the guidelines or are they still—

**Ms Zielke:** Not to ours, and I don't know whether—

**Mr Cook:** No, there haven't been.

**Senator DAVEY:** I want to look at your annual report, with respect to minor breaches. I am referring to page 84, regarding ethical standards and the matters that were notified to the ARC. Do you look at these in terms of how they're categorised, whether they're significant or minor?

**Ms Zielke:** Generally, they are all minor, but I will pass to Dr Southwell-Lee to explain the process in relation to what it is that we consider.

**Dr Southwell-Lee:** As you might know, the Australian Research Council is co-author of the *Australian code for the responsible conduct of research* with the NHMRC and the Australian universities themselves. Under the code, universities are responsible for conducting investigations in relation to integrity, in line with the code. If that relates to a researcher or an institution that's eligible for ARC funding, they then write to us and advise they have undertaken that process in line with the code. So we are not an investigatory body, but we receive that advice from universities about any investigations they have undertaken.

**Senator DAVEY:** Okay, that explains my next question. The annual report talks about where institutions report breaches and the ARC takes action in response, and then it refers to preliminary assessments by the relevant institutions. So the ARC doesn't do their own investigations; they rely on advice from the universities?

**Dr Southwell-Lee:** Yes, as part of that self-regulated model that I outlined, and as agreed with the code with universities and NHMRC, that is the approach.

**Senator DAVEY:** So, as my first question, do you look at it in levels of severity when you're looking at it, or do you just look at it and say, 'No further action is required' or 'Action is required'?

**Dr Southwell-Lee:** The ARC itself has its own research integrity policy. Once we've received that advice from universities, in accordance with the code, we do of course look at to what extent those reported breaches may call into question integrity within the ARC's funded research, and that is across a spectrum of things that are relatively minor, with two things that could be more significant. We do certainly apply a triaging process in relation to that.

**Senator DAVEY:** It refers to 25 matters where the institutions reported breaches and the ARC took action. Can you describe what sort of action you take?

**Dr Southwell-Lee:** Yes, absolutely. For example—we always have to talk in the theoretical in this space—

**Senator DAVEY:** Absolutely.

**Dr Southwell-Lee:** if there is an issue of plagiarism that gives rise to concern about integrity and ethics with the conduct of the individual, that person may, for example, be excluded from participating in peer review panels

for a period of time. It's measures like that that are within the ARC's remit that we're able to implement in relation to their commitments under the ARC's research integrity policy.

**Senator DAVEY:** Great, thank you.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I have a couple of final questions on the annual report. Page 14 says that 83 per cent of your staff are regularly working from home. Was that just a COVID thing, or is that still persisting?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes, it is COVID—it's a figure that highly reflects the period of COVID. It's not the norm. And I must admit it's lovely having so many people back at the office, with the energy—

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Okay, so it's pretty routine now that everyone's back?

**Ms Zielke:** Yes, but it was as recent as March for the ACT.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I'm sure your local cafe and lunch bar—

**Ms Zielke:** We have a cafe again; it's quite exciting.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I'm sure they're very grateful to have people that they can serve too. My final question is in relation to page 91 of your report. There is an interesting figure here. In terms of staffing, you have one lone staff member working overseas. Can you tell me about that role, please?

**Ms Zielke:** The person is overseas supporting their spouse, who is on a transfer. The activity that they do is largely research and analysis work, so they're able to do that remotely.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Is that a permanent situation?

**Ms Zielke:** It's not a permanent situation.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I won't go into it any more; that's obviously private. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** That concludes today's proceedings and budget estimates 2022-23. I remind senators that written questions on notice should be received from senators by close of business on Friday 18 November 2022. Answers to questions on notice will be required to be returned by close of business on Friday 16 December 2022. I thank the minister, officers of the Department of Education and all witnesses who have given evidence to the committee today. Thank you also to Hansard, Broadcasting and the secretariat and to all my committee members, who have been very tolerant, supportive and helpful to each other, which is very collegiate. Thank you very much.

**Committee adjourned at 17:40**