

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

Tuesday 20 June 1995

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B****Chairman:**

Mr H. Becker

**Members:**

Mr M.K. Brindal

Mr S.R. Leggett

Mr J.A. Quirke

Mr G. Scalzi

Ms L. Stevens

Ms P.L. White

*The Committee met at 11 a.m.*

Education and Children's Services, \$951 949 000  
 Minister for Education and Children's Services—Other  
 Payments, \$213 874 000.

**Witness:**

The Hon. R.I. Lucas, Minister for Education and  
 Children's Services.

**Departmental Advisers:**

Mr D. Ralph, Chief Executive.

Ms M. Sleath, Director, Personnel.

Mr B. Treloar, Director, Corporate Services.

Mr T. Brooks, Director, Coordination and Executive  
 Support.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I thank Committee members for the confidence they have shown in me. A relatively informal procedure is traditionally adopted for the Estimates Committees; there will be no need for members to stand to ask or answer questions. The Committee will determine an approximate timetable for consideration of proposed payments to facilitate the changeover of departmental advisers. Changes to the composition of the Committee will be notified to the Committee as they occur. Members should ensure that they have provided the Chair with the completed Request to be Discharged form. If the Minister undertakes to supply information at a later date, it must be in a form suitable for insertion in *Hansard*, and two copies must be submitted no later than Friday 7 July. I propose to allow the lead speaker for the Opposition and the Minister to make opening statements, if desired, for about 10 minutes and certainly no longer than 15 minutes.

There will be a flexible approach in giving the call for asking questions, based on about three questions per member, alternating from one side to the other. Members may also be allowed to ask a brief supplementary question, to conclude a line of questioning before switching to the next member. Subject to the convenience of the Committee, a member who is outside the Committee and who desires to ask a question will be permitted to do so once the line of questioning on an item has been exhausted by the Committee. An indication to

the Chair in advance from the member outside the Committee wishing to ask the question is necessary.

Questions must be based on lines of expenditure as revealed in the Estimates of Receipts and Payments (printed paper No. 9). Reference will be made to other documents, including Program Estimates and the Auditor-General's Report. Members must identify a page number or the program in the relevant financial papers from which their question is derived. I remind the Minister that there is no formal facility for the tabling of documents before the Committee. However, documents can be supplied to the Chair for distribution to the Committee. The incorporation of material in *Hansard* is permitted on the same basis as applies in the House; that is, that it is purely statistical and limited to one page in length. I remind members that there is no provision for tabling questions at the end of the day: if they have a bank of questions which they have not finished, they cannot have it all inserted at the finish.

I ask the Minister to introduce advisers prior to commencement and at any changeover. All questions are to be directed to the Minister (not the Minister's advisers). The Minister may refer questions to advisers for a response. For the benefit of departmental officers a diagram showing facilities available to them is available from the attendants and at the rear of the Chamber. I also advise that for the purposes of the Committees there will be some freedom allowed for television coverage by allowing a short period of filming from the northern gallery. All television stations have been advised by the Speaker of the procedures to be followed. They must not interfere, but follow the privileges granted to the members of the press gallery. Does the Minister wish to make an opening statement?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I do not intend to delay the proceedings of the Committee unduly with a lengthy opening statement. There are two brief issues that I want to raise, as is the tradition. With your concurrence, Mr Chairman, I table a copy of a statistical summary which has been produced by officers of the Department for Education and Children's Services. It is in the traditional form, although this year there has had to be some change in the sort of information available because we are meeting as an Estimates Committee before the end of the financial year, which, of course, adds some additional problems for Committee members, and also, I can assure the Committee, for departmental officers. For example, at this stage we have been unable to calculate the cost of education per student in each school. That is something we will have to do at the conclusion of the financial year and we can make that available to members, if that is of interest, sometime after the conclusion of the financial year.

The other issue is that I have been advised that there is a suggested amendment to page 108 of the Program Estimates document. It is only for the sum of about \$160 000. It is in relation to the payments for the Minister's office *vis-a-vis* the inter-agency support services within the department. It has been checked and approved by Treasury as having been a typo or a mistake in preparation of the documents, and I apologise to members for that. I seek the permission of the Committee to table a copy of that and have it circulated to members for their information. As I said, I do not intend to make an opening statement to the Committee, other than to say, I look forward to the day's proceedings. As always, it was a very productive day last year I thought in terms of eliciting information on education and children's services. As is the tradition of this Government and certainly myself as Minister, we will do as much as we can to assist members in

providing as much information as we can today, and if not today, within the guidelines for providing written responses before 7 July.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Does the member for Playford have an introductory statement?

**Mr QUIRKE:** Yes. But before doing so, one of the points that I should like to raise is about the Auditor-General's Report. It is apt, Mr Chairman, that you made those remarks about the Auditor-General's Report because we are hamstrung in much of our examination of the various lines of the departments by not having that document. During every committee in which I participate, I will be saying that, next year, we need to have the presentation of that document brought forward because the Auditor-General is the chief officer for examining and auditing Government accounts. However, his report comes down at a time when it is absolutely useless for these activities. I hope the Minister will take that back to Cabinet and that the other Ministers, in their infinite wisdom, will see fit to ensure that next year we have the benefit of the Auditor-General's comments in these proceedings.

The Opposition welcomes this opportunity to examine the Program Estimates for Education and Children's Services. Last year the Minister undertook to provide as much information as possible to members of the committee and, in particular, to Opposition members. We look forward to that happening again this year. The Government had a mandate to increase spending on education, to maintain class sizes and to increase spending on school maintenance by \$20 million. Instead, spending on schools has again been cut in real terms and the number of teachers and support staff will be further reduced. Up to 100 teachers and 250 school service jobs will go on top of the 422 teachers and 37 support staff last year.

The Premier and the Minister would have us believe that spending on education has been increased by \$29 million for 1995-96. If that were true, one could be forgiven for wondering why another 350 jobs are to go. If this increase were real, why have secondary school programs been cut this year by \$17 million? Why have transport concessions fallen by \$800 000 on top of the \$2.8 million cut last year? Why have funds to isolated children been cut by over \$350 000? If one compares the total figure for recurrent and capital expenditure this year with the actual expenditure for 1994-95, the difference is indeed \$29 million. A closer examination shows that the recurrent budget has been increased by \$7 million. This is a cut of \$25 million in real terms allowing for an inflation rate of 3 per cent.

More devious is the way in which this Government underspent capital works on schools by \$22 million in last year's budget and rolled the funds over into this budget. The unspent funds were not used to reduce the department's debts as occurred the previous year: they were simply recycled. Actual expenditure for 1994-95 on capital works is estimated at only \$66.2 million. That is \$10 million less than 1993-94 and a shortfall of \$22 million against the budget. In addition, seven major school projects have been allowed to slip a year. Minor works and maintenance was underspent by \$9 million. Members may recall that in 1993 the Minister was strident in criticising the previous Government's record on school maintenance.

He went so far as to say that most schools were in a dilapidated condition and claimed that there was a backlog of \$250 million in outstanding maintenance. The Premier made an election promise to increase spending on school maintenance by \$20 million over four years, and we were

impressed last year when the budget for maintenance was increased by \$7.5 million. Unfortunately, the Minister underspent this allocation by \$9 million. Even worse is the fact that next year the provision has been cut by \$11 million. This is \$3 million less than the last maintenance budget provided by the previous Government. Add the inflation factor to these capital cuts and rollovers and the real reduction to schools this year is something of the order of \$47 million.

We have heard the Minister explain that extenuating circumstances, including community interests, stopped major projects. This argument cannot be applied to underspending on maintenance and, regardless of the reasons given by the Minister, it is bad management to program entire funds of capital works on projects that cannot be delivered. Most cynical was the decision to cut 50 to 100 teachers from special programs. The Minister justified extra teacher cuts by saying that these salaries were not for classroom teaching but for special programs such as Aboriginal education. Ironically, a fall in enrolments presented the Minister with unforeseen savings of \$10 million to \$16 million calculated at the State standard cost and gave the Government the opportunity to reinstate class sizes and keep one of its election promises. This opportunity was rejected.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I declare the proposed payments for the Department of Education and Children's Services—\$951 949 000 open for examination.

**Mr QUIRKE:** On page 61 of paper No. 2, we see that expenditure this year on minor works and maintenance was underspent by \$9.038 million. This program includes minor works, occupational health projects and facilities for the disabled. Why was this line underspent by \$9 million; and why is the Minister's department, in conjunction with the Department of Building Services, unable to manage these programs?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I will briefly respond to his opening statement, but I do not intend to go into the detail of that now. It was a nice try, but I would describe it as Australian Democrat economics—the bottom of the garden sort of statements. I am sure we will explore in detail some of the particular figures that the honourable member has indicated but suffice to say, as I have said publicly on a number of occasions, the Treasury papers are there to see. One can finesse around the edges if one wants to, but the bottom line is how much is intended to be spent next year and how much we spent in this year. It does not matter which way you look at it, the increase is \$29 million. The inflation rate is projected to be somewhere between 2.5 and 3 per cent over the coming 12 months and that \$29 million works out at an increase of just under 3 per cent.

The honourable member talks about lines of underspending but he does not mention areas, such as those of school service officers and a whole variety of other areas, where the Government had to overspend because of the need to put more resources into those particular areas. You cannot have your cake and eat it too: you cannot look at one side of the economic equation without looking at the fact that there were a good number of other areas within our \$1100 million budget in which we had to overspend. It was not just a question of underspending. We will return to the individual issues as we proceed through the day and, as I indicated, I am very happy to do that.

In relation to the capital works budget and the maintenance of the minor works section of it, one issue that the honourable member would have to bear in mind (and I accept

the fact that he is not the shadow Minister and therefore does not have the detailed knowledge of the portfolio) is that increasingly in recent years a number of the maintenance/minor works issues are being bulked up in the major works component of the capital works program. We are trying to combine, with the redevelopment of schools, meeting the maintenance needs of particular schools.

Let us look at some examples. If we have some transportables or timber rooms that need to be maintained and potentially might cost some hundreds of thousands of dollars over the coming years, one of the chief priorities of the capital works program is that, if in the major works component of redevelopment we can get rid of those timber transportables, we replace them in many cases with new or replacement buildings and therefore, correspondingly, we have spent money on major works but equally have significantly reduced our expenditure on maintenance and minor works within the budget.

The information to which the honourable member referred was the reduction in one line of program maintenance and minor works. However, he did not mention the fact that the Government is projecting to increase the \$27 million spent this year on major works to \$52.8 million—a \$25 million increase in terms of major and capital works within the Education Department budget. That is over what was spent. I concede, as I have publicly, that a number of programs were underspent, and I am prepared to go through the detail of them in a moment.

It is not sufficient for members just to refer to one aspect of the capital works budget and say that we are intending to underspend next year compared with this year, without looking at the fact that we are actually increasing by \$25 million another important component of the capital works budget. That major capital works component will pick up a good portion of the maintenance and minor works problems from which many of our schools are currently suffering.

To respond briefly to the other issue, although I have done so in the Legislative Council on a number of occasions, two major reasons exist for the underspending of the capital works budget. First, a good number of schools communities have come to the Government and said to us, 'Look, for a variety of reasons we have decided that we do not want you to go ahead this year with the current projected capital works program.' I will give some examples. Seaton High School was projected to spend \$1.3 million. Through this year we were happy to proceed with what we would see as a traditional sale of the land and redevelopment of the school. The Principal and the school community came to the Government and said to me as Minister, 'Please do not go ahead with that; we want you to hold that off. Do not spend the money, because we want to come up with an ecologically sustainable development through a development company that has great expertise in ecologically sustainable developments.'

Being a reasonable Government, we said to the Principal of Seaton High School (Mr David Tonkin) and his school council (I am sure members of the Labor Party will know David well) that we were quite happy for them to explore this option. However, in the end if it is not financially viable we cannot proceed with it. So, that has been put on hold.

I give the example of Coromandel Valley Primary School, at which we projected to spend about \$650 000. The school community came to us and said, 'Do not spend that money yet, please, because we are looking at an alternative proposition which might involve moving the school to another site,

but give us time to consider that option rather than your spending that \$650 000.'

I will give the example, of which my friend the member for Custance will be aware, of Tanunda Primary School. The Government is desperate to spend about \$3.5 million to \$4 million at Tanunda. As I have said before, I have never had such difficulty in spending \$3.5 million to \$4 million in any community.

There is a dispute in Tanunda between the school council, which wants the redevelopment on one site, and the local council which is strongly opposing that site to the stage that it states that it will fight it through the Planning Commission or whatever other agencies might exist because it wants it on another site. That issue must be resolved.

Glossop is another example. We are desperate to spend \$5 million over two or three years at Glossop. However, again there is an issue there as to whether the money will be spent on the existing Glossop High School site, of which I am sure members are aware, or whether a good portion of the money should be spent on a new senior secondary college at Berri. Again, the community has asked us for the time to resolve the issue at the local level and with departmental officers before we go ahead with the \$5 million program.

I do not want to delay our proceedings. I could give the honourable member another half a dozen examples in respect of which communities have come to me as the Minister asking me to be reasonable and to delay expenditure of money in their areas. As I said at the outset, being a reasonable person, we have agreed—

*Mr Brindal interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In response to the member for Unley, 'The Liberal Government Listens' is our slogan. We have been prepared to listen to these communities which have put such propositions to us.

Very briefly, the second broad area was the problem that the previous Labor Government had in 1992-93 and 1993-94. The honourable member will know Playford High School and West Lakes High School. Over recent years, there has been a significant downturn in the property market. Many of the properties which the previous Government was trying to sell could not be sold. Therefore, that side of the capital works budget was under-resourced. We simply did not get the funds back from land sales that occurred in the time of the honourable member's Government. We have had the same problem this year in terms of getting money back from land sales. As the property market is looking slightly more favourable for 1995-96, hopefully we will be able to recoup the sorts of levels of sales that we had originally intended.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I remind the committee that we have been here for 29 minutes. I am aware that the introduction took some time, but in 29 minutes we have had only one question. The purpose of Estimates Committees is to seek as much information as we can. I leave it to the committee.

**Mr QUIRKE:** To make it worse, Mr. Chairman, I am going to ask a supplementary question. I am sure that the Minister will quite happily embrace any organisation which tells him that it wants to spend money in the future rather than this year. However, the object of this question is to seek information, in particular on occupational health projects and facilities for the disabled which were factored into the last budget but which have not been carried out during this year. We are very concerned about them. Usually they involve only small amounts of money, particularly with regard to facilities for the disabled. We would like the precise information about

that as the Opposition takes facilities for the disabled in particular very seriously.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am happy to take that on notice. I recall opening the Kidman Park unit, which the Chairman will know, for students with multiple disabilities. I also opened the Devitt Avenue unit for students with disabilities. I also attended the opening at Ballara Park Kindergarten of facilities for disabled students. There has certainly been no conscious endeavour by the Government to reduce expenditure on students with disabilities. We would be happy to try to glean whatever information we can in terms of facilities for the disabled to see whether any particular programs have been affected.

**Mr QUIRKE:** The maintenance budget for this year seems to be down \$11 million. What areas of work will be reduced?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I can only refer the honourable member to my fulsome reply to his first question because I perhaps predicted his next question. I have responded to that. We are responding, through a \$25 million increase in the major works component, to much of the maintenance/minor works needs of our schools.

**Mr QUIRKE:** How many staff are now employed in the Education Facilities Branch and how many have taken TSPs? How many have specific training as building or maintenance project managers and how many have worked in this capacity in industry?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will have to take the detail of those questions on notice. Speaking broadly, there has been a reduction, as there has been generally in the central office and regional office staff of the Department for Education and Children's Services. The facilities section of Corporate Services has had some reduction in terms of its services. I think it would be fair to say that a good percentage of the persons employed in our Facilities Branch are people who traditionally, over the years, have come out of an education background. I do not think that that has changed markedly in recent years. We can get that detail and get back to the honourable member.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I refer to the classroom instruction provision in the Program Estimates and Information and note that it has been increased this year by some \$4 million. In view of the recent demonstration on the steps of Parliament House and the obvious interest of the Institute of Teachers in taking the institute and its members into a Federal award, can the Minister indicate the likely impacts on the education budget and on schools generally if the teachers' union is successful in moving to a Federal award?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The potential success of the Institute of Teachers with regard to its current Federal award claim would have a devastating impact on schools and, sadly, a devastating effect on students in South Australia. I think that the ballpark estimate of the total cost of that Federal award claim is \$137 million for South Australian taxpayers. As members would know, the Institute of Teachers, the union leadership, is, first, seeking a \$53 a week pay increase; secondly, asking that all teachers in South Australia reduce by 2½ hours their teaching instruction time in our schools; and, thirdly, asking for amendments or changes to class sizes in South Australia.

Put briefly, the taxpayers of South Australia cannot afford the \$137 million that the union leadership is pursuing in the Federal award arena. The Government has made what I believe is a generous offer of \$35 million—a \$35 million cost to taxpayers and a \$35 a week pay rise for staff within

Education and Children's Services. It will be difficult enough to afford that \$35 million pay rise and, put simply, the taxpayers, the Government and the students of South Australia cannot afford the \$137 million that the union leadership is pursuing by way of a Federal award.

I cannot add too much more than that. It is as stark as that, and that is the reason why the Government is fighting this award application as hard and as strenuously as it can. There has been some criticism that we have fought off the first leg of this award provision by spending \$100 000 or \$200 000 in fighting off the award. I can assure the parents, teachers and students in South Australian schools that that investment, if it can prevent an annual expenditure every year of \$137 million, is money well spent on behalf of the taxpayers of South Australia.

**Mr BRINDAL:** As a supplementary question, I understand your answer to be that you have provided for \$35 million but that anything over the \$35 million will have to be borne either from further cuts in the education budget or from increased taxes, if the Premier and the Cabinet agree to that. Am I right?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** They are the only two options, Mr Chairman.

**Mr BRINDAL:** The member for Playford talked about the juggling of figures and \$29 million—but according to the member for Playford we are not sure whether it is there or is not there. I was privileged to go to Woodend to see the new school opened, and in my electorate I am most interested in The Orphanage. In the context of both of those things, what alternative sources of funding is the Minister pursuing for the department, especially in terms of capital improvements to schools in South Australia, that would not appear in the budget papers?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** They indirectly appear in some of the papers, and that will allow us to discuss them. The honourable member referred to Woodend, and I know he has taken an interest in that development, which was recently opened by the Premier and which has involved officers of the Department of Education and Children's Services and of the Department of Building Management, and the private developers, Hickinbotham's which, as the honourable member would know, was very active in pursuing that option for the residents of the Woodend community. At a time when we are struggling for additional money, are having to balance our State budget and to reduce the State debt, these sorts of innovative or new financing options are options that I as Minister believe and the Government believes we need to consider. They have the advantage of being able to bring forward capital works developments which otherwise would not have been able to occur without these propositions. Woodend simply was a school built by a private developer which we now lease from that developer, Hickinbotham, and we are able to provide that new school in the Woodend community much earlier than otherwise would have been possible, given our difficult financial circumstances.

In relation to the Orphanage, which is in the honourable member's electorate, I am advised that over the years a number of suggestions have been made to the previous Government, and to the new Government, about the future of the Orphanage. A number of people, both to the previous Government, to previous Ministers and certainly to the new Government, have suggested that it is a very palatable piece of real estate in terms of dollars that might be recouped from its sale. As Minister, I considered the propositions that were put to me. However, in the end I rejected the proposition of

selling the Orphanage, for a variety of reasons. The principal reason is the service that it provides as a training and development centre for our thousands of teachers throughout schools in South Australia. As the local member, I am sure that the member for Unley would have had a particular interest in any alternative uses of the site, should the Government have decided to go down that path.

The proposition the Government has agreed to in the end is a very innovative one—I congratulate officers of the department for the work they have done, together with Taball College—which will basically recoup for us about \$1.2 million, and that will be available for use in other school communities in South Australia. Basically, it involves a theological college being built on about a third of the site at the Orphanage. A prominent architect has been employed to ensure that the type of development fits in with the ambience of the Orphanage and of that area. As the honourable member would know, through his assiduous efforts and those of others, the interests of local constituents have been protected in relation to access to recreational facilities, parks and tennis courts. Also, the vexed issue of car parking, which I know is of concern to the residents of Mitchell Street and other related streets around the Orphanage, again through the work of the local member and other officers has been protected as well. Again, that has in effect meant that we now have \$1.2 million that we are able to use on other communities.

The Government is now about to conclude a third innovative financing arrangement, which will recoup for other schools and students in South Australia \$1.5 million, that is, the Government will enter into an arrangement with the private company C&G for the sale and lease back of Schools in Houses at the Hallett Cove East Primary School. Members will know that the Schools in Houses concept was one commenced by the previous Government for which we congratulate previous Governments and Ministers, and this Government is continuing that proposition. The intention is that, further down the track, when the enrolment numbers decline, those houses can be sold and used as residential housing next door to schools. In effect, this Government has brought that forward and we have sold those Schools in Houses to C&G who will be organising the mums and dads of South Australia, with their savings and superannuation funds and whatever else, into an investment fund. They will purchase those Schools in Houses, and we will then lease them back from C&G. This proposition has worked very successfully with the defence services. Previous companies, because they have a guaranteed income stream, have been able to use this proposition. They have pooled together the savings of the mums and dads of Australia and South Australia and have then been engaged in sale lease back arrangements with the Commonwealth Government very successfully.

There will be no change at the school for the students, teachers and staff; they will continue as they exist at the moment. It is just a financing arrangement which generates \$1.5 million to be spent on education capital works in other communities in South Australia. There is the possible need for some expansion at Hallett Cove East in the short term, and the Government is considering discussions with C&G as to whether it will finance and fund a few more houses at Hallett Cove East so that we can plan the expansion of Hallett Cove East. Again, if that is successful—and no decisions have been taken on that aspect of the deal at this stage—we will be able to fund the further needs of that student and

teaching community, without having an up-front capital works investment on the capital works budget.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I am sure that most members would like to congratulate you on your innovative approach and lateral thinking in the area of education. We all know it is a very difficult area for you. On our side of the House, some of the Opposition, perhaps grudgingly, are most impressed with what you have been doing in this area. The Auditor-General's papers are not available and they are critical to Estimates Committees; but is the Auditor-General an officer of the Government or is he an officer of the Parliament? Will the Minister ask Cabinet to look at this matter? It might be the Parliament that needs to get the Auditor-General to change his procedures, not the Cabinet.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The Auditor-General is an officer who reports to Parliament. Obviously, the Government and the Premier of the day may well have an attitude on that issue, as will the member for Playford and, indeed, others. There is no doubting that the early introduction of the budget causes problems not only for Opposition members but, as I indicated earlier, for many departmental officers. In effect, we are going through an analysis of the 1994-95 expenditure when we actually have not finalised our accounts. So we have to work on estimated final year accounts. That issue will have to be taken up with the Auditor-General. As I understand it, during the September sessions of the Parliament, there was to be some opportunity—and I would need to check this with the Premier and Deputy Premier—for consideration of the Auditor-General's Report.

When the Commonwealth Government brought forward its budget, we realised that we needed to bring forward our budget, as all other State Governments are doing, and that that would cause particular problems. I thought at that time that one of the suggestions was that there would be an opportunity in the September session—I see the Chairman nodding, so he may well have more information—for all members to debate and discuss and put questions to the Government and Ministers on issues raised by the Auditor-General's Report.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The comment by the member for Playford regarding the Auditor-General has been noted and will be referred to the House. The Minister is quite right: there will be an opportunity for all members to discuss the Auditor-General's Report and, at next year's Budget Estimates, the Committee can work from the previous Auditor-General's Report if it wishes, although the figures will not be up to date, but there is no doubt that there will be a change in the system. It is ironic that the member for Playford and the member for Unley are members of the Economic and Finance Committee and will have the opportunity to examine the question of the Auditor-General later when his report is brought down.

**Ms STEVENS:** My question relates to Financial Paper No. 2 (page 57, line 12). The capital works program shows that at least seven major works have been slipped from 1994-95 to 1995-96. In his previous answer, the Minister explained the issues relating to the new Tanunda school, the Glossop Secondary School, the Seaton High School and the Coromandel Valley High School. While these reasons are understood, they do not explain why the department's program is not directed at projects that are ready to go. There appears to be a significant problem with the program process, even I might say in relation to putting those other projects on the schedule while communities are still resolving issues in relation to them. Far be it from me to impute to the Minister

motives other than those of the highest order, but my question is: why were projects funded when design and other issues had not been resolved and it was quite obvious that the money would not be spent in the year for which it was budgeted?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The procedure that the Government has used on this occasion has been exactly the same as the procedure used by the Labor Government for the past 10 or 12 years. This Government has not introduced in the capital works budget area any new procedure that is different from other areas. Perhaps the honourable member's question is, basically, whether this Government and the previous Labor Government have got it wrong and whether we ought to change those procedures. If that is the question, we can consider that, but the dilemma with the proposition suggested by the honourable member is that, basically, a Government, of whichever persuasion (Liberal or Labor) in the formulation of any budget would not announce any projected capital works program as going ahead because, as the honourable member suggests, everything would have to be resolved down to the final design before any announcement were made. I would envisage significant problems if any Government—whether it be this Government or a Labor Government—were to be hamstrung by those sorts of restrictions. Nevertheless, I will give the matter further consideration, but I would have to suggest that it is unlikely that the general procedures would change from the ones that have been adopted for some time by both Governments.

**Ms STEVENS:** I ask a supplementary question. I thank the Minister for his undertaking to give the matter further consideration. I think this issue needs to be considered, because it seems to me that, obviously, we need to be as accurate as we can in relation to what projects are coming up and what money is to be spent, because this could be seen as a way of squirreling away money while knowing full well that it would not be spent during the year.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I assure the honourable member that there never was and never will be any intention of squirreling away money that we do know we will not spend. It is quite clear in the budget documents that, in relation to some of the bigger projects, we intended to spend only a smaller proportion of the total budget in this financial year. We made the announcement last August, we knew that a lot of discussion would have to occur, and we hoped that the projects would be up and running by the fourth quarter of the financial year (sometime between March, April, May and June) with the projects being in full stream in the next financial year.

In a number of cases, communities have come to us and said that they want to look at something different, so those projects have slipped. The Government was not in a position to know when it put down its budget in July/August last year that a community would come along and say, 'We want something completely different now because we think we can do this or that.' I cannot respond in greater detail other than to say that it would create some significant problems. I am prepared to consider the matter, but in my judgment it is unlikely that we will change our current procedures.

**Ms STEVENS:** I ask a further supplementary question. In response to the Minister's statement that a community may have wanted to change its mind, I think that indicates a possible fault in the program process. Surely there needs to be a time when the line is drawn.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** That is true, but it is a question of where you draw the line. The honourable member is suggest-

ing that we draw it much earlier. Governments, both past and present, believe that, in some cases, you should make a judgment about how much the capital works program can afford. For example, a school may want to spend \$8 million from the capital works program. The Government would consider that, look at its budget, and then it might say, 'That's a terrific idea, but we don't have \$8 million; you can have \$5 million, and we'll need to sit down with you and revise your ideal program in the light of what the budget can afford.' Communities will come to the Government and put forward propositions, and in the end the Government will say, 'We can't afford \$8 million, but we can afford, say, \$5 million.' We then sit down with that community and try to resolve the matter.

**Ms STEVENS:** Why were the following projects delayed: the Inbarendi redevelopment at the Elizabeth South High School, Seacliff Primary School, and the Seaford 6-12 school, which the Opposition believes were ready to go?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Some problems have occurred at the Seacliff Primary School, and I will supply the honourable member with the details. I am not sure of the particular delays at the Seaford school, so I will take that question on notice and provide the honourable member with that information. I am advised that Cabinet approval for the Inbarendi redevelopment was arrived at finally in June of this year at a total gross estimated cost of \$3.25 million. The latest suggestion is that construction will commence in September or October of this year with completion and occupation on a progressive basis, and that the total project will be completed hopefully—I say 'hopefully'—in August 1996. I know that the honourable member has a particular interest in Inbarendi, but I am not aware of the specific reasons for the delay. If I can obtain any further information, I will give that to the honourable member or provide her with a written answer on notice.

**Ms STEVENS:** I ask a supplementary question regarding Inbarendi. The Minister stated in his answer that construction would begin in September or October. I know that the school council is concerned and that there has been an agreement that the basic facilities will be fast tracked so that they will be ready at the beginning of the 1996 school year. Can the Minister assure me that the basic classrooms, in other words for students to go into—we are not talking about the music-drama area, which I understand will take a bit longer—will be ready? Because, if it is not, it will mean that classes will be out on the oval. There will be 1 000 kids on that site next year and if those things are not done this time on time they will be on the oval.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We can seek through the Committee's proceedings today to get the detail. As I have read to the member, I am told that there will be occupation on a progressive basis. What we need to know is what will be available in February of next year. Certainly, my understanding is that students, because the schools are being amalgamated, will be catered for by February of next year—obviously from the start of the school year—but I will check that with our facilities people and see if we can provide a response. In relation to the issue of delay, one part of the extensive discussions that have been occurring is in relation to the performing arts centre. The member will know of the interest of Mr Colwyn Low and a variety of other very interested local constituents in relation to this aspect of the proposal. My recollection is that there was some suggestion that the Elizabeth City Council was looking at some sort of venue and whether or not the needs of the school and the needs of the local community might be married in some way

in terms of a performing arts venue. My understanding is that that has not eventuated and we are to proceed separately, but, as I understand it, that was another one of the reasons why there was some delay in getting that particular program up and going.

**Ms STEVENS:** As a further supplementary on that one, the school community understands that the performing arts and drama centre will take longer, but the absolutely critical issue will be the other classrooms that students will have to be in at the beginning of the year. They are very concerned, because this was to be done last year and the starting date is now towards the end of this year, that we will have 1 000 students on the site with nowhere to go.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I repeat what I said to the last question: I understand what the question is and my understanding is that students will be able to be accommodated from the start of the school year next year, but we will check that through the day for you and try to give you a response.

**Ms STEVENS:** Does the Minister expect to achieve the budgeted expenditure this year of \$90.6 million in the capital works budget; and what steps has he taken to provide additional staff and resources to achieve the program?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Our expectation is that we will meet that particular line, but we are subject to all the sorts of issues that I have raised in response to a range of previous questions. We will have to view the final expenditure within that light. As I said, one issue, hopefully, is the encouraging signs of the property market recovering and we hope that a number of the properties that are now surplus to our requirements will be able to be sold. We hope that things such as ecologically sustainable developments at various schools can be resolved one way or another and we can get those particular propositions up and going. Certainly, it is our intention obviously—we would not have put it in the budget otherwise—to meet that budget line: we will do our very best to do so.

**Ms STEVENS:** A supplementary question. Are you saying that whether you can meet this expenditure will depend on the sale of properties? What has that to do with whether you will spend your \$90.6 million?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** That is nothing different; that has always been the case. There is an expenditure and revenue line within the capital works budget. One of the revenue lines relates to sale of land, buildings and properties within the education budget. We are very lucky within the Department for Education and Children's Services in that we are the only agency, as I understand, that keeps the money from its property sales to plough back into future capital works. Whatever properties we can sell, we can then plough back into capital works. If we do not sell them, we do not have the money: it is as simple as that. That is no different from the way in which the capital works items operated under the previous Government. This Government has continued it and the budget line is around \$15 million out of \$90 million that is predicated on land and property sales.

**Ms STEVENS:** A further supplementary.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Not another supplementary!

**Ms STEVENS:** I have two more to go.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Elizabeth, you are pushing your luck. There are three questions, perhaps a supplementary or two; three is the limit. We have now had five supplementaries. You want six.

**Ms STEVENS:** I thought I had two more to go, but I defer to your judgment, Mr Chair.

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, you have had three questions and I can come back to you after the Government members.

**Mr LEGGETT:** On the Estimates of Payments, page 58, there is enormous public and school community speculation about the imminent privatisation of school administration. Does the Minister plan to privatise school administration; and what role does the company, Serco, play in all of this?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The Government's position on the Serco proposition is simply that we were approached by Serco some time through last year. Unlike other outsourcing propositions where the Government has been actively pursuing outsourcing, this suggestion came, not from the Government or the Minister, but from a third party that approached us—Serco. I indicated to it, and I have done so publicly, that I have a number of concerns with the proposition in terms of outsourcing the whole administrative function of our schools. Some of those are in relation to whether or not a third party can truly understand and reflect the mix of administrative and educational function of our much valued school services officers within our schools. The second area is, obviously, that a whole range of difficult industrial issues would need to be negotiated. I guess they are not insurmountable, in that they have been resolved, to some degree, in other outsourcing options with which the Government has proceeded. But there were a range of issues and concerns that I had. I said to Serco, 'Look, I am not prepared to agree to your proposition in the form that you have put it. I am not prepared to agree to proceeding with it.'

All I am prepared to do at this stage is to establish a working party to see whether or not we might have a trial of your proposition in a small number of schools.' It is fair to say that there are some principals and schools out there that are pretty keen to trial the proposition. I know the vast majority are not. If you listen to the opposition from the Institute of Teachers and others you might suspect that there are not, but there are a small number of schools that are interested in trialing the proposition. The question for the Government is whether or not we will allow two consenting adults, or parties—willing principals and schools and willing Serco—to come together in some temporary union to explore this proposition. I still have concerns with that and that is why the working party is looking at it. It will provide advice to me and then we will make a final decision on whether we will even allow such a proposition to be explored.

**Mr LEGGETT:** On Estimates of Payments, page 58, the Government has indicated a strong commitment to the early years of education. Can the Minister indicate the extent to which this commitment has already been met?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am pleased to be able to report to the Committee because I talked about this in the early stages of last year: the number one priority for the Government being the early years of education, and the fact that we need to spend more, do more and be more effective in relation to the whole early years of education. The Government committed \$10 million over four years (a minimum of that) for the early years' strategy. For the benefit of members, the early years' strategy is the umbrella strategy. Within that there are many components and they will change over the period of time. The key one for us this year is an expenditure of almost \$4 million on Cornerstones, which is an ambitious attempt to try to provide training and development to almost 4 000 junior primary and preschool teachers throughout South Australia—training and development which those teachers are conducting in school time and in their own time as their commitment to the program.

The program is designed solely to try to provide all our classroom teachers in those early years with greater skills in the identification of those students with learning difficulties and, secondly, to provide them with best practice in terms of classroom teaching methodology and classroom teaching skills in tackling those issues of students with learning difficulties within their classrooms. We have also increased expenditure for speech pathology services and guidance officer services as elements of the early years strategy.

The Government's commitment to basic skills testing is another component of the early years strategy, and there is a range of early intervention programs, such as the reading recovery program which, as the members for Playford, Elizabeth and Taylor will know, is of much interest to a number of schools in their areas. In the Children's Services section of the department, there are a number of pilot programs such as Eclipse and First Start, which are exploring what we can do in the early identification of children's learning difficulties, not just leaving it to junior primary, but tackling it, if we can, within the four year old program in kindergartens and in child-care centres where the nought to four year olds are, and also tackling it, if we can, in conjunction with parents in their homes, as we can, with families under stress.

In the latest budget there is a funding commitment for another pilot program of \$100 000 within the Children's Services section for the Parents as Teachers program. Through that program we are looking to work with parents as the first teachers of children and assist them, together with our staff, in the identification of learning difficulties that might exist at that very early stage with children in the family environment, working with families in their homes, if they wish, to provide that additional assistance. Even the Focus School program, which we announced this year, is another strand to the early years strategy. A small number of focus junior primary schools are looking at the whole area of numeracy: at how those skills are acquired by young children within our schools.

As I said, I see the early years strategy evolving and developing. Hopefully we can retain and continue to resource the good bits—the bits that are shown to be working—and those that are unsuccessful or not working will be discarded as we move through that assessment and evaluation of the early years strategy.

**Mr LEGGETT:** Referring to page 58 of the Estimates of Payments, I understand that basic skills tests will be introduced this year and, to date, they have cost something in the vicinity of \$500 000. That is great, but might not this money have been better directed to children who have known learning difficulties?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I thank the honourable member for that question because I know that that issue has been put to him by some teachers. I know that it is the attitude of the Institute of Teachers and some members of our academic community. The figure of \$500 000, which I have used previously, is not actually money that has been spent yet, but it is the estimated cost through this next financial year of the basic skills tests. That works out at around \$10 a head for 30 000 students, which is \$300 000. Then we have the administrative costs over and above that for salaries and test development.

We were much heartened by the pilot program that we conducted in schools last year. The program was run to try to wrinkle the bugs out of the system and, clearly, with any new system there will be some issues that we will need to

address. The heartening thing was that, even though there were some teething problems, the survey responses from parents, in particular, demonstrated overwhelming support and there was no opposition from the overwhelming majority of parents to the simple notion that, on two mornings in 13 years of education, their children would be tested in some aspects of numeracy and literacy. It is hardly, from the Government's viewpoint and that of some members of the Labor Party, although obviously I will not name them—

**Mr QUIRKE:** Go on, name them.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member for Playford challenges me to name them, but I would not want to embarrass those members who have confided to me their support in the privacy of the lobbies of this Chamber. It goes something like this, 'It is about time this was done. We weren't game to do it for years because of the Institute of Teachers. You have our full support.' I can name six members of the current Labor Party who—

**Mr QUIRKE:** That doesn't leave too many.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** No, it does not! I can name six members of the current Labor Party who have confided in me. Further, four members of the shadow Cabinet have indicated their support for the Government proposition of the introduction of basic skills testing. I will leave it for Labor members to have discussions with their colleagues on those issues. I understand the politics from the Labor Party's viewpoint in relation to it, but the Government was elected to govern and this was a clear commitment to be introduced. We will not be swayed by the opposition from the Institute of Teachers or a small number of academics with particular interests in this area. We are committed to the educational value of these programs.

As I said, we have received overwhelming support from parents. The South Australian Association of State School Organisations, the peak parent body in South Australia, has publicly and loudly supported the proposition of basic skills testing within our schools. The notion that, for two mornings in 13 years when our children are tested independently in some aspects of numeracy and literacy, our year threes and year fives will be terrorised and scarred for life is too hard for any logical and rational person to accept. The Government will continue to work with the interested parties to try to alleviate their concerns about basic skills testing, but, nevertheless, with the absolute commitment to the introduction of those tests in August this year and for the continued use of those tests for a variety of purposes in helping to identify students with learning difficulties, and to provide a safety net for those parents who have come to me and other members over the years expressing their concerns about this problem.

Many parents have suspected there was something wrong with their child but, when they spoke to the teacher or principal, they were told it was a developmental delay and to wait another year. The following year they were told the same sort of thing. One of the most striking examples of that occurred at a public meeting I attended in the area represented by the member for Playford and the member for Florey. I remember that two parents came to me afterwards and provided written documentation of their struggle, in one case over four years, to have recognised within the system the particular learning difficulty of her son and her support for the propositions that the Government was putting forward with respect to early education and basic skills testing.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer to the lines relating to provision of secondary education in schools. On 9 February the Minister



said that enrolments in South Australian schools had fallen by 4 000 students, and this raises the important issues of student retention, curriculum, pathways, resources and the effect of the introduction of the South Australian Certificate of Education. Then on 31 May the Minister told the Legislative Council that SSABSA was planning a review later this year or early next year of some or all of the aspects of SACE and that this issue of falling rates might be considered. I certainly agree with the Minister that there may well be a connection between falling retention rates and the introduction of SACE, and I would welcome some assurance that this issue will be considered as part of a review. My first question to the Minister is: who will be conducting this review; is it the Minister's intention that SSABSA address these issues; or will an independent look be taken at the introduction of SACE?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** As I have said on a number of occasions, it has been suggested that one of the reasons for falling rates may well be the introduction of SACE. Certainly there is some anecdotal evidence of that, but that link has not yet been proved. It certainly would be my wish that any review of the South Australian Certificate of Education would canvass that issue, and I will be making my wishes in terms of that particular review known to the independent body, the Senior Secondary Assessment Board. Dr Jan Keightley, who is the head of SSABSA, an independent agency over which I, as Minister, have no power to direct, will be attending this afternoon, and I think that we can productively explore that question with her. I can express a view, as I am sure all members can express views, but she might be able to indicate in greater detail the potential framework of a review, the time frame and whether this will be covered.

Having had discussions with Dr Keightley, I would be very surprised if she does not indicate that this issue will be considered in the review. The nature of that review—whether it is conducted by SSABSA, an independent body or a committee—has not been resolved at this stage. We are in the initial stages of discussion and I do not think that Dr Keightley will be able to give the final answer to that. It will need to be discussed and considered over the coming months.

**Ms WHITE:** I have a supplementary question. Is the Minister saying that the issues to be looked at in that review have not been resolved at all? Can I have an indication of what they will be?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I think it is fair to say that Dr Keightley will indicate that a final decision has not yet been taken on what issues will be covered by the review. However, as I indicated, I would be very surprised if Dr Keightley did not indicate that this would be one of the issues that could be considered by it. There are many other issues that need to be looked at. Any review of SACE would have to look at the compulsory nature of some elements within the Certificate of Education; the issue of languages and compulsory languages is one which a particular section of the education community has been arguing strongly ought to be addressed within the South Australian Certificate of Education; there has been the debate as to whether or not Australian studies ought to be a compulsory component of stage 1; there has been a debate about how the South Australian Certificate will link in with our new curriculum statements and profiles and what those linkages are going to be; and there has been a debate about the assessment methods in stage 1 of SACE, and whether this satisfactory recorded achievement is suitable as a measure of performance at stage 1. Some argue that there

should be some gradation in performance within the stage 1 SACE.

Also, there has been debate about whether or not the number of units ought to be extended within the two year program, so there are dozens of issues that have been suggested as part of a review. I suspect that most of those issues will be considered and, as I said, I would be very surprised if Dr Keightley does not say that the issue raised by the honourable member will be considered as part of an overall review.

**Ms WHITE:** Can the Minister indicate whether it is his wish that public and community groups will be invited to participate in the review? Will the Minister publish the results of any review?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** It would be my very strong wish—and I am sure Dr Keightley will give the same indication—that there will be wide consultation with anyone with an interest in the review: parents, community groups, business, unions and anyone with a particular interest. However, it will be for Dr Keightley to give some indication of that this afternoon. It is certainly my view that the results of a publicly conducted review, such as this one, ought to be made available.

**Mr VENNING:** Students in rural South Australia face particular challenges in their education. I note that the Government has dedicated 70 open-access salaries to country schools. What else is the Government doing to assist country students and to address their particular needs?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The 70 open-access salaries are important for country area schools and high schools in terms of trying to protect the curricula that those particular schools offer to their students. Whilst the Government has announced as part of its budget strategy a reduction of some 50 to 100 above formula salaries, it has quarantined two areas—the first of which is the area of special education because of the Government's commitment to assisting students with disabilities and those students with learning difficulties; the second area is this package of 70 open-access salaries for country and area schools. We see that as a significant indication of the priority the Government has given to students in country and regional schools in South Australia.

For some time the Area Principals Association has been lobbying a number of Governments and Ministers to look at the notion of some level of average staffing over a three year period. It argues on a basis that in small schools the loss of just a handful of students can have a greater effect on curriculum offerings than the loss of a teacher in a bigger regional or metropolitan based high school. I can understand why previous Ministers have rejected that. Quite simply, irrespective of what Government is in office, an Education Department gets a budget for only one year and, if you lock yourself in for three years' worth of staffing commitments, you create significant dilemmas for yourself in the second and third years if the Government decides to rein in expenditure. So I can understand that and therefore, as other Ministers before me, I have not been able to give a commitment.

However, I treat the proposition of the Area Principals Association seriously and I have indicated that, after the budget process has been completed, I will ensure that an officer from my department will meet with the association or its nominated officers and endeavour to work out what it might cost a Government if it were to engage in an average staffing policy over a three year period. I am not sure whether we will have to do that on the basis of the past three years or projected three years and will leave that to the good sense of

officers in my department and within the Area Principals Association. I need to be in a position as Minister to know whether or not the fears of previous Ministers were correct. We need to know what will be the possible cost to the system if we were to engage in such a commitment.

What area principals have to accept (and they say that they are prepared to at this stage) is that, whilst they may not lose a teacher if they lose four or five students and drop under the level, equally they might not gain a teacher if they go three or four students above a plateau level. There would be an average level of staffing. Clearly, if there is an extraordinary increase we would have to factor in that, but with minor changes above or below they would have to accept the average for the three years. On that basis it may reduce the potential cost to the system. I understand the logic of what area principals have been arguing and why they want to do it, and I am prepared to ensure that our officers have discussions with them to see what are the true costs and look at it in the context of future budget commitments in terms of a country education policy for country students. I will not delay the committee in terms of what we are doing and intend to do in terms of country education, but those two key issues in terms of curriculum offerings for secondary age students look at the heart of the dilemma for country education in South Australia.

**Mr SCALZI:** Minister, you have outlined the financial consequences of moving to the Federal award for teachers. As you know, an important component of the budget for 1995-96 is the training and development of teachers. Can you outline how the budget allocation for training and development will be spent in 1995-96 and what will be the curriculum priorities for it? Does the way in which the funding will be expended recognise the work that teachers do out of normal contact hours? As a former teacher I have had discussions with teachers and SAIT members, as I am also a SAIT member, and they can understand the financial restraints on the Government. Will that work be given recognition?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will have to take some aspects of that question on notice. Broadly, we have about a \$2 million training and development budget. That does not incorporate a whole range of other specific initiatives. For example, the Cornerstones program to which I have referred is a massive training and development program this year which will cost about \$4 million. That is a substantial one-off program. The \$2 million figure is the standard ongoing training and development budget that we provide.

In the area of the curriculum statements and profiles, for example, the Government has committed \$4.7 million over the next two years. We are in the process at the moment of providing about \$800 000 in direct grants to schools to assist them in the implementation of the statements and profiles, which to a degree will help with training and development—it may help in the production of support materials—in a range of issues they deem to be important in terms of statements and profiles. In December another \$800 000 to \$900 000 will go out directly as grants to schools. Members have great delight in presenting cheques to their schools following on the precedent that the previous Government established with the back-to-school grants scheme, which this Government has continued. It is my intention that these two programs this month and in November or December of this year will be opportunities for members to maintain their ongoing contact with their school communities and present them with a contribution towards the training and development effort and

preparation of support materials effort—the total effort for statements and profiles.

*Mr Quirke interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member for Playford has a particular interest in EDSAS. I understand the training programs to accompany the EDSAS initiative are about \$1.7 million this year for EDSAS. As the member knows, the Government has ploughed about \$8 million this year into EDSAS to try to get it up and going for the benefit of schools and school communities. Of that I am advised that about \$1.7 million is for training and development for SSOs and others within our schools. The Government is about to move into the tendering stage for a physical education and sport and health training and development package of around about \$100 000 or so. There are a range of other special programs with training and development, together with the overall budget of \$2 million. In conclusion, if I can provide any further information to the honourable member I will do so, in terms of the overall context of training and development.

I place on the public record my acknowledgment of the tremendous work that the vast majority of our teachers do in terms of skilling themselves for the teaching area of expertise. I know, because I attend and open dozens of conferences in a year that commence at about 8.30 a.m. or 9.30 a.m. on Sunday morning, and a good number of teachers—thousands of them during the year—give up their own time on Sundays, Saturdays and after hours, for training and development. Equally, we are giving a commitment, too, in terms of time off during school hours. In the budget we indicated that we would like to see some change in that mix and we have indicated, as with any occupation, politicians included (present company excepted, I am sure) that you have your good performers and others who are not such good performers and the vast majority are somewhere in between. It is true that some members of our teaching force are not upgrading their teaching skills and not devoting their own hours and time to the improvement of their skills and the Government would like to be party to encouraging them to do so.

**Mr SCALZI:** The Government has indicated a strong commitment to improving behaviour management in schools. Will the Minister indicate the extent to which this commitment has been met?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I can give an initial response, and if there is anything further we can take it on notice and get back to him. I have been pleased with the response from the departmental officers and the system to the Government's commitment in this area. In the last budget we indicated a commitment of \$2 million extra over two years in the area of behaviour management. I am told that the new alternative school/learning centre at the Hub (the Hub Learning Centre), is under way and operating successfully with no concerns of which I am aware from local residents, students and teachers in the neighbouring vicinity. It is operating as an annexe of Bowden/Brompton Community School. I have indicated publicly my admiration for the work that Lyn Simon and the staff have done at the Bowden/Brompton Community School. It is a very important niche within our public education provision. It provides for the small group of students that all of our principals and teachers in the system have struggled with for a while and have now said 'No more'. We may have struggled with them in our learning centres and exclusion programs for periods up to 10 weeks and have not been able to change their behaviour in that area and have had to provide programs for up to a year (or in some cases beyond a year) for the benefit of those students but, frankly, for the benefit

of everyone else in the system—every other student in the class and every other teacher in the school. You only need one or two of these students in a school—the real hard core—to potentially ruin the education of not only the class but the whole school. Liberal and Labor members, from the top down, have approached me with the particular problems regarding the isolated student at a particular school in their electorate who is basically wreaking havoc in a particular school community. That aspect of the budget has worked well. The expansion by up to 50 per cent in the number of learning places equally is on track and working well also.

One of the initiatives there is that, sadly, we have had to provide for additional places for junior primary-aged and primary-aged students within our learning centres. That applies to those students in junior primary and primary schools who the schools have been unable to cope with through their normal behaviour management programs. They have found that, even with suspensions and the normal behaviour management programs, behaviour of those young ones is not changing. We have had to provide for more places for junior primary-aged students and primary-aged students within our learning centres where they can be excluded for up to 10 weeks and for experts within behaviour management to work with those young people to try to change their behaviour before they return to their school or another school.

Frankly, as honourable members will know, there are some students, even at that stage, with whom we struggle to cope as a system in terms of changing their behaviour. They have very sad family histories through no fault of their own in the first place. In many cases they are six, seven, eight and nine years old and they cause tremendous havoc and destruction in some schools and in the educational communities—the educational programs—in those schools. We cannot expect those school communities to cope without the support that the Government is providing through the additional assistance in learning centres and exclusion programs.

**Mr QUIRKE:** On 19 April, the Minister for Industrial Affairs suggested changes to Government employee housing in country areas. The changes were rents to market rates; enhanced purchase schemes for tenants and a security bond for all new tenants. Previously, factors such as location—

**Mr Brindal:** What about teacher housing?

**Mr QUIRKE:** Does the honourable member really want to talk about teacher housing? Previously, factors such as location and isolation were factors in determining rents. Obviously, the new system will produce some anomalies. How many teachers will be affected by this decision? What offsets are being proposed by the Minister where increased rentals make it harder to get staff to certain locations and, in particular, to recruit young people into some of the more remote areas of South Australia?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I thank the honourable member for his question. It is of particular interest to me as Minister for Education and Children's Services in terms of trying to ensure that we continue to encourage experienced and new teachers to country areas, and in particular to remote country areas. I have met the institute. It rang me on a Wednesday and asked to meet me urgently and, by Friday morning, we met to discuss the issue. May I indicate, as I have indicated publicly on several occasions, that we are always prepared to meet the institute in relation to issues about which it may be concerned. That was a further example of an occasion when, at very short notice, we made time available to meet the institute to discuss that important issue.

It is important to note that, from my understanding, the final decisions in relation to the issue have not yet been locked in concrete. I have had discussions with the institute and subsequently with the Minister. The Minister has met representatives who have expressed similar concerns to him. He has told me that he is considering a number of those issues. Therefore, before we work out what we do as an agency in relation to a possible decision, we need to wait until the final decision is taken by the Minister and the particular Government agency—the Government Employee Housing Authority—which is involved in the area. There are particular concerns, for example with regard to contract teachers who have been posted to the country and who might have been unemployed. Having to find four weeks of bond money up front is a particular difficulty for a person in that position. I understand that issue and it is one of the issues that I am discussing with the Minister and other officers.

I understand that, in some cases, we have problems in relation to what is true market rent. For example, in respect of the market in Mount Gambier, there are not significant differences between the market rents and what the Teacher Housing Authority is charging. I will not say that the \$10 would cause significant problems, but there is not much of a difference between market rent and what the agency is currently charging its teachers.

However, in other areas where there is a very short supply of private rental accommodation such as Ceduna and the West Coast and some parts of the Iron Triangle, because of a shortage of supply, the market rent is significantly higher—up to \$150 or \$160—than what might be currently charged in those areas. We will have to work through issues like that with the Minister and the agency to ensure that our teachers are not disadvantaged by what, generally in principle from the Government, has been support for a move to closer consistency with market rents. In my discussions with the institute, and through Lou Davey who is a member of the committee and the subcommittee which is examining the issue, it is clear that there is already agreement that the sorts of issues that I have raised are the issues on which the committee is being asked to provide expert advice to the authority and the Minister.

In broad terms, I understand some of the concerns of some teachers and the institute. I have met them and I am going to consider those issues to see what, if anything, the Government might need to do to ensure that we can continue to provide the quality teachers to remote and country areas of South Australia.

My final point is a bit of a hobby horse of mine. I would be very surprised if the honourable member for Playford, in his quieter moments, would not agree with this. The notion of provision of country teacher housing subsidies and support for areas like the Barossa Valley, the Fleurieu Peninsula or just over the Adelaide hills probably does not carry as much weight for me as the Minister as the need to provide subsidies and assistance for areas like the West Coast, the Far North and areas like that where we have great difficulty attracting anyone to go to those areas to teach.

It is fair to say that the honourable member will know that, in the past, we have not made the distinction between those particular potential locations. We have continued to provide subsidies and assistance. I can understand the institute's position that if that agreement exists, it would want to continue with it. At this stage, I am not saying that we have taken a decision in relation to that point because it is not for us to take such decisions off our own bat. However, as I indicated when I was shadow Minister and as I indicate now

as Minister, it is an issue in respect of which most teachers and parents believe there should be a distinction between the level of subsidies and assistance provided to the Barossa Valley as opposed to that provided to Cook.

**Mr QUIRKE:** Since I was employed by the department, I have believed for 25 years that if you want someone to do a job you pay for it. In the 25 years that I have been involved, I have seen many schemes to get someone on exactly the same wage to go out and do a job where it will cost a great deal more and in respect of which the dislocation expenses involved are a great deal more. Housing is just a small part of that equation. Does the Minister support the sale of housing stock in remote localities which may reduce the department's flexibility in moving staff? Does he have any control over whether teacher housing may be sold to tenants under the new scheme? Are you driving this, Minister, or is it Minister Ingerson?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am not in the driving seat. Based on memory, and I seek guidance on this, I think that it was a decision taken by the previous Government in respect of bulking up Government employee housing and putting it into a Government Employee Housing Authority. It was a decision taken by the honourable member's Government. In respect of bulking up the Teacher Housing Authority, the honourable member in effect said that the Minister for Education and Children's Services was not in the driving seat. He said that the Government Employee Housing Authority and the Minister who works with that authority were in the driving seat. The answer is no, I am not in the driving seat in relation to this issue. Because of the decision to which I have referred, it is a matter now for another Minister. Obviously I have an interest, and if the honourable member or the institute has any concern about it I would be happy to consider it.

**Mr QUIRKE:** During the election campaign the Liberal Party said that it would make \$10 million available to non-government schools as an interest free loan for capital projects such as the construction of new schools. Last year the Minister told the non-government schools that the promise had to be deferred because of financial constraints. Last April the Minister asked the advisory committee on non-government schools to look at ways in which an interest free loan of \$10 million from SAFA could be allocated. Will the non-government schools receive the promised loan this year?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Because of the difficult economic and financial circumstances that confront the State of South Australia, we are not in a position to be able to keep that commitment to the non-government schools. So, there is nothing in the budget papers which indicates that the Government will be able to meet that commitment for a \$10 million interest-free loan facility for non-government schools. Nevertheless, when budgetary circumstances permit, the Government would be interested in exploring ways of ensuring, in developing areas where we have to provide for new schools, that we can provide some assistance for non-government school authorities in the building and construction of new schools. In my judgment it is in our best interests to encourage both Government and non-government schools to be built in developing areas.

Most other States, both Labor and Liberal, provide some measure of capital assistance to schools in developing areas. We are one of the few States, if not the only one, that does not provide some assistance. The answer to the question is that we are in difficult economic circumstances and, as I said to Government schools, teachers and authorities, a lot of the

things we might like to do we cannot do because of difficult financial circumstances. Sadly, I have had to say the same thing to the non-government schools, teachers, parents and authorities. I have said that I know we made that commitment but that we had to defer it; it was not in the last budget and we have not been able to include it in this budget, either.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I wish to follow up a question of the member for Playford with regard to teacher housing and explore a couple of things. It is all right for another Minister to drive this but, as the Minister for Education concerned with teachers, a number of very important issues arise not the least of which is how does one fix market rent in a place such as Cook where there simply is no housing available other than that provided by employers. Secondly, I believe that it has become increasingly the practice, if market rent cannot be fixed, to fix the rent by determining the cost of the house and then doing sums as to what is owed to the Government in the form of principal repayment. So, you can get a modest house in a place like Cook which will cost more than \$200 000 to put there because of its location and the employee will be expected to pay a rent that is commensurate with cost recovery. Would the Minister be prepared to look specifically at the teacher issue and perhaps at having a group of members of this Parliament examine the issue because it is affecting teachers, police and public servants right across the board in remote locations? Frankly, I am not very happy with the approach that has been taken with regard to this issue. I am sure that, as the Minister concerned with education, you must share some of my concerns.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The answer is 'Yes'. As I have indicated, I have already met with the Institute of Teachers and spoken with the Minister responsible, and a number of issues that the honourable member has raised are issues of concern to all of us. We are pursuing those issues and will continue to pursue them. Knowing the member for Unley's background in Cook and working with the Country Areas Program, I welcome his advice and assistance, as indeed I welcome the advice and assistance of the member for Custance and any other member of the Parliament in terms of how we provide housing in these areas.

As I have indicated, there are a couple of provisions that the committee within the Government Employee Housing Authority is looking at which potentially would cater for the circumstances the honourable member is talking about. He has talked about Cook, but I can mention a number of other areas, such as Ceduna and areas of the Iron Triangle, where the market rent has been driven up because of reduced supply—and the honourable member is talking about a case where there is no supply—and because it is a very small private sector market as opposed to Government employee housing.

I can assure the honourable member that this is of concern to me as Minister and is within the context of overall Government support for the policy change that the Minister has announced. We are working with the Minister and others to try to meet the concerns and issues that we have. It is for the Minister to indicate his final decision, but I have to say that the Minister has been prepared to give us favourable consideration in terms of the issues that we are raising. We await the final decision. If the honourable member is true to form I am sure that he will make his views known to the Minister to further cement the submissions that I, as Minister, have made on behalf of the department and teachers.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I thank the Minister for that. I realise the difficulty the Minister faces in not taking over a portfolio

from the beginning. I want to direct the Minister's attention in this context to Aboriginal education, which can be found on page 114 of the Program Estimates and Information. The Minister would be aware of the mixture of approaches that have been taken by previous regimes, and the Minister would know from previous Estimates Committees how in this place we question things such as the decision to have a dual language program in the northwest tribal lands despite the best advice of Aboriginal community leaders, and how previous Governments persisted in that. The Minister would also know that one of the most successful of all programs was the program known as the Wiltja program, which the previous Government refused to do anything about. I would like to know whether this Minister has considered the area of Aboriginal education and has done anything to sort out the mess which he inherited.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I cannot indicate that we have resolved all the issues in relation to Aboriginal education, but the Government is committed to improving education provided to our Aboriginal communities, whether it be in the northwest lands, regional cities or metropolitan Adelaide. Wiltja is of particular interest to the honourable member—he has spoken on a number of occasions in the grievance debate in the House of Assembly about the value and importance of the Wiltja program—and it was through his good offices when in Opposition that I met John Amadio, Geoff Iverson and others who worked and still work within that program. I was impressed in Opposition with their commitment and, more importantly, with their success. I do not think that there is any doubt that much of what we do in Aboriginal education comes from a desire to improve and from a commitment to Aboriginal education.

However, I think that, on occasions, we have to sit back and evaluate the effectiveness and success of various programs and make a decision whether or not the program is one that we need to continue to fund. I am sure that the honourable member would be delighted, as I know John Amadio and other officers were, at the Government's commitment in the capital works program to provide \$800 000 for the housing and accommodation of the program, something for which they have been fighting for some five to 10 years. They have been fighting a long time for that program and now have been unsuccessful in getting on to a capital works program.

I was delighted in our second budget to be able to put together the package to ensure that Wiltja will be an important part of that program. We still have to work through with them the exact location of their accommodation. They have some ideas on which we are working. We are also looking at whether the program will continue at the Woodville High School or whether it might be more sensible to have it located closer to where the accommodation will be, because there are problems with the transport of students from their accommodation to a program, particularly where there has been a history of non-attendance.

That is another issue that we need to work through with them. This is a perfect example of an issue that the member for Elizabeth raised earlier. We could have not announced the commitment to Wiltja until we had the design work done on something. This is something for which they have been fighting for a long time. The Government is committed to it, and we have indicated, 'There's the money; there's the commitment, done on the rough estimates that were done originally, and we now have to work within that budget to meet the commitment.'

The honourable member would be pleased to know that the State and Territory Governments are working productively with the Commonwealth Government on a new national Aboriginal education strategy. Dr Paul Hughes from South Australia is our nominee and is convening that national task force, which will report to the ministerial council in November this year. We hope that that program will bring about increased Commonwealth funding. The Commonwealth Minister has indicated that potentially he will have in the ballpark of between \$30 million and \$50 million extra over four years for all States and Territories—so it is down to a smaller component for us—that are prepared to work with him and with the Commonwealth Government in improving Aboriginal education and, importantly, improving the outcomes of Aboriginal education programs.

We have indicated our willingness to engage in bilateral discussions with the Commonwealth. Through this program, we have indicated that, whilst there might be some ups and downs in terms of total resources that go to Aboriginal education, when you look at the fact that \$800 000 extra is going into Wiltja, in net terms there will be maintenance of effort or even an increased effort in terms of overall Aboriginal education funding. Through that, we are hoping to attract additional Commonwealth funding to try to improve Aboriginal education for Aboriginal students.

**Mr BRINDAL:** The Minister will be aware that the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands actually straddle the traditional borders of South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. One of the big problems of education of the Pitjantjatjara and Anangu people has been as a result of artificially created boundaries. With regard to the sort of approach the Minister is suggesting, is it envisaged that any flexibility will be granted to allow one system to take overall responsibility for the whole area or to allow some measure of cooperation among the three States, so that we do not artificially divide a homogeneous group of people, as has been the case historically?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We acknowledge that issue. I understand the Chief Executive Officer has been having some discussions with the Chief Executive Officers in Western Australia and Northern Territory, and he might be able to indicate the nature of those discussions. In relation to the Wiltja program, one of the issue that the staff down there has identified is the fact that we take Western Australian and Northern Territory students down there, but there is no cost offset in relation to any support from the Western Australian or Northern Territory Governments for our successful program. I am not sure whether those issues have been discussed with the CEOs in the State and Territory, but perhaps the Chief Executive Officer might be able to indicate the nature of the discussions he is having with them.

*[Sitting suspended from 1 to 2 p.m.]*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before lunch, I raised with the member for Elizabeth the number of supplementary questions that she asked in a particular bracket of questions. I remind members that the practice of allowing about three questions is based on the practice of the House in Committee. The principle behind supplementary questions is to facilitate the conclusion of a specific line of questioning or to elicit follow-up information that arises directly from an answer. Supplementary questions are not intended to be a vehicle for asking more substantive questions on a theme. Therefore, I suggest that members use supplementary questions accordingly.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Mr Ralph will report on the discussions that he has had with CEOs in Western Australia and the Northern Territory regarding Aboriginal education.

**Mr Ralph:** To resolve my concerns about what I saw as the lapsing of activity in across-State cooperation with regard to Aboriginal people in the north-west lands, I met with the Chief Executive of Western Australian education, Mr Black, and the Chief Executive of Northern Territory education, Mr Fong, and we looked at each of the major issues that were of concern to us: particularly the provision of secondary education in the lands and ways in which we could work together for both the young people in the lands who come to Adelaide to be part of the Wiltja program and also in terms of matters relating to training and development of teachers, community relations and facilities on the lands.

As yet, we have not resolved all those issues. The tripartite discussions are continuing, and I look forward this year to bringing forward, coordinated across three States, proposals in cooperation with the council of the people who live on the lands so that we can get better quality education and care for young people in schools, whether they reside in Western Australia, Northern Territory or South Australia, because for those people on the lands State boundaries do not exist—they move across them as though they are not present.

#### Membership:

Mr Venning substituted for Mr Scalzi.

#### Additional Departmental Adviser:

Ms Dawn Davis, Executive Director, Children's Services Office.

**Mr QUIRKE:** The Program Estimates show a reduction in the number of CSO staff of 41.6 full-time positions against last year's budget and a fall of 23 staff against last year's actual figures. How has the reduction of 41 jobs been achieved?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In broad terms, it is the result of budget changes that were announced in August last year. We announced some changes to people/staff ratios within preschools. As a result, there has been a small net reduction in the total number of staff within Children's Services, and that will, of course, flow through to the 1995-96 financial year. I am told that the number of early childhood workers who accepted a targeted separation package is 24.9 and that TSPs have also been accepted by about eight staff who work in direct service delivery or administrative positions. So, we are getting close to the ballpark figures. It may well be that in terms of the number of students it has resulted in a small number of additional changes but, in essence, the answer to the question is a reduction due to the previous budget deliberations.

**Mr QUIRKE:** Which preschools are currently being reviewed for amalgamation or closure and which facilities have been amalgamated or closed during the past 12 months?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I might have to take that question on notice. I do not have a list of preschools which are being considered for closure. Ms Davis advises me that the Bellevue Heights preschool closed during 1994-95. If I find that any other preschool has closed, I will advise the honourable member. At this stage, I am not aware of any consideration of other closures. There have certainly not been large-scale closures of preschools. Preschools tend to move from being a full-day centre to a half-day centre (from .5 to 3.5 to 2.5 in staffing entitlements). So, the situation is a bit more

flexible. We do not actually have half-day schools—either you have a school or you do not—whereas we are much more flexible with preschools, and are able to tailor the delivery of service to the number of children: if more children arrive, the delivery increases.

**Mr QUIRKE:** For some years, the Ingle Farm kindergarten in my electorate has experienced a great deal of stress in terms of the number of children who attend and the facilities themselves which are supplied by the CSO. Some four years ago, an extensive program was proposed to build another facility in the area and to relocate that facility on surplus Education Department land at the old Ingle Farm High School. At that time, it would have been much closer to the major primary school in my electorate, which was also relocated onto that facility following the amalgamation of the Ingle Farm schools. Nothing came of that program; it was dropped in the 1991 budget.

A number of attempts have been made by the Ingle Farm community to get the CSO to look at the Ingle Farm facility, in particular, which is now quite old, desperately in need of refurbishment and, effectively, has kids hanging from the rafters. What can I tell those people is likely to happen in respect of that facility in the near future, given that already they have been through several planning processes which have failed to materialise in any form of development?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Subject to anything that the Executive Director might be able to say, the simple answer is that I will take that question on notice and undertake to have a discussion with the honourable member and the community to determine exactly what is being recommended. The advice before me says that \$4 200 is to be spent on maintenance this year and that a major occasional care upgrade has been completed in relation to the school. In terms of hanging from the rafters, I am told the enrolment figure is 71, but the average attendance over the four terms was 58, so that, in average terms, 13 fewer students were turning up over the last four terms than the 71—

**Mr QUIRKE:** That was the facilities.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** That was the facilities—I guessed that was going to be the response. I indicate to the member that we would be pleased to have a discussion with him and with the community. Indeed, we undertake to do so and, whilst we cannot give any commitments other than being prepared to listen and to consult, we will see what we might be able to do.

**Mr LEGGETT:** I refer to page 104 of the Program Estimates on capital works for preschool education. In many communities preschool education occurs on the same site as the local school. I am sure that is advantageous, although there may be problems with it. However, does this generate efficiencies and savings for the Government and also for the taxpayer?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In South Australia we have had a tradition of two different preschool programs for four-year-olds. We have had the stand alone preschools or kindies, as we have come to know them, and we also have had the child-parent centre program, under which four-year-olds are provided with preschool education on a school site under the direction of the principal of the school. We also have some variations of that as we have moved on. We also have some sites with collocated stand alone preschools, if I can put it that way; that is, they have their own management committee and run themselves, and they are not subject to the principal's direction. Nevertheless, they are on the one site together with the school.

In terms of the child-parent centre program, I have to say that as Minister in my time and prior to that as shadow Minister I have been mightily impressed with the standard of the program delivered through both programs—the kindergarten program (the stand alone preschool) and also the child-parent centre program—within our schools.

It is true to say that it is administratively more convenient in terms of being on the site. Also, if you are looking at it in terms of the child, there is a powerful argument to justify being on the same site. Your transition as a four-year-old to a five-year-old is much easier because you have been to that site, you are familiar with the teachers, you might have met the principal on a number of occasions—obviously not on a day-to-day basis—you know the facilities at the particular school, and you are therefore very familiar. Therefore, the transition from preschool to school is, in general terms, much easier. It is a bit harder obviously if you are in a stand alone preschool.

However, we manage successfully to look after the transition because there are successful transition programs. For example, the preschool teachers will take students down to their local primary school on one or two occasions to try to get them used to it. I am sure members have visited junior primary schools where the little preschoolers are visiting on their half day orientation, where they meet with some of the reception students and do some of the reception classes together with the reception students as part of a familiarisation or transition program within the school. Nevertheless, at the end of that period, the four-year-old then does have to move to a different environment and to different teachers and, from the child's viewpoint, it is obviously just a touch more difficult.

We previously had different staffing arrangements in relation to pupil-staff ratios. The last budget has attempted to address that. We still have a difference in mix in terms of trained and untrained staff. That is one of the interesting issues and one of the initiatives that the Children's Services section will be undertaking, with my full support, over the next 12 months, maybe even two years. I suspect that it will be Australia's largest research program in terms of evaluating the sorts of programs we are delivering in the preschool area, that is, in terms of outcomes of four-year-olds after they have had their four sessions and their 12 months of preschool, what we deliver and how we deliver that within the preschool program. Importantly, it also involves looking at our differing models within South Australia to see whether there are differences in terms of the outcomes of the four-year-old program. I do not see this as an 'in and out very quickly and get the answer you want' type of review, which maybe in the past some people have established for such purposes.

But in this area I see it as being a long-term serious piece of research to genuinely look at what we do and to inform us how we can compare the varying sorts of programs that we currently offer. Then future Governments and future Ministers will be in a position, hopefully, armed with that information, to make some judgments.

**Mr VENNING:** What strategies are being implemented during the 1995-96 financial year to ensure that country children have reasonable access to quality preschool programs?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** There are a variety of programs that the Children's Services section of the department is undertaking. Some of those are a continuation of existing programs and programs that were announced late last year. After the rural staffing review we introduced some time

through this past 12 month period something for which country communities have been arguing for some time. We had a pretty steep gradation in the change in the staffing policy. There were some half-time centres where they had .5 director and .5 staff. Once you drop below an enrolment level, suddenly you drop down very significantly to .25 of a program (.25 director and .25 staff). One of the changes we introduced through this last year has been to smooth out that gradation so that the loss in the program is not as significant and, once you get below the enrolment level, you move from .5 to another level of .35 of director and staff and then to .25 of director and staff. So, there are some very small rural centres now which previously would have dropped to a .25 program and which are now being protected with a .35 program, for which, of course, they have been grateful.

I am advised that we will be expanding occasional care services in country communities: at Streaky Bay, Cowell, Cleve, Whyalla, Peterborough, Crystal Brook, Minlaton, Keith, Naracoorte, Mount Gambier, Renmark and Taillem Bend. Those occasional care services will operate in conjunction with the existing preschools in those country communities. Again, country communities—country parents—have been crying out for assistance in terms of occasional care provision. Obviously, it is not justifiable for us to be building stand alone occasional care centres in those small communities, so we are linking those with preschool programs. The \$150 000 in capital works has been committed to expanding that particular program. Those which I read out earlier were existing services operating in conjunction with preschools. The new services will be at the following locations: Kimba, Hawker, Yorketown, Eudunda, Naracoorte, Jamestown and Kingston. I am told there will be further investigation in relation to Hawker and Eudunda to establish the most appropriate model of service delivery.

**Mr VENNING:** When was that announced?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I think that was announced in the State budget. I am not sure whether any of those communities are in the member's area. The local member would have been advised. If it was not in the honourable member's patch, that is why he was not advised, I guess. There are also a number of other child-care programs that are part of the national child-care strategy. A number of positions have been made available for family day care in rural communities, and I made an announcement about them in recent times. The Government is mindful of the child-care and preschool needs of rural communities and is doing what it can to meet those needs.

**Mr VENNING:** The cost to parents of child-care is of interest to the community. Generally speaking, how do the costs in South Australia compare with the national average?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will have to take some of that question on notice. In broad terms, it is fair to say that the costs of child-care in South Australia are a little more expensive than in the other States.

**Mr Brindal:** We provide a better service.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member for Unley indicates that we have a better service here. I think it is true generally in the area of preschools, education and child-care that the quality of the service that we deliver in South Australia is second to none and, in other areas, it is right up with the best of the rest. I have just been provided with some figures from the Department of Human Services and Health which indicate that, for 50 hours of centre-based long day care, our costs are higher than the national average. In South Australia it is \$139.

Tasmania is higher again at \$145. The average looks to be about \$130. So, our cost of care is higher in South Australia.

**Ms STEVENS:** My question relates to contract teachers (page 104). What is the policy concerning the permanent appointment of early childhood workers? How many permanent staff have been appointed since the beginning of 1994? How many contract staff have been appointed during the same period? How does the ratio of permanent to contract compare with that in 1993?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am advised that we have discussed this issue with the Institute of Teachers in recent months and have provided the institute with some information. We have about 176 permanent directors and 16 temporary directors. We have 194 permanent teachers and about 91 temporary teachers. We have 104 permanent early childhood workers and 70 temporary ECWs. These are full-time equivalents. The advice that I am provided with is that we need flexibility so that we can move early childhood workers around the system relatively easily. As the honourable member knows, the current agreement with the Institute of Teachers has us having to do a finetuning exercise within the first term of the year which means that, if we find that, in some preschools we have more staff than enrolments justify, and in others, as the member for Playford said, we have children hanging from the rafters without enough staff, we have to be able to move them flexibly from one place to another. The temporary nature of some of those appointments allows that flexibility. If all employment was permanent, in terms of our Children's Services staffing requirements, we would not have the flexibility that we need. In general terms, that is not significantly different from the historical mix of permanent and temporary employees within the Children's Services section of the department. It is not as though the new Government has significantly altered the mix of permanent and temporary staff within Children's Services.

**Ms STEVENS:** Can the Minister provide the precise information about the ratios between now and 1993?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We can check the figures for 1993. I do not have them available. If we are in a position to provide them, I should be pleased to do so.

**Ms STEVENS:** The next question relates to the sale of surplus CSO assets (page 104). What is the budget for revenue from the sale of surplus CSO assets? How much of this relates to the sale of CSO land?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I suspect that it is not a significant level compared with the school/education section of the department. We might have to take that question on notice. I am aware of a property worth between \$80 000 and \$100 000 that we are selling in the Norwood vicinity. I am aware of some other small properties, but they are not overly significant in terms of the revenue they will bring to the agency. We are certainly not selling significant revenue items in terms of the budget.

**Ms STEVENS:** Which sites are for sale? Have they all been closed or are they still subject to closure? If so, which centres fall into that category?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am not able to assist the potential story of mass closures of preschools, which is perhaps behind the question. As I indicated to the earlier question, we closed one preschool in 1994-95, we think. We are double checking that and we are also checking on any others, if we can establish those. We are not currently aware of any preschools actively on target for closure in 1995-96. We do not have a list of preschools for closure with potential revenue from those for the 1995-96 budget. Again, the 1995-96 revenue

line will not be substantially different from the 1994-95 revenue line because we have not been involved in large scale rationalisation. As I said before, the restructuring of preschool services tends to be more in line with just changing the number of sessions rather than closing and selling sites.

**Mr VENNING:** Can and do preschool children use school bus services?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** They do but the guidelines are such that they are not counted as eligible students in terms of justification of a continuation of a bus route. However, if there is space on a bus, they are entitled to use that particular bus service from their home to the preschool. They are not judged as eligible students because it is a school education bus service. It is one of the issues that has been raised with me as Minister now that we are a department for education and children's services and the school bus transport section of the department will have to address the matter. We will certainly have a look at that and see what might be the financial implications of such a change.

**Mr VENNING:** By that I understand that, if there is not a bus already there with some existing space, a special bus would not be provided for preschool children.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** No; we do not put on a special bus for preschool children. As the honourable member would know, you must have 10 individuals to justify putting on any buses and, as I said, preschoolers currently do not count as an eligible individual in terms of the provision of a school bus service. However, if a space is available, a preschooler can use that particular service. We do not put a bus on specifically for a small group of preschoolers.

**Mr VENNING:** How many preschool children does the Minister think are using buses in South Australia?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I do not know that particular number. I will undertake to try to get that information and make it available by the due date.

**Mr LEGGETT:** Referring to page 104 of the Program Estimates, we can see that there has been a significant growth in the funds allocated in 1995-96 with regard to the community based long day care, from \$176 000 in 1994 to \$1.216 million in 1995-96. What will this mean in terms of the increase of programs for children?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** This budget line broadly refers to a Commonwealth/State agreement under the National Child Care Strategy from 1992 to 1996 which the previous Government entered into and which the new Government was pleased to continue and to devote the appropriate resources to doing so. Under that particular program 890 centre based long day care places, 2 520 outside school hours care and 890 family day care places were to be provided. In January this year I gave approval for new or expanded centre based long day care services at Kangaroo Island, Noarlunga, Happy Valley, St Peters, Willunga and Kensington/Norwood. Part of the funding to which the honourable member has referred will relate to those programs and also to some of the other programs which were approved some time late last year. A number of other high need areas have been approved as well, and they will also have some flow-on effect in funding for 1995-96. Currently I have before me for consideration about four or five other areas, one of which will be of some interest to the member for Custance but which I will not indicate publicly at this stage, and they are possible high need areas seeking approval for child care centre places. However, those approvals have not yet been finalised.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer to page 104 of the Program Estimates, relating to occasional child care. In February 1993 the



CSO received a report commissioned in 1992 into the evaluation of the occasional child care program, and the report made recommendations under four headings—the effectiveness in meeting parent needs, level of integration, impact on staff and effectiveness of modifications to existing facilities. What action has been taken by the CSO to implement the recommendations of the report?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I shall have to take part of that question on notice and provide a response. In terms of the Government programs in occasional care, as I indicated earlier, \$150 000 has been allocated as capital funds for new occasional care services in rural areas, and seven new services are to be established in rural areas. I am told that additional recurrent funding was identified from the new services as well. In the not too distant future I will receive recommendations for new occasional care services in a number of other locations as well. As I indicated to the member for Custance earlier, as a general principle the Government has been moving down a path to integrating many of our occasional care services with other children's services, such as preschools. In particular I instanced the model that we were adopting in terms of providing occasional care services for rural communities. In relation to the specific questions about the report to which the honourable member has referred, I will need to take that on notice and refresh my memory about the particular recommendations and whether or not the Government has agreed or disagreed with them and what action, if any, it has taken.

**Ms WHITE:** One of the specific recommendations of that report was that the fee structure should be maintained at present levels and, when increases are considered, it should be done in the light of parents' capacity to pay for the service. What is the Government's and the Minister's position regarding the current cost of child care and its impact on middle to low income families, and whether the Government has or intends to conduct a family impact statement on this issue?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I would need to take the detail of that question on notice and provide a reply. We are required to undertake a family impact statement on any change that we might be implementing through the Cabinet process. However, if it is something that we do administratively, we do not formally go through a preparation of a family impact statement but we of course are mindful of the impact on families of decisions that we take, and that is obviously one of the considerations we have to bear in mind when we make any changes in any particular area, even if we do not go to Cabinet on a particular issue.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer to a statement by the Minister on 13 March regarding new child care places. On that date he announced 333 child care places under the Commonwealth-State agreement to create 4 300 places by 1996. Will the Minister give an update on the progress of the agreement and advise whether the target number of places will be achieved? Have any discussions been initiated with the Commonwealth on arrangements to apply for the provision of places post-1996?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The target for centre-based long day care was 890 places by 1996 and I am advised that by the end of 1996 we should have met that target for centre-based long day care places. The current planning is to try to meet that target. The target was 890 family day care places. There are currently 600 in place and we are obviously intending, hopefully by the end of 1996, to meet that target of an extra 290. We have a rural carers' model at which we are looking

in terms of implementing in rural areas family day care that will take up a number of those places. At this stage my advice is that we are on target for family day care.

In relation to outside school hours care, the target was about 2 500 and we are currently up to 2 044. My understanding is that we are on target to meet the targets in relation to the Commonwealth-State agreement. In relation to what might happen post-1996, I am advised that there have been no formal discussions with the Commonwealth on a child care strategy. We are working on trying to meet the objectives of the 1992-96 strategy, but I am sure that in the not too distant future there will have to be discussions at officer level in the context of what might occur after 1996.

**Ms WHITE:** On 30 April this year the Minister advised that, as at 31 March 1995, there were 199 child care centres in Australia licensed for a capacity of 7 943 places. The number of approved trained staff was 1 195. How many preschools and child parent centres are now operating, how many children can these accommodate, how many trained and non-trained staff are employed and how many children attend these centres?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am sure that it will not surprise the honourable member that I will need to take the questions on notice and provide information. In terms of preschool numbers, we have explored this before and our understanding is that there has been the closure of only one preschool in the past 12 months, so there should not be a significant difference. As to the number of students and teachers, we will take the question on notice and provide an answer.

**Mr BRINDAL:** You would remember as shadow Minister being fulsome in the praise of the remote and isolated children's exercise (RICE). What has happened to it?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** My understanding is that it is still operating effectively and undertaking a wonderful service for the children of the far north. I am not sure whether we have any details on the RICE program. These questions are not stage-managed and we are not in a position to give a detailed response on the RICE program other than to say that, from my recent visits in the north, I believe it continues to provide a valuable service. We will get an update for the member and provide him with a response.

**Ms STEVENS:** I refer to page 104 of the program estimates in relation to care of students and children with disabilities. What progress has been made in providing out-of-hours care for children with disabilities?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I can provide some information to the member and, if we have further information subsequently, we undertake to provide it by the due date. I am told that support for vacation care programs is provided through the Intervac program, which has an annual budget of \$70 000 and provides funds for staffing support to an average of 19 services each vacation. In the context of the national child care strategy, agreement in principle has been reached for the targeting of places for children with special needs. Negotiations are currently being undertaken in order to determine the best model of service provision for supporting the inclusion of children with special needs.

Evidently some special Commonwealth funding has been targeted towards the implementation of some services in this area. I am told that in this State supplementary services program teams currently provide assistance to children with a disability through child care access support teams and to children from a non-English speaking background through the multi-cultural child-care unit. In addition, a small number

of services have their own supplementary services worker. The Commonwealth has acknowledged its responsibility in this area because it provides the bulk of the funding and that is why it has had that recent report and negotiations are being undertaken with State departments responsible to look at various models to provide additional assistance in this area.

**Mr QUIRKE:** What is the level of assistance provided to preschools by the CSO for 1995-96 by way of operating grants to help it meet operating costs and how does it compare with the past three years?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am not sure whether this is sufficient for the honourable member, but we have made no change in 1995-96 other than an increase by the appropriate rate for indexation which I suspect is 3 per cent. The current level of operating grant resourcing will just be increased by an indexation amount. Is that sufficient?

**Mr QUIRKE:** In essence, we want to discover whether there has been any movement in that area *vis a vis* the 1993-94, 1994-95 budget.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** There has been an increase according to the inflation rate or some CPI inflator of about 3 per cent. There has been no reduction.

**Ms WHITE:** With regard to Program of Estimates page 104, last year the committee reminded the Minister that his Government had undertaken to expand work-based child care in South Australian companies through the establishment of a work-based child care study fund to provide grants to companies to access options in providing child care for their employees' children. The Minister said that that promise had not been actioned and gave the rather surprising reason that he had not done so because of the Commonwealth-State program for an extra 4 300 places between 1992 and 1996 put in place by the previous Government. Is the Liberal policy on work-based child care now subject to the conclusion of programs implemented by the previous Government?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In relation to work-based child care, I am advised that the children's services section of the department will, in effect, undertake seminars during this 12-month period to work with private operators who are looking at the provision of work-based child care.

Wearing another hat, not as a Minister, but as a member of the Government, I am aware that a small number of significant potential future employers in South Australia want to discuss work-based child care with the children's services section of the department. We will certainly work with those employers to see what we can do to assist the provision of work-based child care for those employers.

With regard to the general notion of work-based child care, some of the child care services currently provided within the CBD are, in part, serving the need for work-based child care provision. Honourable members will also be aware that, under the previous Government and continued by this Government, a number of our TAFE institutes provide work-based child care arrangements.

With regard to work-based child care, we may consider the general area of the Levels in terms of the significant developments there. That will be of some interest to the member for Taylor. Nothing has been finalised yet, but there are discussions with the MFP, the Levels Campus of the University of South Australia and with some other interested groups to see whether some assistance may be possible. We will be considering what we can do to assist that process. That is one example, and there are a small number of other examples, where, in respect of this important area of work-based child care, we will be working with major employers.

The other issue relates to the commercial based sector in South Australia. The growth in the number of places in the commercial child care sector since 1990 represents about 37 per cent of the total increase in the sector in South Australia. Everyone would concede that we are coming off a low base. We in South Australia have traditionally had a very small private sector in child care, whereas it is the dominant feature of child care provision in other States. Nevertheless, there has been a reasonably significant increase in terms of the number of child care places from the private sector and we are working with the private sector in terms of planning for future services so that we do not overlap or duplicate. Some initiatives are likely to occur there in the not too distant future in terms of trying to ensure that we involve the private sector providers in a more formal and structured way in terms of joint planning.

**Ms WHITE:** In his response, the Minister referred to a time frame of the next 12 months and discussions with employers about work-place child care. Exactly what assistance does he anticipate providing private employers in terms of child care?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We have not locked ourselves into any final decisions in that area. The reference in the children's services section of our policy document prior to the election was very modest in terms of expenditure in that general area. I cannot remember the figure that the honourable member quoted, but it was clearly not going to be a sum of money which would resolve all work-based child care problems in South Australia.

In terms of what assistance, if any, we can provide to employers wanting to establish work-based child care, we will have to resolve that when we have the discussions with the potential providers of work-based child care and then make a judgement at that time. There is nothing locked in with regard to a particular level of assistance that we might be providing at this stage.

#### Additional Departmental Adviser:

Dr J.V. Keightley, Director, Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In past years the principal questioning component of this line has been SSABSA, so I have been joined at the table by Dr Jan Keightley, the Director of the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia. Whilst I might have a comment to make with regard to SSABSA, it is an independent agency and I will be asking Dr Keightley to respond to the detail of members' questions. Dr Keightley will be able to answer the detail of the issues in relation to the operations of SSABSA. I or other officers will endeavour to respond to other areas in the miscellaneous line.

**Mr QUIRKE:** Am I to ask questions about the Minister's miscellaneous line or about SSABSA?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The miscellaneous lines include SSABSA. Whilst it is a completely independent agency, one of the lines within the miscellaneous lines is SSABSA. As I have said in the past, SSABSA has been the agency that has tended to dominate discussion on the miscellaneous lines. To assist members Dr Keightley is here, but if members have questions on other areas of the miscellaneous lines our agreement is that now is the appropriate time to ask them, because there are other things—non-government school funding, for example, and things such as that—which might be included.

**Mr QUIRKE:** The Opposition would like to congratulate Dr Keightley on her appointment as Director of SSABSA. Each year the Minister has a miscellaneous line for grants to organisations. In 1993-94 the budget allocation was \$490 000. Can the Minister provide a list of grants made to organisations from the Minister's miscellaneous line in the 1994-95 budget?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I can, and I will take that on notice and provide that information to the member.

**Mr QUIRKE:** What provision has been made in the 1995-96 budget for grants to community organisations?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In broad terms it is very similar. The answer is \$491 000 as opposed to a budget of \$499 000 in 1994-5. If it is any different from that, I will clarify it.

**Mr QUIRKE:** I refer to Program Estimates (page 108). How many full-time equivalent staff are in the Minister's office? It appears that staffing has increased from 12.6 to 14.1.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am sure the honourable member will be delighted to know that the number of staff in the Minister's office has reduced from the excesses of previous Ministers under the Labor Government. I thank the honourable member for his dorothy dixer. It is legendary that, at one stage, a previous Minister had 19.6 full-time equivalents within the ministerial office. We have reduced that to a substantive component of 14. From the announcement of Government, the allocation for the office of the Minister for Education and Children's Services was 14, and the reason why it was less last year in actual terms is that we had vacancies. We did not fill various positions through good portions of 1994-95. We now have a full complement of 14. The 19.6 was reduced at one stage to 16, when we first came to government. I understand some pressure from fellow Cabinet members was put on the previous Minister. Prior to the last election, the Minister was required to reduce the 19.6 to 16 and, when Government changed, the allocation was 16 to the then Minister for Education, Employment and Training, or whatever the agency was then called, with TAFE in it. We have further reduced from 16 to 14 the allocation to the Minister's office.

**Mr QUIRKE:** It would be interesting to pursue how many ministerial staff are attached to TAFE, but I am sure this Minister would not have that sort of detail. If we add 14 to that number, I bet we will be around 18 or 19 again, or more.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** You would obviously need to attend another Estimates Committees meeting. In terms of ministerial staff—and I am sure that the Opposition will be exploring that option, as is the wont of Oppositions—the honourable member needs to look not just at individual allocations but at the total allocation for ministerial staff and then make a comparison with what existed prior to the election. That is probably a comparison that most Oppositions would seek out during the Estimates Committee hearings. Certainly, in my agency there is not much joy for the Opposition in that respect. We have cut backed savagely on the Minister's office as part of an overall reduction. We have been brutal, savage and all that. In my office, officers work long hours to meet and service the needs of members in the electorate.

**Mr QUIRKE:** We have information on that. It is 10.6 for DETAFE, and that would bring the total to 24.7. However, we will not pursue the issue any further.

With regard to SSABSA, there seems to be considerable debate in the community on whether students who undertake year 13 are making the best use of their time. This is a subject in which Dr Keightley has undertaken some research. I would be interested to know her views on that topic, given the Minister's comments this morning about SACE and the implementation of SACE and its possible connection to declining retention rates. How many students are undertaking year 13 this year? How does this compare with last year? What are some of the research findings for the variation between the two years?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The number of year 13 students might be something that we will need to take on notice and provide a reply. I will ask Dr Keightley to respond to the honourable member.

**Dr Keightley:** In interstate studies there has been evidence that some students did not manage to increase their score by repeating the year. There are other students who do. In South Australia we have not done an analysis of the success or otherwise of year 13 students' gaining access to their desired pathway.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We will undertake to get on notice the information regarding research. We have speculated and talked about the reasons before. Dr Keightley has just indicated that in South Australia there is no hard research evidence on that. In relation to the year 13s, most principals, parents and teachers would concede that a large part of it is to do with the fact that a reasonable number of those young people either went on to employment, which is terrific, or they were successful in obtaining places in TAFE institutes or in higher education. I am not sure whether Dr Keightley has any figures on the total numbers of places in universities this year compared to last year, but certainly the scores of students in getting into university places really plummeted this year. There were some students with 38s out of 70 who have been successful in getting into some university courses, when last year you had to have 44 or 45. I am not sure whether Dr Keightley has any information on the number of university places that were offered this year compared to last year.

**Dr Keightley:** We do not carry that information, because it is clearly the universities' and not SSABSA's domain.

**Mr BRINDAL:** Government members would like to add our congratulations on Dr Keightley's appointment to those of the member for Playford—more so since I am sure she realises she comes to the appointment at a critical time for SSABSA. What has been done to ensure that the 1995 release of SSABSA results, unlike previous years, occurs accurately and on time?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will ask Dr Keightley, who is well prepared for that question, to answer it.

**Dr Keightley:** I presume the honourable member is aware that in mid-1994 SSABSA commissioned an independent review of its processes. The report of the independent consultants was considered seriously by the board before I joined the organisation, and the recommendations were totally endorsed by the board. During the following months, they were taken on board by SSABSA, and all of them were addressed. Since then, we have commissioned an independent consultant to give us advice about how we are positioned for the 1995-96 results release, which is the one we are about to face. The advice from the independent consultants is that they believe we are well positioned to carry out the responsibilities that are associated with the preparation of this year's results release.

Under the recommendations regarding the systems area, we have rationalised our database so that it is a smaller database to manage. We have added memory to our maximum capacity, so we have more space in our hardware. We have introduced a quality assurance testing process in addition to an audit process, so that our quality assurance person signs off every one of our processes as we go through them, as well as our auditor going along during the cycle making sure of the results and testing them for reasonableness and accuracy. For this result's release, we have separated that function, whereas for last year's results release the auditor was doing the quality assurance function as well. On the advice of our independent consultants, we have split that function.

We have also taken on notice from previous advice that the level of documentation associated with our systems needed to be improved, and we have a high priority on documentation of all our programs, although we are aware that that will probably take several years to get up to the level that we want to achieve. At this stage, it is certainly adequate to ensure a comprehensive results release. We have also established a teams structure within SSABSA to ensure that there are always back-up people, so there are duplicate sets of expertise across the authority. While the back up person may not be quite as up to date as the main person, there is always that facility to back them up, so I guess that is an additional safety mechanism.

We have developed a more comprehensive and coordinated production schedule, so that it is integrated across the way. We have established significant back up and disaster recovery programs. While we have always had them to a certain level, we have now added some more. We have tested those on several occasions and, much to our relief, our back-up programs are actually working, and we will continue to test them on a regular basis, because it is a concern that you need your back up and disaster recovery only in a time of crisis but you need to make sure that it is working.

In addition, we have gained some additional support from the universities to provide the services of an officer to spend more time on the aggregation and scaling program, which SSABSA does as a service to the universities for their selection processes, and we now have an increased amount of expertise to attend to that. Of course, as those university selection requirements change, SSABSA then has to go back and recalculate marks for any student who wants to aggregate, and this means significant work for us. So, they are some of the more detailed strategies that we have put in place, and I am pleased to report that they are all in place and operating.

**Mr BRINDAL:** From past experience, Dr Keightley should be congratulated for implementing a disaster recovery program. I hope that it is not needed this year. As the Minister would know, there is a feeling that universities want a national system of entry, and I believe that many universities are urging Ministers around the country to move in this direction. In the light of what the Minister just said, what progress has been made towards the implementation of a standardised system of entry to universities across the nation?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** At the recent ministerial council meeting of MCEETYA, this issue, among many others, was discussed. There is broad agreement between Commonwealth, State and territory Governments to try to establish a national system. I am not talking about one centre for the whole of Australia that would do everything but something that is consistent nationally in terms of moving

from years 12 or 13 to university. Dr Keightley has been involved in much of those discussions, so I will ask her to provide details of the current position.

**Dr Keightley:** The discussions which relate directly to SSABSA's work include the target date for releasing results, which has been agreed and set as the first working day in January. No year has been set for achieving that target date: we are just agreed that we will continue to work towards that. The range of dates for the release of student results across the nation currently varies from mid-December to at least one day after the SSABSA results are released. At least one other State does so later than us, so there is quite a range, although clearly South Australia is on the later side of the schedule.

One of the components of this is that we will have to have a completion requirement of SACE before we are able to calculate the tertiary entrance score, because universities have endorsed SACE as a requirement. On that basis, everything else has to be organised with a completion check run before we can calculate the aggregate. So the aggregate calculation is a final, final step. In other States it can be done much earlier because there is no completion requirement. In addition, universities have also agreed in terms of national consistency to move towards a national system rather than a national centre. It is proposed that for the 1997 entrance there will be a tertiary entrance rank out of 100 which every State will calculate. At this stage, South Australia is having discussions between SSABSA and the universities to look at how we might calculate that tertiary education rank. This means that all States will have a rank to facilitate interstate transfers.

**Mr LEGGETT:** SSABSA operates a successful overseas program, and I have been fortunate to visit some of its schools in Malaysia. How much income does this program generate for SSABSA and are there plans in mind for expansion?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I congratulate SSABSA on its program which it offers in Malaysia. I will ask Dr Keightley to discuss the current arrangements and any prospects of expansion.

**Dr Keightley:** It is important to note that SSABSA has had a long history of offering an overseas program in Malaysia. In fact, the program was commenced in 1984, and over that 10 year period the numbers involved have more than doubled. Receipts for the 1994-95 financial year from this program amount to \$282 912. SSABSA is highly regarded right across Malaysia. A number of schools have requested consideration by SSABSA of offering the South Australian Matriculation (SAM) in Malaysia. It is the quality of our program that gives us the competitive edge in Malaysia. We have a strong depth and we are viewed as offering a quality service. To that extent, we have done very little marketing in terms of expending large volumes of money—it is just word of mouth and the quality of the program.

We are in the process of negotiating with two additional schools, one of which will come on board next year and the other the year after. Both those schools look positive at this stage. The program relies also on the viability of the schools and their ability to have the facilities that we require to deliver a quality program, because clearly the quality of our program is our marketing edge and that needs to be maintained.

The benefits of this off-shore program to SSABSA should also be noted. We still have to set and offer an examination, so therefore we have an inherent product that is able to be marketed. The income that we generate from this program is

channelled back into the South Australian curriculum. It funds our research program, and we use it to supplement curriculum development, so that we find that our income allows us to do things that perhaps normally we would not be able to do. The ultimate benefit of that is the quality of the curriculum and the assessment that we offer in South Australia.

**Ms STEVENS:** After the problems following the 1993 release of results, an independent review was set up. From memory, it covered at least three main areas, including software and computing, management issues within SSABSA itself, and school management issues, all of which formed the basis of the recommendations of the committee. Will you provide details of each of those areas, particularly regarding the software component of \$500 000 that was also given in relation to SSABSA?

**Dr Keightley:** The review was managed by a committee that comprised SSABSA and a ministerial nominee, and two independent people from interstate performed the actual review and reported to the management group. With regard to hardware and software, as a result of the review we took on board entirely the recommendations with some minor modifications and with a view to long-term modifications. We used some of the \$500 000 to upgrade the computing hardware (the servers) so that we had a back-up server that enabled us to run a duplicate system. This is part of my comments about the disaster recovery program, which is standard language within the field—it does not imply an absolute disaster.

In addition, we also increased our in-house software. We used external contractors, and some of the money was used to supply that equipment. One of the most outstanding components of that was our inquiry system. This is one of the issues that was raised when the results were released. SSABSA was unable to respond directly to individual students, and the inquiry system that was developed in-house enabled us to respond to individual students who telephoned when the results were released. Their ID was keyed in directly, and this meant that instantly we had all their details on screen and, with the appropriate security releases of information about the subjects they did and things like that, we could then have an intense discussion with them. It also enabled us to say, 'You called 10 minutes ago and the notes on our system say that we said we would call you back in two hours.' So it stopped a lot of that which previously we had not been able to do. So, in terms of one of the biggest public interfaces in regard to confidence in SSABSA, the inquiry system certainly confirmed that.

In terms of management within SSABSA, a significant movement with an interim structure has been put in place. We established a SACE Operations Branch which covered and coordinated right across their organisation to facilitate some of that communication that the reviewers found was lacking in previous structures and previous ways of operating. At this stage we are in the process of enhancing that through our follow-up to the strategic plan of setting up some very strong team structures and team ways of operating. We commissioned an independent reviewer, as I said earlier, to tell us how we were going in the implementation. He confirmed that the level of communication across the agency, the morale within the agency and the satisfaction with the levels of communication was much greater than he previously encountered in SSABSA.

The school related recommendations were also addressed very seriously. A schools SACE operations reference group

was established. It met regularly with SSABSA staff. In addition to that, since I have been in the position, we have also enhanced our communication with schools. We have released the Green program book, which has replaced the flotilla of memos that schools were used to receiving. We now have a set timetable which all schools know about. It also has required SSABSA to focus more on its management processes and management structures because in any arrangement that SSABSA has it is a partnership. In terms of the programs manual we are in a situation where schools have to deliver on time, but so does SSABSA. So, that has been a great enhancement to the facility. In fact, early this year we received a number of very positive comments from schools about the programs manual.

I am very pleased also to report that we are still on target and onto the timetable that was set up in the programs manual and met all of the deadlines with the first set of results and enrolment take-up. So, they were realistic and have worked. In addition to that, since the 1994-95 results release, I have met with both members of DECS and have appointments now with members of the independent schools and the Catholic schools, as a result of the reflection on the 1994-95 process to see how we can further facilitate a smooth transition between the schools SSABSA interface. I have also met with the principals of each of the sectors and have talked about ways in which we can smooth that over. I believe that, if you talk to a large number of schools that had very close interaction with SSABSA very early in January of this year, they will tell you that the level of cooperation between SSABSA and schools has significantly increased.

**Ms STEVENS:** A supplementary question. What was the cost of the independent consultant's work and why was that needed following this first review?

**Dr Keightley:** Do you mean the one we used at the beginning of this year?

**Ms STEVENS:** Yes.

**Dr Keightley:** It was a degree of comfort, effectively as much for me as for the public and the community at large as anything else. Because we were in a situation where a review had occurred, it had come out with a large number of recommendations—as you have alluded to and which required quite an extensive answer—and we had thought that we had done it well, but it was in a situation where you would like a confirmation of that belief in the organisation. It is to that end that we asked the consultant to come back, review and reflect over his original sets of recommendations, look at what we had done and then tell us whether we were aligned and whether we still had made the right decisions. Because, while I said we embraced all of his recommendations, some of the recommendations we modified and did not take his direct advice on a one to one basis, on the basis of some other information that we picked up afterwards. So, it was as much a comfort and the notion of continuous quality improvement, that you want to make sure that you are doing the right thing. We are achieving the highest quality assessment results for South Australian students.

**Ms STEVENS:** The cost?

**Dr Keightley:** The cost was estimated to be \$5 000.

**Ms STEVENS:** Will the EDS computer contract take over the SSABSA computing exercise?

**Dr Keightley:** At the moment SSABSA has been part of the due diligence process. Our hardware is in scope as far as EDS procedures are concerned. At this stage our applications are not and so we are awaiting the outcome of that, but certainly we have been part of the due diligence process.

**Ms STEVENS:** In relation to the Australian indigenous language project, in 1992 SSABSA received a grant of \$374 000 from DEET to develop a course of and about Aboriginal indigenous languages. In 1993 States were invited to nominate schools to pilot the programs and in South Australia expressions of interest were received from several—Inbarendi College, Port Adelaide High School and Port Augusta High School. First, could you comment on whether the program has been completed and the details of it, and also how the trials have progressed?

**Dr Keightley:** I have to say this is probably nationally one of the most exciting languages programs that you could ever have encountered. Essentially, the framework is one that is 50 per cent looking at Aboriginal languages from a linguistic point of view and the remaining 50 per cent of the schools that are operating it at the moment are either working from a language reclamation right through to a language teaching. Language reclamation means that students are going back to original documents; often documents of missionaries who ran glossaries at the back of their diaries and journals of the local language. The one in South Australia, the Kaurna language, is that arrangement, through to some of the other languages where the Aboriginal language is very well documented, and therefore the other 50 per cent is about learning the language rather than trying to reclaim the language. It has been funded by DEET and to complement the \$374 000 SSABSA has also received some MPDP funding (National Professional Development) to support the professional development of teachers associated with the project.

The project is scheduled to be completed in December of this year. We have one more steering committee meeting early next year to finish the project off. It is interesting to note that a number of assessment agencies like SSABSA have managed to accredit the framework, SSABSA having accredited at stage one at this stage. As far as I am concerned, it is at a very exciting but also, I have to say, a very fragile stage. The interesting thing is that there are 250 Aboriginal languages and we are trying to work linguistically across all of those for the 50 per cent and hopefully it will expand. There are schools in other States as part of the network, not only the South Australian schools, and my advice in August at the steering committee meeting was that it looks like Western Australia will now put a school on the project for next year as well. It is gaining momentum and credibility across Australia.

**Ms STEVENS:** In the light of what you have said in relation to the apparent success of the trials, what do you believe will be the future of this work in terms of mainstream curriculum in our schools?

**Dr Keightley:** As I said, it is at a very fragile stage. I did note in the ministerial council papers the report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander task force, which identified the indigenous languages framework as needing continuing support, so it is clearly on the national agenda and it is regarded highly by that task force. That is one case. There is also increasing professional development. For example, this morning I was speaking with the officer who has just been appointed to support the teachers in the professional development area. It is not only her responsibility to support those but also to document the issues so that we can start getting strong documentation that will support its further dissemination. She also reminded me that, in fact, the Aboriginal languages and culture are extraordinarily complex and that some of this complexity will confound the progress. I guess we have to keep working at it.

**Ms STEVENS:** My next question relates to the implementation of the higher competencies. SSABSA played a national role in 1993 in developing the approach to the implementation of the key competencies in Australia, and South Australia in particular. Will the Minister detail programs and funding now in place for the implementation of the competencies?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will make some general comments and then ask Dr Keightley to talk in terms of the role of SSABSA. South Australia has continued with the agreement given by the previous Government to the trialling and piloting of the key competencies in our schools for the reception year through to year 10. Dr Keightley might be able to offer some advice on this, but I think that we are unusual in that we have trialled the competencies across all years of schooling whereas the other States have undertaken it only in the secondary years.

There has been some debate about what has become known as the eighth key competency—cultural understanding. It came in at the last moment with the agreement of the previous Minister and Government in South Australia and all other State and Territory Ministers. We had some debate about it at the most recent ministerial council meeting, and the new term for cultural understanding is negotiating cultures, or something along those lines. There is some question for me as to the appropriateness of cultural understanding or negotiating cultures as an additional key competency. I must confess that, as the new Minister, I do not have a fixed position on it. A lot more work needs to be done on it.

No-one is doubting that we need to ensure that this Government is a strong supporter of multiculturalism and multicultural education, but the debate in issue is whether cultural understanding is a key competency. That is especially so as one of the drafts talks about linguistic competence in a language other than English as a measure of competence in cultural understanding. If that comes to fruition, all students will have to be undertaking a language other than English and demonstrating some competence in that language to successfully complete that key competency. That raises a whole series of issues in terms of SACE and what we offer in years eight to 10 within our schools. It is not just a question about whether we are offering it, because it also raises the question about someone making a judgement about competence.

There are some vexed issues in relation to whether or not cultural understanding or negotiating cultures should be the eighth key competency. The position of the State Government, although the previous decision stands, is that we are still exploring the eighth key competency. In fact, a pilot program has been developed to look at the eighth key competency within our schools, and we will endeavour to do that. However, as I said, as Minister I have some questions and I do not have a fixed position as to whether or not it is appropriate. Nevertheless, we will continue to endorse the general nature of the key competencies and to pilot those programs in our schools. I ask Dr Keightley to comment about SSABSA's role in this. In a previous life she was actively involved in this area and has a very interesting perspective on it.

**Dr Keightley:** Not only is South Australia's project nationally unique because we are addressing it from an R to 12 basis but we are also noted for our collaborative effort in this way. We have a joint project between DECS, the Catholic system, the independent school system and SSABSA, and to that end we have project officers looking

after R to 10 work, as well as those in SSABSA looking after years 11 to 12 with a manager managing the team.

At the SSABSA end of the project, we have just finished a complete mapping of our current service statements in regard to the key competencies. This is a paper audit rather than a teaching methodology audit. We are looking at the distribution of the competencies and the occurrence of them. Not surprisingly, using mathematics, it appears in the mathematical areas of the syllabuses, rather than the English areas and communication *vice versa*. In addition to that, a number of school level activities are occurring to look at the kind of methodologies associated with the year 11/12 syllabuses to see whether the methodologies applied in these syllabuses end up enhancing the key competencies. We have also provided some project grants to individual schools to take leadership roles through the R to 12 area, specifically some 11/12 projects, and those are right across all delivery sectors. I regret that I will have to take on notice the absolute values of our grants because I do not have them with me.

#### Membership:

Mr Scalzi substituted for Mr Leggett.

**Mr SCALZI:** All members of the committee would be aware of the Government's commitment to providing an opportunity for all South Australian students to study a second language at primary school level. What is SSABSA doing to promote the study of second and community languages at the senior secondary level?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will make some brief comments before asking Dr Keightley to respond on behalf of SSABSA. As the honourable member identified, the previous Government and the new Government put the base in so everybody in primary school has the opportunity of studying a language other than English. We have some questions about the program, so there is currently a review as to the effectiveness of some of those programs but the base is there. The next step is how many of those students continue to study language in years eight to 10, which is the junior secondary level, and that is obviously a school education responsibility. That is one of the issues that Mr Joe Lo Bianco is addressing. We are seeing a significant drop off in terms of secondary students, particularly year 12 secondary students, studying a language other than English. I think that our figures in terms of percentage of year 12 students are under nine per cent, but Dr Keightley can tell us if that is a bit wide of the mark. Fifteen years ago the figure was something of the order of 15 or 16 per cent. The absolute numbers are probably showing a slight increase because we have a much higher cohort studying year 12 than we did 15 or so years ago.

It nevertheless remains an issue of concern. The National Language Strategy talks about 25 per cent of our year 12 students studying a language other than English. Through his National Asian Languages Strategy which he entered into with the Heads of Government last year, the Prime Minister is talking about 60 per cent of all year 10 students studying an Asian language by the year 2000 or early next century. That relates to one of four designated Asian languages, and not total numbers. That is an enormous jump in terms of having to move a national system. It is not just South Australia that is confronting this particular issue. It is an enormous jump and one that is applying the mind of all within the department as well as Ministers as to how we can continue to do that without going down the path of compulsion.

Some within the system believe that the solution is to make languages compulsory as an element of SACE. As I indicated this morning, I am sure that that will be one of the issues raised in any review of the South Australian Certificate of Education conducted next year. If a Government were to head down that path of making languages other than English compulsory at years 11 and 12, it would create some significant issues in terms of schooling within South Australia. It certainly is not the simple solution that some believe it to be in terms of resolving language study.

Others are talking about bonus marks as an encouragement. Again there would be significant issues created if there were to be bonus marks for languages. I believe that some universities in Victoria are offering bonus scores for those students who undertake a language other than English at year 12 but, again, such a policy decision would create a good number of issues for those of us working with students and young people in our schools. That is the framework within which SSABSA has to operate.

**Dr Keightley:** I did a quick check of our recent annual report. We have in excess of 30 languages with current enrolments and I believe that we have in excess of 40 languages on our books. We participate nationally in the national languages framework, and that means that we host some languages and other States host other languages, so we get economies of scale out of offering the languages. I am pleased to report that the community languages are supported within SSABSA's offerings; we have a number of ethnic schools which deliver community languages and which enrol their students in stage 1 and stage 2 in that language, and those are quite extensive in number.

We are aware that participation in languages is not such that we would meet the Commonwealth targets to which the Minister has referred, so in the past month we have hosted a languages forum at SSABSA to which we invited all key people who were involved in the various aspects associated with languages education. The forum was structured around identifying all the issues and all the solutions to any problems and also around trying to identify for each of those issues which were the institutions, services or individuals that would carry the broad responsibility for those areas.

Issues were identified at primary, secondary and tertiary level in that forum, and the three main issues that arose related to the marginalisation of language learning in the curriculum; student choices and pathways, which are limited largely to academic pathways, and it was perceived as being a limited number of non-study academic pathways; and there was a perceived degree of discontinuity in delivery at the interfaces between schools. The Minister referred to the investigation being carried out by Mr Joe Lo Bianco. I am pleased to say that the outcomes of this forum have been fed into his work and, within an hour before leaving for this Estimates hearing, I actually had a conversation with Mr Lo Bianco who was discussing the outcomes of the forum with the staff who were responsible for the forum.

**Mr VENNING:** Many country schools are concerned about maintaining curriculum choice at years 11 and 12. How does SSABSA help schools with this?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I do not think that is really a responsibility for SSABSA, although I will ask Dr Keightley to comment in a moment if she has anything additional to offer. It really is a responsibility for me, as Minister, in terms of the provision of staff, resources, distance education and so on, to try to maximise the curriculum options for country students. As I indicated this morning, the Government is

seeking to do that in a number of broad areas: the first relates to the 70 open-access salaries; the second relates to at least a preparedness to consider the proposal from the Area Principals Association about average staffing levels; and the third area will continue to be the provision of subject options via some distance education technique. We need to continue to explore that aspect.

As the honourable member will know, a number of our students are successfully studying through distance education, whether it be through DUCT; the use of electronic white boards; the use of interactive computers; or the use of the latest technology, which involves video links between two country schools, in particular where you can see the teacher in the neighbouring country school and you have voice link together with a visual link. So there are a number of those programs. I was recently at Kangaroo Island with a year 12 student who was undertaking a geography lesson at year 12 level with a teacher at a neighbouring area school or high school via voice link. A number of communities are beginning to use the video link program (VONE) as well.

We continue to provide subject options through the open access college, again through the distance education technique. There are a number of other areas, but in those three broad areas the Government seeks to maximise the curriculum choice for country students. We have to compliment the initiative and preparedness to be flexible of country teachers and country principals. When I visit country communities, I see so many examples of country teachers combining both years 11 and 12 in the one class, combining art and drama in the one class or combining a number of different subject areas within the one class. That is just a fact of life in country high schools and area schools if those schools are going to maximise curriculum choice.

It is interesting to note that in recent years when some of these options had to be considered within the metropolitan area a principal, who I will not name, told me that she was absolutely delighted that at her particular high school they had coped with it. We were talking in the context of the cutbacks the Government had made through the recent budgets with subject options, and she said that the staff had coped very successfully. She said that one of the attributes members of her staff had was that many of them had served for many years in country high schools and area schools and had had long experience with some of these combinations of subjects or year levels and did not have the problem that many other teachers had with those particular options.

It is not ideal. In the ideal world, if you had only two maths students at year 12 at Nuriootpa High School you would have one maths teacher working with them. If you had one physics student, you would have one physics teacher or, if you had two arts students and two drama students, you would have an art teacher and a drama teacher. The facts of life are that, irrespective of which Party is in government, we do not have that level of resourcing to ensure that number of teachers for very small numbers of students within many country areas staying on to years 11 and 12. That is one option.

The Government is considering a number of options to try to maximise the choice for country students. We know that there has been a problem with some very small country area schools with small enrolments in years 11 and 12 with access to the AIC (Commonwealth Government assistance for isolated children), and the department has initiated, or is about to initiate, some changes in that area so that the young people who have to go on to a bigger regional school or come

to the city may be able to gain access to the AIC allowance. In all that the Government does, it is seeking to maximise the choices for years 11 and 12 students.

I come from a regional city in the South-East and I am aware of the needs of country communities. My Chief Executive Officer has spent a good period of his time in country areas of the West Coast, Eyre Peninsula, Karoonda and Lameroo and is therefore very familiar with the particular needs of isolated students in country areas. A good number of my senior officers similarly have had experience in country communities.

I assure the member for Custance and his constituents that, whilst on occasions it may not seem that the Government is aware of the needs of country communities, the Government is bending over, and will continue to bend over, backwards to try to assist country students as much as it can within the available resources.

**Mr VENNING:** Are we therefore allowing too wide a choice? Our resources are definitely finite.

**Ms STEVENS:** The Minister mentioned this is really a school education topic. My point of order is that we be able to ask all of our SSABSA questions. If there is a deadline on SSABSA questions, we would want to get back onto the subject.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We have no deadline on SSABSA. We can stay here until 10 p.m., if need be. I meant to ask Dr Keightley whether there was a SSABSA input that she might be able to offer to the member for Custance. She may like to add something more.

**Dr Keightley:** SSABSA can work effectively only in partnership with all delivery systems, and the Minister has outlined a number of delivery initiatives that can be taken. As an organisation we have a curriculum and assessment responsibility and do take into account the rural associated issues in our curriculum and assessment work. When we accredit curriculum statements for use in schools we consider the delivery impact on schools, especially rural schools. A number of questions on our accreditation requirement relate to equity requirements, especially in regard to any specific resource implications that might be inherent in the curriculum structure, and that also relates clearly to both rural and isolated students as well as to metropolitan students.

In addition, in terms of moderation processes in our school assessed subjects and some of our publicly examined subjects, our moderation allocations are determined on a needs basis, and clearly rural and isolated schools have a weighting for their needs and are taken into account in that way.

In trying to set standards in terms of assessment, our markers argue that participating in the marking process is another way of ensuring that they get a feel for the standards across the State. We have just taken some initiatives to ensure that country teachers can become part of the marking process but without compromising either the security or the tight time frames within which we are required to work, as we previously referred to in terms of our target dates.

In addition, we have an open access and social justice group that continues to monitor participation and performance by a group of students, and country students are involved in that. In addition, we also publish supplementary statistics each year and the next lot are to come out in the next couple of months. They show participation and achievement by location, including country location. So, we take a number of curriculum and assessment initiatives that we take in a



collaborative manner in our delivery sectors and in partnership with them.

**Mr VENNING:** Realising that our resources are definitely finite, are we allowing our curriculum to be too wide so that we can treat all people fairly?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** That is a \$64 000 question. I would be interested in Dr Keightley's response. It is a balancing act and we are rapidly reaching the stage (if we have not already reached it) where the system will struggle or continue to struggle to provide the ever expanding number of subject options at year 12. That is a responsibility particularly for SSABSA in terms of its accreditation of year 12 syllabi, and it is an issue that SSABSA may have already addressed and responded to in a particular way.

Speaking as Minister for Education about having to resource the system in terms of educational provision, it is a balancing act. If everyone steadfastly opposes combinations of subject options within the one (which is common in country areas, but there has been a good amount of opposition to that in the metropolitan area from some community areas), or the combination of levels, that is, combining years 11 and 12, the system is struggling, and will continue to struggle, to cope with that variety of options within our schools.

The community, parents and teachers will have to make a judgment sooner rather than later in relation to that breadth of curriculum options. It is wonderfully attractive for students and, if you are in a big school with a large cohort of years 11 and 12 students, you are in a much stronger position to offer the range of subjects currently being offered at year 12. However, if we are to continue to offer that breadth, the community will have to accept that a percentage of those will not be able to be delivered in a face to face fashion with a teacher in a classroom. It will have to be delivered either through distance education or, as occurs in a good number of schools already, there will be a combination of similar subjects or year levels being offered.

I will ask for SSABSA's response in relation to the number of syllabi. I recall as shadow Minister entering into this vexed area, suggesting they we had too many and that SSABSA should look at rationalising the numbers. I am not sure what is the response of SSABSA currently. I will ask Dr Keightley to respond.

**Dr Keightley:** The issue has been highlighted by the increasing retention rates that occur in this State and nationally to the extent that there is a much broader range of students with a much wider range of expectations and aspirations than previously. As a result of that, in trying to be responsive to those students' needs and to give them the best possible edge they might want, no matter where they want to go in future life, SSABSA has responded and developed a range of subjects. We are currently under pressure to increase the pathways that are available from school into the vocation-oriented sector. We are looking creatively at how we may address the issue without necessarily creating another collection of subjects. Clearly, like the delivery challenges, that is one of the curriculum challenges on our doorstep.

We have also probably increased the number of subjects on the books because we have increased the number of semester units. That gives students increased flexibility as they can put together particular units to meet their own needs within a subject area. On paper, it looks like we are steadily expanding the number of units. The total is about 208 on the books at the moment. However, we must acknowledge that that includes a number of semester units, two of which together make up a complete year.

The reality is that we need to be aware of the very diverse aspirations and expectations that our student community holds for us. We need to be able to make those available, even if those pathways do not eventuate for some of them.

**Mr VENNING:** To what degree is SSABSA involved with entrance to universities, particularly with regard to the Fairway system? I was very happy with that system, but it was not wide enough. It did its job in helping disadvantaged country students, but it was not wide enough and it did not apply to many institutions. Can the Minister comment, from his angle, on how it can be expanded and widened? Was the system successful?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The Fairway system is a scheme conducted and controlled by the University of Adelaide. While SSABSA and the Minister may have some views about it (and I would be interested in Dr Keightley's views on any information about its effectiveness and whether there is a role for SSABSA and the University of Adelaide in that scheme), in the end honourable members must be aware that it is a decision for the University of Adelaide. We are not in a position to tell the university yes or no. Equally, we cannot tell the University of South Australia or Flinders University that they should or should not replicate the scheme. That is an issue for the governing councils of those universities. They either will or will not support it. With that introduction, I invite Dr Keightley to comment.

**Dr Keightley:** It is inappropriate for SSABSA to make comments about university entrance and the special provisions that are allowed. We simply provide them with the highest quality information possible to enable them to select. It is inappropriate for me to comment further.

#### **Membership:**

Mr Leggett substituted for Mr Scalzi.

**Ms WHITE:** Earlier today, I raised a point about the Minister's statement made in February that enrolments in South Australian schools had fallen by 4 000 students. With regard to the Minister's public comments connecting falling retention rates and the introduction of SACE, I raised questions about the SSABSA review that the Minister announced on 31 May into aspects of SACE.

At that time, the Minister said that he would refer my questions to Dr Keightley. As Dr Keightley was not present then, I repeat for her benefit that I asked what issues would be considered under the review. With regard to my question whether the review would be conducted by SSABSA or by an independent person, the Minister said that he would refer that matter to Dr Keightley. However, he said that public and community groups would be invited to participate and that the results of the review would be made public.

Last year, the Minister said that he would wait to see what effect the budget-related staff reductions would have on the way in which schools managed SACE workloads. The Minister acknowledged the increasing workload and the responsibilities placed on schools. In relation to the effect of those staff reductions, what feedback has there been, and exactly what issues will the review consider?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I have already commented on the earlier part of that question. Dr Keightley will respond on SSABSA's behalf to those questions. In relation to the effects of the education budget, the review into SACE that SSABSA will eventually announce will relate to the operations of the South Australian Certificate of Education and the range of issues that I mentioned this morning.

The issue of the responsibility for resourcing in the budget will be one for the Government and the Minister for Education and Children's Services of the day. I have outlined some of the issues that schools will have to confront in relation to continued pressures on years 11 and 12 in terms of the breadth of the curriculum and in trying to maintain it. I have referred to the ways in which various schools will have to respond to meet those challenges. That will be an issue for the Minister and the Government of the day and one to which they will have to respond. With regard to the earlier questions on the nature and conduct of a possible review, I invite Dr Keightley to respond.

**Dr Keightley:** With regard to the SACE review, at this stage we have identified some of the issues which may be addressed. However, at the moment we are challenging our current database, which effectively now contains information about participation and performance of students who started SACE at the beginning at stage 1, for those who did it potentially for the first time at stage 2 and for those who chose to do a two-year option and would have completed that two-year option in 1994. For the first time, we have a complete picture of the SACE cohort, assuming that they all had the intention of completing the SACE within the two years.

We are looking at that information and exploring those performance arrangements to ensure that we focus on the right questions about the problems within the SACE. At this stage, we have identified the issue about the inclusion of languages or otherwise, as was previously discussed, in the pattern.

There have been issues about the classification of particular subjects into particular categories. I believe that we will probably consider those issues again. Some issues relate to the reporting of stage 1 and how it is or is not reported. There are issues related to which groups do and do not participate and under what circumstances. At this stage, we do not have a comprehensive list, but we are doing the groundwork to ensure that the issues which are most appropriate to reviewing the SACE are identified.

From a very visual scan of inquiries in early January 1995, it seems to me that another issue about the completion of the SACE is the trip wire of having to achieve a score of 10 out of 20 in three two-unit sequences. Visually, that appears to be one of the trips that students are not completing. We need to consider that point in more detail. However, that is probably classified as anecdotal and visual, having answered a number of inquiries. That is the kind of work that we are carrying out at the moment to identify the issues.

Once the issues are identified, we will establish a set of terms of reference for the review. The board will then decide how to address each of the terms of reference. It may be appropriate to address some of the terms of reference internally because we have all the information. In respect of other terms of reference, there will have to be an external arrangement. However, no decision has been taken. At this stage, the board has not got around to discussing the details of the review. Given that we have a priority between October and early January which is otherwise directed, it is unlikely that we will manage to get this sorted out until the beginning of next year. We envisage that the review will occur in 1996. We will liaise carefully and closely with the Minister with regard to the determination of the final structure and processes.

In terms of your request about public and community groups, the SSABSA board is one of the most representative

and comprehensively constituted boards in this State and has a history of wide public consultation. I cannot see any reason why the board would not continue to use its standard process of wide consultation, as it previously has done with its other policy papers of significance. I also envisage that the board would have no reason not to make the results of the inquiry public, because clearly, if changes were needed, it would need to get public reaction and the public would need to be informed.

**Ms WHITE:** As the statutory authority responsible for the management of the State's credentialing system, SSABSA has responsibility for implementing and maintaining SACE arrangements and the SSABSA board has a statutory function to undertake or commission research related to any matter for which it is responsible. In the SSABSA 1992 handbook I saw the statement:

Through its social justice and equity program SSABSA will continue to monitor the participation rates and educational outcomes of under-represented groups in specific subjects. When these participation rates and educational outcomes form a barrier to options in employment, training and higher education, change will be initiated.

Clearly there is the statutory obligation to research the areas and to confirm or otherwise the sort of anecdotal information to which the Minister has referred in terms of retention rates and SACE. I know that Dr Keightley referred to participation and performance statistics. Exactly what data does SSABSA's research function have regarding enrolment patterns, student achievement, completion rates, barriers to access, participation and success in SACE?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** SSABSA has a surfeit of information available in this area and there are research publications to which I am sure Dr Keightley will be able to refer. If the member does not have a copy of these publications, perhaps Dr Keightley can provide her with a copy. They are always a couple of years behind because they are very comprehensive and take some time to put together as research papers. Nevertheless, they make for very interesting and informative reading. As Minister, in the context of having taken up this issue at the national level and in talking about gender equity so that the special needs of girls and also boys are considered within education, I have relied in very large part on information that SSABSA has been able to provide to throw some light on the special needs of both sexes in terms of educational outcomes. I am therefore pleased to see that SSABSA has provided and will continue to provide this sort of information to throw some light on the subject.

Frankly, other than at Year 12, there is very little quantifiable information or hard data within our education system from reception through to Year 12 that can throw light, in terms of educational outcomes, on what goes on in education. We spend a lot of our time as an education community talking about inputs, costs and a whole range of issues like that, but in terms of the real issues of education—the educational outputs, outcomes and accountability of various educational programs—in my judgment, as Minister, we, within the education system, have done precious little in terms of outcomes. I think that SSABSA, more particularly at year 12 but also at year 11, does provide some hard data in terms of what goes on. Of course, the Government's commitment in other areas to basic skills testing and the attribution of levels under the statements and profiles will, for the future, provide hard data in terms of educational outcomes at other levels of schooling other than at years 11 and 12.

**Dr Keightley:** I will be happy to make available a copy of the 1992 statistics, if the member does not have a copy. Currently we are working on the 1993 and 1994 statistics. The organisation was distracted during 1994 by other priority issues for it to analyse the database at that stage. We are analysing stage 1 results by participation by the region of the certificate or the results addressed—they give us a results address for it—and the region of school location; by participation by gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, English language background, socioeconomic quartile, school type and school card holder; and by distribution of results by region of school location, region of the certificate or the results address and by gender. Also in stage 1 we are looking at the writing-based literacy assessment, the results of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (specifically in 1992), the socioeconomic aspects of achievement in stage 1, and the distribution of results by school card holder and by gender (the interaction of the two).

We are looking at the distribution of results by school location, schools in the Country Areas Program, and schools classified as priority projects and gender (again the interaction). We are looking at the achievement of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. In the writing-based literacy assessment we are looking at the distribution of pieces submitted and pieces assessed as satisfactory by background variables and by gender. At stage 2 level, which is year 12, we analyse the participation and achievement in year 12 subjects by age as at 1 January, the number of subject units undertaken in year 12 and by gender; by region of school location, region of certificate address and gender; by subjects, postcode link with socioeconomic quartile and gender; by school card holder and gender; by school location, schools in the Country Areas Program, schools classified as priority projects; gender and higher education scores; and statistics by gender and other background variables.

That is the range of statistics that we will now systematically report on an annual basis. In addition, now that we will have some completion data, we are at this stage trying to identify the components and the way we will report on completion so that we can get a consistent trend over a number of years. I would be very happy to give the member a copy of it if she does not have a copy.

**Ms WHITE:** As a supplementary question, has SSABSA's research function been maintained or downgraded over the past two years (and I am speaking in terms of effort of research staff and so on)?

**Dr Keightley:** I have only been part of SSABSA since November last year so I can only speak in terms of where I see research going in the new organisation and the strategic planning process, and that has been singly confirmed as a priority area and key result area for the organisation. We are in the process of organising a significant research program. Clearly, work on the statistics has been ongoing. I am not in a position to comment where it is over the two year trend.

**Ms WHITE:** Will the Minister take that on notice and provide an answer?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I would be pleased to take that on notice and seek some information from SSABSA to try to provide a response to that question.

**Ms WHITE:** If the Minister recognises that there is an increasing drop-out rate from year 11 (and I quote from the Minister's words in this Council) 'from the northern suburbs, the Iron Triangle, some of the western suburb areas and the southern suburbs'—that is, the areas that have large concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students—

'because it is too hard for them and is not the option', does this mean that the Minister and the Government have jettisoned the commitments about which I spoke earlier in terms of the social justice commitments and responsibilities of SSABSA?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** It is getting a bit late in the day for that sort of extrapolation of what I have said to what the member is being asked to say. Obviously, the Government is committed to young people and to maximising their options and opportunities for an education and for life. Members will acknowledge that there is that commitment to continue as best we can the sorts of programs that have been introduced and implemented to seek that objective. Anecdotally, I am hearing from principals and teachers in those areas that that is their view as to one of the reasons why there might be a higher drop out rate than a drop in the retention rate. It is time to test that. That is one of the issues the honourable member raised earlier. I certainly will be interested to see whether or not that anecdotal feedback many members have received is correct. That is the first thing we have to do.

But to say that was established and that that was one of the reasons and then jump from that and suggest that we are jettisoning many of the policy objectives we have talked about is not the issue at all. If that were to be the issue, as a system we have to confront constructively the facts that have been provided. If that is the issue, we must look at it. I do not know what the responses will be. I do not have a fixed position on that. What we have to do is establish the facts first and, if there is that issue, SSABSA, school education and the wider community need to look at the original goal of SACE, that it was to be achievable by all, a certificate that everyone could undertake. We must ask, 'Is it achievable under the current arrangements?' or 'Can it be made achievable under changed arrangements?' If it cannot be, we must look at alternatives for those young people. It may well be that alternative pathways will have to be considered.

Other States tackle young people in the age group of year 11 and 12 in a different way. In New South Wales larger numbers of year 11 and 12 age students are heading directly off into the TAFE institutes to undertake TAFE courses rather than continuing on with senior secondary studies within schools. That has not been the way we have approached things in South Australia. The Government is not flagging any changes to that. As Minister, all I am doing is relaying what principals and teachers have said to me, that maybe this is one of the issues that needs consideration as part of any review, which is the position the honourable member was putting down earlier. Dr Keightley has indicated that this will be one of the issues that any review will have to consider and then, when we establish the facts one way or the other, the Government, SSABSA and everybody else needs to address the options in a mature way. It is not a question of Ministers or Governments jettisoning any commitment to young people. Whether we are Liberal, Labor or Callithumpian, we are all as much interested as each other in ensuring that young people maximise their educational, career and life choice opportunities. Whilst we might be separated by the divides of political Parties, Labor, Liberal or whatever else, I would have thought that we all share a mutual goal of trying to maximise those sorts of choices. As politely as I can, I reject the notion that the honourable member is suggesting we are about jettisoning any of these worthy objectives.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I want to pursue the line of the last question. The Minister would recall that in 1975, when the Schools Commission was set up after an investigation of the

Whitlam Government, two areas of disadvantage were recognised. One was socioeconomic disadvantage and the other was disadvantage because of location, country areas. Dr Keightley has pointed out that part of the criteria is schools by reason of inclusion in the Country Areas Program and inclusion of schools by order of region in the Priority Projects Program. Dr Keightley's analysis of statistics was very good and very commendable because, as you said Minister, it will give us a basis that we have not previously had to analyse some of the anecdotal reasons by which we have pursued educational pathways, which have cost both State and Federal Governments millions of dollars in the past two decades.

I point out to the Minister that in the 20 years that the Country Areas Program has existed there have been seven complete year groupings through to tertiary level, and we have yet to know whether the program is even working. In that context I think Dr Keightley made some sort of analysis of students at stage 1 by socioeconomic status. Can we explore that further? I would like to know how we can tell the socioeconomic status of students other than the fact that their parents may have applied for school card, because in many disadvantaged schools there are sons of doctors, for instance, who may well skew the figures. The other question which is closely allied to that is whether you would consider including the length of residency in a country location. As you would know, Minister, and as Dr Keightley would know, St Peter's College has some very successful students who have spent the past five years in the city but who are in fact country students. When we are talking about atonement for country students one of the problems is that we can never work out whether a student from Urrbrae is a city or a country student. So I ask that question and follow it up by asking whether you can also do some sort of statistical research on how long a child spends in the country and what the results are, compared to the length of time a student studies in the country.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The second question relates to a tremendously interesting aspect of the figures, and I will ask Dr Keightley to respond to that, because it is a vexed question. In relation to the general comments about the Country Areas Program and the Disadvantaged Schools Program, the member has raised this issue with me on a number of occasions. I share some of the views that he expresses. The Government has said that, in all that we do in education, whether new programs or not—and there are a number of existing programs—we need to establish mechanisms for evaluation of the effectiveness of those programs, in terms of educational outcomes. There have been some endeavours with the Disadvantaged Schools Program to evaluate its effectiveness. In all that we do in education, Commonwealth or State Government funded, we ought to ensure that we establish processes of accountability in terms of educational outcomes. I have a particular interest in both the Country Areas Program and the Disadvantaged Schools Program and we are certainly looking at various options for the future in relation to those programs. As to the second question, which as I said is a most interesting one, I ask Dr Keightley to respond.

**Dr Keightley:** There are two things I need to say. We use the socioeconomic quartile on advice from the ABS in terms of a wide range of indicators collected, for this one, during the 1986 census, and we are currently using the 1991 census in that way. So we have that as a double check on school card holders and on Country Areas Program and Priority Projects Program participation. Therefore we have some different

ways of looking at socioeconomic status. On the issue of location, I did note also that we in fact look at distribution by address given to us for certificates and results release, as well as postcode or address given to us for school participation, to identify the differences to account for some of the transitory students who live in one place and who study in another place or who have studied and moved to study somewhere else. I guess the key thing that I would want to say as a former researcher, and occasionally dilettantish researcher now, is that SSABSA has to be extraordinary careful to remember what our core business is, which is collection of the enrolment data that we need and the results processing data that we need to ensure that we give a high quality credible certificate.

As I mentioned earlier today, one of the strategies recommended in the review that we have implemented is to cut down the size of our database so that when we manipulate the database to do the computations we reduce the time it takes, because we do not try to move large amounts of data that we do not need for the calculation. Our database is significant and comprehensive because it is constructed to meet our prime needs of certificate, assessment and results reporting. We can do supplementary analyses in an extensive way, but with regard to more complex questions we develop a research design that looks specifically at them. We may take a sample of particular years and provide supplementary information.

Whilst our general big database gives us an enormous amount of information, which we can access and which helps us to look at patterns, we are now trying to identify the issues, which we can then research in more detail and ask supplementary questions. To that extent, as I mentioned earlier, we have our open access and social justice working group, which is very active and is in the process of preparing some specific research designs that will involve additional information by questionnaire to be collected from schools. That questionnaire may or may not go out with our enrolment system, but it is clearly independent and complementary research that goes with the analysis of our database.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I did not mean to load Dr Keightley down with something other than her core business, and I accept the Minister's comments, but I am sure that every member of this Parliament wants the education dollars to go where they are most useful. If SSABSA is overloaded or cannot do some of the work, perhaps we need to do research, because if we put money into areas that do not need it there will always be areas that do need it, and I am sure that every member would say, 'Let's put the money where the children will most benefit from it.'

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The Government is committed to evaluation of the effectiveness of programs and SSABSA will continue to do the sorts of things that Dr Keightley has talked about. Equally, the Department for Education and Children's Services will need to collect information, and much of what we have talked about today involves collecting information in terms of educational outcomes.

**Mr BRINDAL:** What is the number of members on the SSABSA board and how much are they paid?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** There are 27 members, and the sitting fee is \$102 for three hours or \$80 after tax. I am advised that they are paid at the lowest level of sitting fee set by the Commissioner for Public Employment.

**Mr LEGGETT:** Regarding SSABSA's end of year results—and there have been some controversial results in the past couple of years—what steps have been taken to ensure the absolute security of its processing procedures?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Some aspects of that question have been placed on the public record already by Dr Keightley, but I will ask her whether she wishes to respond further.

**Dr Keightley:** A number of initiatives have been taken in a range of areas. We have improved the security of the building in which we operate, we have increased the number of sensors, and we have increased security by requiring access using personalised key pad numbers. In addition, we have restricted after hours access to a limited number of staff. With the cooperation of the security firm, we are now able to track every access to the building after normal working hours and follow those up.

In terms of information technology, we have levels of access to the databases and the network. We have improved access to the system, upgraded our password system and we have a number of screen savers that use passwords. So we have tightened up our IT security access. In terms of our processes, we deliver examination papers by hand through a secure courier, especially to country schools in isolated areas. If the school does not have a safe, we make arrangements with local banks. If a cost is incurred to access security deposits, SSABSA covers those costs in order to ensure optimum security and the minimisation of any chance of a leak through examination papers being unsupervised.

In addition, we conduct a monthly security audit on the whole system, and we change passwords on a regular and much more frequent basis. In the first week, I was locked out of the building and unable to access it on my own. So, we have significantly increased the level of security, and I now have much more confidence in our ability to maintain security. There are supplementary security processes that we put into force during the results processing release. We do not make public where the results processing will occur and we ensure that it occurs behind drawn blinds.

**Mr QUIRKE:** How does the scaling process work, and can the Minister assure the Committee that a choice of subjects on the arts lines for SACE does not *per se* because of scaling eliminate entrance to a number of university courses which are very competitive?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I would be delighted to wax lyrical about the intricacies of scaling given my mathematics background but, with due deference to Dr Keightley who has superior expertise in this area, I will ask her to comment.

**Dr Keightley:** First, I will put scaling into context. Scaling is a requirement by the university and the policy framework is established by the university sector. SSABSA's role in the scaling process is as a service agent to conduct the process. We need to make that clear—the extent of the complexities of it and the underlying policy framework belongs to the university sector. Having said that in that context, I need to say that the reason for having to scale is because the universities require a single aggregate on which to consider students for entrance to higher education. The belief behind the single aggregate means that, if you are to add issues or add scores, the scores have to be of like order. The principle underlying the scaling is to ensure that you are adding matters of like so that you achieve an aggregate with some integrity. That is the underlying principle of it.

The underlying assumptions under the scaling process are that groups of students perform equally as well in certain subjects as they would perform in other subjects and it relies on a common candidature principle. I do not intend, in this environment, to give you the details, but if you want to pursue the mathematical intricacies of it we have a detailed paper which sets the mathematical parameters within which

the scaling process occurs and I am happy to make that available. It is a university document but I believe it is in the public domain and I would be able to make that available to you if you wanted to pursue the fine detail of the mathematics. The scaling process was changed in recent years to be more accurate and also to incorporate the scaling of school assessed subjects because initially the scaling process only related to the publicly examined subjects. The new South Australian model developed by Bill Venables and Brian Knight now allows us to scale both school assessed as well as publicly examined.

In terms of the pattern that appears according to subject performance or subject choice, I have to say that there is no consistent pattern that can be attributed to the scaling process. It depends upon the cohort each year, because the underlying assumption is that for a particular year a cohort of students, or a group of students, will perform equally across a range of subjects. And so, it will depend upon the other students in the cohort that you belong to as a student and their performance (a group of them) in other subjects as to what level of scaling occurred, whether the subject performance of scale scores went up or down when compared with their subject performance. The key thing is that SSABSA's role in relation to SACE is to talk about student achievement and student performance and that is what we do with the subject achievement score. The scaling process is strictly a service to universities.

**Mr QUIRKE:** I do not want to labour the point, but, in essence, there was a second bow to that question. That is, if you choose a series of subjects on the arts line—and there are a number of histories, classical studies and a range of the publicly examined subjects, and I am talking about the school assessed ones—if I remember rightly, entrance to town planning, to medicine or to a range of other very competitive options is virtually non-existent on the grounds that a top paper in one of those subjects that I mentioned a minute ago is automatically scaled down to a point where, when they are added up collectively, you will not receive the necessary threshold scores to go into those courses. That is my understanding of scaling. Is that correct or not?

**Dr Keightley:** There is no automatic scaling down of any subject. Every year the scaling process depends upon the performance of groups of students across a range of subjects, and so there is no automatic scaling down because of a particular classification of a subject. That is what I was trying to say in response to the last part of your question. There is nothing inherent in the scaling process or the scaling basic philosophy that says if you do this subject it will be scaled down. It is dependent upon the performance of groups of students who do those common candidatures across a range of subjects. There is nothing automatic about it, in any sense. It depends upon the performance of that cohort of students who do those common subjects.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The common perception is that if you do mathematics, for example, that will get scaled up. But, my understanding, to follow on from what Dr Keightley was saying, was that this year in one of the mathematics subjects some students were scaled down. Do you have information on that or is that something we need to take on notice?

**Dr Keightley:** We would need to take it on notice but certainly scaling is not consistent: not everyone goes up and not everyone goes down by subject because it is according to where you are in the achievement distribution. There are examples where on particular scores a student will be scaled

up, whereas other students on different scores in that subject will be scaled down.

**Mr QUIRKE:** I am quite happy to receive the publication that Dr Keightley has offered and come back next year with some more educated questions on the topic because I suspect that there are certain subjects which have been scaled down over the years and have never been scaled up. One of the problems that a lot of members of Parliament have is that when the SSABSA scores come out, and particularly given the woeful record of SSABSA over the past couple of years, there is a lack of confidence in many students and many parents in the piece of paper that they receive, so they come around to see me and presumably other members of the Lower House and the Upper House, or they go around to see the principals at the schools.

I say this through you, Mr Chairman, to the Minister to Dr Keightley: your organisation is absolutely impossible to get near during that time for persons such as myself. I would ask if some provision could be made for extra switchboard capacity and that a hot line service be provided. In fact, the Minister can remember that I gave up on one constituent and rang him and he finally got through for me. That is an area that definitely needs a lot of sorting out because there is a degree of concern when these certificates go out to students and to their families and, in most instances, they have performed not to the standard that either they expected or they needed to be accepted into the course. But, as a result of the past couple of years there is some suggestion, and it is possible that these people believe, that they have received a wrong score. It is very difficult to get through to sort some of these matters out with SSABSA. Certainly, I must say that I have been kept totally in the dark over the years.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will ask Dr Keightley to respond in detail, but, if my memory is correct, I remember the incident that the member for Playford refers to. It was in relation to the 1993-94 results release and it was early last year. From what Dr Keightley has said before and as a result of that particular problem—and SSABSA admitted that there was a problem and as Minister I certainly indicated there was a problem as well—we had this whole process of an independent review, etc. Certainly, I have to say that whilst you would have received a number of calls as a member, imagine the number of calls the office of the Minister for Education received at the start of 1994.

I have to say that the new process that SSABSA introduced last year meant a significant drop off in terms of the number of inquiries that came through to our office. I had a look at the personal response system or program that is in place there, which has a number of attributes. It indicates when someone rang, who was logged on and was meant to get back to that person, what time that person was meant to get back, and other functions. Anyone could log into the screen and work out who last spoke to someone, and, if someone had given a commitment to get back to someone and had not, they could go and politely speak to that person about that and seek to answer the queries.

As Minister, having lived through the 1994 results, and the 1995 release, I think that SSABSA as an agency learnt much from the problems experienced in 1994 and the new processes set it up so that it was much better prepared in 1995. I am sure that Dr Keightley's commitment will be best practice and continual improvement. However, I will ask her to respond.

**Dr Keightley:** I referred earlier to how we had expended some of our additional grant, and one of the things we did

was have an in-house software developer produce an inquiry system. The Minister has described that system. Inherent in it is a method of monitoring the calls. On 10 January, which is the day the results came out, we handled 1 140 calls. In total, 4 110 of the calls we received were dealt with in a day of the call coming. In other words, they were dealt with and closed so they did not resurface. All but 200 of the remaining calls that we received in the ensuing week were fixed up within seven days. Of those 200, a lot were from students who pursued issues that were not related to our accuracy or our delivery of results but who were looking at and challenging some of the policy decisions and policy frameworks in which we were operating. They were students who looked at their results and said, 'If you had calculated it this way, I would have got a better mark.' The rules are that we calculate it the way we calculated it. For some of those 200 calls, we needed extensive time to negotiate with schools about the one missing result.

On the day of the release of the results, a number of people were monitoring our front entrance. At no stage did we have more than one student standing in the front entrance, despite the expectation that there would be a large number. We had more SSABSA staff available at the front counter than there were community members who needed to talk to the SSABSA staff. I regret that the honourable member had difficulty in the previous year but, if he had to interact on behalf of a constituent this year, he would have found a much smoother and more integrated process. We have learnt odd little bits and quirks in the inquiry system, and we will work further to make sure that it is very clear and that it works very well.

**Mr QUIRKE:** I asked about a hotline for persons such as members of Parliament who get a number of these matters brought to their notice. Quite often they can be sorted out, particularly if the honourable member has an education background and understands most things, although the scaling has always been beyond me. I suggest to the Minister that a number be circulated to people who are likely to want to get through to SSABSA on the day of the results coming out and one or two days afterwards. Whether or not you take it up is a matter for the Minister. Social Security, Immigration and a number of other departments, with which we deal all the time, provide that facility and it is found to be useful. I suggest that it would be well worth your taking on board as well.

**Dr Keightley:** As part of the results inquiry process this year, we also took on 36 lines in addition to our switchboard and widely publicised a separate number for students for results inquiries. We have maintained one of those lines, and it is now permanently in the phone book as a results inquiry line. When we come to the next cycle, we will expand it back out to the 36. All calls came in on one line and went out to 36 extensions in addition to our normal switchboard arrangement.

Telecom monitoring also indicated that there was a very small number of unsuccessful calls, in other words, people who rang up and discovered that all 36 extensions were engaged. That occurred for only a very short period over the lunch hour on the very first day. We will address that as a strategy and we will ensure that more lines are open on that first day. With the exception of the lunch time on the very first day, nobody who rang would have been unable to get through to a person who had a computer screen in front of them.

I was aware of the fact that, while we advertised that our facility was available from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., a number of officers stayed on until 8 or 9 at night just so that students who could not get to us before 6 p.m. were able to access it. We had a small number of calls and were pleased that we offered that facility because they were often students who had real difficulty in gaining their results from the mail because of delivery issues.

We also have a 1800 freecall line for country students so that any country people who want access can have access to it free of charge. We monitored the use of that. That service was used by a number of country students and by a number of South Australian students who were interstate and who wanted to call about it.

The preliminary analysis of the inquiries indicated that the predominant number related to matters about SACE completion such as, 'Why haven't I completed my SACE? Why didn't I get my SACE?' We have made a consistent effort to increase the level of information to students this year about the requirements of SACE and what they have to do to complete it.

The next highest number of questions related to the aggregation program and scaling. Clearly, that is a university policy framework within which we had to operate. To address that, the universities, with the Minister, have contributed some funding to ensure that we have a scaling and aggregation unit to answer some of those questions and to take the load off the SSABSA staff who are looking at the SACE completion. The data changes and requests for reprints or readdresses amounted only to 410 of the 22 000 student results that went out.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I understand the point that the member for Playford is raising and I undertake to have some discussions with Dr Keightley and SSABSA about it. We can explore the procedures that exist for Government agencies, and we will discuss those issues.

**Departmental Advisers:**

Mr D. Ralph, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms M. Sleath, Director, Personnel.

Mr B. Treloar, Director, Corporate Services.

Mr T. Brooks, Director, Coordination and Executive Support.

**Ms STEVENS:** My question relates to the socioeconomic disadvantaged and to schoolcard. Last year the Minister cut schoolcard; all card holders lost \$10; the level of payment for primary students was reduced from \$113 to \$103; and the level of payment for secondary students was reduced from \$170 to \$160. Schoolcard holders also lost their right to free public transport to and from school. The Minister told the Estimates Committee:

... we have announced a number of changes this year and a review is to be conducted next year. The overall bucket of savings we are looking at is about \$5 million. A ballpark figure might be that we are trying to get the 100 000 students on schoolcard back to around 80 000.

The Minister said that eligibility criteria would be changed to exclude automatic eligibility for certain groups, including the holders of Commonwealth benefit cards and to exclude rent and mortgage payments as an eligibility calculation deduction. The Minister said that the new criteria would apply for 1996, and that would take into consideration the exclusion of the Commonwealth benefit card holders.

What is the total allocation for schoolcard and how does this compare with the 1993-94 allocation and the 1994-95

allocation? Also, what changes will be made to the eligibility criteria for schoolcard in 1996?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The actual numbers in 1994 on schoolcard actually went out to 104 000 rather than the 99 000 to 100 000 that we envisaged at the time of the last budget. We still are estimating the figures for this year because people come onto schoolcard all through the school year, but it looks as though we will be able to reduce that number to about 90 000 with the decisions that we have already implemented. The Government intends to continue with the plans it announced in the last August budget, so there is nothing new or surprising in relation to the changes to schoolcard. However, we have not yet resolved the final changes that will operate for the 1996 year.

There is the obvious difficulty in relation to the automatic eligibility for Commonwealth benefit holders. A number of people on those Commonwealth benefits do not genuinely meet the income test limits that schoolcard is meant to apply, and that is \$426 per week. It is a question of being able to establish an alternative system which will allow us to continue with that process announced in August of last year, and that is aiming for a reduction of schoolcard holders to about 80 000 to 85 000 students. We will still have more than 40 per cent of all children in South Australia receiving schoolcard, even with the changes that the Government announced last August.

As I said last year, schoolcard was intended for those families who were in great financial distress and who needed assistance at taxpayers' expense in relation to their education. I do not think that anyone could keep a straight face and at the same time indicate that they believe that 40 to 50 per cent of all families in South Australia are in such great financial distress that the taxpayers of South Australia are obliged through the schoolcard system to provide them with that particular level of assistance.

I indicated last year, as did the member for Unley and others, some of the particular problems in relation to the way the schoolcard system operated within our schools. There was a clear need to make some significant changes to schoolcard; the Government did so, and it did not and still does not resile from the decision or need to make those particular changes.

I will indicate the figures in relation to spending and if there is any need for clarification of those we can come back to this matter. The advice provided to me is that in 1994-95 the base sum was around about \$17 million, and in 1995-96 we are predicting in the order of \$13 million in total. I think we might have to go back and check the figures for 1993-94. We are looking at the 1994-95 and 1995-96 estimates; I do not have the 1993-94 figures with me, but we will be happy to dig up those figures for the honourable member.

**Ms STEVENS:** How many children are receiving schoolcard benefits this year and how does this compare with last year? How many students will become ineligible for schoolcard under the new criteria?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I suggest to the member for Elizabeth that she listen to my answers. The figure estimated for 1994 was 104 500 and we are looking potentially this year at about 90 000. At this stage we are at about 79 000 to 80 000 and climbing, but we are still estimating because we continue to have schoolcard recipients accepted onto the scheme through the year, and in this respect I refer particular to junior primary students who begin school or people who transfer into the system, for example. So, the ballpark estimate now is about 90 000 for 1994-95.

**Ms STEVENS:** Will foster parents still be within your eligibility criteria for schoolcard in 1996?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** This issue is under active discussion with the Minister for Family and Community Services and me. There has been some discussion for a couple of months now, and we are seeking to resolve the issues of concern between the two agencies in relation to access to schoolcard. I understand the issue that has been raised. A question was raised with me either by the Hon. Barbara Wiese or by someone else in this Chamber a couple of months ago, and we are continuing to pursue discussions with the Minister for Family and Community Services and his officers to see whether or not we can resolve that satisfactorily.

**Ms STEVENS:** This question involves family impact statements in relation to the effect of changes to the schoolcard allocations over the past couple of years. Essentially, there has been a reduction in the number of people considered eligible for a schoolcard; there has been a reduction in the actual amount paid in relation to the schoolcard; and there has been the removal of free transport to schoolcard holders. A range of families from my electorate have approached me in relation to rising costs of sending their children to school, and I am sure other members have experienced this also. I could give many examples of this, but I will just cite one.

Mr and Mrs Kevin Munn are parents of four children and live in Elizabeth Grove. They live on a fixed disability pension. Each of their children attend a different school, for valid educational reasons. For example, their daughter attends Gepps Cross Girls High School, which is the most appropriate school for her, and the other children attend different schools because of special needs. This means an extra \$20 a week in travel. The decrease in the amount of the schoolcard allowance is multiplied by four for each child and they say that there has been pressure on them because school fees in each of those schools also have been rising.

What has been the family impact statement in relation to these changes to schoolcard? Will the Minister make this family impact statement public and will there be ongoing monitoring of the effects of these changes on families?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** As I indicated in relation to an earlier question, the requirement to produce a family impact statement is a requirement in relation to the Cabinet process so that, as a submission goes to Cabinet, a family impact statement is produced for that Cabinet submission. We obviously consider the impact on families in relation to administrative or budget decisions we take within our agencies. It is not correct to say that the Government or the Minister are unaware of the effects on families or do not consider the effects on families in relation to decisions they take. We do not formally produce (and neither did previous Governments), family impacts statements labelled as such for every administrative decision taken within an agency.

As Minister I have conceded that decisions we took in relation to free travel did cause additional imposts for families. The honourable member indicates one family, but many others have contacted me and other members' offices. I do not hide from that fact. It is not a pleasant aspect of the ministerial portfolio when you cause extra imposts on individuals or families within the community, but last year the Government had to take difficult budget decisions, and I will not go through the entire argument. That was one of the difficult budget decisions reluctantly that I as Minister had to take within our agency.

Part of the argument last year was that we sought to minimise the effect of class sizes and classroom teacher reductions. One of the ways we sought to do so was by reducing our expenditure in a whole variety of non-classroom teaching areas such as schoolcard, school cleaning, school bus transport and so on. Clearly, once the Government had taken the decision to balance the State budget (I accept that the member for Elizabeth may take the position that the Government should not have sought to do so), obviously a number of difficult decisions had to ensue for a number of agencies.

The issue of free travel was a difficult issue for the Government as it impacted on those families genuinely in need. For the families getting free travel, who I believe were not genuinely in need, I do not see as having to face as great an impact.

In the other area, I have not had an inordinately large number of submissions, correspondence or telephone calls from those 10 000 to 15 000 people who have been taken off the schoolcard scheme. As I argued before and argue again today, I do not accept the notion that almost 50 per cent of all families and children in South Australia are in such dire financial need that the taxpayers have to support them through the schoolcard system. We reduced that number by 15 000 and I have not received an inordinately large number of submissions in relation to that issue. I have received a number in relation to free travel and I concede that it was an extra impost. As Minister I was fully aware of the impact on families of the decisions we took. Nothing I received surprised me. It was not something taken without the full knowledge of the impact we were potentially likely to cause for a percentage of families in South Australia.

**Ms STEVENS:** To clarify, did you say a family impact statement was presented to Cabinet?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The requirement for family impact statements is related to Cabinet submissions, so when you put a submission to Cabinet you are required to incorporate a family impact statement. I am not sure when last year that requirement was implemented, but certainly the individual budget decisions we took were not in the nature of Cabinet submissions. We were allocated a portfolio budget amount and as Ministers we took decisions to implement those policies. We undertook those sort of decisions within my agency—Education and Children's Services. We took into account in our decision making the effects on families, but we do not formally produce a bit of paper headed 'Family Impact Statement'. I have just indicated that the decisions we took were in the full knowledge that they would affect some families in the community in relation to the free travel.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I refer to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, in particular in relation to schoolcard. I note and applaud the reductions and I think personally that 40 per cent is still far too high. A note on the figures states that something in excess of \$10 million a year is coming out of the Education Department budget for schoolcard. While I totally believe in some sense of equity in educational outcome and that teaching has to be directed towards the socioeconomic backgrounds and needs of each student, I question why the Education Department budget has to be used to subsidise the social welfare component of students in need. In view of the fact that the Minister is spending \$10 million a year on schoolcard, does the Minister consider that it should be part of the welfare budget and passed to his colleague the Minister for Family and Community Services so that that \$10 million can go to teachers and schools and not into subsidising the



social welfare budget of this State, no matter how well spent that money may be?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I hasten to say that there is no intention of such a transfer, but I understand the reasoning behind the question because a number of other people have put it to me. Our business is about teaching and learning in schools. We have an agency, through Family and Community Services, that is there to provide assistance, together with other Commonwealth agencies, to those families in financial distress and, in particular, the issue not only of schoolcard but also of free travel. I am not sure whether it should ever have been a responsibility of the Department of Education and Children's Services. Be that as it may, there is no intention by the Government to remove completely or to transfer from us the schoolcard scheme. Even after the changes we have talked about, we will still be providing schoolcard assistance to around 40 per cent of all children in Government schools in South Australia, which is an extraordinary high percentage, but we will continue to do so.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I thank the Minister for his comments. In the grandstanding side of this place, it is often put to the Government benches that we do not care about socioeconomically disadvantaged people in our schools and in our society at large. Schoolcard is often used as a vehicle for saying that we do not care.

**Mr QUIRKE:** Do you write election material?

**Mr BRINDAL:** The member for Playford seems to have a problem in that so many of their social policies fall into such disrepair that the Minister now has to patch them up. Nevertheless, I will proceed with the question—

*Mr Quirke interjecting:*

**Mr BRINDAL:** I would object to that interjection if I knew what it meant. If I understood it, I would ask for an apology. Does the Government remain as committed to the socioeconomically disadvantaged as the previous Government? Does this Government maintain similar policies to those of the previous Government to ensure that no child in this State is educationally disadvantaged as a result of their background or the circumstances in which they find themselves over which they have no control?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The Government is committed and it has demonstrated that commitment to maximise educational opportunities for all young people irrespective of their backgrounds. That is an absolute commitment from the Government and from the Department for Education and Children's Services. We are all about maximising educational opportunities and eventually life choice opportunities for young people as they leave our school system at whatever stage.

It is not appropriate for me at this stage to go through the myriad programs that the Government continues to provide to further or achieve that particular objective. The area of special education and assisting students with disabilities, and the fact that those sections of the budget have been quarantined and have had their resources increased through two very difficult budgets for the Government, are good indications of the commitment that the Government has had, and continues to have, for those disadvantaged students and those with disabilities within our community. We obviously also have a range of other programs for those students and young people with other forms of educational disadvantage and for students who come from a disadvantaged social and family background. The Government continues to do all that it can to maximise their educational opportunities.

**Mr BRINDAL:** We can only hope that your commitment is shared by those opposite.

**Ms WHITE:** On 10 April this year, the Minister released a media statement headed South Australia ahead on computers in education. In that release, there is a statement that South Australian schools have one computer for every 10.8 children, with more than 16 000 computers in classrooms in South Australia. The Minister stated that the statistics are well ahead of other States.

I want to highlight a particular instance in my electorate although there are many. At the Settlers Farm Primary School, 750 students share access to 16 computers which are 286 machines. The Minister will be aware that there are better machines in many other schools. In about one hour's time, that school will hold a parents' meeting to make a very important decision. On days like this, when the weather is a little cold, those 750 students must sit out on asphalt because they do not have a school hall. The school has been talking to the Education Department about the provision of a school hall, an impost to the school of the order of \$9 000 per annum. The decision which that meeting must make is whether to spend the money on that facility which it definitely needs or whether it should put the money into other areas such as its computing equipment.

The Minister will be aware that the new Carr Government in New South Wales has pledged 640 new computing staff positions and up to \$95 million for 90 000 more computers in the next four years. A total of \$3 million has been allocated annually to connect every school to Internet. I read an article earlier in *The Age* which highlighted the issue by warning that Victoria's education system risks a disastrous chasm between the information rich and information poor because it has no coordinated policy on computers in schools.

Does the Minister have a policy for teaching information technology in South Australian schools? If so, what are the details in terms of contact time for children, standards to be achieved, and the minimum standard for equipment used in schools?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** At the moment, the department is producing comprehensive policy on technology generally, not just on information technology, which is just out for, or about to go out for, widespread consultation within the community. I am not sure whether the previous Government had a similar policy. I am not aware of it, but it might have had one. This might be the first comprehensive policy to be produced under the new Government.

With regard to the New South Wales policy announcement made by Mr Carr, that was to try to provide access, as I remember those particular articles, to one computer for every 10 students. He is obviously starting in New South Wales from a much lower base in terms of the number of computers within the school system. It is seeking to arrive where South Australia already is in terms of the number of computers for students. As the honourable member indicated, we are already providing in South Australia, through the good offices of parents and in the system generally, one computer for every 10 or so students.

In relation to the school in the honourable member's area, if the school goes down the path of the capital works assistance scheme for the construction of a new hall, one of the issues which will have to be factored in is that many school communities factor in higher income from school halls to meet the annual lease repayments. Many school communities, when considering constructing a school hall, do so on the

basis of being able to hire out that school hall in the evenings and at weekends.

**Ms WHITE:** They won't cover costs in Taylor.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The honourable member suggests that people do not have the money. Many schools in similar socioeconomic areas to that of the school in the honourable member's area have made that provision. I am involved in district basketball through my family. I assure the honourable member that Elizabeth, Central Districts and Noarlunga are the most rabid supporters of district level basketball of any area throughout metropolitan Adelaide. Basketball clubs in those areas have a great commitment to hiring school facilities. If the honourable member is not aware of that, perhaps she should consider those areas in terms of the hire of school facilities and halls. Those basketball clubs must hire those facilities to undertake training and preparation for district-level competition. Many other sports make such provision. That is one possibility in terms of offsetting the annual lease repayments or the loan repayments for a school hall.

*[Sitting suspended from 6 to 7.30 p.m.]*

#### **Membership:**

Mrs Geraghty substituted for Mr Quirke.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The other point that I wanted to mention in response to the member's question on computers in schools is the heartening recent agreement that the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers reached at the most recent ministerial council meeting for the in principle introduction of the education network to Australia. As members would know, the Commonwealth Government and Minister are committed to the introduction of an education network which is intended to link all schools in Australia with all TAFE institutes, universities and a number of other outlets as well.

At the recent ministerial council meeting the State and Territory Ministers agreed to the Commonwealth Minister negotiating on their behalf with appropriate private sector suppliers of a potential education network link and to report back to Ministers I think some time in September of this year. The associated part of that agreement was the Commonwealth Minister getting the approval again of State and Territory Ministers to commence negotiations with computer hardware suppliers in terms of a bulk order of computers for all State and Territory Governments in relation to the computer needs of their schools.

The Commonwealth Minister's statement to Ministers was that, on the initial work that it had done, it believed that if the States and Territories worked together in terms of the purchasing of computers, there would be a potential saving to schools of about 30 per cent in the cost of computer hardware. The figures that Simon Crean was quoting—and obviously he is not to be held to these at this stage; they are indications that officers have given him of initial discussions—were that a personal computer which might trade for or cost around \$2 600 at the moment would potentially cost around \$1 700, if such an agreement could be reached between State and Territory Governments and a major supplier or a number of major suppliers. If that sort of an agreement can be finalised potentially it has significant benefits for parents and staff within the member's local school. Whatever money they happen to raise for the

purchase of computers, if there can be a 30 per cent reduction in the cost of that through this State and Territory agreement with the Commonwealth, then clearly there are significant potential advantages for schools in terms of the purchasing of computers.

The third aspect, which currently is not subject to negotiations in relation to the education network, is that the view is that if there is one education network established nationally and if we do bulk up the computer purchases in terms of hardware for that system it may be possible to negotiate with educational software suppliers for reduced prices for educational software to operate on the computers and the network. Those who have had recent experience in purchasing educational software would know that it is extraordinarily expensive for schools. Being able to aggregate the purchases of the various States and Territories might mean, further down the track, that we are able to provide the option of cheaper educational software to be used in schools as well. So, in all those areas, I think the recent agreement between the Commonwealth and the State is heartening and potentially can lead to significant cost reductions in terms of hardware and potentially software for schools.

**Ms WHITE:** As a supplementary question, I take the Minister's point about the Commonwealth-State agreement, but I highlight the fact that it is still very difficult for a lot of schools which do not have a great fundraising capacity. In light of that, how are the 16 000 computers to which the Minister refers in his press release spread across the school system? How many schools have no computers? How many schools have computer to student ratios below the Minister's figure of 10.8?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Clearly, we do not have that sort of information available. I am not sure whether that sort of detailed information is available even within the department. In terms of computer numbers, 'any average' will involve schools with higher ratios and schools with lower ratios. I would be surprised if many schools do not have a computer, but I cannot speak in relation to all 700 schools. All those schools will at least have access to one in relation to EDSAS, because that has been provided through the capital infusion—the \$8 million—that went into the budget for administrative computing support within schools. I am not sure whether we have detailed information available regarding general purpose computers, but I will check.

**Ms WHITE:** How many information technology teachers are employed by the department? How many schools do not offer information technology as part of their curriculum?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** We would have to check with SSABSA's year 12 enrolments whether information technology is a separate subject, but there is a subject called something like that in year 12. We obviously do not have a subject called information technology itself. We have eight key areas of learning within schools, and information technology is integrated in most schools throughout the curriculum. It is not just a stand alone subject; you use a computer when you are doing your mathematics, English, or science. You do not actually sit down and do computing in many schools any more. Computing is integrated across the curriculum, and you use it as an aid or procedure in terms of learning across the curriculum. Certainly, some of our secondary schools do have time available for young people to learn keyboarding skills. I doubt whether we would have information for the number of year 8 to 10 students who are undertaking keyboarding skills and for what time that would be undertaken within schools. It would vary considerably.

**Ms WHITE:** One of the Mayer committee key competencies, as the Minister would know, relates to the use of technology. How is this key competency being introduced, and what steps have been taken to ensure that all students have adequate access to those studies?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The Mayer competencies are being piloted in about 18 schools—Government and non-government—in South Australia, over a two or three year period, and the use of technology is one of those competencies. The South Australian system has the view that our current curriculum basically incorporates the eight key areas of learning. It is a question of highlighting from within the curriculum statements and profiles where young people are gaining those competencies. For example, in the use of technology it may well be that in a number of subject areas young people doing science or whatever else have to use technology. The Executive Director of Curriculum, Mr Jim Dellit, has been working in this field for a number of years, and I will hand over to him to highlight some of the activities going on in our pilot programs in relation to the technology key competency.

**Additional Departmental Adviser:**

Mr J. Dellit, Executive Director, Curriculum.

**Mr Dellit:** The Minister has largely provided all the information that is on file regarding the piloting of the key competency. Part of that pilot program is an audit of the curriculum, both R-10 and 11 and 12 SACE, to see how the key competencies line up with the curriculum as it exists and what sort of changes are required to manipulate the curriculum to ensure that all the competencies are covered. The key competencies are being trialled and piloted in a range of schools. In fact, DECS has not decided to proceed with the introduction of the key competencies, although I think that will certainly happen given the success of the trial so far. The audit of the curriculum has occurred in all areas of study, both the post-compulsory curriculum in years 11 and 12 and the compulsory curriculum from preschool to year 10.

The curriculum has been examined for its ability to host each of the key competencies so that they are not a new piece of curriculum but are worked through the existing curriculum in the manner described by the Minister. It has been shown how technology can be worked through the curriculum in all areas (English, mathematics, science) as well as in its own discrete area of curriculum to ensure that students can demonstrate competencies across a range of learning areas to ensure that they are transferable skills to the world of work. We have auditors available if anyone wishes to examine it to show the sorts of changes that might be required in mathematics and English to ensure that those competencies can be developed.

**Ms WHITE:** I ask a supplementary question. What is the total value of the grants to schools from last year's allocation of \$300 000 under the computer assistance scheme? What is intended this year for that scheme and what criteria will apply to those grants?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The computer assistance scheme is unrelated to the Mayer key competencies, and we would need to get some information for you on that. I am not sure whether the computer assistance scheme is continuing, but we will look at that matter and provide an answer to the honourable member as part of the update at the conclusion of the Estimates Committees.

**Ms WHITE:** Has the Minister had any discussions with EDS on training requirements to ensure that employment opportunities following the outsourcing of the Government's information technology requirements are able to be accessed by South Australia?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I have not personally had discussions with EDS, but the Government has. The Government has already established a small group that has been working with TAFE, universities and industries to try to project the needs of the work force over the coming 10 years in terms of the massive boost in this particular area of industry that we are likely to see in South Australia.

We are obviously talking not just about EDS but also with Motorola, Australis and a number of other industries related to EDS that are looking to come to South Australia and, with the recent decision in relation to Westpac, there is obviously a very significant boost to the State's industrial base in this area. A group has been looking at the work force needs over that next 10 years or so, in terms of what sort of graduates we are looking for coming out of our university and TAFE systems in the first place.

I attended a recent meeting with the Premier, the Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education, the vice-chancellors and a representative from TAFE which is now in the process of establishing a coordinating group to look at this whole area. From our viewpoint we will be looking to have a representative from the Department for Education and Children's Services on that coordinating group because once we know what industry wants in South Australia the universities and TAFE institutes will know what sort of courses they will need to provide over the next 10 years. Then, in a trickle down effect, we will need to know what sorts of subjects our young people should be completing at year 11 and 12 to maximise their chances for those TAFE and university opportunities to feed up into this new industry in South Australia.

So, a lot of work has commenced in this area; a lot more needs to be done obviously; and the Department for Education and Children's Services will be a part of that group in looking at what the educational needs will be.

**Mr LEGGETT:** On the Estimates of Payments, page 58, I note that an allocation of \$800 000 has been made to an initiative called the Wiltja program. Can the Minister explain the benefits of this program for Aboriginal students?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member was away for a couple of hours this afternoon. During his absence from the Committee on other business, I indicate that the member for Unley raised this issue and there is therefore a response from me on the record.

**Mr LEGGETT:** I note that in the past year 14 schools have closed or amalgamated. What is the rationale behind these closures?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** This issue has not been raised. A question has been raised in relation to preschools. The Government made a clear commitment prior to the last election, when confronted with the suggestion that we were to close 363 schools or 60 per cent of all schools in South Australia, that the Government was to continue with the existing school closure policy that the previous Government had used. That policy broadly had resulted in about 10 school closures each year for the past seven years, so the Government said, 'If we are using roughly the same policy, we would anticipate that, on average, we would close about 10 schools a year for the four years,' and that is where the magic figure of 40 eventually came from.

The Government has basically continued with a policy of review in a number of areas. There has not been the widespread decimation of schools throughout South Australia, as predicted by some prior to the election. A number of schools have closed and we are continuing to look at the rationalisation of schools in a number of areas. The commitment we have given all along has been that school communities will always be consulted. They will not get a pink slip out of the blue, 'Don't come Monday' without any consultation. There will be consultation always, but, in the end, the decision will be taken by me as Minister. That may or may not concur with the community view and it may or may not concur with any report that a committee of review might have established.

The community will provide a view to me as Minister, as will the department, and perhaps the committee of inquiry. In the end, the buck stops on the Minister's desk and the decision will be taken by the Minister as to whether or not a school will be closed. The Government is on track to achieving approximately 40 school closures over four years. By and large, most of the closures have been achieved with a relatively small amount of community unrest or protest. There have been one or two isolated examples but the large number have been accepted by local communities as being of benefit to the children and as being supported by the majority of people.

**Mr LEGGETT:** Will the Minister encourage the flying, recognition and use of Australian and State flags at schools? Will he support programs for flying flags properly and students learning all verses of the national anthem? Will that apply to staff and visiting local and Federal MPs?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I cannot talk about an education program for visiting State and Federal members. The former Director-General issued an instruction to schools, and that has been followed up by the new Chief Executive Officer, that there is an expectation that the Australian flag is flown or displayed prominently in our schools. If a school has a flagpole, that might mean that the flag is flown. A number of schools choose to display the Australian flag prominently in the administration area or in the entrance to the school. Frankly, I am not particularly fussed which option schools adopt. We are trying to be flexible about it. We believe that we should engender in our young people a pride for Australia and the Australian flag. It is also consistent with the Commonwealth Government's initiatives in relation to civics education, which have been supported by the State and Territory Ministers and Governments.

*Mr Leggett interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** No, we do not require schools to go through the daily ritual of raising the flag. We have left those sorts of things to local school communities to make a judgment as to what best suits them. In some small communities, particularly in the country, there are more formal flag-raising ceremonies. Nevertheless, there is the expectation that the flag will be flown or displayed prominently.

The Chief Executive Officer has indicated that there is an expectation that all our students will be able to sing the national anthem when they leave primary schooling. I do not know whether we have got down to the definition of first and second verses. In the visits that I make to schools, I note pride in the flag and in the national anthem. Invariably, these days, at formal assemblies, school openings, presentation ceremonies, etc., the children in our primary schools, in particular, stand and sing the national anthem, and that is to be encouraged.

**Mr LEGGETT:** Do you know what percentage of schools fly the flag prominently? Is it the majority?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The answer to that is 'No'. My experience suggests that the majority fly the flag or display it. As I said, a majority of schools ensure that the children at junior primary and primary level sing the national anthem at formal ceremonies and on other occasions.

*Mr Leggett interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am talking about the Australian flag, yes.

**Ms STEVENS:** My question follows on from that of the member for Hanson in relation to school closures and relates to page 58 of the Estimates of Receipts and Payments. In October last year the Minister said that 40 or so schools would be closed over the next three years and that they had not been identified but would be subject to a process of formal restructure reviews. On 11 April the Minister provided information on school restructuring operations. This included details of reviews in progress at that time, including the Marion Road corridor project; the southern Fleurieu cluster; the Christies Beach High School; eastern Fleurieu cluster; Clare school's restructure; Jamestown schools; the Enfield, Nailsworth and Northfield High Schools; and the inner city primary schools. Which schools were closed in 1994-95 and which will close at the end of this year? Can the Minister provide up to date information on the status of the reviews and indicate when schools involved might be advised of the decisions?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** It is important to note that a number of those reviews do not involve potential closures of schools: they involve restructuring. Some school reviews are essentially looking at combinations of primary and secondary schools in some country areas, linkages between secondary schools and TAFE or possibly the establishment of middle schooling in a particular local community. So restructuring includes a whole range of options, one of which is closure but obviously includes a whole range of other restructuring options which do not include closure. So I offer a note of caution to anyone interpreting a list of restructuring reviews: it is not directly translatable to a number of potential school closures.

The list of schools that have closed during 1994-95 is as follows: what was formerly Augusta Park High School, Banksia Park Junior Primary School, Bevan Crescent Primary School, Corny Point Rural School, Forbes Junior Primary School, Fremont High School, Holden Hill Primary School, Marananga Primary School, Modbury Junior Primary School, O'Sullivan Beach Junior Primary School, Ridley Grove Junior Primary School, Risdon Park High School, Tonsley Park Primary School and Redhill Rural School.

The other reviews will proceed. The eastern Fleurieu review is actually the REEF project, which is the Strathalbyn restructure. That project involves a group of schools which have got together in the Strathalbyn area, and the restructure for this year has not involved any closure of a school. In relation to a number of small schools, such as Ashbourne, we have a primary coordinator who operates those particular campuses and they are linked in with the Strathalbyn School and a number of other network schools in that particular area. I must admit that, when I first saw it, it seemed a very complex and involved restructure, and I thought that, if I had been involved personally, I would be surprised if I would have come up with that sort of option. However, it has been very strongly community driven and supported by parents, staff, principals and, having looked at it, having asked a

number of questions and having spoken to the local member, who is the Premier and who indicated that there was very strong support from the community for that particular restructure to go ahead and that everyone was happy with it, I gave my approval for it to continue in order to see how it would work.

There is an example of a restructure review that has not closed down a school but changed the nature and structure of the school. The Le Fevre one has reported, I believe, and there is nothing active on my desk in relation to it. I have not seen any suggestions of closures in relation to that, but I can check for the honourable member. As to the inner city review, which involves Sturt Street, Gilles Street and Parkside, my latest understanding is that it will report in the not too distant future. We are waiting on that report.

The Clare schools restructure is one in which the member for Culance has a particular interest. We have discussed that on a number of occasions. The proposition being looked at there is, in effect, maybe a middle schooling option being provided at the Clare High School site, maybe the top end of the Clare Primary School going over to the high school and maybe a linkage between Clare High School, the middle school and a TAFE campus on the new site, maybe even linked in with preschool and child care as an educational community.

No decisions have been taken on that, other than to say that they are still exploring it and it will be a fair way down the track. Jamestown primary and secondary I understand are not under question of closure but it is a question of either amalgamation or working together in those communities. Peterborough is only being looked at and has not been established as an area. There is some discussion about whether there should be some coming together of a middle schooling option with primary and secondary schools. That is in the early stages.

Christies Beach High School we have talked about. The suggestion, as part of the capital works program, is bringing together the two sites on the one site. It nominally comes within the terms of a review and restructure, but in essence it is bringing together two parts of one campus onto one site. It is still Christies Beach High School. I refer to the Marion Road corridor project. I spoke with the district superintendent recently at a very successful function at Marion High School, at which was present a NASA astronaut and some of the star actors and actresses from Sky Trackers. The latest information is that, hopefully, some time in term three we might get a final recommendation in terms of the Marion Road corridor project. There has been one response there, namely, that Tonsley Park and Mitchell Park Primary Schools amalgamate on the Mitchell Park Primary School site and become Clovelly Park Primary School. Tonsley Park Primary School has closed. That almost exhausts the reviews.

**Ms STEVENS:** The Minister mentioned that not all reviews are potential closures, but which are?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** One does not know that until the review committee reports. As I have indicated on a number of occasions, as Minister I do not have in my top drawer a hit list of schools for closure. These issues are discussed at the local level. Recommendations come to me and I make a decision. It is up to the local communities in terms of what they might recommend. The Marion corridor project may recommend school closures or that they all stay open. The same may be true of Gilles Street, Sturt Street and Parkside. We do not make it a pre-condition of reviews that they come to a certain conclusion. We conduct reviews to look at what

in educational outcomes is best for the school and students in those communities. Then they will report, and if I agree with that, that is fine; if I disagree I make a decision that is different from the review committee. That is the nature of a review. It is not that they are given a list of schools to chop off in their community. They are there to conduct a review.

**Ms STEVENS:** After the Minister's announcement in January of this year that the Port Adelaide Girls High School would close next year, enrolments were immediately lost giving the community little opportunity to explore options. What will the Minister do to ensure that reviews are timely and avoid creating undue community concern and the premature loss of student enrolments because of the uncertainty about the future of a school?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In relation to Port Adelaide Girls High School, the story that I have received from the staff at that school was that they said that, for a number of years under the previous Government and continuing in the first year of the new Government, there had been varying stories about the potential closure of the school. I obviously cannot answer for the previous years of the Labor Government and those rumours and stories.

The issue was first raised with me last year. I met staff, students and parents late last year. I told them, as my commitment always had been, that we could go through a process of a formal public review of the school. They pleaded with me not to go down that particular path. They said that they did not want a review of the school to be conducted. They said that the department and its senior officers had all the information about the school. They knew their views as staff, students and parents. What they wanted from me as Minister was an early decision one way or the other as to whether the school would be kept open, which was obviously their wish, or whether it would be closed, which was not their wish. They wanted a decision quickly and they did not want a review.

I said that I was very reluctant to proceed down that path. They insisted and I wanted to know the attitude of the Institute of Teachers. I said that I would want an assurance from the Institute of Teachers from Clare McCarty downwards, that she supported the process. I received that undertaking from the local Institute of Teachers' representative and from the President of the Institute of Teachers, Clare McCarty, that they did not want a formal review process to be initiated in relation to Port Adelaide Girls High School. Having received those submissions from the local school community which was supported by the Institute of Teachers, I accepted the proposition and made the decision which they obviously opposed at the time and which they continue to oppose to this day.

The issue is difficult. Normally, my preferred course would be to conduct a review and then to make a judgment. While a school is having a review conducted, that will always be a destabilising time for the school. However, that is the preferred course. The preferred course is to be able to say to a community that it will be consulted and that it will have an opportunity to put its point of view and we will then make a decision. In effect, we must ensure that reviews do not drag on for inordinate periods of time. The western suburbs review conducted under the previous Government dragged on for 18 months or two years. That was far too long and it was debilitating for all the schools, staff and parents involved.

Most reviews should be conducted within three to six months maximum. Congratulations should be given to the staff, parents and communities of Nailsworth, Northfield and

Enfield. That review was conducted expeditiously by local community representatives with a recommendation. Within 24 hours of the recommendation, I received a letter jointly signed by the three chairs of the school councils asking me whether I had made my decision. They wanted to announce the decision quickly as they did not want the matter to drag on any longer. That is the kind of period that is appropriate. If a review drags on and on, that is debilitating for schools and it is to be avoided if possible.

**Ms STEVENS:** My next question relates to Serco outsourcing. On 21 February, the Minister told Parliament that he had established a working party to advise him on whether there should be a trial of the proposal to outsource administrative functions undertaken at schools. That followed a proposal put to the Minister by Serco to contract out facilities management. Has the Minister received any advice from the working party? What decision has the Minister made on this matter?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** No, I have not received a report and therefore not made a decision. The committee has commenced meeting, and I await its report with interest. I have been provided with further information in response to an earlier question by the member for Elizabeth in relation to the Elizabeth-Fremont amalgamation. The advice that I have received states that negotiations have been conducted with the school community to ensure that all students will be able to be housed in appropriate accommodation from the beginning of the 1996 school year. It reiterates that, following the recent approval of Cabinet, works will commence in about September to ensure that the existing accommodation on the Elizabeth city site is upgraded prior to the Fremont students arriving on the site.

Obviously the new special interest music facility will not be completed in that time, as the member indicated; there is a ballpark figure of mid next year for the completion of the special interest music facility. In the interim, we are hoping that students will be accommodated within the existing relocatable accommodation. A detailed strategy to ensure that the transition is achieved successfully has been developed and agreed, I am told, between the school community, consultant architects and the DECS Facilities Office.

**Mr BRINDAL:** The Minister would be aware that prior to the beginning of every year many schools attempt to staff and allocate children to classes on the expectation of an enrolment. He would also be aware that the figure used this year was one to 30, so that if a primary school had 300 children expected to attend 10 teachers would be allocated, and if they had 308 children, because you cannot allocate a point of a teacher, they would be given 11 teachers.

As you would be aware as Minister, Highgate Primary School anticipated some eight children above the number that would give them an extra teacher but in the event had 28 fewer students. On the second day back the children were allocated to classes and they suddenly discovered that because there were 28 fewer enrolments one less teacher was needed, and that meant that there was a displacement of a teacher. There was a subsequent outcry from the parents, who perceived that they had been robbed of a teacher and that something had gone wrong with the process. Has the Minister taken any steps to ensure that there is no repetition of this process in future years, or has he any ideas how we can save a recurrence, because it was traumatic for the parents and teachers? I believe it was nobody's fault but a genuine mistake, but equally it would have been wrong for the

Government to leave a teacher there just because it got the numbers wrong.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** It is an important issue. The officers of the department's Personnel Directorate had negotiations or discussions with the Principals Association's representatives and others in terms of the problems we found ourselves in at the start of this year—that is, that the principals' projections were almost 4 000 more than the actual numbers of students who turned up in schools. Part of that is understandable in terms of students receiving job offers or higher education study which they otherwise might not have expected to get. Nevertheless, it left us with a considerable dilemma. I indicated at the time that the sort of options we needed to look at were where we staffed our schools for the start of the year more conservatively and then, if we found that there were additional students, it would be much more palatable for the local community to be told that there was an additional teacher for the school rather than having to displace somebody one or two weeks into a school year.

Having had those discussions—and I will seek advice from Marilyn Sleath or Kevin Boaden, who is about to join us at the table—in broad terms my advice is that we are seeking to staff our schools for 1996 on a more conservative base. Of course, we can never guarantee that any system of estimation will get everything right. The principals were never going to be 100 per cent right, and we did not expect them to be. Our new system will not be 100 per cent right either, and no-one can expect it to be. We will have to be a bit closer to the mark than 4 000 students; that is my expectation of the system. It is our anticipation that we will be closer to the mark for 1996. I ask Mr Kevin Boaden whether he has anything more to say in terms of trying to meet these dilemmas.

#### **Additional Departmental Adviser:**

Mr K. Boaden, Assistant Director, Personnel.

**Mr Boaden:** Schools have already been informed of our estimates of our 1996 enrolment figure. We based this on a series of historical data over the past 10 years in relation to the enrolment pattern for that school. During the next two months, schools will have the opportunity to provide additional information, so there will be some refining of that figure before we actually determine the staff for 1996. A number of schools last year—Highgate not being one of them—determined in advance that they were a bit unsure about their figures and asked that a teacher not be placed in their school until they had firmed up their figures in February. About 30 or 40 displacements were saved last year as a result of that process. This additional process will improve the situation even further for next year. There will still be a difficulty in secondary schools with respect to the year 11 and 12 estimates; they are always difficult for us.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I seek information relating to the administration of the Education Department. Over the past few years, there has been growing dismay among educators, specifically principals in schools, about educational administration at a departmental level. Having recruited Australia's leading educator as your Chief Executive—

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** He will be pleased to hear that.

**Mr BRINDAL:** I know he will. I mean that; I am quite serious—and having flattened out the executive, are you satisfied with the shape and direction in which your Chief Executive is now taking your department?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The answer to that question is obviously 'Yes'. I was delighted that Mr Denis Ralph was able to take up the appointment of Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Education and Children's Services. He has considerable experience in our State education system. He whispered in my ear that four members of this Committee, at some stage of their education careers, have served under him in an educational sense at some stage over the past 30 to 35 years or so. Certainly, that depth of experience, together with the experience in New South Wales, I am sure will stand him in good stead in providing us with much needed stability and leadership of the department as we move out of the 1990s into the next century.

Certainly, from my viewpoint, the Chief Executive Officer and I will continue to discuss the nature and the structure of the department. As the honourable member knows, we instituted a number of changes at the start of last year in terms of the shape and the structure of the department. We are still going through a process of over three years reducing by about 10 per cent the numbers of officers within our central and regional office staff. So, there will continue to be some change within our structures. I will ask Mr Ralph whether he has any comments to make in terms of the shape and structure of the Department of Education and Children's Services, and in particular the bringing together of the former Children's Service Office together with the old Education Department into what will be (it is certainly my expectation, and I know it is his expectation) one united Department of Education and Children's Services and all that that entails.

**Mr Ralph:** In this State, we have one of the most unique and great opportunities to take responsibility for the care and education of children from birth to approximately 18 years to bring about a continuity of sequence in education, teaching and learning, which this State and no other State or Territory in Australia has had before. Within recent months, the Australian Capital Territory has adopted the South Australian model that is in place at the moment. As an educator who has worked as both a primary and a secondary teacher, I am delighted to see the way in which we have been able to bring together the sequence of learning through the first five years of life to all areas of primary and secondary schooling.

With respect to the structure of the department as a whole, it is fair to say that it takes some time for separate organisations to come together to form an integrated and seamless organisation that we are seeking within the new Department for Education and Children's Services. Whilst I am pleased in the main with the structures that we have in place to serve the educational needs of our child care centres, preschools and schools, I am of the view that we need continually to reassess that as part of our pursuit of continuous improvement and improved productivity, and to ensure that we keep abreast of changes that are required in modern management to make ours the most effective education and care system in Australia that has a culture throughout its public service, the teaching service and all aspects of child care in terms of serving the people of this State and ensuring that we produce the best results for the young people in our care in their learning program over 17 years or so.

We need to consider a number of directions in the next stage, and I have brought together principals and the community with the directors of the department to look at where we want to be as an organisation in the year 2005. We need to plan ahead to ensure that the decisions that we take in 1995, 1996 and 1997 ensure that in the next millennium we continue to provide quality education and care that is needed

in this State. I look forward to the contribution that the wider community will make during the latter part of this year as we consult on a proposal for a new charter for education and children's services that will carry this department into the next millennium and put it truly at the forefront of Australian education and child care.

**Mr BRINDAL:** Another concern of the teaching profession is associated with the movement away from a hierarchical model of promotion based largely upon service to the merit principle. The Minister would be well aware of some of the concerns associated with earlier attempts to firmly establish the merit principle. What progress has the Minister made to ensure that the merit principle is not only enshrined in good educational practice but put into operation, and what further plans does he have to ensure that the merit principle is used in respect of all promotion positions?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will ask the Director of Personnel to add any further comments that she might like to add to my response. In broad terms, whilst I understand what the honourable member has said regarding concerns about the merit process, if I understand him correctly he may well mean not that anyone has necessarily opposed the merit process but how a particular process or procedure may have operated.

I understand the issues that the member has raised. The Government announced sometime around the middle of last year a new performance management policy which made some changes in relation to the way our promotion system was operating. For the first time in terms three and four of last year it used performance statements in relation to trying to judge the relative merits of applicants for promotion positions. We are in a process, as I understand it, of reviewing what we have learnt from that process to see how it can guide our future operations. I remain a strong supporter of some form of performance statements or work reporting of some form in our continuing systems. In relation to reviews of panel procedures, we have considered the results of the 1993 review and sometime later this year we should be in a position to announce the Government's views in relation to that issue. I will ask the Director of Personnel if there is anything else in terms of the merit process that she might like to add to my response.

**Ms Sleath:** A fairly intensive review of the merit selection policy and procedures was undertaken not last year but the year before and we involved all of the relevant stakeholders—principals, parent groups, the union, departmental officers and so on. There was an extensive survey done of the users of the policy and we looked at current research around Australia into merit selection. A number of recommendations have come forward from that review. Those recommendations were then taken to what we call a focus group of principals—a group which focus on human resource management issues—on several occasions to test them in that arena as well.

A draft merit selection policy is ready for consultation with the wider field. We did not put it out recently because of other personnel policies that were in the field for consultation, but the new policy will, hopefully, after consultation, streamline the procedures even further. For the internal school merit selection policy they will definitely streamline and give principals greater opportunity to streamline the whole process. We have done costs on the whole of the merit selection policy and everywhere possible we would be wanting, through the consultation process, to reduce those appropriately. I would anticipate that the draft policy goes out for consultation towards the end of the year.

**Mr BRINDAL:** As a supplementary question, there has been an ongoing program, as you know, for many years in the inservice of all the professional staff in equal opportunity. Where is that at? Has that been successful? Has it now integrated totally within the department or is there a need for further work in the area, because it is an important part of the merit process, as you would understand.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I will ask the Director of Personnel to comment in detail. Certainly, considerable effort and resources over recent years have gone into this area, as the member will know, but I will ask the Director of Personnel to indicate the current status.

**Ms Sleath:** Training opportunities for all members of merit selection policies are still currently in place. We train chairpersons, equal opportunity representatives and nominees, and also SAIT union representatives for panels. So, schools which needed further officers trained this year had that opportunity.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** In 1993, after taking advice from the Crown Solicitor, the Minister for Education and Children's Services directed that schools should seek to collect outstanding amounts only by rendering accounts or by personal contact with parents. The instruction also precluded children from being disadvantaged by exclusion from activities or access to facilities as a result of the non-payment of fees by their parents or guardians. Because of the present Minister's decision to allow schools to use debt collectors, the issue of school fees is on the agenda again. The Opposition has a great deal of correspondence from parents who simply cannot afford the fees. Has the Minister taken any advice from the Crown Solicitor on whether schools can enforce the payment of school fees? If so, what was the advice received.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I, too, have received a lot of correspondence over the past 12 months from parents and principals angry at the refusal by some parents who can afford to pay but who refuse to pay. The strongest correspondence I get comes from some parts of the northern suburbs, which are represented by members who are and have been on this committee, and from some areas of the southern suburbs. There are particular pockets where school councils and their principals have a very strong view that a number of parents in their community who can afford to pay choose not to pay.

If parents cannot genuinely afford to pay the school fees, most school communities come to some arrangement with those parents, whether it be for part payment or payment by instalment. To take an example where there is a significant number of families who might be seen to be financially disadvantaged, I recall seeing a statement from the Principal of Salisbury High School in the local *Messenger* newspaper that, if I remember his words correctly, he did not believe that there was anyone in his community who could not afford to take up one of the options that his school was offering in terms of part payment or instalment payment. That is not a statement from me as Minister but from a principal with a considerable number of years of experience in the Salisbury community.

*Mr Brindal interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** As the honourable member indicates, School Card is provided to approximately 40 per cent of families within the Government school system. To answer the second part of the honourable member's question, I advise that I referred the issue not to the Crown Solicitor but to the Solicitor-General. The Solicitor-General provided me with advice two or three weeks ago and the department and

I are now in the process of considering that advice and what response, if any, we need to make to it. In the not-too-distant future we hope to indicate the Government's and the department's response to his advice.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** Is the Minister concerned that some schools have fees over \$300 and that many families who are no longer eligible for School Card are having trouble meeting those costs, particularly when there is more than one child at school? In light of all that, considering the Minister's decision to allow schools to use debt collectors, there is some concern about this matter. Has a family impact statement been undertaken on this matter?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** One of the reasons why some school fees have to be so high is because a number of parents are refusing to pay their fees and make their share of the contribution to the particular school. The school councils in these particular areas will say that those parents who are paying are having to pick up the tab for those parents who can afford to pay but who are refusing to do so. So those other parents within the community are the ones having to pay a higher level of fee because of a refusal by some parents to contribute to their school community. The bottom line is that South Australia's education system will not survive in its current state without the contribution from parents.

If the notion of questions from the Opposition is that we should in some way get rid of and not provide for the payment of school fees, our education system in South Australia will not be able to continue in the relatively healthy state in which it is now. The system will just not survive without the voluntary effort—financial and otherwise—of parents in terms of their contribution to our school communities. That is a strong message that I am getting from school councils, school communities and principals as well. The peak parent body of South Australia, which represents all parents in South Australia, has discussed this issue at great length and recently has adopted a policy position which calls on the Government to ensure the ability for schools to collect school fees.

I accept that it is and obviously will remain an issue of some concern to many in the community. As I have said, if families are genuinely struggling to pay a particular school fee the Principals Association representatives, with whom I meet frequently, tell me that they would take that issue up with their school and that schools invariably would seek to allow for those members in the community who are having genuine difficulty.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** I do not think that the Opposition has any notion to completely dispense with school fees. However, surely the Minister must understand that there are people in the community who live on a week-to-week basis and who cannot stretch a dollar any further, particularly as, in some cases, they have lost eligibility to schoolcard. Some people are really scrounging every day. So I, as do other members, have a great deal of concern about using debt collectors. In view of the Minister's advice that the department does not keep information on school fees and that charges now range from \$60 to \$315, does he agree that it would be appropriate to examine what fees are being charged and whether they are reasonable?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Certainly that will be one of the issues we will consider in relation to school fees. At this stage I have not made a determination in relation to the particular issue raised by the honourable member, but I can indicate that we will give it consideration and certainly some information



in relation to school fees would obviously be of use in terms of our operations as a department.

*Mr Brindal interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member for Unley makes the important point that the school fees are not established by the Minister or the Government: they are established by the school community through the school council, in consultation with the principals and staff representative of the school. So, clearly if the honourable member has a particular issue of concern in her electorate, it may well be an issue that she should take up with her school council Chair and/or President. I would be prepared to circulate the honourable member's comments to school councils in her area to indicate that obviously there is some degree of concern being expressed in relation to the level of school fees.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** I am asking a genuine question across the board and you are turning it into some sort of political vendetta.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am only trying to be helpful, as always, and was offering some assistance so that, if the member was speaking on behalf of her constituents (and she indicated that she had been contacted by a number of people who were living a hand-to-mouth existence—and I presume she is representing her constituents), it may be that her school councils are setting a level of fee too high for her community.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** That was not the question I asked the Minister.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Did you have another question? I am happy to answer another one. Intimidation is not part of my armoury. I was genuinely trying to assist the member in consultation and communication with her electorate. I was offering to be of assistance to the honourable member.

**Mr VENNING:** I understand that there was a discrepancy of some 4 000 students between those estimated for 1995 and those actually attending. Does the Minister anticipate a similar discrepancy next year and, if so, what are the implications for teacher numbers? Will the Minister assure us that any savings from enrolment drops will be used to improve schools?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member was missing from the Committee earlier when a related question was answered and I took the opportunity to indicate that the department has now implemented a new procedure, as outlined by Mr Boaden, Assistant Director of Personnel, which we are hopeful will match more closely the number of students who arrive in our schools at the start of next year and the estimates that we make.

To summarise briefly, we have indicated some estimates to schools, and they will be given the opportunity over the next month or so to communicate or consult with the department, and we will use that amalgam of information to staff our schools. We are hopeful that that will be much closer to the number of students who turn up in our schools next year.

**Mr VENNING:** Does the Minister firmly believe that that can give a closer estimation?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** No system will ever be perfect. However, we believe we can be closer to perfect than a discrepancy of 4 000 students. We are hopeful that we can be closer to the mark than the 4 000 difference. Clearly it creates problems. I know that the honourable member had a number of problems in his electorate in terms of displacements, and certainly from the Government's viewpoint we would rather be able to say in February of next year that we have it exactly right or that we need to provide an additional teacher at

Nuriootpa High School or some other school, and the honourable member can be the bearer of good news to that school rather than having to field a good number of letters and telephone calls from the good citizens of Nuriootpa in relation to losing a teacher as a result of over-estimation of enrolments.

**Mr VENNING:** Before last election the Minister promised to provide \$10 million in interest-free loans to the non-government school sector. Looking at the enrolments, it is amazing that they have gone from 200 000 in 1984 to 177 000 in 1995, a fall of 19 000. On the other hand, private schools have increased from 50 000 to 64 000 students. Percentage-wise, the private school percentage has risen from 25 per cent to way over 35 per cent. Some would say that that trend has been caused because education has not been providing what parents want. In the years ahead, and particularly with regard to this Government, does the Minister believe that the trend will flatten and that a *status quo* will continue?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The honourable member is referring to the statistical summary which we provided at the outset today. He has correctly identified the fact that, over a very long period—the table to which he referred relates to a period of 13 years—the trend has continued for a period of between 15 and 20 years.

If the honourable member were to consider another table which I am not sure is included in the document, he would see that, in terms of comparing our percentage in the non-government sector with that in the other States, for a variety of reasons we have been much lower than the national average in terms of the number of our students who attend non-government schools. The national average is about 28.5 per cent, and the most recent figures for us is about 26 per cent.

That figure has been increasing or trending upwards over the past 15 years or so. The Government believes that we must address what parents think are the key issues and that we must assure them about the concentration on standards within Government school education. Basic skills testing and all we do in that regard is geared towards assuring parents.

If we were to conduct basic skills tests on our year 3 and year 5 students in Government schools in South Australia and compared the results with those in non-government schools in South Australia, I have no doubt that we would compare more than favourably. I would be prepared to stand behind our year 3 and year 5 students, teachers and system in comparison to anyone else in South Australia or in Australia as a whole. I would not fear such a comparison, although it is unlikely that we would be in such a position because non-government schools have not indicated a preparedness to go down the basic skills testing path in South Australia at this stage. However, one of the biggest Catholic diocese in New South Wales, Parramatta, has decided to support and engage itself in basic skills tests.

We must tackle that point and assure the public publicly that we are performing with regard to standards. We need to tackle the perception in relation to discipline problems within our Government schools. That is another issue to which parents will always refer when they talk about reasons why they choose schools for their students.

We have particular problems in our schools because we do not have the easy out of being able to expel or ask someone not to come on Monday if someone happens to misbehave. We are required to provide an education for all students under the age of 15.

If we are to convince the people of South Australia of what most of us accept, namely, that we have a first class education system, we must tackle those issues. The considerable amount of work carried out by Mr Dellit and his team in relation to curriculum statements and profiles will mean that we will be able to say for the first time that there is one framework in relation to curriculum offerings for all our students in all our schools. Over the three years, we will be providing assiduously through Mr Dellit's team and through others quality support materials to assist teachers, and that will be a public assurance to parents and the community of quality within our school system.

We need to address all those issues. It is not sufficient to say that we will simply accept what is occurring and that we will accept people's perceptions of the Government school system. We need to be out there assiduously promoting all that is good within the Government school system. The media do not receive too much kudos. I suspect that they are not here to hear that kudos offered, anyway. However, I would like to congratulate Channel 7 and Channel 9 because, over the past 12 months, in association with officers of the department, they have been running a number of good news stories in relation to good things that are happening within the Government school system. We continue through our officers to provide that kind of information and credit to them.

I can assure members that we will be very active over the coming couple of years in publicly promoting the good things that we do within the Government school system. At the same time I think we have to be accountable, and that is why we have to have in place public accountability measures such as basic skills testing, attribution of levels under the statements and profiles and a number of other accountability measures which will indicate the good performance of our students. In the Quality Assurance Unit, work is being done on quality assessment tasks as well. A range of activities are being conducted by the department to allay any concerns that some parents and community members might have about the level and quality of education that we provide in our Government school system.

**Mr VENNING:** I am aware that over the past few years parents have got the wrong end of the stick and they have expected their children to be taken by bus to the school of their choice rather than to the closest school, which I understand is the criteria. I know that there has been a fairly tough look at the situation and a review. Do you see any further changes in the school bus system? Will there be further outsourcing with regard to the supply of buses?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I am starting to get questions concerning whether we are going to privatise the school bus system. The first point I need to make is that for decades we have had a healthy mix of private sector and departmental school buses, which has operated efficiently and effectively under both the Labor and Liberal Governments. We will continue to look at what is the most cost-effective option in particular areas, and if a private operator can do something more efficiently and cost effectively they may well be successful in terms of a tender. However, if in some areas departmental buses can provide it more effectively and efficiently, they will continue to operate.

It is also correct to say, in a number of our more isolated communities, that private operators, so far anyway, have indicated no interest in offering a service. So, we will need to continue to provide services in those areas because no-one else is in a position to do so. We are currently in a period where, over two to three years, our school bus people will be

reviewing all bus routes in country South Australia to ensure that they comply with the existing policy. The member has accurately portrayed the existing policy. It is not there to provide choice of schools for individuals but is meant to be there to transport students to the nearest school. Sometimes that is interpreted in terms of geographic closeness or in terms of the nearest school bus run or route, which I confess does create some confusion in some country areas. That is the policy, and we will continue to review it. There will continue to be some changes. I know in the Clare area that the local member might have received some complaints about changes we made, but what we found in Clare—

**Mr VENNING:** They were justified.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The member says they were justified; I hearten at his support for that. We are delighted whenever we receive any support on the school bus transport issue. There was a situation where we were transporting students from one side to the other side of Clare to support them in their choice of school. Taxpayers' money, Education Department money, is not to be spent to move people from one side of a regional city to another in order to provide them with a choice of schools; it is there to try to get to school people who live more than five kilometres from their nearest school. That is the main issue in terms of the provision of country buses, and it will continue to be.

**Mr VENNING:** As a supplementary question, are you cutting back on the routes or are you cutting back on who is able to be picked up? Has the criteria been changed, because we have some problems on Yorke Peninsula?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The policy has not been changed: we are seeking to implement the policy. When the reviews are done, if we can manage to accommodate the 100 or 200 students (or however many) we have to transport to a school in five rather than six buses obviously we will do so because that reduces the cost of the school bus transport policy. According to the Director of Corporate Services, we are intending to save \$1.7 million in terms of rationalisation of school bus routes throughout country South Australia, not by changing the policy but by implementing the agreed policy that has been there for years.

**Mr VENNING:** Will there be any rationalisation in relation to private school students using the bus, or are they just filling spare seats?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The policy makes it clear that they can hop on the bus if there is capacity for them.

**Ms WHITE:** The 1994-95 budget included \$18 million receipts from sales of surplus property. The budget papers reveal that revenue totalled \$8.743 million, a shortfall of \$9.3 million, which the Minister has tried to explain as a downturn in land sales. What is the reason for this quite massive shortfall in revenue?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I have given the reason. I do not intend to change my story that quickly. I have indicated before, and I have done so again today, that the principal reason has been an inability to sell some properties. It was a problem the previous Government experienced. I instanced Playford and West Lakes High Schools as examples of schools properties which the previous Government tried to sell and which were factored into its land sales programs in every budget, and we have continued to do so. We are making some progress in relation to Playford High School. We have sold a portion of the West Lakes School to the Bosnian Herzegovina Muslim Society of South Australia Inc, or some similar association. We think we might have sold another parcel of that in this coming year, and we are looking

at recouping the value of that. A portion of the Playford High School has been sold to an old age home, or some association. So we are starting to see some movement.

For example, Grote Street old Adelaide Girls' School site, has a value of up to \$3 million. When the Centre for Performing Arts moves away from there to its new location, then we will be in a position to capitalise on that sale, and we are hoping to do that this year if we can. A perfect example of this whole area is Seaton High School, which I instanced earlier, where the principal wants an ecologically sustainable development. We could have sold that for property for \$1.3 million or so this financial year and, indeed, we wanted to do so. But the principal and the community have said, 'Please don't do that; we want to have an ecologically sustainable development at that school.' Therefore, we have allowed them to continue to explore that, and we have agreed not to sell that property until we resolve it one way or another. We could have gone ahead and said, 'No, we won't even consider the ecologically sustainable development' and sold the property and got our figures up, but we have agreed to delay that land sale. There is a variety of reasons, a principal part of which is the slowness of sale of properties, but in others such as Seaton High School we are a captive of our being reasonable.

**Ms WHITE:** I ask a supplementary question. How will the disposal of Government assets be managed and, given the revenue target for this year from the sale of properties of \$15.3 million, how will this target be met in the light of last year's difficulties?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The procedure for the sale of all Government assets is that the Government declares a particular site as surplus and it is then handed over to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which is responsible for selling properties on behalf of the Government. It is not the responsibility of the Department for Education and Children's Services to sell Government assets. A decision is made to declare a site surplus; it is then another agency's responsibility to sell that asset. Basically, it is handled by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

As I indicated earlier, there are some positive signs, albeit slight, in relation to a strengthening of the property market. One of the problems suffered by the previous Government and by this Government last year is a downturn in the property market and, therefore, the lack of potential buyers. As I said earlier, we have been getting some sniffs for the West Lakes High School, the Playford High School and a number of similar properties which have been on the market for three or four years without being able to be sold, so that is a hopeful sign. Properties such as Grote Street and the Seaton High School are further examples: once the decision is taken, we will be in a position actively to explore their sale. So, the Government is holding up those decisions for a variety of reasons.

We have virtually concluded agreement in a number of other areas, but the moneys will not be paid until 1995-96. For example, the sale of The Orphanage, which will recoup \$1.2 million, has been agreed basically with the Tabor College. A deposit has been paid, but we will not get the final instalment until next year. We have taken a decision, and the money will come in in the next budget period. Should the matter of the Hallett Cove East financing option be concluded successfully, that money will also flow through to the budget in the 1995-96 financial year. For all those reasons and on the best advice available to me, we anticipate achieving pretty

close to the mark of \$15 million this year. The Norwood-Morialta school council has decided to support the sale of part of its property. The potential value of that site could be up to \$3 million. If that property is sold, it can be used for the capital works that are envisaged. If it is not sold, those capital works will not proceed. So, with many projects there is a direct translation: once the property is sold and the money comes in the department will be in a position to proceed with those capital works redevelopments.

**Ms WHITE:** My next question relates to the behaviour management policy of the department. I would like to highlight a view expressed by many people in my electorate. I have received a letter from a constituent about an incident that happened at a primary school in my electorate on 5 May. The letter states:

My son. . . was bashed and kicked in the head by two school bullies resulting in him needing medical treatment. . . [My son] is now back at school but he is terrified that he may be attacked again. The teachers were informed of the attack and say that they don't have the staff to supervise the children during play and lunch breaks and as a result my son is kept in a computer room during such breaks for his own protection. . . Through the hospital social worker the school has been told that in the event of [my son] suffering any permanent disability the school will be sued for compensation. Whilst I understand that school bullies. . . have always been part of the school system I consider that it is aggravated by the understaffing in schools in that they cannot supervise the children during play hours.

Does the Minister accept my constituent's view that reduction in staffing levels is aggravating safety concerns in schools?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** In the end, if we are talking about incidents that occur within a recess break or lunch break and if a school is having significant problems in terms of school bullying or harassment during those periods, then it may well be that some schools do have two or three teachers out on duty. I must say, in most of the schools that I attend it is more often one or two teachers who, on a roster, are engaged in patrolling or being on duty out in the yard during recess and lunch times. If a school, for example, is wanting to look at having three or four, or whatever number of teachers on duty all the time out in the yards, then clearly any policy that reduces the total number of staff will reduce the options for that school. It either means that more teachers have to do more lunch duty, and that is obviously placing a greater load on teachers, or you will have reduced numbers. It depends on what policy the school is adopting in terms of numbers of teachers that they have on lunch duty or recess duty in that school.

If it is an isolated incident—and I do not know the history of this school—then no amount of protection will guarantee that this sort of incident will not occasionally occur within our schools. If it is an incident that is being repeated by a person or a group of people within a school, then, clearly, it is a significant issue that that school needs to take up in consultation with our considerable number of departmental advisers who are available in relation to behaviour management within the school system to see what programs and what behaviour management strategies can be adopted, first, at the school. Then, secondly, as I instanced before, if the school has tried everything with a young person and nothing works at that school, then that is one of the reasons why the Government has increased significantly the number of learning centre places, so that that young person can be excluded for a period of up to 10 weeks from the school so that, in small numbers, experts in behaviour management can

work at trying to alter the behaviour of that young person before they return to that school or to some other school.

As I said earlier, a number of members on both sides of the House have provided me with examples of particular problems with particular students. On behalf of the department, all I can say is that we have officers there who will do whatever they can to assist your local staff and principal in trying to manage the process and, in the end, if it means there has to be an exclusion, we will then seek to provide a place in a learning centre. If there has not been that consultation at this stage, then I would ask the member to provide me with the details and I would be prepared to ask officers in the department to speak with the member first, if need be, but meet with the school to see whether we can pursue some sort of strategy to ensure that this young person is not being locked away on the basis that he or she is frightened of others in the schoolyard. Clearly, that is not an acceptable long-term behaviour management strategy in terms of that school.

**Ms WHITE:** On 11 February there was a media release about a new school discipline policy. Has that been finalised and has the Government committed the additional \$2 million for behaviour management over two years as announced by the Minister on 13 February? If so, how will this money be spent?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The answer is, yes, we are progressively spending that additional \$2 million. Again, earlier today I instanced the increase in learning centre places. I instanced the annexe of the new Bowden-Brompton school and down south at the Hub learning centre. So, in a number of those areas we are committed to spending those sums of money and have already done so in many areas. I am told, for example, that a new learning centre is to be opened shortly at Elizabeth Vale for year 3 to 7 students and there will be a change in focus of the learning centre at Brahma Lodge to cater for years R to 3, which I talked about earlier today, the sad fact being that we will have to do more in those areas. A range of other programs is being funded throughout the country and in the city in terms of behaviour management. We are spending the money and we will continue to spend the money to try to assist principals and staff with managing any difficulties they have in their schools.

**Ms WHITE:** Has the school discipline policy been finalised? If so, will the Minister table a copy?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** My understanding is that a draft of the school discipline policy was cited by James Lush in the *Adelaide Review* in recent weeks. So, there are obviously a number of drafts floating around the department. It is about to go out into the field for consultation so that we can listen to what parents, principals and staff have to say. I understand from the Chief Executive Officer that it will be circulated next month. After we have consulted with the field, we hope to finalise the policy before the end of the year.

**Mr LEGGETT:** The Minister mentioned the rising quality of education in our Government schools, and I am sure that this can be attributed partly to the strong stand that has been taken on discipline. Will the Minister outline what is currently being undertaken in the behaviour management program that he has initiated? The Minister has covered some of this question but not all of it.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I have spoken about that aspect of our policy as it relates to increased provision of alternative learning centres. However, as the honourable member has rightly pointed out, I have not commented on other aspects of our behaviour management policy and strategy. We are intent that our new draft policy will provide for increased

powers for principals for expulsion of post compulsory age students. The decisions are to be taken by principals at the local level rather than by officers of the Department for Education and Children's Services. The new policy will provide for that.

There will also be provision for a number of options, such as the use of behaviour management contracts or fair discipline contracts, but we have not finalised a name for those. We will also be looking at behaviour management codes within schools based on an overall State code or system. A number of the initiatives that were included in our policy platform prior to the election will be incorporated in the draft policy when it is circulated for comment. As always, we are very reasonable in these sorts of things and we will await comment from the field before we make final decisions in terms of how we implement that draft policy.

#### **Membership:**

Mr De Laine substituted for Ms White.

**Mr De LAINE:** I refer to Program Estimates page 112, 'Broad objectives and goals'. The Minister's announcement that Port Adelaide Girls' High School will close next year will mean, if it happens, an end to an important single sex school environment for girls and young women in the western districts. What was most disturbing was the failure of the Minister to announce any plans for the future of the 140 students now attending the school, despite repeated undertakings by him that no school would be closed without full consultation with the school community. What action has been taken by the Minister to place the students currently at Port Adelaide Girls' High School in an alternative school or schools? Will he give a guarantee to female students in the western suburbs that they will be given the opportunity to attend an all-girls' high school?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I understand that the honourable member has just joined us, but he is raking over old coals. We previously have discussed this matter very fully in this particular committee. I say that in no critical way of the honourable member, but I have already indicated the Government's position in relation to Port Adelaide Girls' High School. Certainly, the Government should not in any way be criticised for not carrying out full community consultation when, as I have indicated previously, we were asked by the local school community, the staff and parent representatives not to go to a full scale review, and that decision was endorsed by the Institute of Teachers and also by Clare McCarty. I went on at some great length earlier in relation to this issue, and I refer the honourable member to my earlier comments in relation to that. Certainly, I reject absolutely any suggestion that the Government could be criticised for a failure to consult in relation to the Port Adelaide Girls' High School.

Clearly the school will close at the end of 1995, and we have indicated through senior officers within the department that we are working to provide alternative options for the girls who attend Port Adelaide Girls' High School. A number of options still are being considered and explored. It is being made a little difficult because for various reasons—and I understand that—some of the representatives of the Port Adelaide Girls' High School have chosen not to be involved further in the process. Frankly, I think that is sad; I think that they are being led to believe that in some way the Government might change its decision. I have indicated publicly, and do so again today, that, as Minister, certainly

I will not be changing the decision in relation to Port Adelaide Girls' High School, and we should now be working together in the interests of those girls in terms of their future educational options.

Whilst I cannot control whether local community representatives will continue to be part of that process, I certainly indicate that our officers will continue to do all they can to ensure that we maximise the options and the opportunities for those girls to continue their education. One of the options for some of them may well be to continue their education at an all girls' high school, such as that at Gepps Cross, and that is one of the issues that is being considered. However, as the honourable member will know, a number of other options are also being considered for those girls in relation to other opportunities within their local area.

**Mr De LAINE:** Will the students who are relocated be assisted with public transport fares?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I do not know whether they will be assisted with public transport fares, but we will be considering what public transport options exist if they have to move to other than a local or neighbourhood school. If everyone was prepared to work together in terms of looking at transitional arrangements, we might be able to explore those options. However, if local community representatives continue to refuse to be involved as part of that process, we will have to continue to look at it from a departmental viewpoint.

**Mr De LAINE:** The department recently announced a review into the provision of secondary education in the Parks area. On top of the announcement in relation to the impending closure of the Port Adelaide Girls' High School, people in the western suburbs are understandably very concerned about the Government's agenda in conducting this review. What is the purpose of this review and will the Minister give an assurance that the school will remain open for at least the remainder of this term of Government?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** No, I am not in a position to give any guarantee in relation to the future of the Parks High School. We are conducting a review and we will need to look at the results of that review before we make any decision in terms of the long-term future. When one looks at the profile of the Parks High School, it is interesting to see that it has currently about 37 or 40 year eight students. It has about 43 or 45 year nine students. It has about 40 year 10 students. Something significant is happening in that community. Local families are choosing clearly to send their students to other areas for a variety of reasons, and I am not aware of those. We are looking at the future of that school and at education provision in that area.

As all members will know, a school will not be able to sustain itself if it is taking in only 30 to 40 students at secondary level in year eight. In the long term clearly a school cannot sustain itself with 150 to 160 students in secondary school, when you are trying to provide the breath of curriculum at years 11 and 12. Dr Jan Keightley referred to 210 subject options currently available through the SACE. So, clearly something significant is happening down there in terms of local families and what is going on in terms of their educational choices. We are conducting a review to try to establish that and we will then make a judgment. I am not in a position to give any guarantees at this stage.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** There has been ongoing concern and debate about the proposed siting of private uniform shops on State school premises and campuses. These concerns have centred around fears that quasi-monopolistic arrangements

have been entered into and this, combined with the Government's decision in March to remove price control on school uniforms, will lead to substantial increases in costs to thousands of parents. Will the Minister guarantee that under the new arrangements free access for potential suppliers to the school uniform market will continue, thereby allowing full and open competition to keep the cost to parents to a minimum? Is the Minister aware that arrangements between manufacturers of school uniforms and suppliers of material for school uniforms to exclude other retailers from accessing school uniform fabrics at the wholesale level by maintaining exclusive arrangements regarding material do exist? Will the department make claim to any rent paid by on-site uniform suppliers or will schools retain it all for their own use?

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I thank the honourable member for her question. First, the Commissioner for Consumer Affairs took a decision in December last year in relation to school uniforms and a number of other areas. Various levels of price control or monitoring apply in South Australia and his decision was to move it from price control to price monitoring, which means that he will continue to monitor the price of school uniforms and, should there be a problem in future with significant or unjustifiable price hikes, it would remain as an option and may go back under the previous category of price control. It is important, first, to put that issue in perspective.

Secondly, this issue has arisen as a result of a decision that the Golden Grove High School has been fighting for the past two or three years. I am advised that Golden Grove High School has argued passionately with the previous Government and the previous Minister, and certainly with me as the new Minister, that it wants to be able to provide the parents with quality uniforms at a more competitive price than currently exists. That is the school's intention and wish. It is the school's decision; it is not my decision as Minister to enforce that option on the school.

Golden Grove High School approached the previous Government and me and it said, 'Look, we think that this is a great idea. We want to be able to provide quality uniforms to our parents at a more competitive price.' Obviously the school is not doing that to increase prices for parents. The people at Golden Grove High School are not silly. The principal, Dr Manuel, is very experienced and the school council is a very professional group of people. They are not doing something to inflict pain and hardship on the parents of Golden Grove High School students.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** I did not say that.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I know that the honourable member did not say that. I am saying that the people at Golden Grove High School are not doing that to cause massive price hikes. They are doing it for the reasons that I have just given. They believe that they, as a school community, will make some money with regard to the running of the operation on that site and the bulk of that money will go back into the school operations. That is another element of fundraising. The department potentially receives 10 per cent in terms of rental on a portion of the premises of the site.

The matter has gone out to tender. The member used the term 'quasi-monopolistic'. The tender was open to anyone, including Mr Schoolwear who has been opposing the option. Anyone could tender to operate that shop. Mr Schoolwear, for his own reasons, chose not to tender. Clearly someone else will be successful in that operation. However, parents will still retain the right to go to Mr Schoolwear, to John Martins or wherever to purchase school uniforms for Golden Grove.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** No.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The honourable member may shake her head, but if she does not believe me, she should check again with the school. My office has spoken directly with the principal and we have received the assurance that the parents will continue to have the choice. They can purchase from the school uniform shop on site or they can go to Mr Schoolwear or to John Martins and if they can provide the school uniforms at a more competitive price than the school uniform shop, parents can purchase uniforms from those other private suppliers. That will obviously be a way of ensuring that we will not see those massive price hikes for Golden Grove High School uniforms.

**Mr CLARKE:** I have spent all day listening to the Minister. I thought that he was a QC being paid by the word—

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** I wish I was.

**Mr CLARKE:**—in the time that he has taken to say nothing.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** You are being rude.

**Mr CLARKE:** Yes, I am being rude because I am entirely jacked off about the fact that Estimates Committee meetings should primarily be the property of the Opposition rather than an opportunity for Dorothy Dixers from a bunch of backbenchers who can raise their questions in the Party room instead of wasting the Opposition's time in raising probing questions for the Minister of the day. That is what it boils down to.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**Mr CLARKE:** Not that I want to be provocative, Mr Chairman. I want to raise the Nailsworth High School with the Minister. That school happens to be one of the schools amalgamating as a result of a process initiated by the Government, although not in a Liberal electorate. I will be interested to see what happens in a Liberal electorate. I want to raise a number of points and, given the time, I guess that they will have to go on notice unless the Minister can answer everything in five minutes.

*The Hon. R.I. Lucas interjecting:*

**Mr CLARKE:** I do not think we have 24 hours. With respect to the decision of the Government to amalgamate Nailsworth with the Northfield High School, does this mean that any secondary school with fewer than 400 students can be expected to be considered for closure even in Liberal held marginal seats? What does the Minister believe to be a minimum size for a secondary school? Will the closure mean that additional works will be required at other schools such as Northfield and Enfield, and what are the details? When will these works be undertaken? Has provision been made for this in this budget? What arrangements are being made to place students at alternative schools? Can the Minister guarantee continuity of curriculum choice for all students, and will curriculum choice be enhanced as a result of this amalgamation?

Will any student or their parents be disadvantaged by a requirement to pay additional travel costs to school? With regard to the school area itself, if the Government is able to flog the land, will the proceeds of that sale go towards upgrading the facilities at the Enfield and Northfield High Schools? Will an area, such as the oval, be reserved or offered to the Enfield council for a greenbelt area in the Nailsworth region? If it is turned over to residential land there will be no greenbelt or play area for residents in that region, and it is a very valuable resource which should be able to be utilised by the local community. The Minister would be

aware of the recommendations that are contained in the committee report entitled 'Strategic Planning for the Future of Secondary Education in the General Region Currently Served by Enfield, Northfield and Nailsworth High Schools'. I was not given these pages; I got the first 16 pages of the report but did not get the last three pages.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Didn't they trust you?

**Mr CLARKE:** No, I got them from your department, Minister, but only the first 16 pages. I subsequently found the remaining three pages which detail a number of recommendations with respect to the transition. In short what it means is that, if you are to amalgamate these two schools, you will have to put the necessary resources in place to ensure that the transition goes ahead smoothly, in particular for the Vietnamese students in the area, because as you would be aware a significant number of them attend Nailsworth High; and if they are, through the amalgamation process, to go across to Northfield High, a number of strategies need to be put in place to ensure that that does take place. That means that your department will actually have to spend a quid to make sure that there are necessary resources put in place to ensure that that takes place. Unfortunately, given the cutbacks in education under your stewardship as Minister, I have some fears with respect to that matter. I hope that you can allay my fears and assure me that all the recommendations contained on pages 16 to 19 of the committee report will be acted upon by your department, and the necessary resources given effect to by you as Minister.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I point out to the member for Ross Smith that we have given him the privilege of asking questions from the back bench, which generally is reserved for the time when all questions have been completed by both sides. Government members have not asked a question since 9.30, which was an arrangement to accommodate the Opposition to ask a string of questions, and we have allowed others in. Also during the day Government members declined to ask questions to allow the completion of certain lines before schedule. I think your attack on us was totally unfair. I take it as a slur on me as a Chairman and the committee because there has been cooperation. Minister, we have five minutes to go before we complete the line.

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** It is always a delight to have the honourable member enter into parliamentary proceedings and debate, and sadly we have had him only for the last 10 minutes of these estimates.

*Mr Clarke interjecting:*

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** Well, we would have been delighted, too. We enjoyed it very much last year, and we look forward, with an open invitation, next year to his spending more time with us.

**Mr CLARKE:** Is this just another song and dance routine?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**The Hon. R.I. Lucas:** The honourable member can choose for himself: I can spend five minutes talking about nothing if he wishes (I am very capable of doing so) or he can behave himself for five minutes and listen—if that is possible—to my endeavouring to answer his questions. In relation to the Nailsworth-Northfield-Enfield review, as Minister, I have not yet endorsed these specific transitional recommendations he has referred to in that report. I have indicated that some of the proceeds of the sale of the Nailsworth site would clearly need to be spent on some capital works refurbishment, in particular at the Northfield site, with some needed occupational health and safety work

that has to be done at the Enfield site as well. Certainly, he has my commitment that we need to do some redevelopment work at Northfield in particular, but also some work at Enfield in terms of managing this transition.

He also has my commitment that our officers will do as much as they can not just for the Vietnamese students, whom he has especially mentioned, but for all students in terms of ensuring a continuation of their programs and a smooth transition as much as we can. Clearly, it is the Government's view that it will improve their educational options, because any school with 400 students, or whatever the number was at Nailsworth, is clearly less able to offer a variety of options than a bigger school which may well have 600, 700 or 800 students in it. The Government does not have a fixed position in relation to an arbitrary level such that below a certain number of students a school shall be closed. We will consider each circumstance after an appropriate review. That review, in your circumstance, was supported by representatives of all three school communities. I have said earlier today that, 24 hours after I received the report, I received a letter from the Chairperson of the Nailsworth High School Council and the other two Chairs of the school councils imploring me to act quickly to endorse their recommendations. At that stage

I had not even seen the report, and they were asking me quickly to enact those decisions. We have acted as quickly as we could in relation to it.

There is no arbitrary limit in terms of numbers. Earlier we have listed the numbers of school closures, and I can assure the Committee that a number of schools have been closed in Liberal electorates as well as Labor electorates. We have listed all those schools which have been closed this year. The honourable member can rest assured that this Minister is not vindictively seeking out Labor seats and Labor electorates to close down particular schools. We are reviewing across the State in terms of educational provisions. Tonsley Park Primary School is one recent example—and I am very reluctant to introduce questions of marginality of seats, because that does not come into our decision making—because that electorate is clearly a marginal Liberal electorate and that school has been closed.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for asking questions having elapsed, I declare the examination of the votes completed.

#### ADJOURNMENT

At 10 p.m. the Committee adjourned until Wednesday 20 June at 11 a.m.